

CASE STUDY

Stories

WEST NILE



Introduction

To continue with the good work started under the Socio-Economic Empowerment of Female Inmates in West Nile Project, a project which strictly catered to the rehabilitation and reintegration needs of women prison inmates, Advance Afrika received additional support from the European Union to implement a two-and-a-half-year action, the “Empowering Local Communities to Prevent Violence against Women and Children in West Nile” (ELVWC) project, with the objective of empowering women and children in Koboko and Arua districts to live peaceful and dignified lives as they enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights. The project was implemented in partnership with the Uganda Prisons Service and Partners in Community Transformation (PICOT). The intervention had two overall outcomes: Oc1) Female (ex-)inmates have access to improved and impactful rehabilitation and reintegration services; Oc2) Community structures actively engage in changing attitudes, perceptions and practices regarding respect for women’s and children’s rights.

With the closure of the project, we compiled stories of a select group of individuals who have been a part of the project and it is those stories which we share with you today. Most of these are stories of inmates and ex-inmates from Arua Women’s, Arua Main and Koboko Prisons as well as some of the partners we have been privileged to work with in this project. Whereas the prison inmates and ex-inmates shared with us how they ended up behind bars, their lives in jail and how the project has impacted their lives, the other partners, on the other hand, shared about their involvement and the lessons learnt from being a part of the transformational work. These are stories of real people going through real challenges and trying to turn their lives around despite some of them getting out of prison during the Covid19 lockdown and having to deal with all its consequences since what they found at home was not what some of them had left behind. They reveal the need to continually fight sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in all its forms because it affects the very fabric of our society, breaks families apart and, in many cases, ends lives. Working to change this has been at the heart of the entire action.

In reading these stories, you will realise that whereas some ex-prison inmates fully regain their freedom as soon as they get out of prison, others, especially women who were in jail on charges of murder even when the offence was committed in self-defence, continue to live in a mental prison because members of the community, and sometimes even family members, make it hard for them to reintegrate peacefully. Such persons end up living not only a life of guilt, but one marked by fear as well. Therefore, these stories are not simply a testament to the lives impacted by the project but a call to all of us as a nation to do better. We should do better as leaders, as communities, as families and as individuals and we hope that, as you enjoy reading these stories, you will also take time to reflect on what you are doing or not doing within your area of influence to make life with dignity a possibility for everyone, including those who have been to prison.

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Driciru Margaret

My name is Driciru Margaret. I am a 40-year-old mother of four and I live in Oluko village, Vurra sub-county in Arua district. I ended up in jail because I was accused of killing my husband in 2015 and given a four-year sentence that ended in March 2020. My husband was an incurable drunkard who would dare anyone to a fight whenever he was drunk and people often beat him up at drinking joints. He fought anyone, including me and our children. He even tried to commit suicide by drinking poison, but his attempt failed.

One day, we had visited his brother's home. He left me there and went drinking, but when he returned, he grabbed my breast and pulled me while threatening to kill me. In self-defence, I grabbed and twisted his penis, which prompted him to let go of me. Later on, we returned to our home, but we had barely settled in when his brother walked in and pulled out some money to buy alcohol. My late husband immediately grabbed the money and ran to the local brewer's bar. His brother then requested me to follow him to ensure that he didn't drink the alcohol before he returned home, but no sooner had I reached the bar than he started yelling about what a disrespectful wife I am. That led to another fight, from which I managed to escape and returned home.



When my husband reached home, he grabbed a knife and attacked me in the presence of his brother, who advised me to leave home at that point and only return when my husband was in a calm and sober mood. I spent that night at my sister-in-law's place. On my way back in the morning I could hear people crying. I rushed to reach home only to be informed that my husband had passed on. Some people, together with my sister-in-law, attempted to beat me but I was saved by one of my brothers in law, who called the police, who took my late husband's body and me away.

I was taken to Arua Central Police Station. While at the station no one came to file a complaint, not even my late husband's relatives, so the officers asked if I had any sureties. I didn't have any. So I was taken to court and remanded for three months and then sentenced to four years in prison.

