

The RHU Spotlight

MAGAZINE

INSPIRING TO THRIVE: WE ARE RHU



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JAN 2025



At Reproductive Health Uganda we are committed to advancing the ministry of health mandate of providing services in a manner that ensures safety, privacy and confidentiality to all clients that seek health services at health facilities

Reach out to us for a range of services including family planning, STIs/HIV counselling and testing, cervical cancer screening, response to gender-based violence, laboratory services among others.

Visit the nearest RHU clinic or call our toll-free line 0800299003.

We are Reproductive Health Uganda - your trusted and caring health service provider.

Welcome Message

A New Year, A Renewed Commitment

Dear Readers,

Happy New Year and welcome to the second edition of The RHU Spotlight Magazine—an annual publication dedicated to celebrating milestones, reflecting on challenges, and charting the future of sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Uganda. As we step into a new year filled with hope and opportunities, we invite you to journey with us through events, insights and voices that define our collective efforts.

This magazine is not just a compilation of articles; it is a testament to the power of partnerships, the resilience of communities, and the transformative impact of SRHR advocacy, information sharing and service delivery. At RHU, our vision is clear: to create a society where every individual, regardless of age, gender, or background, has access to comprehensive, high-quality sexual and reproductive health services. This publication serves as a window into that vision, highlighting the incredible efforts made by our staff, partners and communities with support from our infatigable donors over the past year.



Who We Are

Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU) is an indigenous youth-centred, non-governmental organisation that pioneered sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programming in Uganda, founded in 1957. We are an advocacy, capacity building, information and service delivery organisation. We have a long-standing experience and expertise in providing integrated sexual reproductive health and rights information and services. RHU is affiliated to the world's largest sexual reproductive health organisation, the International Planned Parenthood Association (IPPF).

RHU exists to improve the quality of life of individuals especially young people, women, girls, the poor and the vulnerable. We do this through:

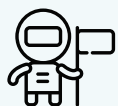
- Advocating for respecting, honouring and fulfillment of SRH rights
 - Promoting SRHR in a gender-sensitive manner, with special focus on young people [10-24]
 - Promoting gender equity and youth representation
 - Implementing integrated SRHR interventions that focus on promoting gender equality, reducing HIV/AIDS and strengthening SRHR in humanitarian emergencies
 - Delivering integrated SRHR information and services
- through static, outreach and community service models
 - Investment in systems strengthening and human capital development that can support effective youth-centred programming, boost advocacy efforts, provide strategic leadership and management, and provision of SRHR services and information. In addition, to overcome societal norms that hinder women and girls and promote transformative feminist action, it is crucial to capacitate key stakeholders and empower community structures.





Vision:

A Uganda where everyone's SRHR are protected and fulfilled



Mission:

To champion and sustainably provide capacity building, research evidence, high quality rights based SRHR information and services, with a special focus on young people



Values

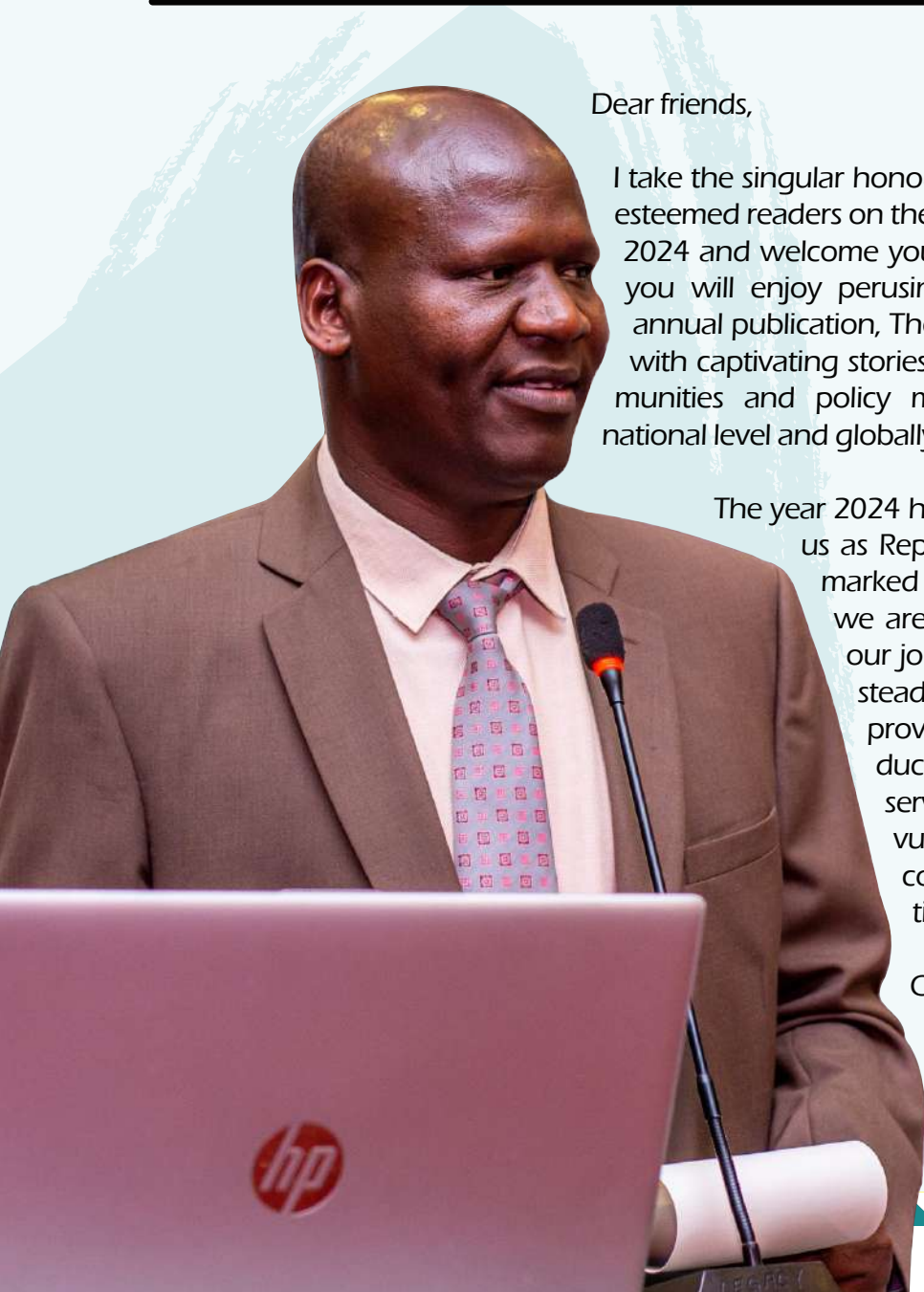
- Voluntarism
- Rights Based
- Integrity
- Choice
- Result Oriented

RHU Clinics And Branches



Apac	0392-000 22 / 0700 390 212	Kapchorwa	0392-000 227 / 0700 390 219
Arua	0392-000 221 / 0700 390 213	Katego	0392-000 233 / 0700 390 226
Bushenyi	0392-000 222 / 0700 390 214	Lira	0392-000 236 / 0700 390 153
Bwaise	0392-000 234 / 0700 390 227	Luwero	0392-000 228 / 0700 390 220
Fort Portal	0392-000 223 / 0700 390 215	Mbale	0392-000 229 / 0700 390 221
Gulu	0392-000 224 / 0700 390 216	Mbarara	0392-000 230 / 0700 390 222
Hoima	0392-000 225 / 0700 390 217	Mitiyana	0392-000 231 / 0700 390 224
Iganga	0392-000 226 / 0700 390 218	Tororo	0392-000 232 / 0700 390 225

A Note from the Executive Director



Dear friends,

I take the singular honour to congratulate you our esteemed readers on the great accomplishments in 2024 and welcome you to the year 2025. I hope you will enjoy perusing our second edition of annual publication, The RHU Spotlight Magazine, with captivating stories from young people, communities and policy makers at the grassroots, national level and globally, impacting lives.

The year 2024 has been an exciting one to us as Reproductive Health Uganda, marked with key milestones and we are proud to share with you our journey. While we remained steadfast in our commitment to providing quality sexual reproductive health and rights services including in the most vulnerable and underserved communities using innovative models.

