



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN



Whilst the pandemic disrupted most of our formal educational programmes and business endeavors, it also presented a silver lining for reimagining the scope, nature, and future of the Okere City project.

2020 was as tough as it gets. Because of COVID-19 challenges that came with it, it will rightfully go down as the year of the pandemic.

Whilst the pandemic disrupted most of our formal educational programmes and business endeavors, it also presented a silver lining for reimagining the scope, nature, and future of the Okere City project.

Because of the COVID-19 lockdown, I was able to spend most of my time in 2020 in Okere. Spending a lot of time in Okere did not only allow me to reflect but it also gave me the opportunity to meet and share our ideas about Okere City with the community members. It presented us with unique bonding opportunities.

Being in the field, I trekked from household to household understanding the complex nature of the challenges that the people in Okere grapple with. We dissected some of these challenges and conducted more empirical research to enable us to come up with innovative solutions to some of them. Among them, we conducted research to understand the prospects and opportunities for village banking in Okere. We also collected data and analyzed it to understand how Shea nuts could be used as the vibranium for spurring economic transformation in Okere. In fact, this research enabled us to launch Okere Shea Butter to the market place. We were also able to startup Okere Shea Cooperative Society towards the end of 2020 which we are going to build on to establish and strengthen a robust and vibrant Shea movement in Okere.

Similarly, we were also able to establish Okere Community Health Centre, build a Community Hall, start up Okere Boxing Club, organize cultural dance and music activities, among others.

Despite the impossible odds, we did not give-up but conquered. For the living wind to blow in Okere, we must indeed always seek to become conquerors.

Ojok Okello

WHAT THE PEOPLE OF OKERE SAID ABOUT OUR WORK IN 2020



Ojok Lameck

“Okere City is enabling to reimagine my life as young and responsible person in my community. In 2021, I actively participated in the VSLA and boxing club activities”

Mary Ochen

“I am delighted to be elected as the Vice Chairperson of Okere Shea Cooperative Society. It will once again give me the opportunity to practice community leadership and also learn from other people in my new leadership role”



Betty Alum

“I am grateful that Okere City continues to provide educational opportunities to my children despite all the difficulties. I am particularly grateful to Anita Acon for offering pay school fees for my child”



HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR PROJECTS IN 2020



1. OKERE COMMUNITY NURSERY SCHOOL

“Okere Community Nursery School’s work will in 2020 be hinged on developing the community school as a leading centre of excellence for early childhood development in Otuke District” said Ojok Okello during the first Annual General Meeting held in January 2020.



To develop Okere Community Nursery School as a leading of excellence, there is need to be functional management and administrative structure. That is why in addition to the School Management Committee which was already formed in 2019, we also formed the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA).



“But for the PTA to work effectively, there should be a manual to guide its operations” said Otim Anthony.

One of the parents of the school during the AGM. He also called upon the parents to support the school by bringing all the contributions required on time to allow for smooth operations of the school activities.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted most of the operations of the schools, we had already made unbelievable progress. The number of children attending our early childhood development classes had soared to 100 being taught by 3 trained early childhood development experts.



WE ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR CHILDREN-SPONSORS



In 2020, we were delighted to match our pupils with 5 generous sponsors through our Sponsor-A-Child initiative.

We are grateful to Anita Acon from Kampala whose donation has been matched to support Adongo Lydia and Ogwal Jonathan to complete their childhood development programme at our community school.



HERE IS WHY ANITA SUPPORTS OUR WORK

“Widespread poverty is holding back so many from living up to their full potential, and it can be difficult to think of ways you can have any meaningful impact as an individual. So when an opportunity to change even one person’s life presents itself, as in the case of Okere Community School, how can we not take advantage of it. I’m so thankful to the people behind this initiative for giving us an opportunity to make a positive change in our country, one child at a time” – Anita Acon



Fabiene from Germany also sponsored Daniela who is six years old. She is one of the best pupils in our top class level.



2. OKERE VSLA ACTIVITIES



In 2020, we continued with our VSLA activities bringing together 110 community members to save and lend money among themselves despite the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic.



By December 2020, up to 6,000,000 UGX was distributed to the registered members of the group.

“I was able to borrow 300,000 UGX which enabled me to start-up a small restaurant. Now my household have a steady stream of income enough to afford us the basic necessities” said Grace Achola, one of the active members of the group.



3. OKERE SHEA BUTTER

We also introduce Okere Shea Butter to the marketplace in 2020. With its oils extracted from Okere City's giant nilotica shea nuts, Okere Shea Butter has the kind of smoothness and finesse that is unbridled.



It is an organic, natural and perfect solution for most of your hair and skin care needs.



