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The School Open Day Event

An initiative to involve parents, teachers, pupils and the surrounding community in school activities -including promotion of school sanitation and hygiene.

This document highlights the background, objectives and some of the activities involved in a *School Open Day*, taking a specific case of Nyarukoma Primary School in Nyantungo sub-county, Buraro parish, Kyenjojo district. This case is a result of fieldwork and in-depth discussions with the District Education Officer of Kyenjojo district, Madam Gertrude Tibakanya, and the head teacher of Nyarukoma Primary School, Mr. Agaba Samuel.

INTRODUCTION

A *School Open Day* (SOD) is an activity carried out once or twice a term aimed at involving parents, teachers and the neighbouring community in some school activities. *School Open Day* objectives may include: improving sanitation and hygiene (San&Hyg) conditions in the school, fundraising, promoting girl child education, etc.

On a selected date during the school term all pupils and members of the school community physically participate in the *SOD* activities. These can include cleaning the school compound, latrines, classrooms, washrooms etc. as well as information sharing on San&Hyg through health talks, music, dance and drama and where possible through the media.

These *School Open Day* events are arranged to enable the surrounding communities to jointly work with and support the school authorities towards healthy and friendly school environments. A common problem indicated by district and sub-county staff is the poor relation between school and surrounding community. This has reportedly resulted in vandalism and theft of school assets, soiling of toilets, etc. Primary schools may be seen as government property that does not belong to the community.

Objectives of a School Open Day

- To improve the relationship between the school and the neighbouring community
- To promote joint planning between and contribution by the school community, parents and surrounding communities on school development and its environment.
- To promote parent involvement in the affairs of the school.
- To promote transparency, accountability in the developmental plans of a school
- To empower the pupil community in participating in extra curricular school activities.

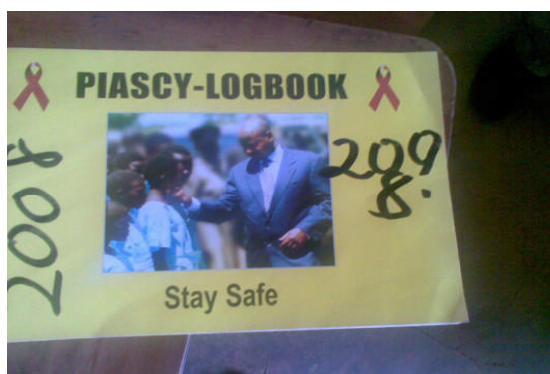


School children involved in sporting activities

BACKGROUND OF SCHOOL OPEN DAYS IN KYENJOJO DISTRICT

Kyenjojo District is located in Western Uganda about 270km on the Kampala-Fort Portal highway.

Kyenjojo District Education Department (DED) is at the forefront of promoting the *School Open Day* initiative at all primary schools in the district. Initially, the department focused on the PIASCY¹ programme under which there is awareness raising on HIV/AIDS using children as agents of change, and these activities are regularly recorded in a PIASCY logbook.



Cover page of a PIASCY Log book

However, the department realised that there are also other challenges in the district education system, like absenteeism, defilement, poor San&Hyg, early marriages, school drop out, malnutrition and child labour. Hence the District Education Department saw the *School Open Day* events as excellent opportunities to address these issues.

With the District Education Department having only six official staff, more personnel had to be added to the *School Open Day* support force. Those added include one Sports Officer, eight Centre Coordinating Tutors attached to Kabulasoke Outreach Team and two staff from the International NGO UPHOLD. This made it feasible to support *SOD* events in the district, even if many schools would actually have an event on the same day. One district or NGO staff person would go and supervise an event in one school.

¹ Presidential Initiative on AIDS strategy for Communication

DESCRIPTION OF A SCHOOL OPEN DAY

Players/ Stakeholders involved in planning and conducting a School Open Day event

District and Sub-County officials

The District Education Department staff, Sub-county leaders, Parish Chiefs, Health Assistants and Community Development Officers.

School community

- School administration, head teacher, deputy head teacher, senior woman and male teacher, class teachers, heads of departments, prefects and class monitors.
- School clubs; scouts and girl guides, Girl Education Movement, sanitation club, Young Talk, Music, Dance and Drama Groups.
- All pupils in upper, middle and lower classes.
- School Management Committee (2 members); 4 representatives from Sub-Counties; 3 representatives from commissioners committee (old boys and girls & the foundation body) and 2 representatives from the parents' body.
- Parents Teachers Association; all 9 members who are selected by the parents are involved.

