

IMAGINE UGANDA

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K RETREAT IN
Karamoja

REBUILD YOUR HOME
AND **CHANGE** YOUR
LIFESTYLE IF YOU WANT
ME TO COME BACK

PAGE 8



EUROPEAN UNION

CARITAS

Schweiz
Suisse
Svizzera



Where Dignity Matters



Note from the Country Director

Dear Reader

As we begin the New Year, allow me to wish you all a happy and prosperous 2019. This year, our biggest project, the Economic Empowerment and Social Reintegration of Youth Ex-prisoners in northern Uganda, will come to an end on 31 March 2019. This is a project which saw us expand from 13 to every prison unit (28) in the Lango and Acholi sub-regions, impacting the lives of over 1,200 prison inmates and ex-inmates. On another note, I would like to inform you that I

will be stepping down from the position of Chief Executive Officer effective end of March, after seven years of being in that position. I have no doubt that I am leaving Advance Afrika in capable hands that will take the organisation forward beyond where I have been able. Therefore, this is the last foreword I will be writing for this magazine in my capacity as CEO. Like in the last issue, we continue to use this magazine to highlight the plight of ex-offenders who seek employment in the formal sector. You may be aware of the challenges and discrimination that ex-offenders face in trying to seek employment, the background check, stigma and lack of trust, among others. All these see an ex-offender serving another jail term out of prison (in the society).

In this issue of *Imagine Uganda Magazine*, we feature the story of Ojok Denis Abura whom we met at Kaladima Prison. He was serving the last year of his four-year jail term for rape. Owing to the nature of his offence, Denis was committed to the High Court and he spent three years on remand while occasionally reporting to court only for mention of his case. When he learnt of the plea bargain arrangement, he made up his mind to accept the offence in exchange for a lighter sentence. While in prison, because of his teaching background, Denis used his time to teach his fellow colleagues who had enrolled in both primary and secondary education. Upon release from prison, Denis was invited to resume his teaching job at Awer Primary School and, besides teaching, he practises mixed farming.

Also in this issue, we bring you stories from our West Nile intervention where one inmate, Nabil Abdalla, is giving back to his fellow inmates and prisons authority by repairing uniforms free of charge as he sells other clothes, which he makes from inside Arua Main Prison, and provides for his young family.

Colleagues, a life with dignity for these young people is possible if we all do our part and support the restoration of their social functionality. We continue to remain indebted and grateful to everyone who has made it possible for us to reach as many prison units and ex-inmates as possible through generous contributions, prayers and determination to make a difference and see lives restored. On their part, some of the youth ex-offenders are already doing remarkably well and have become agents of change in their communities.

Thank you all for standing with us and let us keep doing whatever we can to see many more lives changed and transformed.

Yours sincerely,

RWANKANGI RONALD | CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

IMAGINEUGANDA

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UPCOMING ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

- Disability is not inability: Muzamil Ali on life and work with Advance Afrika
- Breakfast meeting
- Coalition building meeting
- Retreat in Karamoja
- Extending our work to karamoja
- Online survey about employment of ex-convicts
- A new beginning in 2019

This issue is for January 2019.

We love to hear from you, send us your favorite story/comment or opinion about life after prison to info@advanceafrika.org and we will feature them. Help us become better with each issue.

Disclaimer:

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Abdalla Nabil preparing a cloth for sewing

ABDALLA NABIL

My name is Abdalla Nabil and I am 31 years old now. I was arrested in July 2015 and charged with the offence of aggravated defilement. After being on remand for a year, I was convicted on 31 August 2016 and I will be released on 21 April 2023. After finishing my second degree in Human Medicine from Uganda Christian University in 2014, I went back to the village and got a teaching job at Bramali Primary School in Maracha district. I was an English and Mathematics teacher on government payroll. To complement my income, I would also work

part-time at Family Health Care Clinic on weekends. Working two jobs was difficult because you barely get any rest, but because I needed the money, I soldiered on.

Being an only child who had been taken care of by a single and poor mother, I decided to get married so that my mother could have someone to help her while I juggled my two demanding jobs. So I met a girl and we started cohabiting. I made my intention to marry her known to her people, but their response was negative. They asked her to go back home, but she refused. After that, they were quiet for several months.

Then one day, I just saw police officers coming to arrest me.

I was thrown in jail and when they arraigned me in court, I was charged with aggravated defilement. They alleged that I had been living with an underage girl (17 years). However, that is not what she told me. When we had met nine months earlier, she had said she was 19 years old. However, there was nothing to prove it. So they accused me of being educated and an adult who should have known better than to marry a young girl and they concluded that I had influenced her decision.

As we speak now, I and my wife, whom I was imprisoned for defiling, have a three-year-old daughter. My wife was seven months pregnant when I was arrested and she lives with my mother in Maracha district. Together, they are raising her. I also send some support to them from here, but my mother, who is a cleaner at Maracha Hospital, is the one who supports them on a daily basis.

While already in prison, I learnt that my wife's family did not want us to live together because in the past there was a clash between her clan and mine. Some people from her clan killed one of my nephews and my uncle reported the matter to the police. As a result, six of them were arrested and charged with murder, and three of the suspects are serving their jail sentence in Arua Prison here with me. Surprisingly, we all live together as one.