I have fallen head of heels it love with Okere Shea Butter . I cannot look further from it . It is by far the best moturizer I jave ever used. Additionally, the story behind the womem who collect the nuts is inspiring. To think that when I buy a tin of Okere Shea Butter, at least some money finds its way to these women and the community is amazing.



AWEKO FAITH

CLIENT FEEDBACK



SHAMIM NIRERE

Usually when you color your hair, it weakens and breaks. But Ever since I started using Okere Shea Butter, my hair hasn't been breaking. It has rather grown thick and long

4. OUR SHEA (YAO WAA) PROJECT

In September 2020, we started implementing Our Shea Project made possible with a 3,000 USD support from CivSource Africa.



The major objective of the project is to strengthen the intricate relationships between Shea trees, the economic empowerment of women in Okere

Just a few weeks into its implementation, the project is significantly contributing towards the protection, regeneration and conservation of shea trees while at the same time bringing together a community of women to build a movement to ensure promote the sustainability of Shea trees and harness its socio-economic and natural benefits.



During one of our community engagement forums, one of the participants suggested that all members present at the meeting had to make a commitment pledging never to cut down any Shea tree. This idea was seconded by all the members and they pledged to not only cut down any shea trees but to also become ambassadors for the community protection and conservation of the trees.



Thus far, the community of Okere are holding up to their pledge of not cutting shea trees but they also reporting cases of shea destruction. For instance, in the past weeks, two cases were reported and one of the culprits was arrested and penalized by the local unit of the Uganda Police Force in Adwari Sub-County.

As part of Our Shea Project, we also ran a series of sensitization campaigns to broaden the understanding of the Okere community about the benefits of Shea trees beyond what they know about the precious resource.



Members pose for a picture after one of the community engagement forums.

THE COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES AMENDMENT ACT, 2020.

PROBATIONARY

5. FORMATION AND REGISTRATION OF OKERE SHEA COOPERATIVE SOCIETY

Among other achievement in 2020, we formed and registered Okere Shea Cooperative Society to be the bedrock upon which our investments on Shea nuts and Shea butter will be rested. We also started the construction of the storage facility and headquarters of coop.



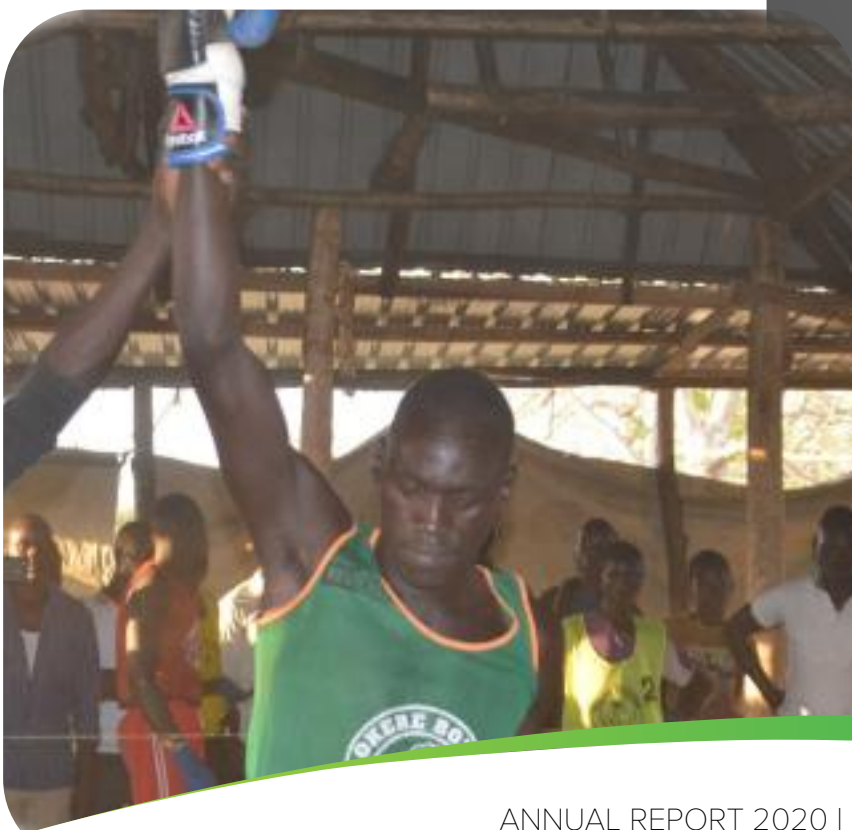
6. OKERE BOXING CLUB



We excitedly launched Okere Boxing Club in 2020. There is a unique story behind the formation of this club. Over a decade ago when we found ourselves in the IDP camps in Lira town, hundredths of youth and children without much to do resorted to boxing classes which were then offered by Lira Boxing Club. We wanted to be strong. To defend ourselves and perhaps fight the LRA rebels. Alas, our skills were misdirected. We returned home years later and could only use our special skill-sets to continue disturbing the peace of our community. We became petty criminals, stealing whatever we could to survive.