In prison, life was not as bad as I had expected. We gained experience in business and entrepreneurship skills through the trainings conducted, where I focused on farming. I was released in March 2020 and decided to return to my people because I didn't know the perception my late husband's people held of me at that time. They never visited me while I was in prison. But if they want me, they know where to find me; they can speak to my people.

When I got out of prison, I started the business of selling avocados. I would walk around the village buying avocados and then resell them in Arua town, making a small profit. However, with the announcement of the lockdown, every time I went to the market, I had to move up to 12 kilometres from home to the town centre, so I resorted to buying raw avocados in bulk and going to sell them at the market only on days when I am sure I will make sales. I also planted cassava and now I am clearing more land to plant groundnuts.



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Adiru Winnie

My name is Adiru Winnie, a 30-year-old inmate at Arua Women's Prison. I have been in prison since March 2013. I stayed in prison on remand for nine months before I was convicted of murdering my husband. It all started with a fight over one of my chickens that my husband had sold without my consent. I confronted him and asked him to either return the chicken or pay me for it. He arrogantly said to me that is his home and I should not ask him about property. He abused me, quarrelled with me and started fighting me; but I insisted I wanted my chicken back or he should give me the money for it.

He later drank a drug used for spraying cabbages and started crying. My neighbours pleaded with me to take him to hospital, so I went out to look for means of transport, only to return to the news of his death.

I was arrested and stayed on remand for nine months and was later sentenced to 18 years in jail. I will be released in 2026. At the beginning, I felt like my life had come to an end, but ever since Advance Afrika came here and started training us in business and parenting skills, my perceptions started to change slowly and now I feel so different about myself.

During the business skills training, I participated in the business plan competition and won myself a sewing machine. Now I make clothes and I want to be the best tailor in my village when I get out of prison in 2026. I also make chapatti that I sell at the OC's shop through which I am able to earn some money here in prison.

I am a mother of two children, both of whom I left behind when I was brought here. My oldest child is at her late father's home while my mother is helping me to take care of the younger one. I thank Advance Afrika for changing my life, for enabling me to be a part of their training programme. My advice to fellow women who are out there is for them to watch out for domestic violence because it is a very bad practice and any bad reaction can easily land you in jail, like it did to me. They should be on good terms with their partners and the moment any kind of disagreement or mistreatment starts, they should call in elders to resolve their issues or, better yet, walk away instead of taking matters into their own hands and ending up in jail which, in turn, leads their children or dependents to suffer owing to their absence.



Edea Gloria

I am 25 years old and I was brought here in November 2019 because of murder. I am in prison with my son, who is one year and eight months old. My late husband got a loan in my name and failed to pay it back and that is how trouble started in our home. We fought very often, until one day during those fights, he kicked me in the stomach and I felt a sharp pain. This annoyed me and, in retaliation, I picked up a knife and used it to cut him. I was arrested and taken to the police; the police later took me to the hospital, where my uterus was removed. When I recovered from the operation, I was first remanded for fourteen days. Thereafter I was committed to the High Court. When my time to go on trial arrived, I narrated my story to the presiding judge and that is how I got a five-year sentence.

Living with my child in prison is not good. If anything happens, both of us are pushed inside the ward forcefully. The feeding inside here is also not always good for a child. My child also lacks a lot of essentials such as clothes and free space for playing, among others. That is why I am happy that Advance Afrika has today opened a day care centre. Now, my child will be safe, play with other children, study well as well as learn to speak English. I worry less about staying inside here with my child because he will at least learn good manners and once I get out, I will just transfer him to a school outside prison.



Ichoka Ibrahim

My name is Ibrahim. I am 29 years old and I live in Koboko town. Before going to prison, I used to work for someone who mistreated and underpaid me, claiming I had embezzled his money, which I had not. He simply did not give me time to explain. While I was in prison, I received training in entrepreneurship and life skills from Advance Afrika and that gave me the courage to start my own business when I got out. That is why I did everything I could to be my own boss instead of working for someone else again.

