The Church and Community holistic ministry

Samuel Ocung, Micah Network Global Consultation, Thailand, 2006

Case Study of
Pentecostal Assemblies of God in Uganda

Brief history and background of PAG

Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) is a church that has been registered as Non-Governmental Organization and operates nationally in 46 districts of Uganda. Its endeavors began in 1930 by few Ugandans who received calling to reach out to the community with the Word of God. The work of the Fellowship is fully run by the nationals.

PAG has 3,500 community churches organized under 460 Assembly Church celebration points. PAG has approximately 300,000 believers and it is the second largest Protestant denomination in Uganda. The fellowship is overseen by an Executive body composed of the General Superintendent and General Secretary.

Humanitarian crisis in Uganda and its effect on local livelihood

A humanitarian tragedy has been unfolding in the Northern and North-eastern parts of Uganda -- its impact on some of the most vulnerable groups, especially children, is a story that demands close and continuous attention. With an armed rebellion threatening to undermine Uganda’s progress to economic development, child soldiers emerge as central figures amid deadly violence and growing humanitarian emergency.

There are thousands of testimonies of human brutality in this face of the world were Christianity takes the leads in demography. Mutilation of innocent people is notable in this area ravaged by war. Testimony by Consolate Auma in Northern Uganda poses challenge to the church in its attempt to seek peace and reconciliation among all the affected parties.

Consolata Auma talks with difficulty because of her mutilated mouth and fights back tears when she recounts her ordeal at the hands of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels. With her nine-month-old baby tightly strapped to her back, Auma insists that the only rebels who should be pardoned are those who were abducted and forced to fight, and "not the ringleaders".

"If [LRA leader Joseph Kony] comes back, he should be killed," she said, adding that it was the 'ringleaders' who ordered her lips, nose and ears to be cut off.
Auma was captured by the rebels in April 2005 while walking from Paicho village, 30 km northeast of Gulu town, to Awach. That evening, her captors mutilated her, accusing her of committing a crime by walking on the road. "They said they did not want anybody to move on the road," she said.

Sarafina (38) from Kalongo IDP camp in Pader District stepped on a landmine in 1997. She has five children, including one who was abducted six years ago and has never returned.

Families in the internally displaced person’s camps experience poor living condition. Poor hygiene is evident and this has claimed lives due to resultant diseases.

Children in IDP camp collecting water from a well in Acoa camp- Katakwi district. The camp houses close to 5,700 IDPs and has two water points. The camp has one health center that is poorly stocked.
Mission: To engage community in Holistic development that transforms their lives into desired dignity through participatory poverty reduction and Christian ministry

Families in the internally displaced person’s camps experience poor living condition. Poor hygiene is evident and this has claimed lives due to resultant diseases.

Response by PAG to the plight of mankind

The Pentecostal Assemblies of God established its first response to humanitarian calamity in 1993. The holistic ministry was set up to rehabilitate communities that had been traumatized by armed conflict in the Northern and North-Eastern Uganda. This region suffered from rebel insurgency, cattle raids by neighboring Karamojong and the effects of HIV/AIDS.

Over the several years, PAG focused on community development. PAG staff worked with local farmers to increase livestock production through a credit program that provided female goats to farmers of community development groups. Participants repaid the loans (and helped others) by passing on to another program participant the first kid born. Another credit program offered improved groundnuts seed to farmer groups. PAG began HIV/AIDS work for the purpose of prevention and care by training peer educators and counselors for people who were infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. PAG also worked with groups of HIV positive people on food security issues. Where development was problematic due to insecurity PAG provided cooking pans to thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) families living in camps that had been set up as a result of increasing violent cattle raids and rebel attacks. Participants and beneficiaries of PAG programs testified as to how PAG interventions had improved their lives.

In 2003 the picture changed dramatically when LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army rebels) invaded North-Eastern Uganda, overrunning most of the region. The rebels stayed around for over six months, and to avoid their brutality tens of thousands of people fled to IDP camps or to stay with relatives and friends outside of the danger area.

By early 2004 some people were ready to go home, but they needed help to start farming again after losing everything to the rebels. PAG was a major contributor in this rehabilitation. It was the implementing partner in a relief and rehabilitation program that included PAG, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), the Canadian Food Grains Bank (CFGB), Tear Fund UK and TEAR Australia, a partnership that brought together Christians from four continents in support of those who had suffered at
the hands of the rebels. PAG distributed food, seed and agricultural tools to over 1,000 families.

Now in 2006 the situation in North-eastern Uganda has stabilized to the extent that community development activities have begun again. PAG’s operations in North-eastern Uganda focuses on working with local community committees and groups of participating farmers to improve food security and income through goat credit program. PAG is introducing improved he-goats to increase the size of local goats, for better market prices. PAG is also offering credit for improved groundnut seed and cassava cuttings to farmer groups so that they can improve yields and incomes beyond what they had before the rebel incursions of 2003-2004.

![Life is better with food security](image)

PAG National Development Coordinator (Samuel Ocung) with one of the families that benefited from cassava project

PAG continues to serve the HIV/AIDS support groups in an attempt to restore hope among the infected and affected persons. Some groups are being provided with credit for goats while several groups of widows have received credit for oxen and plows. In the past year PAG church leaders were trained on some of the HIV/AIDS response strategies.