Our impactful interventions have not gone without recognition. The Akina

Mama Wa Africa, 2024 report on the Ugandan Media Coverage of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights recognised RHU as one of the top contributors driving the SRHR conversations. Through webinars, stakeholder consultations, and robust online campaigns, RHU has led SRHR knowledge sharing both nationally and globally. This recognition underscores our dedication to ensuring that SRHR remains a priority conversation for all.

Cognizant of the effects of climate change on vulnerable communities and to demonstrate the nexus between climate change and sexual reproductive health rights, RHU was at forefront of several climate change related processes. And our efforts in building climate-resilient communities and health systems gained recognition. At the national level, the Ministry of Health acknowledged RHU's contributions during the launch of the Climate and Health National Adaptation Plan (2025-2030). At the sub-national level, Kasese District Local Government awarded RHU for building a climate-resilient health community within the district.

Health is often overlooked in conversations about climate change, yet its effects are deeply connected to SRHR. Climate-induced crises such as floods



and droughts disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, especially women and girls, making access to critical SRHR services even more challenging. Hence, RHU has been at the forefront of integrating SRHR into climate change adaptation plans. Notably, RHU supported the development and launch of the Kasese District Climate Change Adaptation.

On put communities at the forefront, we yet again registered an exhilarating example of community-led resource mobilisation as seen in Luwero district, where RHU volunteers spearheaded the construction of a new spacious clinic in Wobulenzi Town Council to make SRHR services more accessible to young people, women and men in the greater Luwero area.

Therefore, as we embark on the year, 2025, we prepare ourselves to address the issue of sustainability amidst the shrinking donor funding environment exacerbated by changing priorities in the traditional donor countries and the concerns over the sexual rights environment in Uganda, the uncertainty following the outcome of the US election and the anticipated reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule (GGR) in January 2025 and implementation of project 2025 under President Donald Trump which poses a significant threat to SRHR

programmes worldwide, including in Uganda.

However, without a doubt, with strengthened partnerships, innovative strategies, and unwavering determination, we are confident that we will achieve even greater success in 2025. We are especially excited and looking forward to the novel partnerships we are embarking on in 2025. Namely, the partnerships between RHU, DFPA and IPPF, where RHU and DFPA will be co-hosting a centre of excellence; and then one between ADRA Denmark and Uganda, DFPA and RHU, that will see us navigating Uganda-South Sudan border in the districts of Acholi and Karamoja aimed at building resilience to climate and weather-related shocks through averting, minimising and addressing loss and damages among vulnerable populations.

As we embark on a new year, I extend my deepest gratitude to the government of Uganda, our donors, partners and volunteers who have continued to believe in us and walk this

journey together. Your support reassures us that our work is impactful and valued. To the communities we serve, you remain at the heart of RHU mission— we work tirelessly every day to ensure that your SRHR needs are met.

We cherish you all! And I wish you all a prosperous 2025!

... we remained steadfast in our commitment to providing quality sexual reproductive health and rights services...

Navigating the Year 2024: What Lies Within

In this issue, we have meticulously curated a blend of compelling narratives, in-depth analysis, and forward-thinking strategies to inspire and inform. Here's a glimpse of what awaits you:

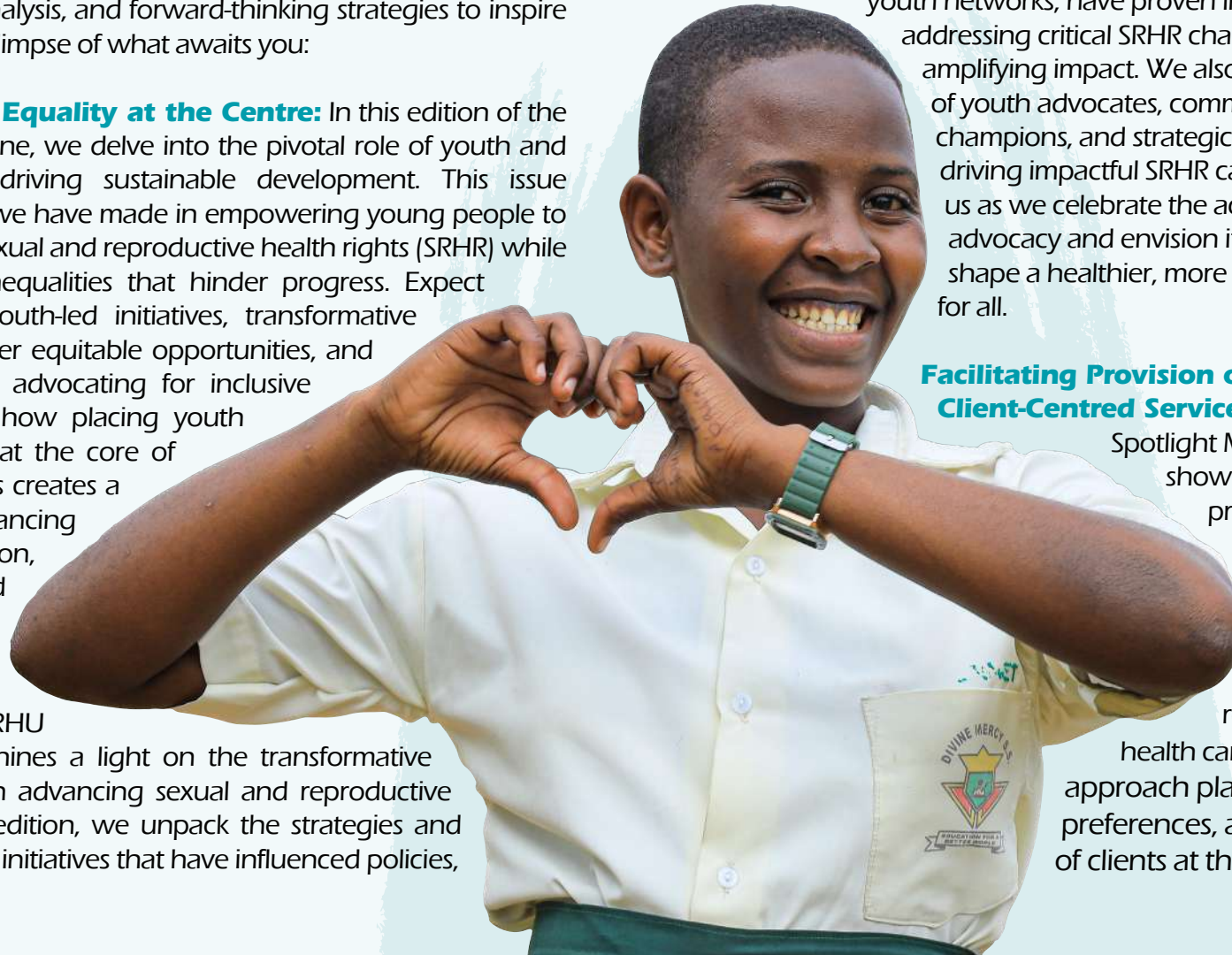
Youth and Gender Equality at the Centre: In this edition of the RHU Spotlight Magazine, we delve into the pivotal role of youth and gender equality in driving sustainable development. This issue highlights the strides we have made in empowering young people to take charge of their sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) while addressing gender inequalities that hinder progress. Expect inspiring stories of youth-led initiatives, transformative programmes that foster equitable opportunities, and insights from experts advocating for inclusive policies. We explore how placing youth and gender equality at the core of development agendas creates a ripple effect, enhancing access to education, healthcare, and opportunities for all.

Advocacy in the Spotlight: The RHU Spotlight Magazine shines a light on the transformative power of advocacy in advancing sexual and reproductive health rights. In this edition, we unpack the strategies and successes of advocacy initiatives that have influenced policies,

improved access to SRHR services, and fostered community empowerment. Through compelling narratives and expert insights, our readers will discover how advocacy bridges gaps between communities, stakeholders, and policymakers to create lasting change. We examine collaborative efforts among stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, communities and youth networks, have proven instrumental in addressing critical SRHR challenges and amplifying impact. We also explore the role of youth advocates, community champions, and strategic partnerships in driving impactful SRHR campaigns. Join us as we celebrate the achievements of advocacy and envision its potential to shape a healthier, more equitable future for all.

