

KEPLWA

Children of a KEPLWA Egangakinos member play together during a meeting.



Photos: Caroline Turvatemba



Grace Atee received psychosocial support and referral from Egangakinos staff.

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Grace Atee, a 32-year-old widow, struggles to survive in the strife-torn Katakwi district of northern Uganda. In 2003 Atee fled her village, a target of attack and looting by the Lord's Resistance Army rebels and Karimojong cattle rustlers, and sought refuge in Okoboi Camp. In the camp for displaced people she lives in a makeshift thatched hut, along with her four children and ailing mother.

In Katakwi District in Northeastern Uganda, there are 20 camps like Okobi that each offer sanctuary to approximately 6000 civilians who have been forced out of their homes because of the violence. But life in the camps is tenuous for tens of thousands of displaced people, many

of whom lack food, clean water, and access to basic healthcare. HIV/AIDS is prevalent, and despair widespread.

Atee's husband is suspected to have died of AIDS three years ago, and she too is HIV positive. Bereaved and in poor health, Atee says she was in dire straits. "I had no courage to live on after my husband's death," she recalls. "There was nobody who could talk to me about my situation."

For help she turned to KEPLWA, the Katakwi Egangakinos People Living With HIV/AIDS, a support group simply known as 'Egangakinos', which means 'let us support each other'. Egangakinos is an AIM-supported community-based

Michael Ateria, Project Director at the KEPLWA offices.



organization that provides psychosocial services to people in internally displaced-persons camps who have HIV/AIDS. Atee was counseled by Egangakinos staff members, who referred her to Uganda Cares, a local NGO providing medical assistance including antiretroviral therapy.

Atee has begun taking antiretroviral drugs for HIV, and her health has improved. There is a new sparkle in her eyes, and she is smiling again.

The referral network, of which KEPLWA is a part, was a crucial element of AIM's HIV/AIDS strategy in 16 Ugandan districts. Michael Ateria, the KEPLWA project director, says the referral system has been working more efficiently since the introduction of standardized forms throughout the network. As a result, Ateria says, "all service providers understand the referral forms we use and how the system works."

Still, according to Ateria, many hurdles remain before people living in displaced-persons camps, especially children, will receive the basic health and social services they need. "We hope one day a big organization with sufficient resources and expertise to care for children will come to the camps," he says.

But the gains so far have been significant. Many people who are living at Okoboi and

AIM'S ROLE	Provided funding, technical assistance, and capacity building
TOTAL GRANT	Ush 27,379,000
CONTRACT PERIOD	December 2004 to December 2005
ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY AIM	Home-based care Sensitization for PMTCT, VCT uptake
OTHER DONORS	Tides Foundation HACI Uganda

other remote camps now have access to a package of healthcare services and have benefited from referrals. Ateria says he is optimistic that the community-based referral network has become a permanent feature of Uganda's healthcare system. ■