I am scared of the relationship between my wife and her family since she refused to go back to them and it led to my arrest. I hope to find out when I get out.

At first, life in prison was not easy. I wondered why I had to suffer for trying to do the right thing. However, to overcome those thoughts I got involved in productive activities. I have been able to learn very many skills such as basket weaving, tailoring, carpentry and joinery, but it is joinery which started earning me money first among my skills because the tools were readily available. We all do our work in the prison workshop here.

After taking part in the business and life skills training offered by Advance Afrika, I went on to register for the business plan competition which was open to all the trainees. I emerged number one and my price was a

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After taking part in the business and life skills training offered by Advance Afrika, I went on to register for the business plan competition which was open to all the trainees.

tailoring machine, which I use for making clothes. My customers are fellow inmates as well as prison officers. Sometimes I buy materials and sew clothes which I sell in the prison barracks and also send to my wife to sell in the village.

Inside here, I mainly repair private clothes for inmates (the ones they use for going to court) and also for prison officers. I normally charge between 500 and 1,500 shillings, depending on the size and magnitude of the work to be done on the clothes, but for the torn inmates' and officers' uniforms, I repair them free of charge. That is my way of giving back to the institution and my colleagues for supporting my business. I also sell kitenge shirts, short-sleeved ones at 20,000 shillings and long-sleeved ones at 25,000 shillings, men's suits at 120,000 shillings, trousers at 25,000 shillings, and the rest range from 10,000 to 20,000 shillings.

The last time I checked, I had 2,300,000 shillings saved in my account at Bank of Africa. This is proceeds from my tailoring business. I intend to use some of this money to buy a designer and overlock machine to add quality and value to my work. Prisons authorities have supported and guided me in my work, which has enabled me to open

this account. When I get out, I want to open a shop for selling clothes and to also start a tailoring school so I can share my skills with those who deserve it, since it was other people's generosity which made it possible for me to know what I know.

I am very grateful to Advance Afrika and every other person they work with for thinking about us inmates. For me, in particular, the skills I have learnt have enabled me to provide for my family while in jail. The quality of my life has improved and I can also take care of my pressing needs.

The last time I checked, I had 2,300,000 UGX saved in my account at Bank of Africa. This is proceeds from my tailoring business.

A portrait of Muzamil Ali, a young Black man with a shaved head, wearing a light-colored, vertically striped button-down shirt. He is looking slightly to his left with a neutral expression. The background is blurred, showing an outdoor setting with other people.

MUZAMIL ALI

My childhood, losing my sight and education

My name is Muzamil Ali, I am 28 years old, a son to Ali Lati and the late Nyakuru Faima. I am the second born in a family of six children. I grew up in Terego county, Arua district. I was only six months old when I started experiencing challenges with my sight. Apparently a close associate of my mother envied her and applied some unknown concoctions to my eyes. I was told that I literally cried for a whole week when that happened. My father made an effort to have an operation done to rectify my sight with support from Keith Wardel, a UK-based doctor who carried out the operation at Kuluva Mission Hospital. I was told over three bottles of water was removed from my eyes and further management

abroad was recommended. The doctor was willing to foot the bill but my parents declined since they were worried about my safety. The doctor then recommended that my parents take me to school when I reached school-going age since he couldn't do anything else to help without my parents' consent.

When I was eight years old, I was taken to Arua Demonstration Primary School for Primary One. I had to learn braille, which is the only way for a person with my challenge can read and write. All this, coupled with coping with life in a new environment (boarding school), proved a difficult and daunting task. That year, I did only oral exams and passed very weakly to go Primary 2. At that point, I started getting used to the system and this caused a tremendous change in my education. I remember that in term two of

Primary Two, I was number 26 out of 280 pupils. This made me ask myself: Does it mean that only 25 heads in this class defeated me? This propelled me to concentrate even more. The second position was mine in third term – with the first position going to one tiny girl. From then on, the first position was always mine up to Primary Seven. I also held several leadership positions such as head boy, chairperson Debating Club, chairperson Malaria Club, academic and news prefect, among others. One unusual thing I remember this time was the fact that when a teacher missed his/her class and was reported to me, the moment I spoke with them, they went back to class. To date, a few of them who are still there still request me to talk to the candidates during briefings for examinations.

When the PLE results were released, I qualified for and was admitted to Mvara Secondary School where I, again, held several positions of leadership, such as UNSA class representative, and UNSA speaker for two terms in Senior Three and Five. I recall one of my closest friends also contested this very position. However, I ran a very robust campaign and in the last minute, he had to step down in my favour. At the same time, I also represented students with special needs as their chairperson and we successfully advocated for some of the subjects being taken by them then to be included in the school programme. I have very fond memories of the six years I spent at Mvara SS because it was historic not only for me, but for the school as well. It attracted a lot of publicity, both nationally and internationally, hence earning me utmost respect from the entire school community. Many students confessed to joining the school after reading my story in the newspaper so as to excel in debates.

Debate journey

My debating career dates back to primary school, where my school was one of the giants in the then Oluko sub-county. There was also a rival school (Jaiko). Whenever my school and Jaiko met for athletic and football competitions, we took that opportunity to challenge each other and everyone would want to prove their worth in spoken English.