Facilitating Provision of Client-Centred Services:

The RHU Spotlight Magazine showcases how prioritising client-centred services transforms the delivery of sexual and reproductive health care. This approach places the needs, preferences, and experiences of clients at the forefront,



ensuring services are accessible, respectful, and tailored to individual circumstances. This feature explores RHU's commitment to empowering clients through informed decision-making, offering comprehensive and non-judgmental care, and addressing barriers such as stigma and cultural biases, health cadre capacity, etc. It also highlights innovative strategies and success stories that demonstrate the impact of client-centred care in improving health outcomes.

Innovations and Knowledge Management: Here, we delve into the transformative impact of innovations and knowledge management in advancing sexual and reproductive health rights. From leveraging digital tools for service delivery to creating data-driven solutions, innovation plays a pivotal role in addressing emerging challenges. This issue highlights how RHU integrates cutting-edge technologies and evidence-based practices to enhance service accessibility, efficiency, and effectiveness. It also emphasizes the importance of knowledge sharing, documenting lessons learned, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement within SRHR programming.

Investing in Systems and Human Capital Development: In this edition of the RHU Spotlight Magazine, we emphasize the importance of strengthening systems and building human capital to advance sexual and reproductive health rights. Robust systems and skilled personnel are the backbone of effective and sustainable SRHR service delivery. This feature explores RHU's initiatives to enhance healthcare infrastructure, integrate innovative technologies, and provide continuous training for healthcare providers. It highlights success stories of capacity-building efforts that have empowered teams to deliver high-quality, client-centred care. Discover how investments in systems and human capital development are creating resilient structures and empowering individuals to champion SRHR at all levels.

On this first page of a promising new year, we thank you—our readers,

supporters, and advocates—for walking this journey with us. Your engagement and commitment drive our passion and purpose. Together, let us turn the pages of this magazine and discover the incredible possibilities that lie ahead. Here's to hope, resilience, and impact in the year to come





YOUTH AND GENDER EQUALITY AT THE CENTRE

Inter University Dialogue 2024.... **It was Excitement, Funfair, Sharing Experiences and Giving Accountability**

Makerere University, Kampala was the host. More than 400 students, from 14 universities attended physically. Another 300 students attended virtually. Students, youth leaders, civil society organisations, and policymakers convened. It was a colourful event. Lots of learning, funfair, catching up, competitions, challenging each other, and access to services filled the day. It was the Inter-University Dialogue (IUD) 2024.

This particular IUD 2024 convened different players to explore the potential of digital platforms in advancing sexual and reproductive health services including information for young people, under the theme, "Promoting Young People's Sexual Health: Leveraging the Digital Space," The guest of honour, Honourable Jacqueline Amongi, a member of the East Africa Legislative Assembly didn't mince words. She urged everyone to embrace digitalisation. "Young people in Uganda and beyond face immense challenges when it comes to accessing sexual and reproductive health services and information, and with the digital sphere now playing such a large role in their lives, it is critical that we harness it for good," Hon Amongi urged.

"By promoting a safe and informed digital space, we can empower young people to make well-informed choices and take control of their health. This approach not only fosters a healthier, more resilient generation but also builds a society where all individuals, especially young women, are empowered to reach their full potential," she added.

Generally, technology continues to transform the ways we connect, learn, and thrive. For young people, digital spaces are increasingly central to accessing knowledge, finding community, and seeking the guidance necessary to lead safe and healthy lives. Yet, as empowering as this digital era is, it also calls for diligent, responsive measures to ensure it genuinely serves the needs of our youth. Through interactive discussions, Generally, technology continues to transform the ways we connect, learn, and thrive. For young people, digital spaces are increasingly central to accessing knowledge, finding community, and seeking the guidance necessary to lead safe and healthy lives. Yet, as empowering as this digital era is, it also calls for diligent, responsive measures to ensure it genuinely serves the needs of our youth. Through interactive discussions, panel sessions, and workshops, participants examined the role of digital tools in providing accurate, accessible SRHR information, tackling misinformation, and

addressing challenges like stigma and privacy concerns online. Attendees shared experiences and insights on utilising social media, mobile apps, and online resources to engage youth more effectively.



This was a culmination of events that started a month earlier, especially with the Own Your Future (a university students initiative that aims to create safer campuses for students), coordinated inter-university competitions in the categories of Debates, Public Speaking and Poetry on the IUD theme of the year. Gulu University emerged the overall winners, after showing their debating skills; as the awarding ceremony for the winners in all the categories climaxing the IUD 2024.

The Inter University Dialogue 2024 emphasised the importance of collaboration between young people, CSOs, and decision-makers in shaping digital health initiatives that resonate with young people's needs. It highlighted RHU's commitment to nurturing a supportive environment for youth-friendly sexual health services through innovative digital solutions, knowing very well that young people are not only innovators and change-makers, but they are also actively creating solutions to address their own sexual and reproductive health needs.

A big thank you to Makerere University for hosting the IUD 2024. A big thank to the different partners, especial Own Your Future for contributing to this safe space for students to interact and discuss with different players issues affecting them. And, congratulations to Gulu University and all individual winners!



RHU Internship Programme.... The Experience that Enriched My Academic Knowledge and Strengthened My Commitment to Contributing to Positive Social Change

During my first time in Hoima, I anticipated a transformative experience filled with learning and practical application of my academic knowledge. Little did I know that my journey to Hoima, specifically to Kyabigambire and Kitonya village, would profoundly impact my understanding of gender-based violence and its pervasive effects on young girls and women. The team, composed of dedicated interns and seasoned professionals, ventured into the remote villages to conduct health surveys and assess the effectiveness of educational programmes centred on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and gender equality through sessions facilitated by Reproductive Health Uganda field staff aimed to empower young girls and women by educating them about their rights, providing psychological support, and teaching them about gender equality.

Equipped with a questionnaire, the team set out to engage with the community members. The process began with focus group discussions, where we listened to stories of change and hope. The young girls of Kyabigambire village shared stories of how they used to go to discos [night clubs] at night with boys and disrespect their elders before the sessions. They expressed their gratitude for the sessions which have taught them to respect their parents, avoid bad peer groups and stay in school for a brighter future.

One of the most memorable moments was a conversation with a young girl named Immaculate.

At 12 years, she had already faced more challenges than many do in a lifetime. However, her participation in the SGBV sessions have ignited a spark of hope and determination. She spoke about how the sessions have equipped her with the knowledge to protect herself and the confidence to speak out against abuse. "I got pregnant while I was still a young girl. I am very grateful for these sessions because they have taught me about gender equality and encouraged me to work hard as a young mother to provide for my daughter and family. I am here with my daughter as well so that she may learn from these sessions, stay in school and not end up getting pregnant at a young age like me," says Immaculate, a participant in the young girl sessions of sexual and gender-based violence from Kyabigambire village in Hoima.

During the women champion sessions, the women shared their experiences with an openness that was both humbling and inspiring. One heartbreaking story that was shared involved consent. "Before these sessions, I never knew that a man needs to have a woman's consent before sexual intercourse. It was during the sessions that I got to learn that a man needs his wife's consent before having sex in order to have her well prepared to have sex that is pleasurable to both," comments one of the participants in the women champion sessions.

This and so many more experiences shared left me appreciative of what the organisation is doing to inform and educate people especially those in village areas about their reproductive and sexual rights in order to address SGBV problems in people's everyday lives. Fieldwork is rarely without its challenges and the biggest challenge

faced was language barrier. However, the challenge was mitigated by the invaluable assistance of local intern and interpreter who ensured accurate communication. Understanding the cultural context was essential and we approached every conversation with respect and a willingness to learn. The data collected revealed significant improvements in the lives of participants. Many reported increased awareness of their rights and greater confidence in asserting themselves. However, the survey also highlighted areas needing improvement such as creation of sessions for the youth within the village who can become peer educators among their fellow young people to address issues like alcoholism, drug abuse and teenage pregnancies.

This field experience was transformative on multiple levels. Professionally, it enhanced my research skills, particularly in qualitative data collection and analysis. I learned the importance of empathy and cultural sensitivity in conducting fieldwork. It was an eye-opening journey into the realities of gender-based violence. The resilience and courage of the participants, coupled with the dedication of RHU underscored the importance of such interventions in communities. This experience not only enriched my academic and professional knowledge but also strengthened my commitment to contributing to positive social change.

