

# NORDIC DAY

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Flags of Scandinavian countries. Following their cordial relationship with Uganda, the countries have for the past supported Uganda in socioeconomic transformation

## Celebrating Nordic Day

By Jacky Achan

**N**ordic countries are a geographical and cultural region in northern Europe and the North Atlantic that includes three Scandinavian countries. It is basically made up of Denmark, Norway and Sweden (which are the Scandinavian countries) plus Finland, Iceland, including their associated territories Greenland, the Faroe Islands (both part of the Kingdom of Denmark and the Åland Islands).

Every year, the countries celebrate the Nordic Day in honour of the basic agreement on Nordic co-operation, referred to as the Helsinki treaty. The governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden reached the basic agreement on Nordic co-operation to promote and strengthen the close ties existing among the Nordic people.

This was particularly in matters of culture, legal and social philosophy. They agreed to attain uniformity of regulation throughout the Nordic countries in as many respects as possible under this treaty.

It included appropriate division of labour and extending the scale of co-operation among the Nordic

**EVERY YEAR, THE COUNTRIES CELEBRATE THE NORDIC DAY IN HONOUR OF THE BASIC AGREEMENT ON NORDIC CO-OPERATION, REFERRED TO AS THE HELSINKI TREATY**

countries. Signed on March 23, 1962, the treaty defines the tasks, composition of the Nordic council and the Nordic Council of ministers, as well as methods of practical co-operation.

### Long standing tradition

Nordic Day celebration reflects the long-standing tradition of close collaboration between the Nordic countries. It also reflects on shared values, including democracy, rule of law, gender equality, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Countries belonging to the Nordic bloc have for more than 60 years enjoyed free movement of labour and the Nordic region is the world's 11th largest economy.

Celebrating Nordic Day is a happy and sociable reminder of the Nordic identity and Nordic values, as well as of the diversity of the modern Nordic way of life today.

The Nordic countries are witnessing considerable global interest in Nordic architecture,

film, food, fashion and music. They, in turn, aspire to raise the visibility of the Nordic region and support Nordic culture both within and beyond the region's borders, through among others the awarding of the Nordic Council prizes.

The Nordic Council awards five prizes every year: The Literature Prize, Film Prize, Music Prize, Environment Prize and as of 2013, the Children and Young People's Literature Prize.

### Language

One of the strengths of the Nordic co-operation is to understand each other's language. Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are closely related.

If you speak one of them, little effort is required to understand the others. Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are, therefore, the working languages for official Nordic co-operation.

For meetings of the Nordic Council and Council of ministers, an interpretation



The Nordic countries are witnessing considerable global interest in Nordic architecture

service is offered between Finnish, Icelandic and Scandinavian.

Today, the Nordics have one of the most highly educated people in the world and the bloc has scored many international successes including leading the world in transparency, trust, the environment, gender equality and happiness.

### Nordic Day in Uganda

This year, just like last year some activities to mark Nordic Day have already been held. At the beginning of the year, the Nordic sports day was held in Lubowa on Entebbe Road.

At the beginning of the year, hundreds of people from the Nordic community in Uganda participated in a variety of

sports during the Nordic Sports Day on January 20.

Norway did well in the football tournament, where they took both first and third place. Denmark took first place and was winner of the Nordic Sports Day 2018.

The day was wrapped with a dinner party at Faze2 in Kampala, where the trophy was handed over from last year's winner Sweden to the new winner Denmark.

Also a raffle, was held and participant's in the sports day were able to collect over sh2m for Street Child Care Uganda started and run by ex-street children. It provides a home and education for street children in Kampala.

## Plan for Uganda

Looking at Denmark alone, in the period 2018-2022, its vision for partnership with Uganda is to contribute to poverty reduction through inclusive and sustainable economic development.

This is in addition to promoting democracy, good governance and human rights plus support Uganda's stabilizing role in the region.

Gender equality will also continue to be an important Danish priority in Uganda and will prioritise initiatives targeting young people as almost half of Uganda's population is between 10 and 30 years old.

Overall, according to Denmark's ministry of foreign affairs country policy paper for Uganda, Denmark will continue its human rights-based approach to development in Uganda.

Sweden and Denmark have also commended Uganda's generous approach towards refugees and its role in regional stability.

# Nordic countries boosting

Stromme Foundation has, over the years, been at the helm of building sustainable communities in Uganda with support from Nordic countries. Priscilla Serukka, the regional director of Stromme Foundation East Africa, told Stella Naigino about their work and achievements

**Briefly explain what Stromme Foundation is and when it started.**

Stromme Foundation (SF) is a Norwegian based international development organisation, whose vision is to create a world free from poverty.