Community members

Representatives from the Local Leaders (LC1, LC2 and LC3), Religious leaders (Catholic, Anglican, Moslem, Seventh Day Adventist and 'Abeikiriza sect'), Local Community and all parents.

Roles and Responsibilities of the stakeholders

Stakeholders	Roles/Responsibilities
District Education Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers support supervision • Offers Technical Assistance • Monitors action plan implementation
School Administration and heads of department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise the relevant preparatory meetings • Participate in the selection of the theme of the event.
School Management Committee (SMC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amends and approve activity plans • Mobilises resources for the school open day • Facilitates some of the event activities
Parents Teachers Association (PTA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organises and coordinate the parents body • Links the general community to the school community
Civic leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitize and mobilise the community on various issues; San&Hyg, policies in place etc.
Religious leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate people on moral uprightness • Act as a channel of information dissemination.
Local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to information sharing during the day • Takes part in action plan development • Takes part in the activities of the day; school cleaning up, gardening, plays/games etc.

Nyarukoma Primary School is found in Buraro parish, Nyantungo Sub County, Kyenjojo district. It is located 5 km from Kyenjojo town and has 1,800 children, 935 girls and 865 boys.

The first Nyarukoma Primary School Open Day event took place in the third term of 2006. The School Open Day In April 2008 aimed at *increasing parent involvement in school affairs for the betterment of school performance.*



Pupils lining up for inspection

Steps followed in organising, implementing and follow-up of the School Open Day at Nyarukoma Primary School – April 2008

1. **Identifying of areas for improvement within the school**, this was done jointly by the school leadership and parents through a number of meetings.
2. **Planning for the School Open Day event** i.e. what activities will be done, how and by whom. This was also done jointly by the SMC together with parents representatives, civil leaders and religious leaders.
3. **Sensitizing the school community**; the school community was sensitized on the event, and the children conducted a series of rehearsals for the songs, poems, speeches and plays to be presented at the event.
4. **Mobilising of the surrounding community**; surrounding communities were informed of the event, parents were informed through letters, delivered by the children, and announcements were made over the local radio station- 'Kyenjojo Development Radio'.
5. **Actual School Open Day Event**; on this day, a number of activities took place: official speeches, sports competitions, drama presentations etc. The final outcome was an action plan with activities to be addressed by the various stakeholders and to be monitored at a particular date.
6. **Action Plan for implementation**; some of the issues that have been successfully addressed are: (i) parents financially contributed towards the renovation of classrooms and construction of food storage facilities, (ii) parents also accepted to pack lunch for their children to fight malnutrition.

7. **Support supervision and monitoring;** this is offered by the DED, members of the School Management Committee and civic leaders.
8. **Feedback is given to the school administration** on findings of the monitoring.

Activities of a School Open Day

All activities of a *School Open Day* depend on the theme of the day e.g. San&Hyg, sex education, absenteeism, school drop outs etc.

The theme of the *School Open Day* held in April 2008 was on increasing parent involvement in school affairs for the betterment of school performance. Some of the activities were:

- Reciting Poems in line with the theme
- Sports competitions between parents, teachers and children.
- Making Speeches
- Electing a new School Executive Committee.
- Acting out the problems /issues identified through Music, Dance and Drama
- Sharing lunch between parents, children and teachers.
- Checking the state of school facilities.
- Evaluating teachers' performances
- Discussing specific issues/problems being faced by the school and propose probable solutions.
- Joint action planning and developing the Way-Forward.



A school ECOSAN facility being inspected

A typical School Open Day programme

Time	Activity
10:00-11:00 am	Arrival, Registration & Assembling of all guests
11:00 - 12 noon	National /Kingdom Anthem & opening prayers
12:00- 1:00 pm	Opening remarks by head teacher chairman P.TA & chairman SMC.
1:00-2:00 pm	Lunch Break
2:00-3:00 pm	Pupil presentations in song, poems, dance and drama
3:00-4:00 pm	Discussions on school development issues with action plans
4:00- 4:45 pm	Sports competitions between teachers & children, teachers & parents, parents & children
4:45- 5:00 pm	Closing remarks by chief guest and official closure

