



VOLUNTEER
ACTION NETWORK

Vac-Net Annual Report 2014/2015



Creating Possibilities!

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3. Vac-Net Profile

WHO WE ARE

The Volunteer Action Network (Vac-Net) is a grass root's non-profit organization situated in Gulu. It was established in 2005 by a group of committed volunteers who live and serve in the region, they realized the worsening situation of the rural poor, especially women who are adversely affected by the Socio-economic imbalance and yet constitute a greater labor force for production. The organization is rural inclined and aims at empowering underserved women and youth in northern Uganda through socio-economic, health education and political programs, creating opportunities while strengthening families and communities.

VISION

Having a community free of Poverty and Diseases

MISSION

Our Mission is to empower underserved women and youth in Northern Uganda through socio-economic, health education and political programs, creating opportunities while strengthening families and communities.

It seeks to offer women and youth leadership and empowerment abilities required to lead successful, dignified lives.

Strategic Objective

1. To improve household income food security and economically empower marginalized women and youth.
2. To reduce violence, abuses and discrimination approaches against women and children
3. To provide access to justice to women and girls, who are survivors of gender based violence,
4. To contribute to the reduction of HIV incidence rate by 4% and contribute to the district's goal to reduce HIV prevalence from 13.4%
5. To contribute to education and instill the spirit of volunteerism
6. To put in place systems enhancing smooth operation of activities and organizational sustainability

4. OUR TARGET GROUP AND AREA OF OPERATION

Our support goes to women living in rural and peri-urban centers in Northern Uganda. Most of them are victims of domestic violence, former abducted girls, single mothers, child headed families and widows all stay and work in a post conflict region which suffered a civil war for more than 25 year and are recovering and rebuilding their lives.

- 99% of our borrowers leave below poverty line making less than \$1.25 a day per person
- On average all eat less than 3 meals a day
- 91% stay without electricity, 65% use candle
- 71% live in housing with mud & stick walls and grass-thatched
- Each family supports 7 people on average.
- 82% are illiterate

1. We provide micro loan to groups of women between 5 to 15 members
2. Our average micro loans range from \$57to \$300
3. We support traditional business loans and Agro business loans
4. We provide business and entrepreneurship skill training
5. Provide opportunity for women to participate in leadership and participate is civic activities
6. We support women working and staying in rural Villages and Peri-Ubarn centers
7. Provide Adult Literacy training for Credit plus participants
8. We provide a referral pathway for victims of domestic violence
9. Addressing reproductive health and HIV/AIDS
10. Advocacy and promotion of women's rights

"There is no tool for development that is effective than the Empowerment of Women"
...Koffi Anan...

5. Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment

Micro loans Changing lives For Women in Northern Uganda

This year we supported 4,082 women, with business skills training and provided micro loans to 1,284 rural women who are working their way out of Poverty and self-determination. To enable them start and expand their business, Improving livelihood, while enabling them to support their children and families, changing communities.

" I feel happy I can pay school fees for my children using my own saving from my business. A small loan is making a big impact in my family".

Emilly- Client, Gulu



Can Opwonya Women Group- Gulu

Small Enterprise Development for Rural Women



We continued to Support small enterprise development for women, 138 small businesses including weaving, bakery, Poultry and soap making business supported. Improving household income while creating employment opportunities.

"With the skills I got after training, I was able to start my own business. I 'm a manager to my business, my family and my children are living a better life, this program is revolutionary"

Florence—VacNet client, Gulu

6. IMPROVING HOUSEHOLD INCOME, FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

IMPROVING HOUSEHOLD INCOME, FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION



Women provide up to 90% of the rural poor's food and produce; Vac-Net's Agro program supported 220 women farmers by offering agricultural loans and training.

Our agricultural program promotes increased food security and increased household income that improves nutrition, more than 220 have been trained in best agro practices including marketing and animal husbandry, also 220 agro loans have been lent to women and youth involved in agro business improving livelihood, income and food security.

"My Cow gives me 15 liters every day which I sell and take care of my family needs. I support my children and pay all their school requirement, life is better ever since I left Camp life.