I extended this to the classroom. Eventually, every Friday afternoon was designated for debate. I am particularly passionate about debate because I think good debaters make great and effective leaders. Since then, I have participated in most debate competitions right from primary to secondary and university. I have also represented Uganda in International debate competitions.

Right now, I am an adjudicator with the National Debate Council, a not-for-profit organisation

I am now a disability inclusion facilitator after undergoing a training with Light for the World, where we are now doing 12.4 per cent of our work in Uganda.

spearheading debating in the country. I am equally a trainer for young people in debate. Last year, I trained Muni girls who favourably outcompeted other schools in the northern regional and went on to win the national debate competition to clinch the Stanbic bank sponsored championship and was awarded a solar system worth twenty million shillings on top of a trip to Pretoria. I feel delighted whenever anyone reveals to me that I inspired them to join debate.

Debate has created for me many opportunities, including that for exposure. I met my current team leader, the Advance Afrika CEO, Mr Rwankangi Ronald, through debate. During the 2009 National Debate Championship, I emerged the best speaker in the whole country and, together with two other debaters, we represented Uganda in an international debate competition held in the Netherlands. Mr Rwankangi, now my boss, and Mr Don Wanyama, the current Senior Presidential Press Secretary, were heavily involved in building the capacity of young debaters in the country, and they actually accompanied us on that trip. While in the Netherlands, I was able to make long-term friends, with whom we have since kept in contact. The reflections from my first trip out of the country are a story for another day because it was one to remember forever.

Fresh from university in 2016, I had no idea how life would turn out for me or even where to begin from. However, because I had kept in touch with Mr Rwankangi, he offered

me an opportunity to volunteer with Advance Afrika. From being a volunteer, I am now a Project Assistant based in Arua. This opportunity has not only provided me with a source of income, but also equipped me with skills that I never had. For instance, I am now a disability inclusion facilitator after undergoing a training with Light for the World, where we are now doing 12.4 per cent of our work in Uganda. This follows an earlier training conducted for Advance Afrika by the same organisation in disability inclusion.

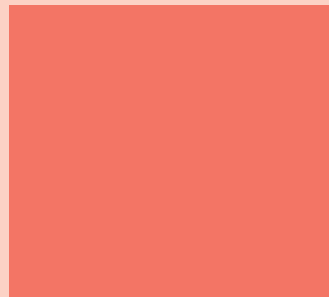
Our work involves training youth prison inmates in entrepreneurship and life skills. By being a part of the team that organises these trainings, I have been able to use the same knowledge to start my own business of selling motorcycle spare parts in Arua, where I also employ other youths. This gesture from Mr Rwankangi granted me an opportunity and inspiration to engage with voiceless people in my community, something which was only a dream during my childhood and education period. My work has enabled me to establish cordial working relationships with key stakeholders in the district of Arua where I am based. It has also widened my scope of interactions and understanding of community issues. Now when I visit ex-prison inmates who are doing businesses, I speak authoritatively and from an informed point of view as I guide them in their businesses. Many people are left amazed by what I am able to do in my state of disability, but through all this my colleagues at Advance Afrika have been so understanding and supportive. I believe my being a part of the team continues to challenge them to be inclusive in all they do because I am a constant reminder that disability is not inability, but also that we live with persons with disabilities in the same community and that they ought to be treated equally, like everyone else.

COMMENTS FROM FELLOW STAFF



For most of us, disabilities are limitations. You would not expect someone disabled to be able to work as effectively as everyone else. Looking at Ali go about his work and daily life will quickly change this notion. He is hardworking and smart. Not only is he working with Advance Afrika; he is also running his own business. He is an enterprising person and has seen his business grow in the period that it has been running. Ali is also our connection to many of the leaders in the Arua local government. Many of these leaders have a lot of respect for Ali, which is a reflection of the kind of person Ali is.

DANIEL NTENDE



It has been an amazing opportunity and experience working with Ali over the years in Advance Afrika. Working with him has taught me to be more patient since I took time to understand and learn what he likes and dislikes. It was not so easy to comprehend him at some point but knowing that he is a part of our team, I put effort into getting to know him better. Coming to Arua, a district I had never been to before, Ali made it easy for us to integrate since he knows quite a number of people and places in the small town which is his home district. Ali is hardworking and committed to his work. He also supports the team a lot, especially in implementing community activities.



Ali is a friendly person. For him disability is not inability. I feel challenged by what he does, especially being able to manage his own business as well as communicating on social media, something I don't expect of a visually impaired person.

NANCY ACEN



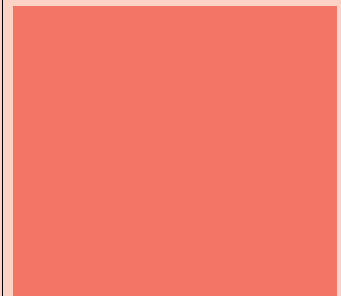
Ali is so full of life, very positive and intelligent. He reaffirms the notion that anything is possible because we all have the potential to make a difference no matter where or how we are.

SHARON ATUKUNDA



Ali is an intelligent colleague. Given his situation, I am always thrilled at the level of his articulation and knowledge of this at Advance Afrika.