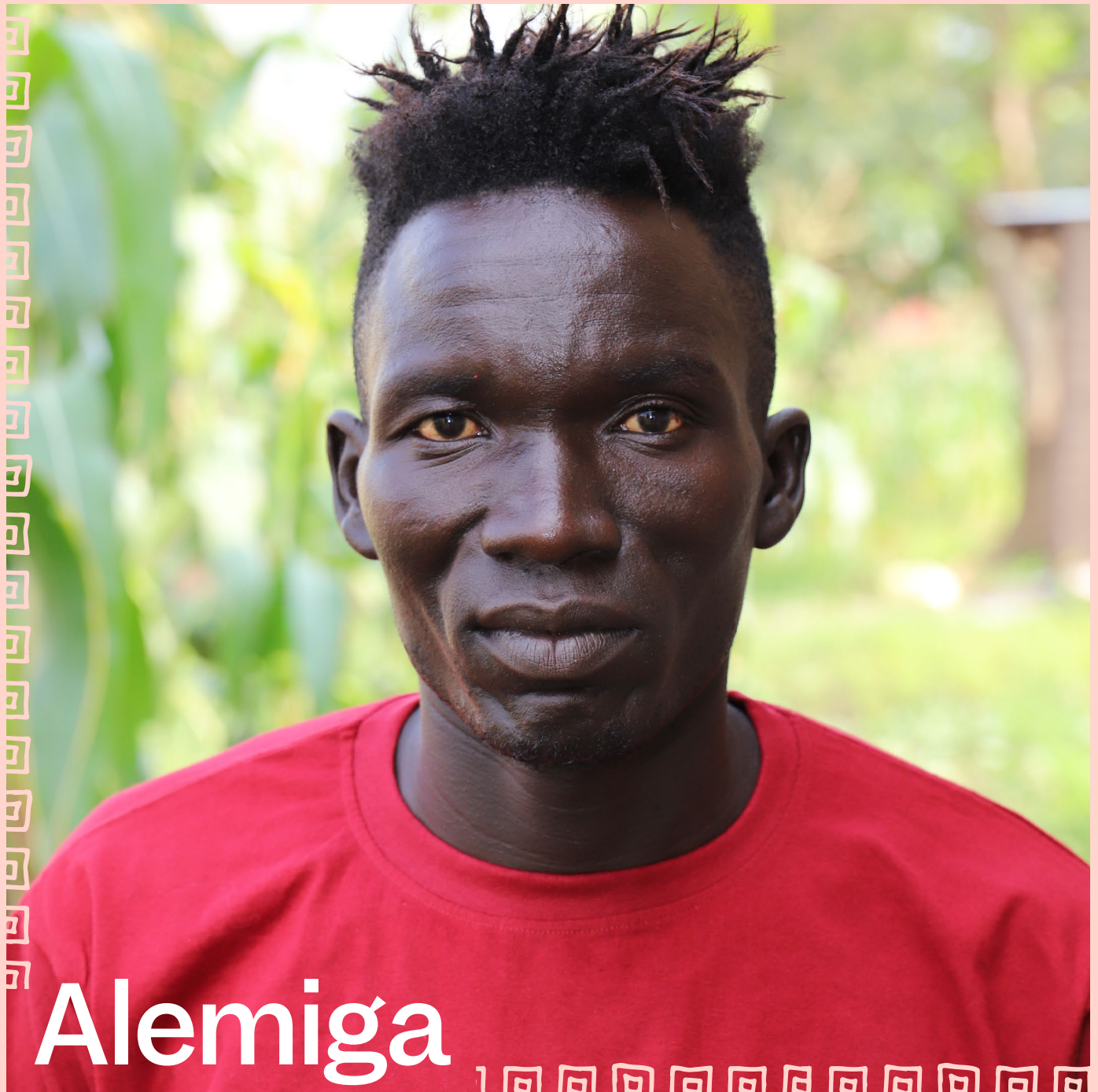
Life after imprisonment

The moment I finished my sentence, I came back home, looked for a suitable location, got some little money and processed a licence from the municipal authority. I later approached a meat dealer to give me meat on credit; I would pay him after selling it. I also reconnected with my old contacts (suppliers and customers). Through this arrangement, I only pay for the actual cost of the supply, while I retain all the profits at the end of the day. This is what I have been doing for the past month and once I stabilise, I will start thinking of expanding my business.