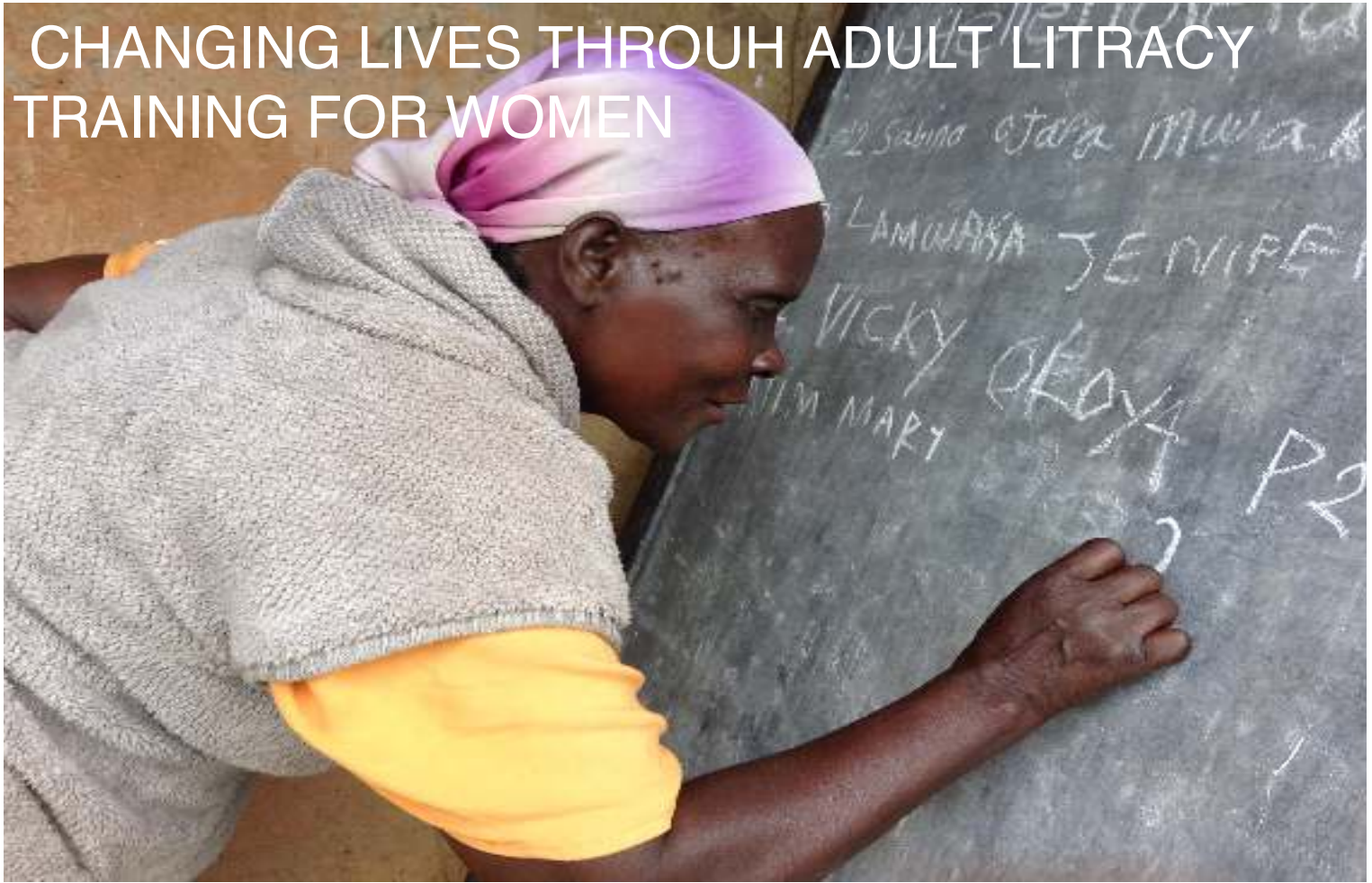
Thank you Vac-Net for changing our lives with small loans and training"

Hellen –Acet, Gulu



VacNet album 201.

CHANGING LIVES THROUGH ADULT LITERACY TRAINING FOR WOMEN



VacNet album 2015

This year 2015 we have supported 250 more women, giving them an empowerment opportunity to learn about their environment through adult literacy learning, teaching them basic literacy, numeracy and life skill training. Majority of the beneficiaries are formerly abducted child soldiers, victims of sexual terrorism, horrific violence and poverty, and are now recovering and rebuilding their lives and that of their children. The demand and relevancy for this program continues every year and we will continue providing this empowering opportunity

"I was blind but I can see now"

Anek-Client, Gulu -Uganda

Anek is 54 years and a mother of 5 children. She missed out the opportunity because of gender biases in her family, which favored only boys to go to school. She is excited and can interact better with her group members after attending the literacy training, she can write her name for the first time in life.

8. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND HIV/AIDS SUPPORT

THE COMMUNITY ADVANCING PREVENTION FOR HIV/AIDS PROJECT (CAPH)

Vac-Net with support from Civil Society Fund (CSF) successfully implemented the CAPH project in Gulu District contributing to the reduction of HIV/AIDS prevalence from 14.3 to 9%. The project addressed structural challenges and our approach was two-fold focusing on behavior, bio-medical and structural interventions reaching out to communities. 6,670 community dialogues were conducted, supported 891 commercial sex workers with alternative businesses and skills with startup capital, distributed 620,000 condoms to the sexually active, opened 122 condom distribution centers, trained and supported 138 VHTs, conducted and supported RCT and SMCs, finally mobilized and created referrals for PMCT in Gulu District.



Client – Being Counseled before HIV/Aids Testing
Source VacNet Album 2015

SUPPORTING OVC'S FAMILIES THROUGH ENTERPRISE

*" We achieved the real empowerment from the training, we can run our liquid soap making business and supply to our community, our welfare has improved and supporting our children without external support is revolutionary"
Thank you VacNet.*

Vac-Net trained 720 OVC's caretakers in business skill and enterprise development such as liquid and detergent making skills, mushroom and ginger growing business. All groups were provided with start-up capital, supervision and market support linkages to enable the families become self-sustainable. In return, 40 OVC in the supported families joined school.

9. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND HIV/AIDS SUPPORT

WE ARE BREAKING THE SILENCE ON MENSTRUAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOL GOING GIRLS IN NORTHERN UGANDA.

Worldwide, approximately 50% of girls and women are of reproductive age. Most of these women and school girls will menstruate each month for between two and seven days, for at least thirty years of their life. New data show that the world is still unlikely to fulfill one of the most modest commitments: to get every child in school by 2015. More than 57 million children continue to be denied the right to primary education, and many of them will probably never enter a classroom. Part of this disparity is attributed to a lack of separate WASH facilities at schools, especially for girls during menstruation age.

To address this reality, Vac-Net invested in the production of affordable and safe sanitary pads for school going children, education and awareness creation that benefit rural school going girls. Young girls are provided an opportunity to learn how to make, use and sell sanitary pads, and selected young girls are trained on how to make them, 10 schools in Northern Uganda are to benefit from the program.

Over 57% of schoolgirls aged 11-13 absent themselves from school due to menstrual-related challenges. The study found that around half of the girl pupils in the study report missing 1-3 days of primary school per month. This translates into a loss of 8 to 24 school days per year. This means per term a girl pupil may miss up to 8 days of study. On average, there are 220 learning days in a year and missing 24 days a year translates into 11% of the time a girl pupil will miss learning due to menstrual periods.



*School going attentively listening to facilitator
Source VacNet Album 2015*

10. ADDRESSING GENDER INEQUALITY THROUGH COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

ADDRESSING GENDER INEQUALITY THROUGH COMMUNITY DIALOGUE



Vac-Net hosted 4 public dialogues bringing together key community stakeholders including civic, religious, cultural and political leaders together with community activists and civil society representatives to discuss the theme: *Why Women and Gender Equity In Civic participation matters?*

VacNet Album 201:

"I feel part of the program after being involved together with women in the programming of the community project, when my wife is supported, our family benefits"

Oryema – Accet, Gulu



VacNet Album 2015

11. SUPPORTING ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

TRAINED RURAL WOMEN IN CITIZEN JOURNALISM



To empower women to seek out, understand, and share the most timely, critical, and relevant information in their communities, and to make informed decisions based on that information. As part of our leadership development that we offer women in Northern Uganda, we trained 32 women in citizen journalism and equipped them with equipment.

Women stay closest where issues and challenges occur in villages and most time reports end up not getting into the mainstream of the media.

SUPPORTING ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

Justice is the foundation ensuring women become equal participants in decision-making, development and their own futures. Without access to justice, women are disenfranchised and disempowered, experiencing violence, abuse and inequality.