GERALD NALODA



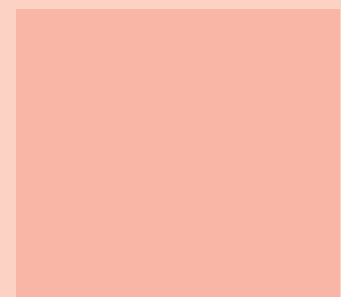
Ali is very interesting and amusing. I am inspired by his hard work, determination and outspoken character.

ALLELUIA NOWAMAANI



Ali is not only a staff member at Advance Afrika, but also an entrepreneur. We have been able to see his business develop and flourish for the past one year. It teaches me that I need passion to achieve whatever I want in life.

EMMA WACHAL





Ojok Denis Abura reading in front of his new grass thatched house

REBUILD YOUR HOME AND CHANGE YOUR LIFESTYLE IF YOU WANT ME TO COME BACK

After spending three years in prison on remand, I agreed to have committed the offence I was accused of in exchange for a lighter sentence during a plea bargain session at Gulu Main Prison. All I ever wanted was to know how much longer I had to stay in prison, serve and go back home.

ARREST AND JOURNEY TO PRISON

On the morning of 18 December 2014, I met with local defence officers in my village as I was returning from my garden where I

had gone to dig. They said they had been searching for me all over the village. They added that the previous night, I and two of my colleagues had raped a woman in Parabongo trading centre. They then dragged me to the nearest police post to record a statement. On reaching there, I realised I was the only suspect in custody. I learnt later in the day that the other two suspects had run away from the village. After two days, they were also arrested and brought to the police station. We were produced in court, not allowed to say anything, our sentence was read to us and we

were all remanded to Gulu Main Prison.

I stayed on remand for close to a year without knowing my fate, whether I would be convicted or released. During that period, I pleaded with my parents to request the victim to come out and testify if I was really among those who had raped her. However, they told me she had left the village and relocated to West Nile owing to shame and pressure from people about what had happened to her. Because of the nature of the offence against us, we were all committed to the High Court after a year in prison.

CONSIDERING A PLEA BARGAIN

The idea of being convicted of a crime I did not commit was tormenting, but staying in prison without knowing my fate was worse. So when officers of the law such as the Chief Justice, the Resident Judge as well as the Paralegal Advisory Services (PAS) visited the prison and talked about a plea bargain, I started giving it serious thought. I requested to speak with our court-appointed lawyer and he explained to us further what a plea bargain is about and we all agreed to give it a try. We had been in prison for three years now. Every time we were taken to court, our names would simply be read out and we would be returned to prison. Besides, out of over 3,000 inmates on remand, fewer than 50 were tried during those High Court sessions, which only came once in a while. To make matters worse, inmates from Amuru were barely included among the few whose cases were heard. Therefore, in the absence of concrete evidence against us, the absence of witnesses, coupled with poor investigations, a plea bargain was the only option left to us to learn our fate. We had stayed in prison long enough and just wanted to know how much longer we were to serve that sentence and regain our freedom. So we agreed with our lawyer on the plea bargain idea. The lawyer then handled all the negotiations on our behalf. On 18 January 2018, we were all sentenced to four years in prison. We accepted the sentence and the time we had already served on remand was subtracted, leaving us with eight more months to stay in prison. I was also transferred to Kaladima Prison in Amuru, where I completed my jail term.

LIFE IN PRISON

Before going to prison, I was a teacher. I had been teaching for five years, with the last two before my imprisonment at Awer Community Primary School. After completing my

66 When I reached Gulu Prison, I found out that there was a study centre inside prison for inmates who wanted to further their education.

secondary education at Gulu Central High School, my parents didn't have money to pay for higher education, so I joined a Primary Teachers College because it was cheaper compared to university. However, before I could finish, I started teaching in one of the rural schools which was in need of teachers in Amuru so I couldn't complete my certificate.

When I reached Gulu Prison, I found out that there was a study centre inside prison for inmates who wanted to further their education. I approached the social workers and told them about my expertise and background, and that is how I became an inmate teacher. I taught my fellow inmates for the entire time I was in jail. I taught mathematics and science for those in primary and history, commerce, geography and entrepreneurship for secondary students. My joy came from helping my students to learn and every time they sat and passed their exams, the feeling I got was unexplainable. Sometimes, however, they didn't pass well, which was understandable in view of where we were and the fact that learning was happening not under the best of circumstances. Still, they used that time to improve themselves by getting an education.

WORK AFTER IMPRISONMENT

Immediately I returned home from prison in September 2018, the administration of Awer Primary School wrote to me, requesting that I take up teaching in the school again. I was excited because I did not know what to expect or how to start life again after being away for four

years. I had two houses before my arrest, but I found both of them had collapsed on my return. My wife had also left. A lot had changed in those four years. So I requested that I be given a week or two off to clear my head before resuming teaching. My colleagues and people in the community treat me well, but I have a feeling that people talk about me in my absence. A prayer session was also organised where community members gathered and prayed for me. They welcomed me back home the same way the prodigal son was welcomed back. The teaching job I have now is not the best because it pays me very little money and sometimes the money comes very late. We are often told money is not enough since it is a community school and it depends on the goodwill of well-wishers within this community as well as parents' contribution towards school fees, but I am happy to have it.