From the beginning, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has been accompanied by fear, ignorance and denial, leading to silence and inaction by different agencies and to stigma,
Mission: To engage community in Holistic development that transforms their lives into desired dignity through participatory poverty reduction and Christian ministry

discrimination and abuse against people living with HIV/AIDS and their families. Children orphaned and otherwise affected by HIV/AIDS have paid a harsh price for this failure to act.

Action against HIV/AIDS has to be a shared responsibility. No single stakeholder has the capacity to respond unilaterally to a crisis of this complexity and magnitude. It is vital therefore to ensure that information about dangers of HIV/AIDS and the steps needed to tackle the crisis is available to every – one – policy makers in the participating organization, community leaders and the public. Everyone needs to collaborate by collecting and disseminating information and experience. The church is the best forum for dissemination of HIV/AIDS information and restoring hope for the affected persons. However, this has not been possible for decades due to ignorance by the religious leaders who in turn push responsibility to medical personnel.

The water and sanitation programme was designed to protect the existing water-sources and dig shallow wells in some areas. PAG provides basic health education to communities and promotes good hygiene in the households.

PAG continues to engage the Iteso and Karamojong tribes in peace and reconciliation dialogue. This has been possible through negotiation meetings mediated by PAG pastors from Teso and Karamoja ethnic groups. We believe that with continued intervention of the church in resolving this hostile neighbourhood, the two ethnic groups will one day live in total harmony.

PAG conducts Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) program in the North-eastern Uganda. This has provided an opportunity for acquisition of knowledge and skills by the disadvantage people. It’s evident that after 2 decades of armed conflict, there are millions of people who lost the opportunity to go to school (attend formal education). Generations of women and men were either born in the bush or abducted by rebels during childhood, grown in the bush and now parents of children whose education future is uncertain.

In an attempt to establish sustainable community development, PAG adopted the Participatory Evaluation Process (PEP) model. PEP helps the community recognise their potential to address their problems using the locally available resources. Working with the community, irrespective of the religious, political and other differences has strengthened the bond of community members. The participants have been able to identify and prioritise their problems and engage in self help approaches.

Challenges in holistic ministry

- Unjust attitude and systems within society that discriminate against vulnerable groups such as Persons Living with HIV/AIDS, women, people with disability
- Church leaders were mainly trained with the theological perspective of looking at community problems. The focus of church establishment was on spiritual evangelism. Community development was seem as a deviation from the faith
Mission: To engage community in Holistic development that transforms their lives into desired dignity through participatory poverty reduction and Christian ministry

- Balancing the demand for justice and forgiveness is still difficult but possible intervention
- Community development is very difficult when the people are on the move (internal displacement) due to insecurity. Every leader when affected by insecurity may have trouble thinking beyond their own situation
- Holistic ministry requires resources especially to facilitate development needs. The mission leaders and followers are poor and have all been affected by the humanitarian tragedies. They can not pull together the resources adequate to meet their development needs
- Slow response by international communities and institutions. The war in Northern Uganda has taken 20 years. It was in 2005 when the international community woke up to this crisis and declared it as the world’s most neglected. We can now see efforts to pursue peace talks between LRA rebels and government of Uganda.
- The rising political intolerance which is making our political situation uncertain and unpredictable. Several attempts by the church to seek peace and reconciliation between the rebels and the government did not yield good fruits. If the ongoing peace talks fail, there is likelihood of the country sliding back into chaos and ashuring in another cycle of humanitarian crisis.
- The overwhelming number of people in crisis verses limited resources. In 2003, one of the PAG churches hosted over 26,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in a facility with one toilet and one water tap.
- The break down of justice delivery systems. Justice delivery mechanisms often collapse living the army and security agencies to purportedly dispense justice and maintain law and order using tear gas
- Slow response of government to the advance of rebels leading to creation of civilian militia to protect the people. Now that the war in North-eastern Uganda has ended, there is rising misuse of local guns by the ill-trained militia.
- Unbalanced regional growth of the country. Gross marginalization of some ethnic groups triggering the cycle of political tension, political conflict, politically motivated wars, humanitarian crisis, chronic poverty and back to political tension.
- Tribal tensions (for example between the Iteso and Acholi). Politicians capitalize on the tribal tensions to build political capital. *What can the church do in this kind of situation? Intervention by the church may risk itself being political. When the church keeps quite then it’s setting a time-bomb which can explode into another cycle of humanitarian crisis.*

**Recommendations for effective delivery of community services**

- The church should advocate for truth and reconciliation. More so advocate for clearance of guns from the ill-trained informal security units and tribal groups.
- Develop rapid response mechanism to crisis at the local church level, national and international levels.
Mission: To engage community in Holistic development that transforms their lives into desired dignity through participatory poverty reduction and Christian ministry

- Promoting participation and community empowerment. Most of the approaches used by most development agencies create dependency syndrome in the community.
- The church should build and promote good governance systems. The church needs to get serious on governance issues like corruption. This has become a source of political conflict and wars which eventually lead to humanitarian crisis.
- Pro-active approaches to humanitarian crisis management minimizing the likelihood of risks.
- Building the capacity of the church to respond to crisis. This can be done by training in disaster preparedness and management.
- Work with the groups that have demonstrated their willingness to try and do something on their own.
- Develop local sustainability by adding value to local resources.