

Stella Achen, Ph.D

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Brief Introduction

Stella Achen is a lecturer at Makerere University. She is involved in research and community engagement among vulnerable and marginalized pastoral communities in Karamoja sub-region. Stella is passionate about research in the fields of Adult and Community Education, Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Education and Services, and Maternal Health Education. She holds a doctorate in Sociology from Makerere University and aspires to share her knowledge and research work to improve the lives of the indigenous communities, youth, and disadvantaged groups.

Knowledge and Skills

- Research: I have conducted research in sexual and reproductive health in hard-to-reach communities, especially among the indigenous pastoral communities in north-eastern Uganda, who often experience social inequalities and isolation in all aspects of life.
- Teamwork, I have delivered through teamwork. I work and deliver results with a team of committed, knowledgeable, and skilled staff.
- Mentorship, I mentor especially undergraduate students in sexual and reproductive health education issues, with little knowledge and experience as young people growing up.
- Leadership Skills, I am currently leading a team of 18 academic staff with different competencies and skills in different expertise in numerous fields. I have led this team for the past one year and six months.
- Communication, I have competence in scholarly writing and oral communication. I have presented papers at both international and national conferences.
- I have experience in writing small grants.

Work Experience

I have worked in a higher institution of learning, specifically Makerere University as an academic in different academic positions. I have taught courses at undergraduate and graduate levels. I have taught courses especially in health education, youth and health, population and development, community development, and project planning and management. I have supervised both undergraduate and master's projects to successful completion. In addition, I have examined students' dissertations at both undergraduate and master's levels.

- Training professionals in Adult and Community Education.
- Proven experience in qualitative research and analysis, working with different data sets and using qualitative data software to analyse data.
- Over seven years of working closely with disadvantaged and vulnerable communities to improve their lives and health.

Leadership and Responsibility Experience

Acting Head, Department of Adult and Community Education, Makerere University

I am the head of the department since July 2023. During my term of office, I have successfully reviewed two undergraduate programmes, and one master's programme.

Examination results are consistently uploaded to the system on time, ensuring that students have timely access to their performance outcomes.

Staff and student welfare have improved in the department; students are receiving support in the form of counseling and guidance on personal challenges that affect their academics.

Coordinator, Bachelor of Youth Development Programme (BYDW)

I served as the coordinator of the Bachelor of Youth Development Work programme from April 2022 to July 2023. In this role, I led a team of staff in reviewing and refining the programme, successfully steering it through approval processes. Additionally, I closely worked with students to initiate and support peer-led seminars focused on addressing key challenges affecting their academic performance, with a particular emphasis on sexual and reproductive health issues.

National coordinator of short courses

I served as the National Coordinator of short courses in the then Department of Community Education and Extra-Mural Studies (CEEMS) from March 2009 to November 2010. I was able to coordinate and build teams to work within the different districts in Uganda where the department had learning centres. Also, I was able to ensure that by the time of the certificate award, all learners were ready to receive their certificates after clearing all their outstanding fees dues.

Education and Training

Ph.D. Sociology, *Field: Sexual and Reproductive Health 2022 (Received on 17th February, 2023).*
Makerere University, Kampala. Thesis: Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health of Pastoral Adolescent Girls in Moroto District, Uganda
Makerere University

Post Graduate Diploma in Online Facilitation

The University of Agder. August 2015 – September 2016

Post Graduate Diploma in project Planning and Management

Uganda Management Institute. September 2011- August 2012

Master of Science in Population and Reproductive Health

Makerere University, Kampala. (August 2010. Dissertation: Utilization of Obstetric Care Services: A Case Study of Soroti Municipality in Uganda

Bachelor of Adult and Community Education (BACE)

Makerere University, Kampala.

Grants

Freedom Fund Grant, titled “Participatory Intervention Development Research for a Program to address Child Exploitation in Karamoja, Uganda. Role: Principal Investigator (PI).

Collaborating Organization: AfriChild Centre. Project Duration: August 1st, 2024, to June 30th, 2025. Funder: Freedom Fund.

Spencer Foundation Grant, titled “Harnessing Ugandan Universities’ Role in the Education-to-Work Transition of Students.” Role: Co-Principal Investigator. Project duration: January 2025 to December 2027. Funder: Spencer Foundation

Google Inclusion Research Award, titled “Collaborative Development of AI Solution for Scaling Up Adolescents’ Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Education and Services in Uganda.” Role: Co-Principal Investigator. Awarded 2023, Funder: Google Atlanta

Awards

Staff Mobility for Training, Erasmus+ Programme (2021-2027) to the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences, University of Groningen, Netherlands, from 3rd – 16th May 2025. The purpose was for mentorship for career growth, research collaborations and building partnerships with the faculty at the University of Groningen.

Erasmus Global Mobility Grant to the Department of Global Development and Planning, University of Agder, Norway, from September 22nd – September 29th 2024. The purpose was to share knowledge with staff and students of the department.