In the East African region, SF implements education and livelihood programmes in rural and hard to reach communities. SF works with local non-governmental and community-based organisations.

Programme sustainability is ensured through a rights-based approach in programming, and community participation, respect and the dignity of the beneficiaries are at the core of programme.

**Where in Uganda are you working?**

SF has activities in Gulu, Amuru, Nebbi, Yumbe, Moyro,

Abim, Kaabong and Kotido in the northern region. Other districts include Wakiso, Mpigi, Mbale, Kaberamaido, Rubirizi and Bushenyi.

We work through local partners to improve access to quality education and empower the rural poor economically.

**As an organisation aimed at eradicating poverty and ensuring sustainable development, what are some of the programmes you have embarked on to achieve your goals?**

All our programmes are implemented through a rights-based approach to ensure meaningful and systematic inclusion and empowerment of the most vulnerable.

The approach takes the side of people who suffer injustice, by acknowledging their equal worth and dignity. SF recognises the poor not as beneficiaries, but as active rights-holders.

The foundation establishes



Priscilla Serukka, the Stromme Foundation regional co-ordinator

corresponding duties for duty bearers against whom the claims can be held. We enlighten rights-holders about their rights and communities and sensitise duty bearers

about their roles and responsibilities. This ensures that even when we exit the areas, the programmes live on. Equal participation of women, girls and people with disabilities in social, political and economic activities is upheld.

In addition, we have integrated our economic empowerment programmes with the education

programmes for more sustainable results. Our programmes include:  
■ Provision of inclusive quality elementary education in poor hard-to-reach communities through our implementing partners; that is Early Childhood Development and primary school education.  
■ Bonga (adolescent girls' empowerment) and Community Based Vocational

Skills Training Programmes, which reach out to youth who have previously dropped out of school. The project equips them with literacy, numeracy, life and occupational skills to enable them start their own income-generating activities. The adolescent girls and youth are instrumental in the development of their communities and act as change agents.

■ Community-managed microfinance programme is one of our mainstream programmes aimed at economic empowerment. Here, we aim at seeing community members, especially the women in rural areas (who are often excluded from the formal financial sector), enjoy economic security and live a dignified life.

■ We also provide financial services to the economically active poor in rural, urban and semi urban areas, through Stromme Microfinance East Africa Limited, which is a subsidiary of the Stromme Foundation.

**Currently, the northern region is suffering from effects of climate change, with farmers having less or no yields. What strategies has Stromme Foundation put in place to ensure that farmers in this region to get good yields and develop?**

It is true that the people in the northern region,

## Bailing the rural population out of poverty

**People in rural areas usually suffer financial constraints that even when they want to invest in a project, they hardly have funds to do so. What has Stromme Foundation done to improve their access to finances for investment?**

One of the approaches to this is the Community Managed Microfinance programme that consists of self-selected groups of 20 to 30 poor people, organised to save and to contribute to a common fund. This fund is lent out to members as per the group's constitution. The members also work together for socio-economic development of their families and community.

Beyond the saving and lending, the model embeds other social aspects, such as food security, non-formal vocational training, entrepreneurship, as well as life skills training.

Currently, in partnership with Farm Concern International, we are implementing a pilot scheme in Commercial Village model for market access and financial services. The model applies a value network approach to targeted value chains to improve access to markets for over 1,000 households in Rubirizi and Bushenyi districts.

Stromme Microfinance East Africa Limited, through microfinance institutions, is extending financial services closer to the enterprising individuals and groups in rural areas to increase their investment in income-generating activities.

**Farmers are always faced with a challenge of marketing their produce and those who get it are usually cheated by middle men who pay them less money. How have you helped farmers add value to their products so that they can earn more from them?**

The goal of the Commercial Villages Model is to systematically build the capacity of 1,000 smallholders in five villages of Rubirizi and Bushenyi district turning them into profitable farmers, increasing incomes and building capacity of farming families for socio-economic growth to break the vicious circle of poverty.

The Rubirizi/Bushenyi COVIMAP Pilot Project is being implemented by Farm Concern International, with support from Stromme Foundation and close collaboration with Community Volunteer Initiative for Development (COVOID).