Asiimwe Samantha - Student of Journalism and Communication, Makerere University



Youth Mentorship.... Meet the Iron Lady Championing Justice for Women and Girls in Hoima

“As the Rotarians say, service above self,” Joy Katwesige says with a smile. But Joy isn’t a Rotarian. She’s a 25-year-old matriarch of change in her community, passionately championing sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR) and gender equality, particularly for adolescent girls and young women. Her dedication has earned her national recognition, countless accolades, and the unshakable nickname, “Iron Lady.”

Joy’s journey into championing SRHR and gender equality is nothing short of extraordinary. A former president of the Youth Action Movement (YAM)- Hoima branch. YAM is a young people arm of RHU that catalyse youth participation in governance, policy/decision-making and programming. YAM groomed Joy to be the iron lady she is today. Notably, even after graduating from YAM, Joy continued working with RHU as a champion of girls and young women, mentoring them and empowering them to be aware and stand up for their rights, especially SRH rights and gender equality.

These engagements continued to open doors for Joy. She has worn the crown of Miss YPlus Western Region, First Runner-Up 2022/2023 and Miss Popularity YPlus Uganda 2022/2023. In October 2024, her grassroots advocacy was celebrated when she won the Girl Champion Award under the Survivor Advocate category, organised by AHF Uganda Cares, a testament to her relentless efforts in championing the rights of young people living with HIV/AIDS.

A Voice for the Vulnerable

Joy is a hands-on advocate, organising school outreaches and community engagements to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, combat stigma, and promote acceptance. Her interactions with teachers and students foster conversations that break barriers and empower young people living with HIV/AIDS. Joy’s advocacy doesn’t stop there. She’s also a fierce champion against gender-based violence (GBV), taking on cases that many shy away from due to fear of societal pressure. One such case exemplifies her bravery. It was 1:00am when Joy received a distressing call: a three-year-old girl had been sexually assaulted by a 25-year-old neighbour. Without hesitation, Joy jumped on a boda-boda (a motorcycle taxi), arriving at the family’s home by 1:30am. “I knew I had to act immediately,” she recounts. “The child’s safety and justice couldn’t wait.”

Confronting Power and Privilege

What followed was a battle against a deeply entrenched system of privilege and power. The suspect hailed from a wealthy, well-connected family, and the Police were initially reluctant to act. “When I called the police, they said they couldn’t arrest him,” Joy recalls. “But I wasn’t going to back down.” Undeterred, she personally escorted the man to the police station on another boda-boda. Even the local council leader—a relative of the suspect—tried to dissuade her. Community members warned her that her efforts would be in vain, but Joy remained resolute.

Fighting for Justice

At the police station, her reputation preceded her. “When the officers realised who I was, they knew I wouldn’t let this slide,” she says. “They have seen me fight for justice before, and they knew I meant business.” Joy ensured the child received immediate medical attention and filed an official case. Leveraging her network, she secured pro bono legal support for the family. Her relentless pursuit of justice not only

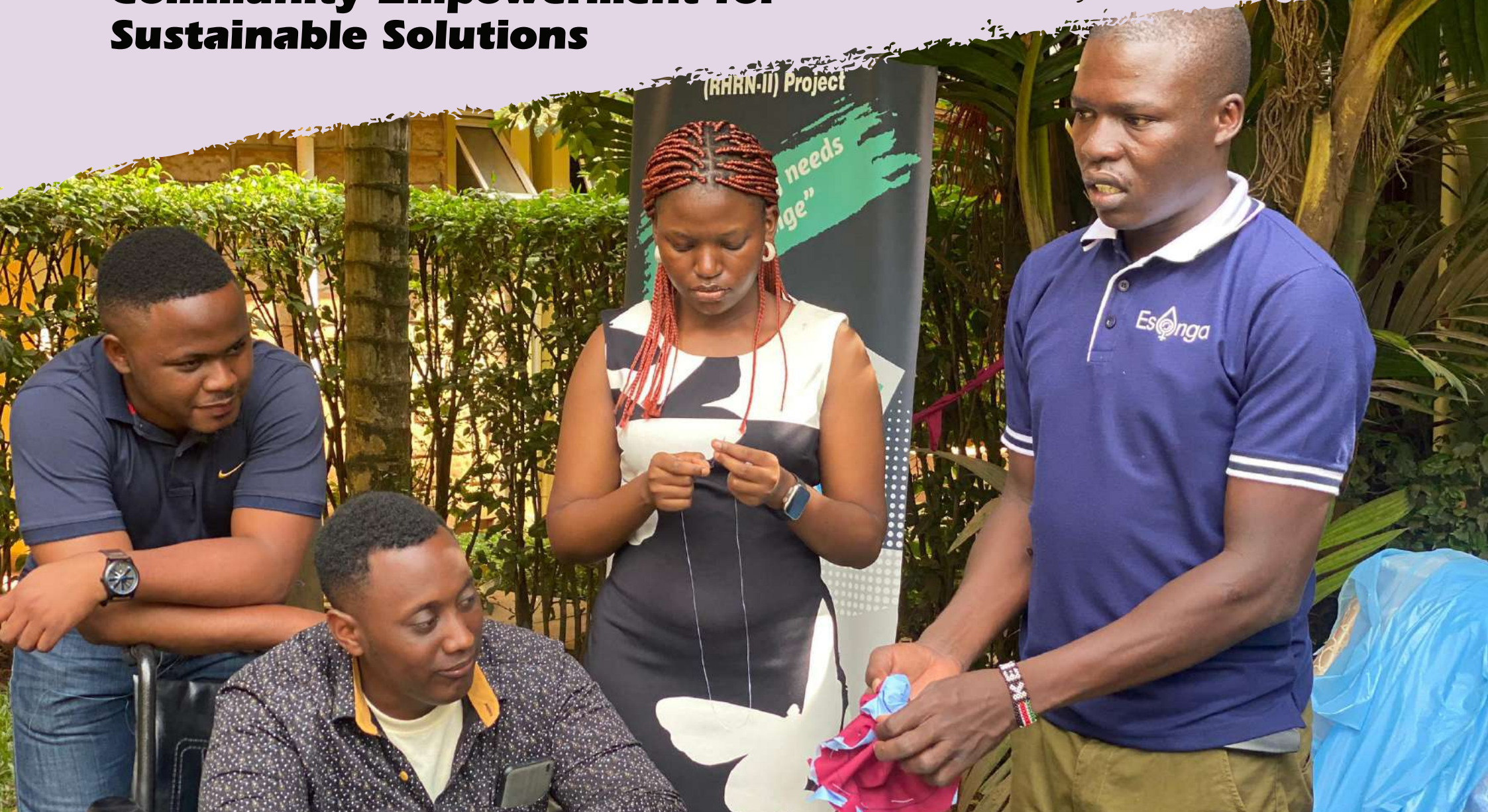


saw the suspect arrested but also sent a powerful message to the community: no one is above the law when it comes to protecting women and children.

The Iron Lady of Hoima

Joy's tireless efforts have earned her the nickname "Iron Lady" at the Hoima Central Police Station—a moniker she wears with pride. "It's not just a name; it's a reminder of the strength we need to fight for justice in a world that often looks the other way," she says. Joy's work exemplifies the transformative power of grassroots advocacy. In her words, "Change doesn't come easy, but it starts with one person daring to stand up, speak out, and act." With every case she fearlessly takes on, every life she transforms, and every seemingly insurmountable barrier she shatters, Joy Katwesige emerges as far more than just a champion of SRH rights and gender equality— she is a guiding light, illuminating the path to justice and empowerment for her community.

Championing Menstrual Health.... Community Empowerment for Sustainable Solutions



With a red patch on that dress, they are laughed at, made fun of and left out. And pads? What do you mean pads? Yes, the most essential commodity for girls to manage menstrual hygiene. To them it's just another word. I am sure you have heard of the girls that have dropped out of school because of menstruation. Women and young girls that resort to using soil, or banana fibres to manage their menstrual flow. It's sad, right?

Menstruation is meant to be enjoyed by every woman. However, we are flooded with heart-breaking stories in the media and communities of how young girls endure the would-be happy days of their lives. The stigma they have experienced, including being isolated from their peers, served as a wake-up call. A ray of hope came through when Reproductive Health Uganda trained more than 50 young people in Sebei and Rwenzori region in menstrual health management. A team of 14 young people, the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) under a coalition of seven organisations implementing the Right Here Right Now programme, sought to be part of the solution.