Policy Communications award. Policy Communications Fellow 2019-2020 by Population Reference Bureau and African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP).

Statistics South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa. Travel award to present a paper at the 2nd ISIBALO Young African Statisticians conference in Pretoria, South Africa, July 2009.

DAAD, Short stay scholarship award at the University of Bonn, Germany.

Innovation

From the Inclusion Research Project by Google titled “Collaborative Development of AI Solution for Scaling Up Adolescents’ Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Education and Services in Uganda, the team was able to collaboratively with the community develop an app to empower adolescents with AI-driven sexual health education and services.

This TeenApp can be accessed from: <https://www.airshe.org/>

Courses Attended

Curriculum globALE master trainer course, March 2023 – December 2023

Publications

Ahimbisibwe, K. F., Aganyira, K., Nampijja, D., Mudondo, C., & Achen, S. (2025). Rhythms of Learning in NGO-Supported Village Associations in Western Uganda. *Global Society*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2025.2464580>

Sanya, R., Mugalu, B. W., Biira, G. N., & Achen, S. (2025). Participatory design of a community AI intervention for scaling up adolescent access to SRHR education: Case of the TeenApp. In *Proceedings - 2025 IEEE/ACM Symposium on Software Engineering in the Global South, SEiGS 2025* (pp. 65–70). IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/SEiGS66664.2025.00009>

Achen, S. Atekyereza, P. & Rwabukwali, B.C. (2021). The role of culture in influencing sexual and reproductive health of pastoral adolescent girls in Karamoja sub-region in Uganda. *Journal of Pastoralism* (11:25). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13570-020-00188-9>

Achen, S., Rwabukwali, B.C. & Atekyereza P. (2021). Socio-cultural perceptions of sexuality influencing the sexual and reproductive health of pastoral adolescent girls in Karamoja sub-region in Uganda. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Open* (4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100191>

Achen, S., Rwabukwali, B.C. & Atekyereza P. (2020). Contraceptive use among young women of pastoral communities of Karamoja sub-region in Uganda. *Journal of Culture, Health & Sexuality*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2020.182348>

Openjuru G., & Achen S. (2014). Shack Video Halls in Uganda as Youth Community/Literacy Learning and Cultural Interaction Sites. In: Sanford K., Rogers T., Kendrick M. (eds) *Everyday Youth Literacies. Cultural Studies and Transdisciplinarity in Education*, vol 1. Springer, Singapore DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4451-03-1_10

Achen, S., & Openjuru, L. G. (2012). Hollywood in Uganda: Local appropriation of transnational English language movies. *Language and Education* 26:4, 363-376, DOI: 10.1080/09500782.2012.691517

Presentations /Conferences

International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and Partners convened by the African Union Commission and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) under the patronage of H.E. Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. From 30th September – 2nd October 2024 at the African Union Headquarters. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

“The role of culture in influencing sexual and reproductive health of pastoral adolescent girls in Karamoja sub-region in Uganda.” Presented at the International Research & Innovation Dissemination Conference, May 9th-10th, 2022 at Munyonyo Speke Resort and Conference in Kampala, Uganda. Themed “Two Decades of Swedish Support to Societal transformation through research, innovations and partnerships”

“Socio-Cultural Perceptions of Sexuality and Sexual and Reproductive Health of Karamojong Adolescent Girls in Uganda”. Presented at the international conference of Gender and Women Studies in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 17-18th June 2019.

“Challenges of Contraceptive Use among Pastoral Adolescent Girls in Karamoja in Uganda”. Presented at the 8th International African Population Conference held on 18th - 22nd November 2019 Kampala Uganda. Themed "Harnessing Africa's Population Dynamics for Sustainable Development: 25 Years after Cairo and Beyond ".

Utilization of Obstetric Care Services: the Case Study of Soroti Municipality-Uganda. Presented at the international conference organized with the theme Demographic Challenges of Southern Africa: Context and Change. The conference organizer was the Population Association of Southern Africa in August 2008, in Durban-South Africa.

Projects

Inclusion Research Project Recipient 2023 for a project titled “Collaborative Development of AI Solution for Scaling Up Adolescents’ Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Education and Services in Uganda”. Award by Google Atlanta

"Labour Externalization Pathways to the Gulf Cooperating Countries (gccs) and Development Implications For Uganda". Makerere University Research and Innovations Fund (RIF) 2020. Round 2.

“Developing an integrated framework for addressing Population, Health and Environment for Uganda’s refugee and host communities. Makerere University Research and Innovations Fund (RIF) 2019. Round 1

Community Outreach Initiatives

The Jason Initiative (TJI)

Transforming Lives: Advancing Awareness & Support for Sickle Cell and Inherited Genetic Disorders.

Website: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-jason-initiative/about/?viewAsMember=true>

Karamoja Christian Ethnoveterinary Programme (KACHEP),
Empowering the indigenous people of Karamoja to utilise their resources for community development.

Website: <https://www.kachep.org/history>

References

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