

Ayaru blends technology in local materials to excel

Ayaru using a computer to make teaching materials. Photos by Andrew Masinde



Ayaru and her Primary One pupils during a lesson at Nyangilia Primary School, Koboko district

New Vision in partnership with the Irish Embassy, Travelcare and Trocaire is searching for Uganda's most innovative teacher. Every Wednesday, we shall profile some of the nominated teachers until August when a panel of Judges shall select the best. A total of top 12 teachers will each win sh1.5m. The five most outstanding teachers will enjoy an all-expenses paid study trip to Ireland early next year. Today, Andrew Masinde brings you Margaret Ayaru, a teacher who has, despite several constraints in rural northern Uganda, transformed the teaching in her school, using Internet resources

By Andrew Masinde

An incessant sound of a printer welcomes one to Margaret Ayaru's Primary One class at Nyangilia Primary School, Koboko district. Ayaru, a senior teacher at the school, is printing learning aids, which she has designed for her class.

Next to her is John Avuga, the headteacher, patiently waiting for Ayaru to help him type and print circulars for parents. He plans to invite parents for a planning meeting the following week.

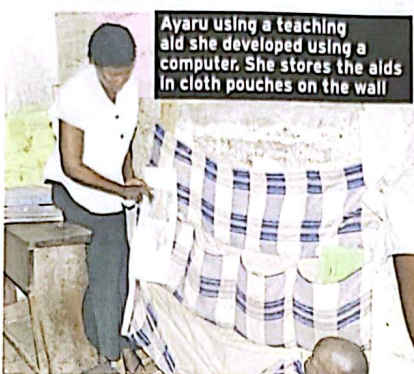
Avuga says two years ago, he would write the letters and later have them photocopied and sent to the parents. This is because there was no teacher who knew how to use a computer in the school. That is no longer the case.

When the Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LABE) programme gave computers to the school, Ayaru volunteered to be trained to work both as a computer teacher and secretary to the headteacher. To effectively play both roles and also teach her class, she works extra hours.

"I do not mind doing more work, since I had targeted accessing the computer to help me research and improve my teaching materials," says Ayaru.

Making unique teaching aids
Apart from the local materials that she makes from cardboards and other discarded materials from the community, Ayaru uses the Internet to research on modern teaching techniques and ways of making cheap, but unique teaching materials. Avuga is all praises for Ayaru's innovations that have turned round teaching in this school under the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme.

"She has helped the school have a well-grounded lower primary section with good teaching. In addition, she has helped in digitalising all school records," the headteacher says. "She makes unique teaching materials through her own Internet research," he added. Avuga says Ayaru is organised



Ayaru using a teaching aid she developed using a computer. She stores the aids in cloth pouches on the wall

WHO IS MARGARET AYARU?

- Margaret Ayaru, was born in Lobule sub-county, Koboko district. She went to Lurujo Primary School, where she completed her primary education in 1992.
- She joined Maracha Secondary School and completed O'level in 1996.
- She then went to John Bosco Core Primary Teachers College - Lodonqa in 1997, for a Grade III certificate.
- In 2000, she was posted to Birijaku Primary School, where she taught for five years. She has also taught at Midia and Nyangilia primary schools.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Ayaru did a diploma in education at Muni National Teachers College. She is now a senior education assistant.

Ayaru during a lesson

and her class is always busy and interesting, owing to unique instructional materials. With a cloth with pouches hanging on a wall, thanks to her innovation, pupils have a place to keep their belongings, such as books, pencils and food containers. More so, she has charts, boxes and several other reading materials that she made, hanging all over the class.

"Many people thought I was insane while collecting waste boxes and other abandoned stuff from dustbins. However, they later realised I was just being innovative. Every day as other teachers headed home, I would stay behind at school, cutting boxes and paper to make teaching materials for

my pupils," Ayaru says.

Avuga says because of her innovations, many teachers have now adopted new teaching techniques. "Even when the teacher is out of the classroom, you find pupils learning on their own because everything is written on the boxes and papers on class walls," Avuga says.

Highly applauded

Grace Adiru, a parent, says her first born, who is in Primary Four, is not as active as the one in Primary One, which is handled by Ayaru. "I believe it is the Primary One teacher (Ayaru), who is good." She explains that when her boy is at home, he keeps singing the names of

the objects that are around him.

Christine Ayo, a resident, says Ayaru is a hardworking and talented teacher.

"When she is passing through the village, children run to her, to greet her. This shows that she has a great bond with the children, something that all teachers should have."

Another resident, James Ongom, says Ayaru is an innovative and determined teacher. He says on many occasions, he has seen her pick boxes from the shops, with no shame. This,

he says, is something that is extraordinary.

"I also visited her class and what I saw there was impressive. For the first time I saw a book-shelf made from cloth. I think she is a world class teacher," Ongom says.

Doris Ayakaka, a teacher at Nyangilia Primary School, says: "Ayaru is an active teacher who is always quick to take up assignments."

She explains that when LABE introduced computer lessons in the school, Ayaru was the first to embrace the opportunity.

Ayakaka adds that Ayaru is a born leader and always advises the rest of staff on many issues.

Stella Midia, a Primary Seven pupil,

says Ayaru is a lovable teacher. "She has never taught me, but I like her very much. When you enter her class, you just see drawings everywhere."

"We were not taught like that. I believe I would have learnt faster if I was also taught with different reading materials

like those used by Teacher Ayaru. She also advises us to read our books. I also want to be a teacher like her," Midia says.

Much as she was teaching in upper primary classes in her former school; when she was posted to this school, she was assigned to handle the lower classes.

"The weapon I use to succeed is showing children that I love and care for them. I make sure that I employ all the methodologies that I learnt while training to be a teacher. I also come up with new innovations aimed at making my pupils love my subjects," she explains.

She says it was the reason she came up with learning aids that engage the learners.

What district officials say
Yunus Aligah Awaa, the Koboko district education officer, says: "Ayaru is an innovative teacher, who is never tired of introducing new ways of teaching."

He says when non-governmental organisations come to the district with programmes aimed at improving techniques of teaching, Ayaru is always available.

"I have also visited the school and what teachers and the pupils talk about her, says a lot. The introduction of computers in the rural school faced challenges because of lack of teachers, but Nyangilia Primary School had Ayaru who was willing to multi-task," Awaa says.