But the youth of Okere are reimagining a new path. Some even ambitious enough to dream of becoming world boxing champions. We will put in all that is humanly possible to make some of these dreams come true. Every day, 51 young men who are registered members come to the training site to perfect their boxing and kickboxing art and skills.



On Boxing Day (26th Dec 2020), the lads who have been training for barely a month were able to put up a spirited fight attracting hundreds of village folks to spectacular boxing, kick-boxing and taekwon-do tournament.

7. OKERE CITY SUPERMARKET AND PUB

The Okere City Supermarket isn't just a grocery store, it is inspired by actual needs of the community and its mission driven. We established the supermarket to provide these basic but fundamental grocery needs for the folks in Okere village.

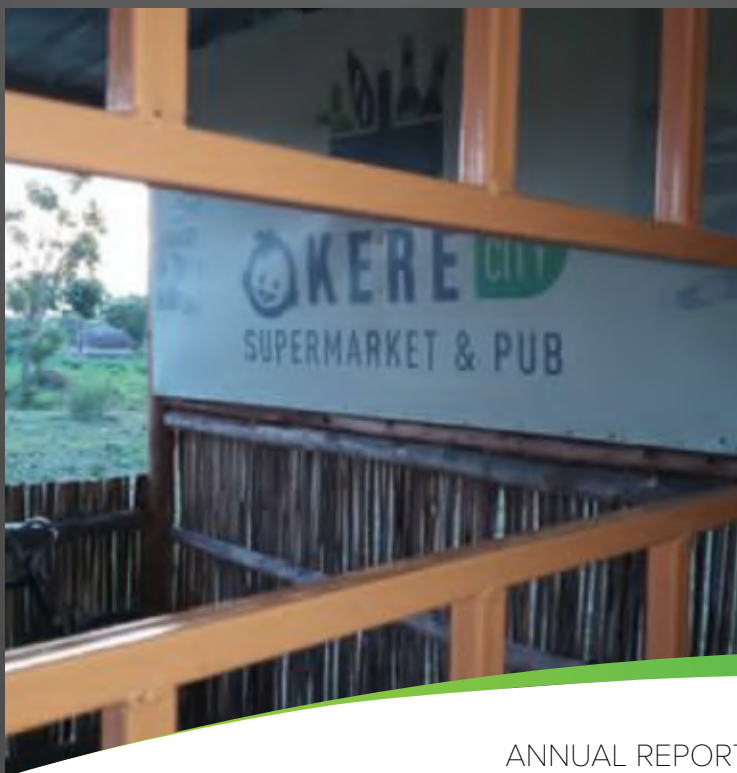


Initially, our community members had to wait for an entire week to buy basic goods like salt, soap and sugar from the weekly market — 5KMs away.

This problem was further compounded with COVID-19 lockdown which led to the closure of the weekly market. Similarly, most rural households wouldn't have enough disposable income to purchase an entire week's stock. Thus, the unholy trinity of long distance, COVID-19 lockdown and low levels of disposable income among the rural community in Okere village enabled us to quickly innovate and ensure a continuous supply of basic household needs and supplies.



Through the shop, we haven't only brought these goods closer, we also offer goods on credit with trust as the most important currency.



8. OKERE COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

The end of May 2020 brought the Okere City Project a new gift — Okere Community Health Centre. The facility will provide essential health services such as testing and treatment of diseases like malaria, typhoid, STIs. We shall also do voluntary guidance and counselling especially to HIV/AIDS patients. Of paramount significance will be our health education services offered through community outreaches.



“We are excited for the commencement of this journey that will make us be a part of an enabling ecosystem for promoting and enabling better rural healthcare services to the community in Okere and beyond” said Ojok Okello, the co-founder and CEO of the Okere City Project.”

Ojok Okello

9. OKEME FESTIVAL

To crown off 2020, we organized the Myel Kwaro/Okeme Festival (Lango Cultural Dance and Music). The people of Okere danced off all the trials, challenges and tribulations of 2020.



The dance contest attracted over 13 community groups who actively participated and competed to win a cash prize.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT CHARLES OPIO,

District Commercial Officer, Otuke District Local Government

In 2020, we registered Okere Shea Co-operative Society, a significant feat in our attempt to position Shea nuts as a key economic development resource in Okere. This registration would not be possible had it not been for the incredible support offered by Mr. Charles Opio, who is the District Commercial Officer of Otuke District.



When our Chairman paid a courtesy visit to his Office to introduce to him the idea of registration a cooperative society to promote value addition to Shea nuts in Otuke, Charles was warm as well as receptive. While he was excited he was also quick to note that he is sick and tired of supporting cooperatives to register on paper yet they continuously fail to operate and succeed beyond the first year.