My life has changed tremendously, and I want to thank God for using a bad situation to empower me. The lesson I got from prison is life-changing. And I also want to thank everyone who is making this possible for ex-prison inmates like me.

Challenges faced in business

Business during this time of corona hasn't been the same. The crisis spoilt our business, our regular customers no longer come as usual since the lockdown affected everyone. Sometimes you buy meat and it ends up getting spoilt because customers are now very scarce, unlike before. The other challenge that I am facing is from the town council. They gave all of us here a condition that in order for us to continue with our operations, we need to be in a well-constructed facility. My landlord accepted that we can use his land to put up those structures, but with my little capital, I cannot afford it. From the moment we were given this condition, I have been trying to save money so that I can meet those requirements, but unfortunately, corona came and spoilt our business as well as many other people's livelihoods. Recently, my accuser, the one who opened the case of theft against me back then, has started disturbing me again. This is not making only my business, but life as well very difficult.



Alemiga Rashid

I am Alemiga Rashid, a 25-year-old resident of Gbulagbulanga village in north division, Koboko municipality. I got out of prison in July 2019 after spending two months on remand on the charge of defilement. A very influential district officer accused me of defiling his daughter who was 17 years old by then. I met this girl in August 2018 and a month later she was pregnant. However, she told me the pregnancy wasn't mine, but because I loved her, I decided to take responsibility by agreeing to care of her and the pregnancy as long as her parents agreed. So, I was surprised that her grandfather opened a case of defilement against me when, at that particular time, elders from her family had started approaching me. They visited me and asked if I was the one responsible for the pregnancy and I accepted. I did this because of my family. I did not want to run away or lose my job because I knew my people would suffer if I ran away since I was the sole breadwinner.

Ever since I got out of prison, life has never been the same. I haven't been able to find any meaningful work to do despite all the pressure on me from home.



These elders told me that since I had owned up to the pregnancy, I should now officially take their daughter as a wife and that they would only return for further discussions after she had given birth because their tradition forbids them from having any discussions when a pregnancy is involved. Two weeks after this discussion, the girl was brought to my place of work where I usually slept sometimes. I then rented a house nearby and we started living together happily, but after only five months, her grandfather started disturbing me all over again.

One morning, while I was balancing the books for the previous day's sales, two policemen and my father-in-law came to my place of work. The police officers said they had come to arrest me. They told me to follow them. I complied, but on reaching the station, we found the district speaker already there in the office of the OC station. I was ordered to remove my belt and shoes and I was pushed inside jail. The next day, I was to be arraigned in court, but that didn't happen because the OC station and the District Police Commander had a disagreement over the matter. I had accepted responsibility for the pregnancy and we had started living together with the consent of elders from her place, but her grandfather would have none of it. He simply wanted me to be jailed. Everyone, including my boss at the time and other guests at the hotel where I worked, pleaded and begged him to allow us to resolve the issue out of court, but the complainant refused.

On 31 May, I was taken to court and immediately remanded. A few days after I was put in prison, the lady gave birth to a baby boy. Later on, when my case came up for mention, the magistrate started interrogating me and I narrated my story. He later on asked for someone to stand as my surety as well as for some money for bail. Together with my friend who stood surety for me and my former boss, we managed to raise the bail money and I was released from prison that same day, but on condition that I reported back to court until my case was closed.

Early upbringing

I was raised by my grandmother and right now, I am the one who is looking after her. My biological parents are still alive, but they no longer live together. After their separation, my mother took us to our uncle and left us there, but my grandmother went and brought us to her place and she started taking care of my younger siblings and me. I studied in many schools on scholarship as a result of being a good footballer, but that alone couldn't take me far. I had to drop out of school, look for work and provide for my family. One day I went to a hotel to ask for any available work, I worked there for two months and I ended up as the hotel manager.