Advance Afrika also supported me with four piglets (one male and three female) when I got out of prison. These were an addition to one that I had already bought and it is even about to give birth. I hope to have multiple income streams to sustain me as I look for something better to do in future.

BRINGING BACK MY FAMILY TOGETHER

While I was in prison, my wife visited me several times and stayed with my parents, who looked after her as my case was being determined in court. However, when this was not happening, she made up her mind to go back to her parents' home. So one day when she came to visit like she usually did, she broke the news to me. She said life without me at home had become difficult and she would prefer to go back and live near her parents because she would be much better off and well taken care of there. My father had many children to look after and he could only do the bare minimum for my wife and children, which to her was

Ojok's newly constructed hut



“Because the house I live in at the moment belongs to my younger brother, who left it for me when I was released from prison, I immediately decided to start constructing my own hut to ensure that I can bring back my wife to live with me.”

not enough. I understood her plight and accepted her request. When she heard that I was out of prison, she visited me here and stayed for a few days with all my three children and we shared a lot about getting back together. After she went back, I also visited her at her parents' home to make known my intention of bringing them back to live with me. Her parents welcomed the idea, but my wife told me she, too, would like to come back now that was out of prison, but she couldn't with the way things were. She asked me: Which house will I come back to if I return today? She gave me one condition and that is to build a house and change my lifestyle before she could return with the children.

Because the house I live in at the moment belongs to my younger brother, who left it for me when I was released from prison, I immediately decided to start constructing my own hut to ensure that I can bring back my wife to live with me. My younger siblings are helping me do this. Even my wife came back again to gather the grass for roofing it. I no longer drink and I got born again while in prison. My life now revolves around the school where I teach, my pigs and the garden.

WHAT IS A PLEA BARGAIN?

A plea bargain is the process between an accused person and the prosecution, in which the accused person agrees to plead guilty in exchange for an agreement by the prosecutor to drop one or more charges, reduce a charge to a less serious offence, or recommend a particular sentence subject to approval by court.

The plea bargain rule was promulgated and on 1 April 2016 under sections 41(1) and 41(2) (e) of the Judicature Act, Cap. 13. This was after an eleven-man team, headed by the Principal Judge, Yorukamu Bamwine, was set up by former the former Chief Justice of Uganda, Benjamin Odoki, in 2014 to drive the initiative with the aim of enhancing the efficiency of the criminal justice system. It was introduced amid a report that Uganda had more than 38,000 inmates instead of the recommended 15,000, making its prisons the most congested in East Africa. This was coupled with case backlogs in all courts.

WHO IS DENIS?

Ojok Denis Abura is a 28-year-old resident of Awer in Amuru district. He was arrested in December 2014 for rape. He first stayed on remand for a year before being committed to the High Court. After two more years on remand, together with his colleagues, they were handed down a four-year sentence after accepting the charge against them in exchange for a lighter sentence under the plea bargain order. While serving his sentence, he supported primary education inside prison, where he taught science and mathematics owing to his background in teaching. He also enrolled for our entrepreneurship and life skills training while serving the last few months of his sentence at Kaladima Prison, where he was transferred from Gulu Main Prison after conviction.

Denis was released from prison on 10 September 2015. Upon returning home, he was warmly welcomed by family members, who organised the community and thanksgiving prayers to welcome him back. The school where he taught before his arrest also wrote and asked him to go back to his former job.

Denis is currently rebuilding his life and a home to enable him to bring back his wife, who had gone back to



Ojok Denis Abura reading in front of his new grass thatched house

her parents while he was in prison. He is the proud father of three children. He is a teacher at Awer Primary School and a born-again Christian who has committed to changing his life for good.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Ojok Denis is a good teacher who was misled by bad peer groups. His life before prison was exemplary to young people in this community until he joined those bad friends and that resulted in his imprisonment. We have asked him to resume work and he gets along with other staff members. We treat him like any of our other staff members here in every respect.

The crime that led to his imprisonment happened outside the school and it did not touch on the school in any way. One bad thing was that our staff member was accused of being a part of something bad and another was that we lost a committed teacher.

As administration of this school, we sat down and decided to give him a second chance. We had heard about

the crime and followed the case closely. We know that if he committed the crime with his colleagues, then his action was influenced by the bad group he had joined and by alcohol. However, another thing that gives us confidence in him is that the police did not find or present any evidence to connect him to the alleged crime. He got into trouble for being friends with the other two suspects. So we live, work and laugh with him despite what happened to him. Moreover, we are confident that the four years he spent in prison have changed his life for the better. Mr Opio Denis Acula, Deputy Head Teacher, Awer Primary School

PRISON AUTHORITY ON ENGAGING INMATES WITH PARTICULAR EXPERTISE SUCH AS OJOK

In prison here, normally when an inmate is brought, an admission book is opened which contains all their details. Therefore, we know who they are, where they are from, what expertise they have, their level

of education. After they have settled in prison, especially for those with long sentences, we engage them in areas that can utilise their expertise. In addition, those who know they qualify to do something like teaching, music, carpentry etc. have often walked to us and asked to be included in such programmes, and that is how Ojok was involved. For instance, we have students undertaking studies, both in primary and secondary, here at Gulu Main Prison. Inmates who have reached at least Senior Four are engaged to teach their colleagues on a voluntary basis. We do not pay them any money, but sometimes some organisations, such as Restore Leadership Academy, have helped us to motivate them with a small token of appreciation once in a while. Mr Andrew Okello, Senior Welfare and Rehabilitation Officer