To address violence against women, gender bias, inequality and gaps in the justice chain for women, Vac-Net provided the critical information and resources, enabling women to know their legal and human rights within the justice system. Vac-Net successfully conducted 2 TOT trainings and opened a toll free hotline for women headed by peer counselors to provide a referral path way, to link service providers with victims of domestic violence from the grass roots level.



12. SUPPORTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC ACTIVITIES



Women have the right to participate in political processes that affect them, their families, and their communities. Increased women's participation in leadership and political parties tend to be more inclusive, responsive, egalitarian, and democratic. When women meaningfully participate in peace processes, they can help to expand the scope of agreements/ policies and improve the prospects for durable peace and development. Vac-Net conducted civic education training, supported 10 women to participate in elective politics in Northern Uganda, training, supporting and encouraging women to participate in elective processes at all levels. 52 women participated in our leadership development program of which 10 participated in contesting for political offices as a way to amplify women's Voices.



Source: VacNet Album 2015

"If water and sanitation, education, health, roads and domestic Violence issues are to be addressed meaningfully, women must occupy offices and positions of decision making at all levels, and what matters is to have a good number of women represented"

Prisca , chairperson for our peer counseling program -contesting at Division level Pece - Gulu

13. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The staff of Volunteer Action Network received 6 capacity building support training, 2 new staff with competence and skills were recruited to support the program. Specific areas of financial management, Gender mainstreaming, Monitoring and evaluation, communication and report writing, leadership and management skills and fundraising were the key areas which staff benefited and the organization have gained by staff becoming more effective in achieving their target.

“I feel motivated and empowered, with the skills I have acquired, I can handle more tasks and challenges. I’m very proud to work with supportive organization, we are a contributing family”
Kevin Okumu Anena –Vac-Net Staff



Vac-Net Team together with Board members after the capacity building training—Source Vac-Net Album

LESSONS LEARNT

- Recognizing local and community involvement in all stages of programing is key for program success.
- Organizing community forums and outreaches for specific groups promotes their right to and participation in leadership and other development affairs that affects their lives.
- Mainstreaming gender in all programing promotes program efficiency since gender has direct linkages to poverty and disease.
- Affirmative action remains vital for vulnerable groups.

CHALLENGES

- Limited, insufficient and unreliable funding
- Poor Coordination and Networking
- Limited transportation means
- Community leaders always expect transport allowances to participate in community activities organized by Vac-Net, with limited resources, we could not facilitate them and this affected their participation in our activities.

14. ORGANISATION EXPENDITURE

INCOME	Actual 2015
Grants	\$70,000
Individual Donations	\$6,450
Total Income	\$76,450
EXPENDITURE	
Direct implementation	\$54,000
Program Support Costs	\$16,500
Equipment	\$4,080
TOTAL	\$74,580

"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice".
--Nelson Mandela

Expenditure



- Increasing Household income
- increasing Food security
- Reproductive Health & HIV/AIDS
- Administration 10
- Adocacy & Leadership Development

15. PARTNERSHIP AND NETWORKING

Empowering marginalized women and youth at grassroots level, addressing gender disparities, promoting access to justice for women, providing financial inclusion, creating employment opportunities, promoting adult education, providing entrepreneur skills development and addressing reproductive and HIV/AIDS pandemic requires multi-sector partnership and networking with all stakeholders and like minded organizations and individuals. Vac-Net worked together with several extra-ordinary organizations, institutions, and individuals in the implementation of the above interventions.

While our primary focus was to grow our credit plus program by providing more micro loans, basic business skills training, addressing gender inequality and support political programming for women we would not achieve much with out the support from extra-ordinary organizations. **Women's Global Empowerment Fund (WGEF)** provided support for training, capacity building advocacy and political programming, **The Greater Contribution (TGC)** supported micro loans and literacy program, **Barclays Bank** supported credit plus and institutional development, **The Wong Street Journal** supported micro loans, **Global Giving Foundation** livelihood and **Civil Society Fund (CSF)** supported reproductive health and HIV/AIDS interventions. We are deeply thankful to all our partners and individual donor, without their technical, financial, support we wouldn't have achieved much and we are committed to continue furthering our partnership and achieving our mutual goals.





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