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Parents jointly agreed to contribute a small cash contribution of 2,000 UgShs per parent per year towards renovation of school classrooms
- Parents agreed to pack lunch for their children, which was not the case before, to promote their participation in class
- A school food storage facility was constructed as agreed upon in one of the school open day events. Harmonious Relationships have been developed between parent and teachers, parents and pupils and between teachers and children.
- Full participation of all school stakeholders in planning for school development issues has been achieved

LESSONS LEARNT

- School Open Days act as an interface meeting, linking all school stakeholders from within and outside the school community.
- It improves parents-teacher relationship, parent-child relationship and teacher-child relationship, promoting cooperation.
- It enables various school issues to be addressed in one event, saving time and money.
- It enables parents to understand their role concerning school affairs.
- It enables parents to learn from each other through sharing information and experience.
- It enables teachers to know their weakness through helpful criticism from other members of the school community.
- It promotes children's personal hygiene and healthy school environment
- To cut costs for a *School Open Day*, the programme is kept short - probably to half a day and refreshments are kept at drinks and simple snacks or packed food.

MAJOR DRIVERS OF THE PROCESS AND SUCCESS FACTORS

- The involvement of the district education department, especially if there is a pro-active District Education Officer with an enthusiastic team
- Active involvement and support from the woman Member of Parliament – in this case it was Hon. Joyce Kwebiha
- Choosing of child agents - mainly parents from within a community willing to take part in the agreed action points e.g. following up on school drop outs, sensitizing and mobilising other community members regarding an issue etc.
- Joint action planning at the end of an event making all the stakeholders involved responsible and accountable.
- Conducting of an evaluation later in the term to monitor progress.
- Use of religious leaders as a communication channel; they pass on important information after a sermon and are looked up to by many.
- Support offered by the International NGO UPHOLD through the district education department in form of technical assistance and facilitated implementation of most School Open Days.
- UNICEF's involvement, especially the provision of hand washing facilities in schools
- An exchange visit made to Bushenyi district changed the attitude of many teachers towards teaching.
- Airtime for talk shows on Kyenjojo Development Radio- a local radio station - has been provided for by the woman MP. The talk shows discussed school related issues especially on girl child empowerment.
- The use of role models as facilitators during the event to boost and encourage the children; these are normally older boys and girls of the school.
- Well-organised school committees and clubs who prepared the event.
- The participatory nature of the event involved parents, teachers and children.

RESOURCES

Resources involved in the preparation of a successful *School Open Day* event are: human input, funds, costumes, especially for the games, dances and plays, musical instruments, sports gears and equipment.

A rough estimate of cash needed per *Open School Day* event/school is about 150,000 UgShs (about US\$90 in 2008). This cost can be reduced further by limiting refreshments to only simple drinks and snacks, or keep it at a half day function, or encourage those to attend to come with packed food. Information provided by Nyakasenyi Primary School confirmed spending as low as 50,000 UgShs (2008: US\$30) to organise a *School Open Day* event. Under Universal Primary Education, funds for this can be accessed from the vote of co-curriculum activities and management under the U.P.E grant.

CHALLENGES OF THE INITIATIVE

- If facilitation funds depend on contributions from NGOs the scaling up or regular organising of these events may be at risk.
- The U.P.E grant is sometimes delayed or does not come at all, affecting the holding of many School Open Days.
- In a whole, the preparation and holding of a *School Open Day* event slightly interferes with the normal school timetable since preparatory activities run even during class room hours.
- Lack of a school main hall facility in which this event can be carried out especially in case of heavy rainfall. Therefore most times it is held in the open space.

CONTACTS FOR MORE INFORMATION

Mrs. Gertrude Tibakanya, District Education Officer, Kyenjojo District, Mr. Agaba Samuel, Head Master Nyarukoma Primary School Kyenjojo district.

REFERENCES/ MATERIALS USED AND INFO SOURCES

- NETWAS and IRC (2007 and 2008) Kyenjojo School Open Day visits and study reports (unpublished)
- Resource persons: Cate Nimanya, Gertrude Tibakanya
- For further information contact Information Officer: netwasuganda@gmail.com - phone 0414 577 463

And visit www.watsanuganda.watsan.net

Further reading;

- School Open Day manual, MoES
- Khamal et al. (2005) Joy of Learning- IRC publication, www.irc.nl/page/27171
- IRC (2007) Towards Effective Programming for WASH in Schools. IRC Technical Paper 48 www.irc.nl/page/37479