WE MET THEM WITH A SMILE
BETTER OUTCOMES PROJECT
December, 2019
In Orom, a village of 89 inhabitants, 90km from Kitgum, something changed last March: under a mango tree, a few steps from the main road, 15 men gathered and founded the Kwoloke group, meaning “life must change”.

So what brings these men between the ages of 18 and 70 to meet one afternoon, every once a week - the awareness that together they are stronger, the will to change things in the community and the desire to guarantee a better future for their children is what triggers the minds of the able bodied men.

Today, one year later, we meet Kwoloke group, one of them among three other groups, to learn from a year journeyed together.
It’s harvest time: four sacks of fresh onions are ready to be sold in the nearest town market while their garden eggs are placed under the sun on plastic bags which the group can readily afford, and resold when the vegetable is off season when the group makes a good bargain. The earnings will soon be divided and partially reinvested.
The harvest is the result of a careful and constant work in the fields: Clement, a member of the group donated 15 by 48 square meters as a community garden. The men work the land in turns so that they can have time for alternative ventures. They ensure that the vegetables are properly irrigated.
In the quest to build a strong generation in Orom, *Kwoloke* group is working towards a quality education for the children in their community. Romeo who is part of the group is now old, he can’t spend long hours in his cotton field yet he has six grandchildren to look after and his cotton field is his only resource. The group went an extra mile to offer their services to Romeo in his field. At the end of the season, his cotton is ready for a harvest and Romeo is able to send all his grandchildren to school.
Caesar’s dream was different. He wanted a new home for his family, a dream he is realizing with a brick house he is building after occasional encounters with the other members of his group - he can’t wait to sleep between the masonry walls from the collective effort of Kwoloke group.
Clement, the most energetic in the group, lost his wife a few years ago, but he has found the energy to regain his life. Today, his children are happy to be in school. They laugh and chat about their joys of having a school uniform.
The men of Kwoloke group have improved the hygiene of the whole village: most of them had no latrines, now every family has a well maintained latrine.
The energy of this group is endless: with their future plan to acquire more land for cultivation, use improved seeds and fertilizers, and produce honey, they have carried a market survey which has provided them with the enthusiasm to go on and on with their business.

But that's not all: the 15 heros have been advocates and champions of other men within the community encouraging male participation in health, parenting and economic empowerment issues as a means to build a better future for their families and the entire community.
A determined Alice ready to build a future for the family

For Alice it was a nightmare to return home - everything she earned was spent on alcohol by her husband, leaving their children to go without food; and when she tried to talk to Johnson, he raised his hand at her.

It was draining for Alice, she couldn’t bear to see her children go hungry; worried she returned to her village to look for work to be able to provide for her family needs.

Despite the fear of leaving her children with her husband, Alice succeeded in her mission: and returned to Oget village with capital to invest after a series of community jobs that earned her the amount.
Unfortunately her four-year-old son fell ill and had to be operated on at Kitgum Hospital, eight kilometers away from home. It is precisely in looking after the child that Alice met AVSI Foundation - and from then, things started to get better.

With the money she earned, she joined a savings group which she succeeded in after receiving financial skills from AVSI. Not only did she find safety for her saving, but Alice met friends who listened to her and shared with her advise.

Convinced that Robinson was ready to accept support, the couple received counseling from a para social worker every week. Valentino, reached them on his bicycle, ensuring the couple received each psychosocial sessions to put an end to domestic violence.
Alice now smiles at life. She gets up by six every morning and with Robinson, they take care of the harvest while their children are in school. She waits for them at home at sunset – their favorite time when they sit around a cup of tea to talk about their day.

Alice’s small income has grown over time; the sesame and cotton fields are bearing fruit and allow their six children to go to school. The couple also invested part of the income in cows and goats.
Alice has always been a determined woman, but today more than ever she feels invincible with the man who changed: she wants to send their children to a professional institute, to increase their animal stock and continue to participate in her community saving group - the group of friends who changed her life for better.
The story of a changed teen

Jennifer enjoyed night life. She disregarded her parents caution and routinely return home late in the night, causing tension at home.

The eighteen-year-old may have risked her life so much, but she is now the reference point for Agago youth where she does not miss the opportunity to sensitize her peers about the risks of HIV and AIDS.
But how did the change happen?

“I was bored, surrounded by people who cared less and I felt my life had no value. But on that afternoon when I sat down to listen, something caught my attention.”

Jennifer was about to drop out of school when during a meeting organized by AVSI she felt safe in a place where people were willing to listen and understand her. She attended one session after the other and invited her mother too to listen to the topics.
This is how her family life began to change: when Jennifer resumed her relationship with both parents, abandoned bad company, completed her fourth year in secondary school.

She hopes to become a midwife and to help her siblings not to make the same mistakes she did.

“Today I chat with mum and I listen to her. I help dad to pick cotton from the garden. I enjoy the time I spend with dad.”
Social cohesion succeeding in the fight against HIV

A feeling of abandonment can overwhelm people, especially the young ones when they find their HIV status positive. But being part of “Let’s Love One Another” group is helping Catherine and 70 other children, all below 17, and their families to cope with such difficulties.

Wamare Wunu group, meaning “Let’s Love One Another” was formed by AVSI to connect families of HIV-positive children.

The group is assisting several families to ensure HIV positive children adhere to their regimen, they are keen on their nutrition and ultimately live a viral suppressed quality life.

“Every 30 days I feel stronger than before”
“We began getting together in this place in October 2018. We meet every month and the friends I found fill me with positive energy. Every time I return home I have the courage to face the challenges that life puts before me.”
   Catherine, mother.

“We started putting together our savings, I even asked for a loan and with the money I built a decent house for my children. Now we sleep peacefully.”
   Philomena, mother.

“Our sons finally felt understood - they found friends and for the first time they were part of a group that didn’t discriminate against them.”
   Sarah, mother.

“It is exciting to meet every month and see our garden grow. At home I plant tomatoes, eggplant and sesame. You should see how well they grow. Even taking medicines has become easier; with a full stomach the medicine is lighter.”
   Ronald, teen.

“I have a vegetable garden at home, thanks to the lessons we were given at the demo garden - I planted tomatoes, garden eggs, onions and aborigines. My children have a balanced diet and with the extra money from the sales, I buy soap and their school books.”
   Olga, mother.

The families themselves were the protagonists of their change, they support each other, they religiously preserve their hospital appointments and take their regimen, certain of the foods they will harvest from their own vegetable garden.