Among the Sebei region beneficiaries was the Reproductive Health Youth Group in Tumboboi, Kapchorwa district whose members were skilled on how to make reusable sanitary pads. After the training,

...What started as a passion quickly became a thriving business. Many girls buy from us these pads since they have no time to make them by themselves....

Emmanuel Chebeti, a 26-year-old member of the group, eagerly returned home to share his insights with his wife. Together as a young couple, they recognised a unique opportunity not only to support their family financially but also to uplift their community by training more young girls around their home.

With his wife, Chebeti Felister, they began making reusable sanitary pads, turning their newfound knowledge into a sustainable solution for the girls who struggled with the high costs of disposable products. This did not stop at just earning income, Felister has been able to transform her fellow girls' lives like that of Cherotich Wahida a 17-year-old girl whom she trained. Today, Wahida is able to earn UGX30,000 [about US\$8] monthly from selling the reusable pads to girls in her neighbourhood.

"What started as a passion quickly became a thriving business. Many girls buy from us these pads since they have no time to make them by themselves." Emmanuel noted. He added that profits from their sales help them fend for their family. And, for every coin they get, they spare a few cents as savings to purchase a tailoring machine that will help to expand production.

Their journey illustrates the profound influence of the Right Here Right Now youth advisory committee in transforming lives of young people through education and empowerment. By fostering such initiatives that promote reproductive health, they have not only contributed to reducing school dropout rates among young girls but also instilled confidence in young women across Tumboboi sub-county, creating sustainable change.

Integrating SRHR and Climate Change....
How a Beekeeper is Championing Sexual and Reproductive Health



Evas Natukunda, 31, a resident of Karangura sub-county, Kabarole District, has become a renowned beekeeper in her community. Her success in beekeeping has earned her the title of champion beekeeper, with the profits significantly improving her livelihood over the years. In July 2022, Evas made her first honey harvest, collecting 14 kilograms, which she sold for UGX1 10,000 and used part of the earnings, UGX85,000, to purchase additional beehives and acquired materials such as a smoker, a bucket, and protective gear for harvesting.

In same year, 2022, Evas decided to champion sexual reproductive health, after receiving training from Reproductive Health Uganda where the training covered gender equality, sexual and reproductive health rights, family planning, the making of sanitary pads, and climate change-related environmental conservation activities such as tree planting.

The knowledge gained from the RHU training helped her use her earnings from honey more productively. "RHU trained us on sexual and reproductive health issues. Earlier this year, during the first school term, I used part of my income from honey sales to buy materials for making reusable sanitary pads. I went to Karangura Seed Secondary School and trained female students on how to make them. Each

student took some pads home," she said. Evas has also visited different homes in her village to sensitise people about sexual and reproductive health rights, like condom use, and family planning among others using money from her honey sales to cover transportation costs.

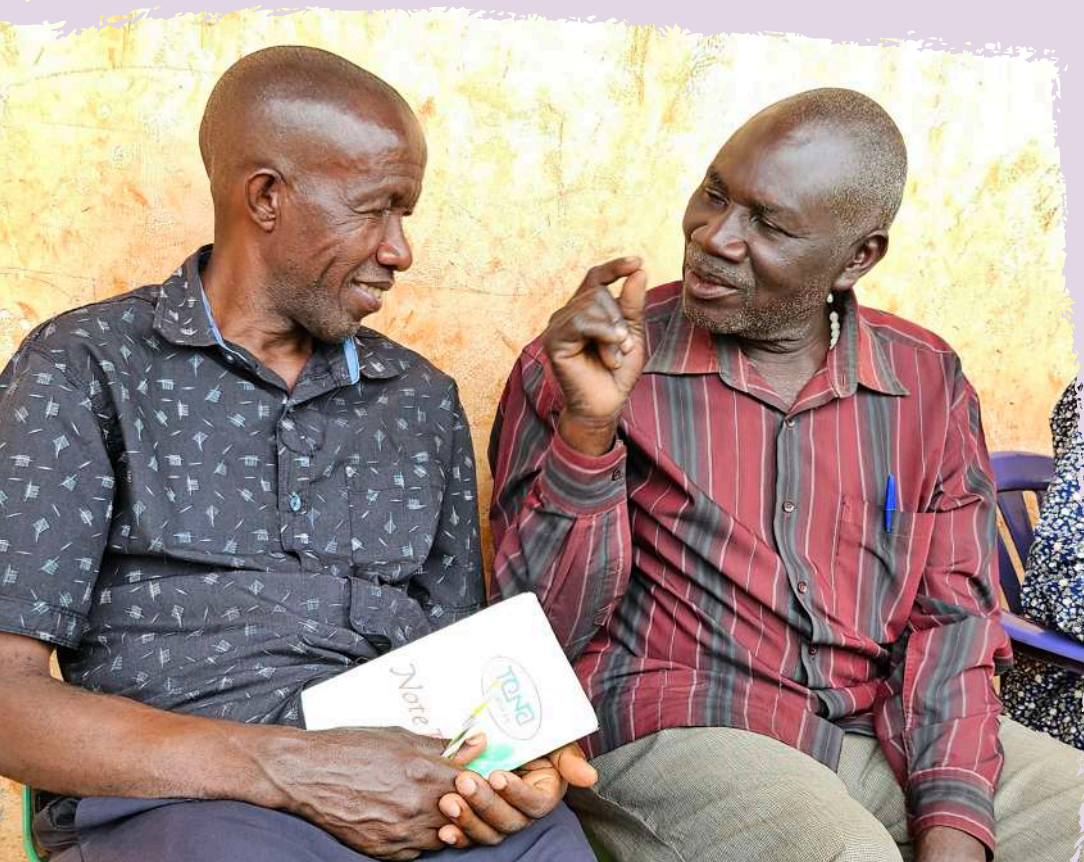
She notes that RHU training on family planning, helped her dispel myths that most men believe. Most men don't allow their wives to use any family planning methods and as a result, most women have produced many children and they find difficulties looking after them. "I was not using family planning before due to various myths because my husband could not allow me to use any, but after the training, I encouraged my husband to adopt a family planning method. Now, we are doing much better and we are planning for a manageable family size instead of having more children than we can care for," she observes.

After realising a stable income, Evas joined the Karangura Youth Beekeepers Association, which consists of 30 members. The group has a savings initiative, where members make savings every Tuesday when there is a sitting, and savings are shared at the end of the month. Membership requires owning at least one beehive. In June this year, Tunado, a national-level NGO for beekeepers, selected her as one of six group members to become a champion with a new task of training six members of her group in improved beekeeping practices to help them become successful beekeepers.

...I was not using family planning before due to various myths...., but after the training, I encouraged my husband to adopt a family planning method....

Male Involvement.... Indeed, It Does no Harm

Lubega Joseph has been the local council (LC) I leader, always re-elected by his community for more than 10 years. His community, like many other villages in Uganda ooze all kinds of issues. Among the things that perturbed him most was what he terms 'young boys' aged between 17 and 24 years, breeding harmful practices in their homes, especially violence against women and children.



“We have young boys involved in drug abuse; they are not many, but they are there. Then many of them start having families young. Many of them start having children at 17 years,” Joseph says. “As though that’s not problematic enough, these young boys practice harmful acts. They would be idle, loitering all over during the day. They would neglect and abandon their children. They beat and torture their wives, yet they were not providing for them,” Joseph recalls.

With this happening, Joseph developed the urge to help the youth in his community. With barely any knowledge and skills on how to do it, he embarked on the mission to do something, beyond why he was elected. Good enough, in 2021, an opportunity popped. “I was trained by Reproductive Health Uganda three years back. For me, this was what set the ball rolling,” Joseph says.

RHU facilitated trainings and has been mentoring Joseph and 60 other males in Hoima district as ‘male champions’ to promote, women’s rights, gender equality and male involvement in their communities. The purpose was to have men and boys have increased knowledge in gender equality, SGBV, in challenging harmful norms, and misconceptions and stereotypes; and then practice equal relationships in the family and holding powerholders accountable to respect, protect and fulfill women and girls’ rights. They were trained in human rights, including sexual reproductive health rights and gender equality, community mobilisation, among others.

This was under the Danish Family Planning Association supported Programme to Improve Sexual Reproductive Health Rights Policy and Service Environment in Uganda. “They first trained us as champions, then they sent us out to train others. Personally, I have trained 15 men from Kitonya [in Hoima district] who have also become male champions,” Joseph proudly says.