Life out of prison

Ever since I got out of prison, life has never been the same. I haven't been able to find any meaningful work to do despite all the pressure on me from home. My former boss requested me to go work at the hotel, but because earlier on I had had some disagreement with one of my supervisors, I did not want to go back there if she was still there. Before corona and the lockdown that followed, I used to play soccer for different teams, and sometimes I would cross the border into Democratic Republic of Congo to play as a mercenary. At least there, I got paid money that could take care of my family for a good number of days, but now all this is not possible and life has become tough. I have been surviving by the grace of God and through assistance from kind acquaintances who once in a while come to my aid.

In the small garden behind my house, we have been planting vegetables and any other food that can grow fast. This way, I am relieved of the high cost of living. Once in a while, I also go to town and work as a taxi tout, thereby earning some money for food and other basic needs.

Amina Nambozo



I spent
four months
in Koboko
Prison on
remand for
assault.

My name is Amina Nambozo. I am 25 years old and I live in Koboko municipality. I am a mother of four children (three boys and one girl). Unfortunately, I lost my first child in 2013, so now I have only three children. I spent four months in Koboko Prison on remand for assault. While in prison, life was hard until I joined the parental and business skills training organised by Advance Afrika. My life immediately began to change and it is that training which helped me to start life afresh when I got out of prison.

Before going to prison, I used to sell second-hand clothes in bales. I sometimes selected first-class second-hand clothes from wholesalers in Arua and then I would return to Koboko and make some profits from each selection. Unfortunately, I was arrested and after release, I didn't have the capital to pick up from where I had left off. I worked as a house girl for two months, saved some money and started frying chips and chicken in front of Rock Bar in town.

While I was in prison, it was my neighbour who looked after two of my sons while my grandmother took care of my daughter. My first three children, including the one who passed on, have the same father who is in Tanzania, and the last child has a different father, but he is currently in South Sudan where he is into the timber business. I started seeing him before I went to prison. Ever since my first husband went to work in Tanzania, I have never heard from him, neither has he sent any support for me or our children.

When I got out of prison, with the things I was doing, my life was getting better, I was providing for my family well, I had even joined a savings group, but when corona hit us, things changed. The bar in front of which I worked closed and up to now, it has not yet been opened because of the presidential directive.

While I was in prison, I was also given community service as part of my sentence and my duty station was Koboko magistrates' court where I worked as a cleaner. So when I got out, they retained me to continue working there. I used to earn USh. 100,000 from it, but now with the crisis, they have reduced my pay to USh. 50,000 only, and that is the money I have been depending on to provide for my family. The father of my youngest child also sends us some financial support weekly when he has money. Sometimes he does not but I understand because things are hard everywhere.



Hakim Peter

I was released from prison on 3 July 2020 after being in jail for a year. I started serving my sentence at Koboko Prison where I stayed for 10 months and finished the remaining two months at Arua Main Prison. When I reached home, I found that had broken into my house and made away with everything I had left behind. Before going to prison, I had a girlfriend, we were cohabiting, but my family did not know about her.

When I got arrested, she came back home in the evening, but found the house locked. I had earlier called her while I had just been taken into custody to notify her. When she later came to visit me in prison, she told me she returned home after work, but found another lock on our door. I later learnt it was my uncle who had locked it. I told her to simply go back and stay with her people until I returned from jail, but now that I am out, I have found that things are very different. Corona has spoilt everything, but I promised her that when I settle down, I will bring her back.

Before returning to Uganda, I worked in South Sudan in a family business. But as an adult, the money I earned was not meeting my needs, feeding alone took almost all of it, so I decided to return to Uganda and start doing something of my own to enable me to develop and raise my family. However, my family members were not willing to help me to set up a business; instead, my uncle wanted me to go back to South Sudan. I felt frustrated and that is how I started drinking excessively.