The project aims at increasing farm gate value of maize, bananas and beans by 10% and facilitating annual sales worth \$750 per household, translating to \$1.5 Million. Additionally, household and wholesaler buyers' incomes are anticipated to increase by at least \$250 and \$300 respectively per year. These results are being achieved through strategic business partnerships between the smallholder farmers within Commercial Villages, other farmer organisations and market actors with a major focus on increasing profitability and enhancing value chain efficiency.



# communities in Uganda

especially the north east, have been affected by the prolonged drought in the last couple of years. Last year, we ran an emergency campaign to raise food for people in Karamoja. Through support from several friends in Uganda, we gave quick relief to 250 families that we are working with. This was followed up with a climate resilience and diversification of livelihoods project, co-funded by the Nordic Climate Facility, in partnership with Woord en Daad.

The project promotes an integrated, diversified and sustainable rural production model in Abim, Kotido and Kaabong districts in the semi-arid Karamoja region in north-eastern Uganda. Its main objective is to reduce the vulnerability of man and nature to the increasingly extreme climate patterns through promoting forest-based enterprises like apiculture, afforestation and farmer-managed natural regeneration of indigenous tree species.

## What is your relationship with Nordic countries?

Our funding comes from Norway and Sweden. Without



One of the farms set up as part of the commercial Village pilot

their financial and technical support, we would not be able to achieve what we have achieved in East Africa.

## What have you achieved so far in line with achieving sustainable development in Uganda?

In Uganda, through our local partners, we have engaged 89,395 people organised in 3,548 community microfinance groups from 2014-2017. They are now saving and able to access

## ALL OUR PROGRAMMES ARE IMPLEMENTED THROUGH A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

financial loans to advance their income generating activities.

Our Bonga programme has given a headstart to 9,272 adolescent girls who had dropped out of school, while over 1,372 youth have been

empowered with vocational skills. Over 21,500 children were able to enrol in primary school.

## What are your challenges and how do you go about them?

Sometimes, duty bearers resist the rights-based approach because they see it as a threat to their power. Secondly, realising rights may take long.

SF has continuously built the capacities of her partners and local leadership, who in turn sensitise communities to make them appreciate the approach.

There are also challenges in getting competent literate staff within the community, which requires a lot of time to train the staff. In addition, getting credible local partners to undertake the work takes time and resources, more so, in building capacity.

The effects of climate change have challenged our implementation, especially in Karamoja region. Finally, some of the partners misuse resources, leading to shortages.

## What does the future look like for SF?

I am excited about the future of SF. We have been re-strategising to see how we can adapt our programmes to the changing world. The current strategic plan is stopping this year.

As such, all efforts are geared towards consolidation, completion and strengthening

modalities that will ensure sustainability as we exit the communities of intervention and, in some cases, also exit of old partners.

There are new challenges to address in the development work arena, for example, the increasing youth unemployment and a lack of sustainable solutions to poverty.

Our new strategic plan that kicks off in 2019 will seek to address these challenges towards a sustainable poverty-free world.

SF will ensure a strengthened and vibrant civil society that can support and mobilise greater forces for human rights. Strategies will be put in place to build the capacities of civil society to respect and recognise human rights, have strong governance structures to enhance accountability and transparency and engage meaningfully in policy dialogues to make critical contributions to poverty reduction programmes.

Deliberate involvement of the private sector in SF's interventions will be a key task. It is expected to create room for new innovations that can be integrated in the community programmes.