As male champions, “We teach people to leave the old way of life, but to live the present- where couples supporting each other and strive to live at peace. We try teaching men to abandon domestic violence, where their wives spend nights out, children spend nights out, children are not taken to school because of conflicts at home,” he adds. Joseph emphasises, “We teach them [men] to stop these practices. Take children to school without discrimination whether it’s a boy or girl.”

Joseph says that even as he reaches out to everyone, he has a special focus on ‘the young boys’. He teaches them to promote equal partnership and peace at their homes. “It has no harm for you as a young boy to work hard and support your family. It does no harm to regulate your drinking and having fun. It’s does no harmful for a man to escort his wife to the hospital when she is sick or pregnant,” Joseph echoes his message to the youth in his community.

“It does no harm for a man to support his partner to fetch water. There is no harm if the woman has left food on fire for you to help when need be. When it comes to family issues, you need to work together,” he emphasises,

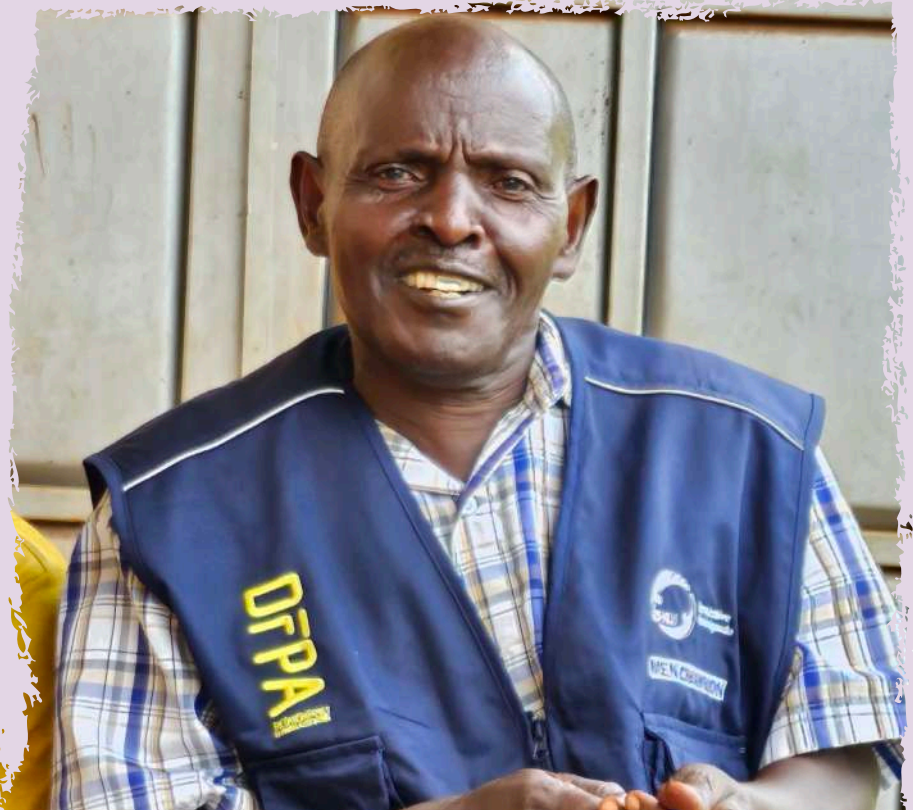
Among the young people Joseph has mentored is 25-year-old Mande James, who has also turned out to be a male champion. “I used to drink and smoke, use drugs, sleep in night clubs, I would beat my wife and sometimes send her away. I thought I was the boss and the head of the family, and I needed to prove this,” James recalls.

“But I discovered when you are the head of the family, it’s not about proving your authority and power, that’s not good at all. You need to work together, a couple and children so that you are one,” he adds.

James hasn’t broken the chain of the multiplier effect. “Likewise, I reach out to my fellow youth, especially the fact that they knew me as

‘something else’, but now I am transformed, and I am happy. I teach my fellow youth how to prevent getting and transmitting HIV. I urge them to help their partners on chores; be involved in their partners and children health,” James says.

Another male champion Joseph has mentored, Abudlal Kukoza says when couples in their community have misunderstandings, they reach out to help. “When I get to know about a case involving violence, I call a colleague, then a community leader to go and check them out. But sometimes you talk to the couple by yourself,” Abudlal says. “When we started, we wanted to see peace in our families, but now we are supporting the entire community and we are sure we are on the right trajectory,” he concludes.



Integrating SRHR and Climate Change.... Connecting Climate Change, SRHR and Gender Equality

In the picturesque region of Fort Portal in mid-western Uganda, nestled within the vibrant and close-knit community of Nyankwazi Bwanika, Olive Karungi's story exemplifies the transformative power of innovative, community-driven initiatives. A widow and mother of three, Olive has become a symbol of resilience, empowerment, and hope—her life profoundly impacted by the Innovative and gender-sensitive Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for Resilience and Green Jobs, commonly referred to as the Green Jobs Project, implemented by RHU and WWF Uganda. This project is reshaping lives by seamlessly integrating climate change with economic empowerment, gender equality, and enhanced access to sexual reproductive health rights services. The Green Jobs Project not only equips communities with the tools to tackle environmental challenges but also fosters sustainable livelihoods. By employing a nature-based solutions approach, the project leverages the immense potential of natural resources to support community well-being and strengthen resilience against the adverse effects of climate change. Through its efforts, the project is not only addressing immediate challenges but also laying the foundation for long-term, sustainable development in communities like Nyankwazi Bwanika.

Sustainable Solutions: Tackling Climate Change at the Grassroots

The Green Jobs Project champions nature-based

solutions to strengthen community resilience against the severe impacts of climate change. Through the formation of groups such as Kichwamba Youth Vegetable Growers, Obumu Women Farmers, Youth Beekeepers' Association, and Green Star Catering, the project has empowered communities in Bunyangabu and Kabarole districts to address their unique challenges and become active agents of change. One of the most impactful initiatives by these groups has been the construction of water tanks, a solution to the pressing issues of water scarcity



and accessibility. These tanks were born out of a collective effort by the groups to address the arduous and often dangerous journeys that women and girls endured to fetch water from distant sources.

Today, the water tanks provide a reliable and clean water supply, significantly reducing the long distances that community members once had to travel. This intervention has eased the burden on women and girls, freeing up time for other productive activities and enabling families to better cope with erratic weather patterns linked to climate change. Olive, a community member, reflects on the change: “Before the project, we used to walk over 20 kilometers to fetch water. It was exhausting and dangerous, especially for women and girls. Now, with the water tanks, we have clean water right here in our community.”

Previously, these treks not only consumed valuable time but also exposed women and girls to the risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Olive explains further, “Walking such distances through isolated areas made us targets. There were many cases of harassment, and some women even fell victim to sexual violence. The water tanks have restored our safety and dignity.” This initiative highlights the power of community-driven solutions in addressing climate challenges while fostering safety, equity, and improved quality of life for vulnerable populations.

Climate Change, Health, and SRHR: A Critical Link

SRHR is often missed out in conversations about climate change, yet its effects they are deeply connected. Climate-induced crises such as floods and droughts disproportionately affect vulnerable populations,

including women and girls, making access to critical SRHR services even more challenging. These environmental stresses, coupled with economic instability, often exacerbate gender inequalities, hindering access to necessary services like healthcare, education, and family planning.

Addressing Teenage Pregnancies and GBV

The Green Jobs Project has tackled critical issues such as teenage pregnancies and gender-based violence (GBV). The availability of water tanks and the economic opportunities created by the project have reduced the vulnerabilities that often expose young girls to exploitative relationships. “Teenage pregnancies were rampant because girls were forced into early relationships for financial support,” says Stephen Tinka, the chairperson of the Kichwamba Youth Vegetable Growers. The community groups under the project have become safe spaces where critical issues like GBV and SRHR are openly discussed. Leaders such as Stephen have been trained to mediate conflicts and provide counselling. “I have mediated many disputes,” he explains. “When couples understand each other and share responsibilities, it reduces tension and violence in the home.”

...I now help with household chores like washing utensils and bathing children. These tasks were once seen as a woman's responsibility, but now we share the load.....

Redefining Gender Roles

One of the most transformative aspects of the project has been its success in challenging and redefining traditional gender roles. Training sessions have focused on promoting equality in households and communities. Stephen reflects on his own transformation: “I now help with household chores like washing utensils and bathing children. These tasks were once seen as a woman's responsibility, but now we share the load. It has brought us closer as a family.”