One evening when I was drunk, my uncle came home with police officers and they accused me of attempting to commit suicide. I was arrested, taken to jail, but later on when I was tested, they released me because they found that I was only drunk. The following day, he returned and they took me to Koboko Central Police Station. The officers who came this time did not even allow me to close my door. I first stayed on remand for two months and then I was convicted of attempted suicide and sentenced to a year in jail.

In prison, an officer told us that a training was going to take place and she encouraged me to register. At the time this information reached me, I was serving as the head of Katikiros, so I used it as a chance to register. During this training, I was also the translator for those who didn't understand either English or our local language. We were trained in business and parental skills as well as how to manage violence at home, among others. This training changed my life because I learnt so many things which I did not know before.

When I finished the training, I immediately started planning for my business. I hope to open up a computer centre when I have the resources to do it. Right now, I have a three-acre piece of land my uncle said I can use, so my plan is to use it for farming. I currently lack the required capital to even buy seeds, let alone transporting myself to the farmland which is just about 4 kilometres from where I live right now. Since I came back home, life has been very hard. Sometimes I even go for a whole day or two without eating anything. The home where my other family members live is far from town and in order for me to get what to eat, I have to walk up to there, but it is not easy.

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Gloria Sunday

My name is Gloria. I am 18 years old and I live in Mucungo village, Nyagazia parish in Koboko district. I was in prison for 10 months on remand for murder. My boyfriend was killed in May 2019 and I was arrested because I was with him. The police officers told me to reveal who killed him, promised I would be released, but later on I was accused of murdering him. I stayed in custody for two days and I was temporarily released after the father of the deceased went to the police and told them to let me go. He said that if I was the one who had killed his son, I wouldn't have gone to his home to report the death. As soon as I was released, the police came home again after just one day and took me back to jail.

I later learnt that my boyfriend's relatives insisted that since I was the deceased's girlfriend, I was either the one who killed him or I knew who did. I was transferred from Maracha to Koboko Police Station and taken to court immediately, then remanded to Koboko Prison. After 10 months, I was granted bail, but I still report to court up to now.

Besides me, there was another suspect with whom I was arrested together. He was a troublemaker in the community. Unfortunately, he was diabetic and was therefore transferred to Arua Referral Hospital, where he died while in custody.

Life in prison was not bad, but every time I thought about home, I felt sad. I used not to be prayerful, but in prison, I started praying. Also, the training I took part in about business while in prison helped me to think about my future. Now, I am doing some small business in the trading centre near our home. I buy rice, cook it and then make round coloured pieces and sell. I also help my mother with selling her goods on days when I'm done before her or if she has to go somewhere. Now I also listen to my mother, but before, I cared less about what she said.

I advise my fellow young girls to behave well, to be respectful, unlike me before going to prison. I also encourage them to have something productive to do for themselves to keep them busy instead of engaging in bad things.