“I have supported many Cooperatives to start-up their work but there is almost no cooperative society to be proud of in Otuke” he lamented. I hope Okere Shea Cooperative will something I can be proud of in future” he said.



SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: Charles Opio,
District Commercial Officer, Otuke District Local Government

The procedures for registration a cooperative society is one hell of a tedious exercise. But Charles braved both the scorching heat and the torrential downpours to make sure that we ticked all the necessary boxes to enable us register. As is mandated by the Ministry of Trade, Industries and Cooperatives, the District Commercial Officer is expected to conduct a series of training to orient and equip the prospective cooperative members with the concept and key principles of a cooperative business. Charles did all he could to ensure that the people of Okere understood these core values.



Charles Opio taking the Okere Community members through the principals and value of a cooperative business.

“You cannot become a good cooperator if you do not understand cooperative values such as honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others” he told us.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: Charles Opio,
District Commercial Officer, Otuke District Local Government

One day, it rained cats and dogs in Okere. The rain could not stop and yet Charles had to ride for 15KMs to return to Otuke Town from Okere village. He told our Chairman, “Mr. Ojok, I have to go. I can afford to ride on a slippery road in the night and yet the headlamp of my motorbike is faulty”. Charles braved the torrential downpour all because he wants us to be successful.

We would like to promise Charles that his sacrifices will never be in vain. For, we shall work tooth and nail to make sure that Okere Shea Cooperative Society emerges as one of the best Shea Cooperative Societies in the world.



“I am willing and happy to do whatever it takes to make sure that Okere Shea Cooperative lives to see a brighter sun soon”





OUR SPECIAL 2020 VISITORS



Our Special 2020 Visitors

In 2020, we welcomed Maureen Akena, one of the proudest moral boosters to Okere City. Her visit was such an inspiration



Anthony Masake and Peter Magera from Chapter Four also paid us a courtesy to offer us free legal advisory services.

Our Special 2020 Visitors



Fr. Walter Ojuka from Aliwang Catholic Parish also paid us a visit to baptize the children in Okere and to give our community hall a divine blessing.

Caleb Okereke also visited us to do a writing assignment for the Guardian UK about our work. We cannot wait to read the story when it finally gets published.



IN THE MEDIA

On 30 Sept 2020, our Chairman and Founder - Ojok Okello shared the Okere City story at the inaugural Gathering of Givers - a philanthropic event organized by Civ-Source Africa and that was aired on NTV-Uganda.



Our Chairman, Ojok Okello also joined the #KampalaGeopolitics conference to discuss how biodiversity can offer a sustainable competitive advantage. He mostly shared about our work on restoring and conserving Shea trees and adding value to Shea butter.

SOME OF THE KEY LESSONS WE LEARNED IN 2020

a) “In every dark cloud, there is always a silver lining”: The COVID-19 pandemic enabled us to reimagine the nature, shape, form and future of the Okere City Project while at the same time giving us the opportunity to tirelessly work towards building a more resilient community.



b) Our operations in 2020 have once again demonstrated to us that hopefulness always thwarts hopelessness. Things were tough but we braved even the toughest of storms. We remained hopeful, committed and steadfast in our work to build a sustainable city in Okere village. .



c) Engaging the local political leadership of a community is always essential. We strengthened our relationship with the relevant local political authorities to the extent that they suggested and worked hard to make sure that one of the polling stations in the 2021 elections was stationed at Okere City.



d) Building on existing projects and innovating them to create more impact definitely matters. That is exactly what we did with our VSLA activities which got transformed into a village bank, one of the first ones of its kind in Uganda. This transformation should however be informed by data, insight and evidence.

WE ARE EXCITED ABOUT 2021. HERE'S WHY AND HOW;

- a) We shall strengthen Okere Village Bank and position it as a financial inclusion vehicle for the rural people of Okere.
- b) We shall construct a storage facility and office space for Okere Shea Cooperative Society.
- c) We shall also expand the operations of our community school to include a Primary School. The inaugural class of Okere City Primary School shall commence in 2021.
- d) We shall also start work towards the physical establishment of Okere City Primary School at a specially designated site.
- e) We shall expand the scope of Okere Community Health Centre to include Laboratory and Maternity Services.

WE ARE EXCITED ABOUT 2021. HERE'S WHY AND HOW;

- f) In addition to strengthening our operations of building a Shea movement in Okere and beyond, we shall also set-up a Shea Parkland in Okere.
- g) We shall strengthen the operations of Okere Boxing Club and work towards organizing many boxing matches in Okere and beyond.
- h) We shall also strengthen our socio-cultural and community artistic projects.
- i) We shall also broaden our operations to include civic-education and other politically relevant activities.
- j) Work towards positioning Okere Shea Butter as a leading Shea butter product line in the Ugandan market.



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