Integrating GTA in Climate Change....

How Nyakake Transformed Her Life Through Green Jobs

In Kichwamba I village, located in Kichwamba sub-county, Kabarole district, Resty Nyakake, a 30-year-old mother of four, is rewriting the narrative of her life and community through sustainable agriculture and gender equality. Nyakake, a seasonal vegetable grower,



has not only improved her family's livelihood but also championed environmental conservation, thanks to the transformative Green Jobs Project. The Green Jobs Project, implemented by Reproductive Health Uganda in partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), seeks to create and scale green jobs using a nature-based solution approach.

By integrating the gender transformative approach (GTA), the initiative empowers communities to achieve sustainable development while promoting gender equality. Nyakake's journey with the project began in 2021 when she joined the Kichwamba Youth Vegetable Growers group, a community conservation organisation supported by the Green Jobs initiative. The group, which comprises 34 members, has benefited from RHU's training programmes on sexual reproductive health rights, gender equality, climate change, and gender-based violence. "It has been about three years since we started working with WWF and RHU, and we have gained a lot, I have been growing vegetables for six years, but this business has truly transformed my life and family since I joined the project. Before, I didn't know how to conserve the environment and often destroyed wetlands in my farming activities."

She says through the training sessions, she learned of sustainable farming practices that preserve natural resources and that these new techniques not only enhanced her vegetable yields but also ensured the protection of the local ecosystem. Nyakake said she is determined to expand her vegetable-growing enterprise while continuing to champion environmental conservation and gender equality. Nyakake says in 2023 she encouraged her husband and joined their association

with the initiative which has since cemented love at home and staying in a family that is gender-based violence-free.

Lessons on gender-based violence strengthened her relationship with her husband. "I now understand the sources of violence, and as a couple, we sit together and discuss issues. We respect each other more. My husband is supportive, and we now plan together, at home, he helps with domestic work, which was not the case before," she adds. "We embraced the use of family planning, which has helped us manage our household better. My husband even allows me to work and make money, which was not allowed before the training," Nyakake reveals. "Because we plan and work together, everything has become easier. This collaboration has reduced our family's expenditures, unlike before when we would spend about thirty thousand Shillings on vegetables from the market," she said.

She grows tomatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions, eggplant, green pepper, beans, and other vegetables, which are in high demand as staples in local markets around Kabarole and Fort Portal City. In their 34-member group, they initiated a savings programme where they meet every Sunday. Members are required to save between

...My husband even allows me to work and make money, which was not allowed before the training...

UGX1,000 and UGX5,000 every Sunday, but some contributing UGX10,000 or more. The savings are then shared at the end of the year. "As group members, we stopped relying on banks for loans. Within our savings group, we lend money to ourselves. This has helped us sustain our vegetable-growing businesses because we can easily access funds to buy seedlings and, at times, rent land for cultivation," she says.

She attributes her success to the training provided by Reproductive Health Uganda, particularly on gender equality. These sessions enabled her and her husband to work collaboratively, an improvement from the past when he showed little interest in her activities. "The beauty of it all is that my husband and I now work as a team, thanks to the gender equality training. I convinced him to join the association, and this has brought a lot of development to our home. Everyone understands their rights. We are now champions of gender equality and environmental conservation in our community," she said.

Despite her achievements, she acknowledged facing several challenges, including seasonal changes and poor-quality seedlings. "I bought cabbage seedlings for one hundred eighty thousand Shillings [9 packets]. They looked promising in the garden but failed to yield. After investing about four hundred thousand Shillings, I only earned thirty-five thousand Shillings, instead of the expected one million Shillings. We need certified seed companies to supply seedlings that guarantee a good harvest," she says.



**DRIVING
POSITIVE
CHANGE**

Engaging the Private Sector.... Male Workers Committed to Eradicate HIV Stigma and Discrimination at Bwendero Dairy Farm

Bwendero Dairy Farm, located in Hoima City, employs hundreds of workers, with a significant portion being youth of reproductive age. Over the past five years, the company has partnered with RHU to empower its workers with knowledge and soft skills

related to sexual and reproductive health. This collaboration has yielded remarkable results, including increased male involvement in combating HIV/AIDS and a significant reduction in stigma and discrimination among the workforce as the company introduced the HIV/AIDS policy among others. These efforts align with the Presidential Fast-Track Initiative to end HIV/AIDS by 2030. The General Manager of Bwendero Dairy Farm, Albert Bituura, says the partnership with RHU has created a safe and healthy environment for workers, fostering a vibrant and productive

workforce since there is no stigmatisation and discrimination. "With RHU coming on Lubega Joseph has been the local council (LC) I leader, always re-elected by his community for more than 10 years. His community, like many other villages in Uganda ooze all kinds of issues. Among the things that perturbed him most was what he terms 'young boys' aged between 17 and 24 years, breeding harmful practices in their homes, especially violence against women and children.



to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. “Before RHU’s involvement, there was fear and reluctance among staff to openly discuss their health status. Now, with RHU’s encouragement, there is greater openness and willingness to seek help,” he explains.

Albert says through the partnership, there has been an introduction of counselling sessions and access to treatment in the sexual related services. “Even if a worker is diagnosed as HIV-positive, they understand that they can lead a long and healthy life through treatment adherence. This has reduced absenteeism and improved productivity on the side of the company,” Albert notes.

He adds policies ensuring non-discrimination and stigmatisation of workers have also been established. This has been embedded in the human resource manual including provisions that prohibit discrimination based on HIV status during the recruitment and also no worker can be dismissed or penalised for being HIV-positive. On male involvement in the fight against HIV stigma, Albert says, “Men often initiate sexual activity, and their active participation in practicing safe sex and living responsible lives is critical to reducing the spread of HIV and stigma.” He adds that different peer groups have been established among staff, with leaders trained on sexual reproductive health and addressing issues such as sexual harassment.

...Before RHU’s involvement, there was fear and reluctance among staff to openly discuss their health status. Now, with RHU’s encouragement, there is greater openness and willingness to seek help...

“The knowledge gained at work extends to their homes, where workers influence their families and communities. For instance, women encourage their partners to get tested,” he says. The peer groups have been instrumental in fostering a supportive culture and enhancing awareness. “The conditions at home impact productivity at work. A worker with a disorganised mindset either because of stigma will struggle to perform. By addressing these issues holistically, we ensure a healthier and more focused workforce,” Albert explains.

Fatia Nayamba, a welder and peer educator at Bwendero Dairy Farm, adds that men in the community often avoid HIV/AIDS testing or training sessions, but said at the factory they have been bringing them on board and encouraging them to know their status and reduce transmission risks and stigma. “At the factory, I have been engaging men from different departments. Whenever there is a training or testing session, the first people I mobilise are male workers, who often claim to be busy, in such sessions they have been able to learn how to fight stigma to their fellow workers,” she says.

Fatia says peer educators at the factory have been instrumental in involving men by encouraging them to visit the clinic at the factory and get tested. They have sensitised them on condom use and at the factory there are condom dispensers in various locations, which are regularly refilled and people cannot be stigmatised whenever seen taking them. “When we see the dispensers getting empty, it shows they are being used responsibly,” she notes.

Darius Bainomugisha, a health worker at Bwendero Dairy Farm medical clinic, reports that at the factory, they have been actively engaging male workers in HIV testing, with support from RHU to ensure workers are aware of their status. "The company offers time off for workers who need to go for treatment and refills of ARVS, and if they live far away, we sometimes arrange for their medication to be picked up on their behalf," he says.

Patricia Manderu, the Gender and Youth Officer at RHU, based in Hoima, says that their partnership with Bwendero Dairy Factory began in 2018 with efforts focused on training the senior management and workers on gender equality, sexual reproductive health, and addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. "In the first phase, the company's intervention was minimal, but over time, they began to embrace the initiatives. Most of their workers are within the reproductive age of 20-40 years and sexually active, so they needed access to accurate information," Patricia explains. She says the partnership has resulted in progress, with the company now having policies in place, including an HIV/AIDS policy and a sexual harassment policy. In addition, the factory has established committees, such as the Occupational Health and Sanitation (OSH) Committee, which support these efforts. Members of these committees have been trained to implement and uphold the policies.