# Sweden boosts maternal, child health

By Owen Wagabaza

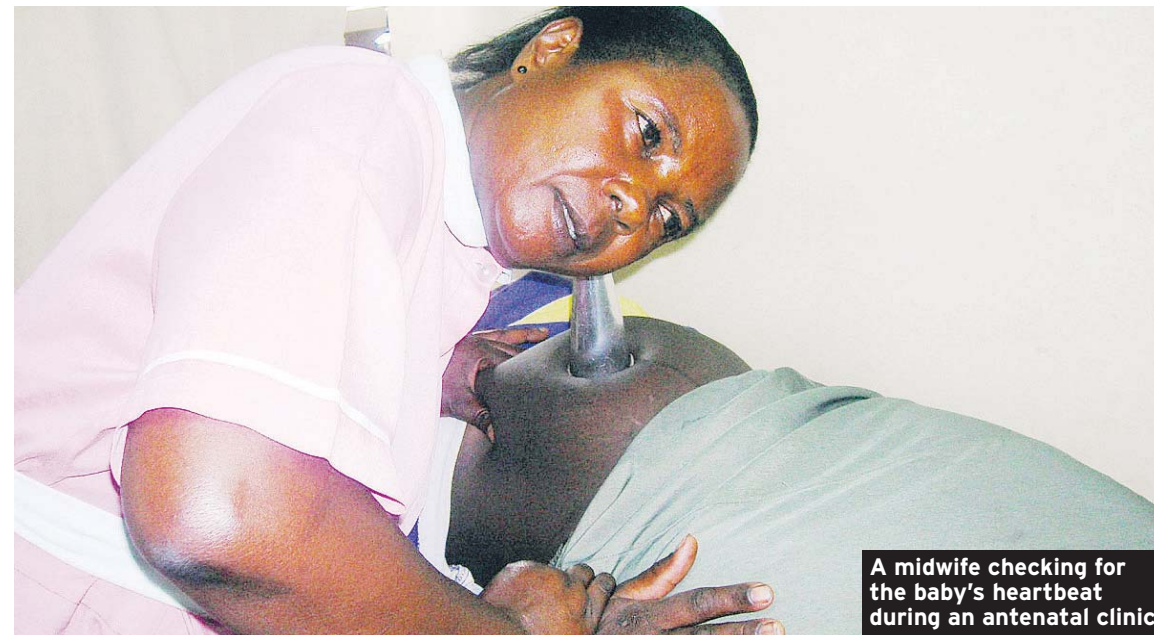
In 2016, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) through the Swedish Embassy signed an agreement with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund to improve maternal, newborn and adolescent health in Uganda. The support worth over sh22.5b accumulated to a total of over sh100b that the two UN agencies have received from the Government of Sweden since 2011.

Karamoja has many a time been identified as the most disadvantaged and poorest region of Uganda in terms of both income per capita and key human development indicators. According to the Uganda Demographic Health Survey 2011, the maternal and child mortality indicators in Karamoja are the highest in the country with maternal mortality estimated at 750 deaths per 100,000 live births and infant and newborn mortality at 87 and 29 deaths per 1,000 live births respectively.

## Funding goal

The funding was aimed at, among others, strengthening the continuum of care for maternal and newborn health services in the Karamoja region, targeting approximately 59,680 pregnant and post-partum women and their newborns.

The funding was also aimed at ensuring that the district health management teams plan, implement,



A midwife checking for the baby's heartbeat during an antenatal clinic

monitor and evaluate priority maternity health interventions from the district level to the lower levels.

It was aimed at equipping health workers in Karamoja to have capacity to provide quality goal-oriented antenatal care, safe delivery, postnatal care, prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV, newborn resuscitation and essential newborn care, infant and young child feeding and ensure health facilities have appropriate equipment and life-saving commodities to provide essential and emergency maternal and newborn health services.

The funding was also to facilitate

village health teams to provide home visits to register pregnant women, identify and refer pregnant and postpartum women and newborns with danger signs and obstetric complications for care at health facilities. The funding was to also facilitate functional transportation voucher scheme and ambulatory service benefiting pregnant and post-partum women and their newborns.

According to a recent report, so far, under the new funding agreement, over 140 health workers have benefited through training and approximately 3,293 village health teams have received improved

training that will ensure all expectant mothers are registered and referred to the nearest health facility for safe delivery.

There has also been a significant increase of deliveries in health facilities as a result of strategies that include the introduction of new innovations such as the birth cushion, solar suitcase and the transport voucher.

## Training sites

Implementing agencies have also set up nine maternal and newborn health training sites and a total of 135 health workers have been trained in life-

saving skills of pregnant, postpartum women and their newborns.

The funding has also helped in the provision of essential medical equipment to improve basic emergency obstetric and new-born care to over 70 facilities in the region. Over 100 students have benefited from scholarships for pre-training in midwifery, majority of which have completed and are now employed in various health centres in the region.

There has also been increased coverage of HIV-positive pregnant and breastfeeding women initiated on Anti-Retroviral Therapy leading to a decline in numbers of new infections in children. There has also been the introduction and roll out of Option B+ that has resulted in the rapid reduction of new paediatric infections.

Apart from Karamoja, the Swedish International Development Agency has over time provided financial support to maternal, newborn and child health programmes in the West Nile region. In December 2016 for example, SIDA contributed support worth over sh10b to improve maternal health in the West Nile region. The support was expected to reach an estimated 135,000 pregnant women and over 300,000 children with key health interventions.

"These contributions are part of our efforts to improve maternal and child health by strengthening health service delivery in Uganda, indirectly supporting gender equality and women's empowerment," Per Lingärde, the Swedish Ambassador to Uganda says.