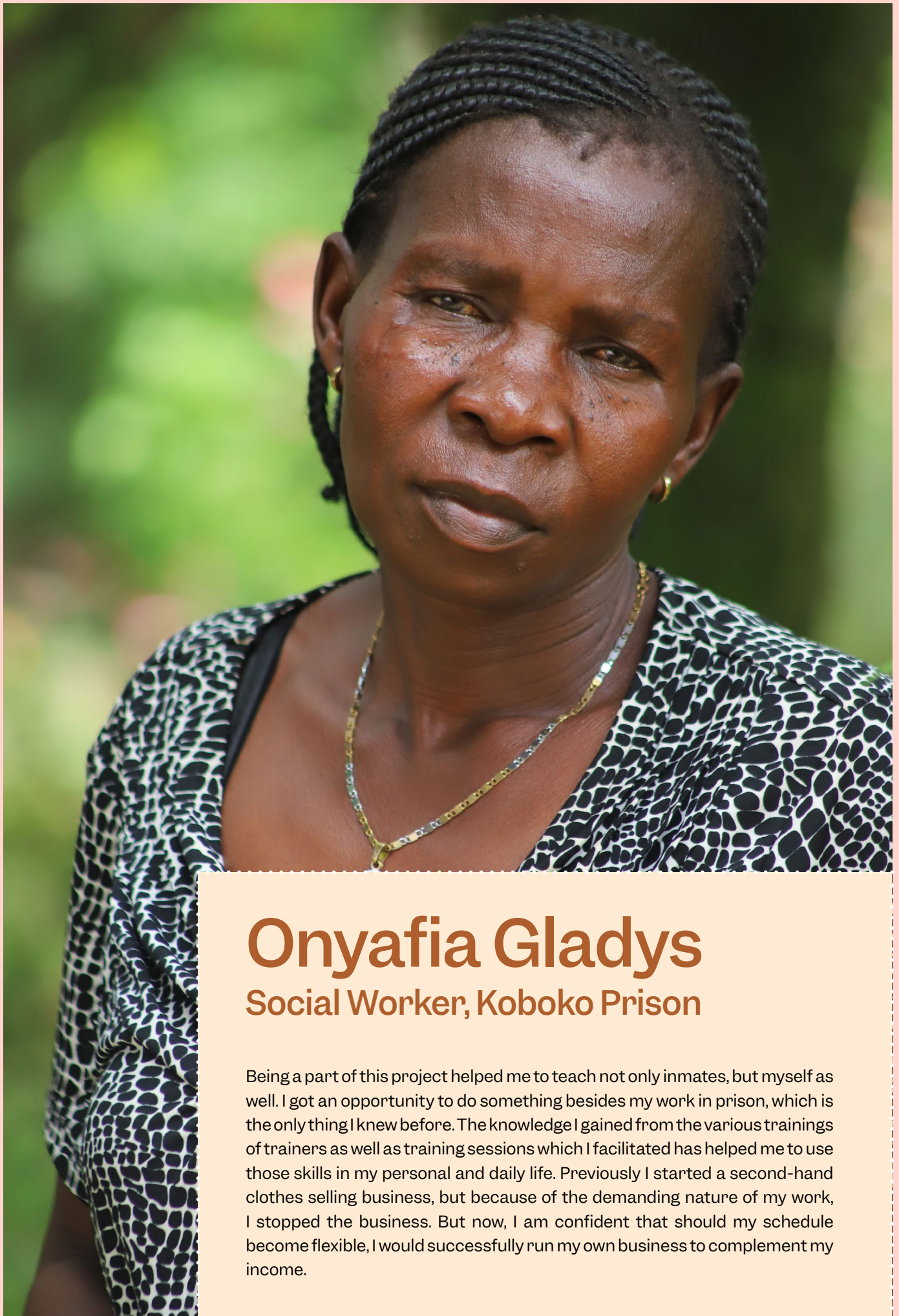
Atayi Pascaulina

(Gloria's mother)

The father of the deceased was not interested in the case, but his relatives have been the ones insisting. I saw how my child was suffering in prison and we approached court and requested for her to be released on bail and it was granted, but at a cost of about UGX 450,000. We were also asked to be reporting to court periodically, which she is doing.

I am a mother of six children, four girls and two boys. Out of the six children, the father of five of them is still alive and he is supporting me to look after them; it is only Gloria who does not have a father. Gloria was stubborn as a child. She lived with my grandmother for a while, but she left and started living with my sister, and it is here that she got in trouble the most and ended up in prison.

When Gloria came back home, I saw a humble and disciplined child. Previously she would move around the village aimlessly, but now she does not. She also listens and respects us now. Gloria came back from prison a changed person. She told us that they were trained while in prison and she also revealed that she realised that if you do wrong things, the law eventually catches up with you, which then leads to imprisonment. Occasionally, she helps me to sell my goods in the market. She has also joined a savings group at the trading centre, where they also give loans to one another.



Onyafia Gladys

Social Worker, Koboko Prison

Being a part of this project helped me to teach not only inmates, but myself as well. I got an opportunity to do something besides my work in prison, which is the only thing I knew before. The knowledge I gained from the various trainings of trainers as well as training sessions which I facilitated has helped me to use those skills in my personal and daily life. Previously I started a second-hand clothes selling business, but because of the demanding nature of my work, I stopped the business. But now, I am confident that should my schedule become flexible, I would successfully run my own business to complement my income.



