

THE SAFE JOURNEY TO SCHOOL

Gulu City, Uganda



Introduction

As the morning sun rises over the bustling streets of Gulu, Uganda, the cheerful sounds of children's laughter fill the air. For the head teacher of Gulu Primary School, Ms. Orem Lilly Rose, these sounds signify more than just the start of another school day—they represent hope, transformation, and a safer future.

Gulu Primary School is the proud pilot institution for the Safe Journey to School - MyCityMyLife project, an initiative funded by UN-Habitat and implemented by Responsive Drivers Uganda (ReDU). This groundbreaking project aims to ensure that children can travel to school safely and confidently, overcoming the dangers that have long plagued their journeys.

At Gulu Primary School, we are filled with immense joy and pride to have been chosen as the pilot school for this initiative," says the head teacher. "This project was born out of a road safety data collection survey and has brought significant improvements to our school and the surrounding community.

A Journey fraught with challenges

For years, children attending Gulu Primary School faced perilous journeys. "Many of our pupils walked long distances to get here," the head teacher explains. "About 50% were dropped off by boda boda riders, which added its own set of risks. Some children had to cross the dangerous Gulu-Juba to Egypt road, leaving parents worried and attendance rates inconsistent."

The challenges were not just logistical but deeply personal. "The road leading to the school was a constant source of discomfort and safety concerns for our pupils. It was heartbreaking to see their well-being jeopardized by something as basic as their journey to school."

A photo captures Dr. Harriet Aciro, a dedicated member of the Board of Directors, engaging with PTAs and SMC teams to raise awareness about the dangers of overloading children on boda-bodas. She emphasizes the critical need to ensure that children are not overloaded, are seated securely, and are equipped with essential protective gear.

Additionally, she highlights the importance of children wearing warm jackets to prevent health risks such as hypothermia, colds, and respiratory infections. Dr. Aciro's message underscores the vital connection between safety and well-being, inspiring the community to prioritize the protection of their children.

Meeting with PTAs, SMCs by ReDU
with Dr. Harriet Aciro presenting Board of Directors



A beacon of change

The Safe Journey to School - MyCityMyLife project introduced life-changing measures. Sensitization sessions engaged parents, the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), the School Management Committee (SMC), and Gulu City authorities. Together, they implemented road safety initiatives, including zebra crossings, traffic guides (known locally as Ololipops), and road safety clubs.

Parents agreed to contribute 2,000 UGX (approximately 0.56 USD) per child each term to sustain these efforts, funding traffic guides, routine repainting of zebra crossings, and uniforms for the road safety clubs. This unanimous commitment underscored the community's resolve to safeguard their children.

"The establishment of a road safety club and the installation of zebra crossings on the busy Juba to Egypt road have significantly enhanced pupil safety. We thank the Safe Journey to School project." the head teacher proudly states.

More than just a school project

While the initiative primarily focuses on schoolchildren, its benefits extend to the wider community, including parents and people with disabilities. "The project ensures safety for everyone," the head teacher notes. "It's more than just a school program—it's a community effort."

Reflections on progress

Looking back, the head teacher recalls how the project was born from parent concerns raised during school meetings. "Before ReDU's intervention, there was a strong sense of worry and no clear solution in sight. Today, thanks to this initiative, we see the change we had long hoped for."

During the UN Road Safety Week in 2022, a poem written by the students highlighted the urgency of the issue:

"In one minute, you will see no zebra crossing. Children crossing roads with no clear warning. The challenges are many, the dangers are near, but together, we can make our roads clear."

A Safer, brighter future

The Safe Journey to School - MyCityMyLife project has transformed more than just the roads around Gulu Primary School. It has brought a community together, instilled a sense of responsibility, and ensured that children can dream big without fearing their journey to school.

"With every step our children take on these safer roads, we take a step closer to a brighter future—not just for Gulu Primary School, but for generations to come," the head teacher concludes.

Gulu Primary after zebra crossing