RETREAT IN

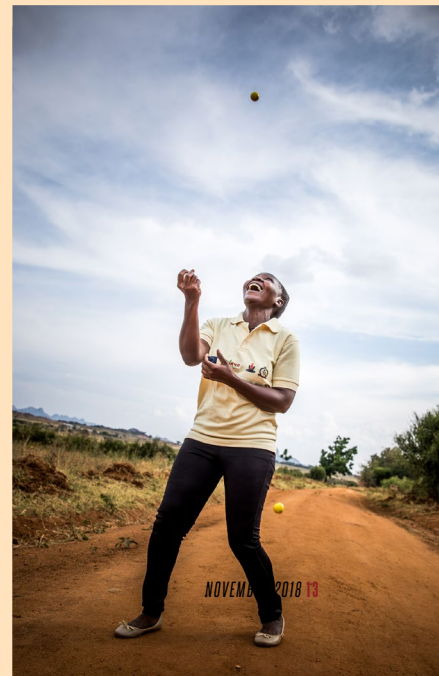
Karamoja

In December 2018, we went on a five-day staff refresher training, which also doubled as our annual retreat. The retreat has become an integral part of our organisational culture. The focus of this getaway was to build the capacity of our staff to be able to integrate conflict transformation into their day-to-day work as well as strengthen the team spirit and capacity to address conflicts within the team. At this retreat, Ms Rendel Freude, a renowned photographer, and Dr Kristin Kunze, alias Sophia Altklug, joined us and made the experience worth remembering. The two artists visit us and our partners annually to offer photography lessons and creative theatre exercises.

The decision to go to the Karamoja sub-region for this staff reflection caught many of the participants by surprise, but it was not far-fetched for a young and innovative organisation like Advance Afrika. We did not only hope to introduce our staff members to an intervention we are building in Karamoja to enhance the capacity of the community living around Kidepo Valley National Park by empowering them to effectively represent their interest, but also to expose them to a different culture and environment. Given its history, the Karamoja sub-region faced a number of conflicts,

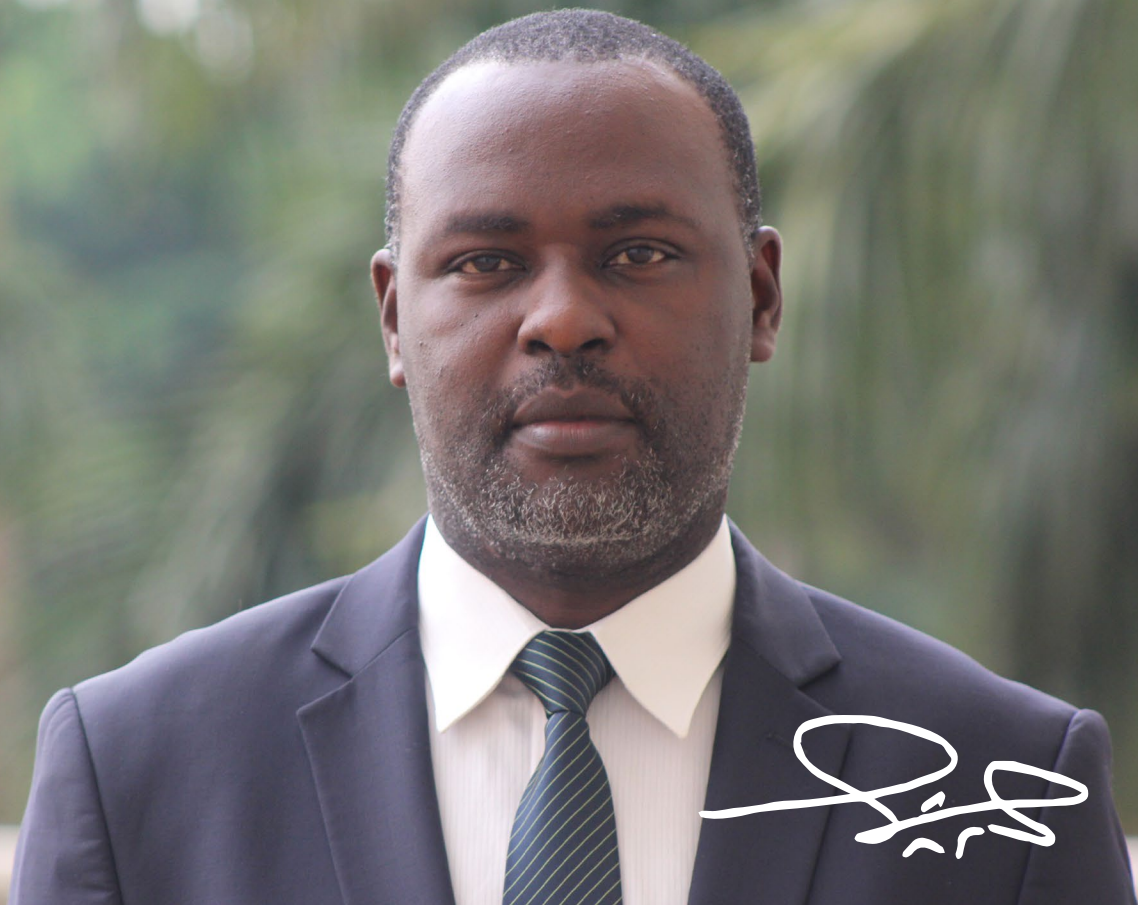
ranging from cattle rustling and the struggle for scarce resources, given its semi-arid landscape to animal-human conflicts due to its proximity to the game park.