Alemiga Francis

Para-social Worker and Paralegal
Officer, Uganda Law Society

We were trained several times regarding sensitisation and holding dialogues. Our major work revolved around organising dialogues in communities to resolve conflicts and reintegrate ex-prison inmates into their societies successfully. When an inmate is released, we reach out to their people about their impending return to prepare the people in that family and community.

We worked very closely with the police and local area leaders in every area where we went to avoid conflict and show legitimacy about this work and we barely faced any resistance because most people whom we interacted with understood and accepted their son or daughter back home. Sometimes, though, some people are suspicious when they see ex-inmates coming back home. That means our engagements have had a positive impact in the communities.

We used to experience cases of complainants coming to demand reparations from ex-inmates even after the offender had already served their jail time. In such cases, all we needed to do was to clarify to such persons how the law works for them to understand that the person they sent to jail had already served their sentences and therefore they were already a free person. Also, some ex-prison inmates usually feel shy or withdrawn after going back home because of uncertainty about how they will be treated or what people will think about them because of the offence they committed.



Kadabara Boniface

Project Officer, ELVWC Project, PICOT

Working as a focal person in the Empowering Local Communities to Prevent Violence against Women and Children in West Nile (ELVWC) project on behalf of PICOT has made me learn that changing attitudes, perceptions and practices regarding respect for women's and children's rights is not an uphill task but requires a holistic, multisectoral, multi-stakeholder approach where the community should be at the centre. For any change process to take place, especially with regard to attitudes, practices and perceptions, it is key to have everyone involved, i.e. local leaders, government officials, the police, elders, cultural and religious leaders because each category has a strong influence on the perceptions, practices and attitudes in the community which are crucial to any change process.

The ELVWC project leveraged PICOT's participatory community outreach programme through forum theatre to empower communities to say NO to SGBV and prevent and protect the rights of women and children. This was a very effective and successful approach because the community outreach offered a platform that brought together the community and participants from different walks of life, including the duty bears, to discuss and respond to issues that are pertinent to the community. As forum theatre works with stories from the community itself, often from their own experiences, it directly and authentically creates a link to the minds and hearts of the community, thus enabling open dialogue while providing opportunity to the members of the community themselves to share human interest stories, experience and dialogue to trigger discussions around sensitive societal topics, such as oppression, discrimination and equality.



Ropani Sauda

Executive Director, PICOT

The community enjoyed participating in the forum theatre plays in which many, especially women, shared their life experiences with regard to sexual gender-based violence. Forum theatre is the best means of passing information to an illiterate community. The plays performed under the project gave opportunity for the community to reflect on the rights of women and children. Culturally, for many years women have been denied access to land, while girls were also not sent to school. However, through the project's engagement with the community, a good number of men pledged to support the women to access land for production as well as support their female children to get an education.

The prison inmates used forum theatre as an entertainment tool as well as for passing information to the policymakers and for behavioural change communication and, as a result, many individuals, leaders and policymakers learnt valuable lessons from the forum theatre plays.

Conclusion

Successful reintegration of inmates into communities is not a role for the Uganda Prisons Service or those in the criminal justice system alone. Rather, it requires the concerted effort of several stakeholders, including structures within the community. The community-based services need to establish a close link with the Uganda Prisons Service and actively support reintegration processes. It is also crucial to engage men and young male children in the struggle to prevent violence against women and children because it is one of the surest ways of fighting the vice. By its very nature, our society is very patriarchal and most young people grow up, as a result of indoctrination, thinking that the incidents they have grown up seeing happen around them are the norm, but in a situation where a life of togetherness, respect and responsibility is lived, a child grows up knowing the right thing to do. Duty bearers such as the police and the Justice and Law Services Sector (JLOS), on the other hand, need to strengthen law enforcement in order to send a serious signal to potential perpetrators of SGBV. Future initiatives should focus on creating support aid for survivors of SGBV since poverty is one of the reasons why victims of SGBV decide to negotiate with culprits.

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