AGEH/Civil Peace Service (CPS), through Mrs Irene Mukasa Erben, a peace advisor with Advance Afrika, supported the staff refresher training. For over 50 years, AGEH, as a state-recognised personnel service provider, has been a reliable partner for development workers and a key source of specialist personnel for many church and other civil society organisations active in the field of international development cooperation work. Since its inception by the Catholic associations and organisations in 1959, AGEH has supplied over 6,000 experts for development projects. AGEH is one of the implementing organisations of the CPS and a member of the CPS Consortium. The CPS is funded by the German Government and implemented by nine German peace and development organisations. CPS experts support people on the ground in their commitment for dialogue, human rights and peace on a long-term basis. Currently, more than 300 international CPS experts are active in 42 countries.



IMAGINE DESIGN & PUBLISHING

NOVEMBER 2018 13



Advance Afrika CEO and co-founder Ronald Rwankangi stepping down after 7 years

Ronald Rwankangi, CEO and co-founder of Advance Afrika, has stepped down from his position effective 1 April 2019. Ronald, who has been with Advance Afrika for seven years as CEO and co-founder, shared the sad news and his gratitude with the staff members in his beginning-of-year message.

'Dear Colleagues, Happy New Year! I know this might come as a surprise to most of us, but I am writing to inform you that after 6+ years of leading Advance Afrika in the position of Chief Executive, I have decided to step down from the CEO position at the end of March 2019,' said Ronald. 'Working with all of you, at different levels, different locations, different times, has been very transforming, not just to my professional and career journey but also to my life in general. I thank you all for making my journey at Advance Afrika rewarding, worthwhile and exciting. As I step down, I am very confident that Advance Afrika has even a better future because of you. Together, and over time, we have built a great team, we have built systems, we have built a brand and we have demonstrated that we are achievers. This gives me confidence that we shall continue being the best at what we do. In a different capacity, I shall

continue supporting Advance Afrika in the realisation of the dreams and aspirations that we have set forward. May God bless you and may God bless Advance Afrika.'

Ronald co-founded Advance Afrika in 2012, and has served as its chief executive since then. In addition, he contributed immensely to the rapid growth and international reputation of Advance Afrika. He himself won several awards for his dedication to serving the vulnerable and marginalised persons, especially prison inmates and ex-inmates in northern Uganda, including the Visionaries of Uganda Award (Socio-Economic Transformation) and the Vocational Service Award (Rehabilitation of Prison Inmates and Youths).

This announcement comes at a time when Advance Afrika has just earned itself a reputation as the leading organisation in the rehabilitation, reformation and reintegration of prison inmates and ex-inmates in Uganda.

While we are excited for his future, we are sad to see him go. However, we are confident that the time he shared with us, changing lives and restoring social functionalities, has provided the necessary mentorship needed for the organisation to live long after his departure.

STAFF MEMBERS ON SREE

As one of our major projects, the Economic Empowerment and Social Reintegration of Youth Ex-prisoners in northern Uganda project, which was funded by the European Union and Caritas Switzerland, ends in March 2019. We asked some of our staff members and key stakeholders who have been working on this project to share their highlights of being part of the project. Below, we share what they said with you.



Working closely with the action's multi-stakeholder holistic approach enabled me to appreciate the relevance of social reintegration and economic empowerment of young people. I visited, participated and witnessed change in lives, attitudes, mindsets and hope restored in youth ex-prisoners. Social reintegration is the key for a safer and productive society.
Stephen Michael Ocaya, Community Liaison Officer



I have learnt that one must reflect on their past experiences in present situations in order to have a better future. This way, crime and mistakes in life are avoided/controlled, hence a better and peaceful society. Everyone is valuable and everyone deserve a second chance after making mistakes in life because two wrongs do not make a right. Ramadhan
Opio, Project Assistant, Victim Offender Relationship Project



Participating in the entrepreneurship trainings inside prison and seeing inmates smiling and impatient to start their venture inside and after imprisonment was a fantastic moment. When one of them came to thank me much later upon his release, I knew that the work Advance Afrika does really makes a lot of sense.
Gaetan Bidaud, Research Associate

This has been a very special and unique project. Right from the time of its inception, it sounded interesting and different from the several other projects we have reviewed and supported. In Advance Afrika, we have developed a lasting partnership. For us at the European Union Delegation in Uganda, we are very happy of the work we have done with Caritas Switzerland and Advance Afrika. This is the only project that ever hosted over 15 European Union Ambassadors and I believe the impact on your organisation is far more positive, as seen from the visits we undertook several times.
Elizabeth Ongom, EUING



I wholeheartedly appreciate Advance Afrika for choosing northern Uganda to implement this project. I was here from the onset of this intervention and I have learnt to appreciate it because I have seen it grow from just one to 28 prison units and I have grown with it, too, from officer in charge to District Prisons Commander and now Regional Prisons Commander. As prison officers, sometimes we are referred to as magicians, because in the midst of the small budgetary allocation, we do our best to redeem the situation and endeavour to improve conditions in the respective units. Advance Afrika found us in the struggle, empowered our officers to do their work better, and further went ahead to work side by side with us for the past five years. Even as this project ends, we are grateful for the journey we have undertaken together and we pray for a better future.
SSP Margaret Obonyo Oriik, Regional Prisons Commander, Greater North





◀ Representatives of CSOs and UPS after the second coalition meeting

Sharon Atukunda_ Advance Afrika Director of Programs speaking at the Coalition Meeting



Coalition Meeting

Advance Afrika, together with the Uganda Prisons Service, convened a follow-up meeting of civil society organisations working with the Uganda Prisons Service on social rehabilitation and the reintegration of prison inmates. The meeting, which attracted a diverse range of participants from not-for-profit organisations, donor agencies and the Uganda Prisons Service, took place on 6 March 2018 at the Uganda Prisons Service headquarters in Kampala.

Premised on sharing the experiences and good practices of not-for-profit actors, the purpose of the meeting was to explore synergies for the effective delivery of social rehabilitation and reintegration services. The meeting also sought to strengthen the coalition that was formed in 2017 to do a joint advocacy strategy to lobby for reforms to the current inmate rehabilitation and reintegration system in Uganda. Ideas generated during the meeting were tabled at a breakfast meeting with Members of Parliament for consultation, action and possible policy influence.

THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS CAME OUT AS RESPONSES TO CHALLENGES THAT WERE IDENTIFIED BY PARTNERS:

1. The need for civil society organisations to align their entrepreneurship and life skills training manuals with the Uganda government skilling programmes curriculum.
2. The need to set up a one-stop centre for all CSOs engaged in the rehabilitation of inmates to engage each other and share ideas.
3. The need for clarity on which minister should give an order to release inmates who should be out on such an arrangement because the guidelines do not specify which minister should do this.
4. The need for partners to document and share the good work, impact and challenges of their interventions.
5. Proactive and continuous engagement with communities to promote mindset change from the punitive to the corrective approach to rehabilitation.
6. The need to visit the Equal Opportunities Commission to address them on the issue of people being denied jobs because of their criminal records.
7. The need to support persons with mental health challenges by working together with Butabika Hospital and other facilities to ensure that assistance is provided to those with mental health challenges.
8. The need to consider interventions in emerging areas such as the elderly and inmates in long-term imprisonment.



Breakfast Meeting

ADVANCE AFRIKA ENGAGED MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO CHART A POLICY DIRECTION FOR THE SOCIAL REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF EX-PRISONERS IN UGANDA

Advance Afrika engaged Members of Parliament to chart a policy direction for the social rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-prisoners in Uganda.

Following a successful second convening of a coalition meeting with CSOs actively working with the Uganda Prisons Service in the social rehabilitation of ex-prison inmates in Uganda, Advance Afrika engaged Members of Parliament to chart a policy direction in a consultative meeting on 18 December 2018. During the meeting, several issues were discussed, including the situation of children in prison with their mothers, integrating ex-inmates into the labour market, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, plea bargain and so on. The legislators noted that whereas the policy suggestions are good, there are limited resources for implementation, as seen from the meagre resources allocated to the Uganda Prisons Service every financial year. They further urged the organisation's executives to investigate and do more research on recidivism and re-offending, then arrange and share their experiences with the Parliamentary Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs as well as other relevant government ministries/agencies to ease sectoral coordination. This is because most of the work we are doing complements government effort since it is their mandate to do such work. Advance Afrika has been working in partnership with the Uganda Prisons Service to prepare youth ex-offenders for life after imprisonment since 2014 in northern Uganda after signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Lawmakers, from both the government and opposition sides, expressed gratitude, besides noting that the area in which the organisation has built expertise is often forgotten when priority areas for funding are being considered by both the government and development partners. This means that all the good work being done is just a drop in the ocean compared to what requires to be done to rehabilitate and reintegrate ex-offenders in Uganda. The meeting enabled Advance Afrika to share experiences, best practices and lessons learnt with select Members of Parliament and seek input from the legislators to advance correctional policy as part of Advance Afrika's initiative to develop an advocacy strategy to influence national correctional policy. The meeting also elicited suggestions on how to reform the current rehabilitation system in Uganda. Areas for decisive practical action and immediate follow-up for Advance Afrika were identified.

It became apparent at the end of the deliberations that the potential of all players, including policy-makers, implementing agencies and development partners must be harnessed to provide coordinated leadership in reforming correctional services. Both meetings held with Members of Parliament provide an entry point into in shaping the policy direction with regard to the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-prisoners in Uganda.

VISION:

A safe and free society where young people live with dignity and realise their full potential

MISSION:

We address the root causes of vulnerability by developing opportunities for economic empowerment and transforming the social functionality of communities

VALUES:

Courageous leadership, Passion, Appreciation and Professionalism