George Tamale, a workplace health specialist from the Federation of Uganda Employers, says that Bwendero Dairy Farm achieved HIV stigma and discrimination at the workplace after they partnered with the factory and RHU to help formulate guidelines for different policies now in place and help in their implementation.



Engaging the Private Sector....

Cost-Benefit Gains as Bugambe Tea Estate Invests in SRHR, OSH, and Gender Equality Policies

Ronald Byarugaba, the Personnel Officer at Bugambe Tea Estate in Kikuube district, revealed that the company employs approximately 1,300 workers during peak season, 58% of whom are women, primarily aged between 20 and 40 years. He notes that for over a decade, the tea company has prioritised occupational safety and health (OSH) and investments in SRHR and gender equality, culminating in the establishment of policies integrated into its operational manual.

He says policies mandate the formation of committees with departmental representation, which has improved issue identification and decision-making processes. "With this structure, we can promptly address concerns raised from various departments, enabling us to maintain a productive and safe working environment," he says.

Ronald says other policies such as the gender policy, PPE policy, grievance committee, gender equality committee, and sexual reproductive health policy, all aimed at boosting worker productivity. "Before these initiatives, we faced frequent accidents and challenges with disease control. Today, such incidents have drastically reduced," he states. He adds the company in the long run after the investment, has realised the cost-benefit aspect, where there have been reduced accidents due to improved safety measures, and cut costs for the

company of the operation.

"Trainings in sexual reproductive health, all these have not only created a safer working environment but also saves time and money for both workers and the company," Ronald

says. The company currently enjoys a decent work environment with no discrimination or sexual harassment, thanks to extensive worker trainings

conducted in collaboration with Reproductive Health Uganda. "We ensure equality in the workplace, even though our labour force is predominantly women—a group that often faces discrimination elsewhere. At Bugambe Tea Company, all workers are treated equally, and there are no roles assigned exclusively to a particular gender," he says.

He further explained that any worker found engaging in harassment faces disciplinary action because there is an established committee where such



cases are reported and addressed through a clear disciplinary process which has enhanced communication between workers and management. "This committee provides a platform for workers to give feedback, and their concerns are promptly addressed. This approach has saved the company time, as decisions made by the committee are respected and followed by workers. To date, no employee has faced dismissal or penalties without due process," he emphasises.

To further manage costs, the company undertakes periodic fumigation as part of its disease control strategy. Additionally, the factory offers free treatment for employees and up to four dependents, reducing disease spread and ensuring consistent worker attendance. "When diseases are controlled, staff attendance improves, directly increasing productivity and reducing absenteeism-related losses," he notes.

Joseph Kusemerwa, who oversees the Bugambe Tea Estate Clinic, observes that the clinic's annual budget has decreased from UGX250 million to UGX150 million over recent years, thanks to the implementation of policies. "This reduction is a direct result of the company's commitment to health policies that have minimised disease outbreaks, people have free access to treatment of STIs, family planning and other sexual related diseases," Joseph says.

However, the personnel officer, says

that implementing these policies and standards has not been without challenges, particularly given fluctuations in the tea sector. "While we have invested heavily in these initiatives, the cost has been significant, especially during times of declining tea prices. We train staff in occupational safety and health, but within a few months, new employees join, and we have to train them again. This continuous cycle adds to the company's expenses," he says. He also mentioned that budget constraints during the past two years, caused by declining tea prices, forced the company to prioritise PPE distribution. "Only workers in critical roles received PPEs during this period, as we were financially constrained," Ronald explains.



Beatrice Mugabo, who serves as a division manager at the factory, says, "The gender policy has ensured that women are not discriminated against. Women now hold significant positions in the factory, such as the estate manager who is now a woman, and we are doing our roles like men." Regarding sexual harassment, Beatrice notes that the policies have effectively addressed previous issues. "Before these policies were implemented, some workers would harass others, especially during promotions. Now, promotions are based on merit if someone qualifies, they are promoted regardless of gender," she explains.

Generally, "When workers are healthy, nothing stops them from performing their duties. We all feel confident knowing the company is committed to ensuring a safe work environment. This assurance has directly contributed to increased productivity," Beatrice concludes.

Robert Kinagodeze, a peer educator and worker at Bugambe Tea Estate, affirms that the company's investment in gender equality, SRH, has had a positive impact on the company's workplace and the workers. Robert says some of the benefits they are enjoying including paid annual leave for all workers, maternity leave for women, and free medical treatment for employees and their family members. "These measures have helped us save on personal medical expenses. Instead of spending money in hospitals, we get treated at the company clinic. This peace of mind allows us to focus on our work without worry," he notes.

"Because workers are treated promptly, there are no absences due to illness. This has directly improved productivity. Additionally, the knowledge we gain from trainings is shared with our communities, creating a ripple effect of positive change," he explains. Robert further

notes that workplace accidents have become rare due to the implementation of the OSH policy and other training they receive from drills. "With proper training and a clear understanding of safety procedures, accidents have been minimised. The grievance and safety committees ensure that workers' concerns are addressed promptly," he adds.



SRHR- Climate Change Advocacy.... RHU

Revolutionalising the SRHR and Climate Change Nexus

In a landmark event, the Kasese District Local Government, in partnership with Reproductive Health Uganda and support from the Danish Family Planning Association (DFPA), launched a comprehensive 10-year District Climate Change Adaptation Plan (DCAP). The launch presided over by H.E. Adam Spaare Spliid, the Deputy Ambassador of Denmark to Uganda happened on September 2024, in the mid-western Uganda district of Kasese. This initiative aims to build the community's resilience to the growing impacts of climate change, with a particular focus on integrating sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender equality into climate adaptation efforts.

The newly launched plan comes in response to the escalating signs of climate change in Uganda, such as rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events. These shifts pose significant challenges for communities, particularly those in Kasese, which has long struggled with the impacts of droughts, floods, landslides, and heat waves. These extreme events place considerable strain on local populations, especially women and girls, worsening the gender disparities.

"Kasese has been selected for this initiative not just because of its geographic vulnerabilities, but because of its urgent need for long-term solutions to mitigate the impacts of climate change," said H.E. Adam Spaare. "These extreme weather events have caused

significant hardship, and in many cases, have exacerbated issues such as gender-based violence."

What sets this plan apart is its holistic approach that goes beyond environmental issues to address the interconnected social challenges exacerbated by climate change. The plan emphasises the importance of reproductive health, gender equality, and violence prevention as essential components in building resilient communities. RHU plays a critical role in this approach, ensuring that the rights of vulnerable populations affected or prone to the effects of climate change, particularly women and girls, are central to climate adaptation efforts.

Annet Kyarimpa, Director of Programmes at RHU, emphasised that, "Climate change and sexual reproductive health are inextricably linked. As we tackle the devastating impacts of climate change, we must also address the social challenges it exacerbates, particularly gender-based violence, child marriage, and unequal access to reproductive health services. This plan is a powerful tool to address these issues while building resilience in the community."

Dr Joseph Katswera, the Kasese District Natural Resources Officer, presented the core components of the plan, which include both environmental and social elements. The key of the plan include: mini-irrigation schemes- initiatives designed to help local farmers cope with erratic rainfall, improve agricultural productivity, and enhance food security; Infrastructure development including construction of roads and bridges will enhance accessibility and resilience during times of flooding, ensuring that vital services and resources can reach affected areas.

Then it has the empowerment programmes for vulnerable groups, with special focus placed on vulnerable girls and women, ensuring they are included in the adaptation process. These programmes will provide women and girls with resources to become active agents of change within their communities, promoting gender equality and SRHR as critical elements of climate resilience.

“These initiatives are not just about protecting the environment; they are about safeguarding people’s livelihoods and ensuring that the most vulnerable have the support they need to adapt to the changing climate,” said Joseph. In his closing remarks, Kasese District Chairperson, Mr Eliphaz Muhindo Bukombi, urged donors and implementing partners to ensure that the activities outlined in the adaptation plan are localised to address the specific needs of the community.

“It is crucial that the people of Kasese are actively engaged in these efforts and that the initiatives are customised to their unique challenges and circumstances,” he said. “Only through this approach will we achieve the lasting, sustainable impact we are all striving

for,” he concluded.

The integration of SRHR into the Kasese DCAP is a critical step in ensuring that all members of the community, especially women and girls, have the resources and support to face the dual challenges of climate change and gender inequality. Through gender-transformative programming, RHU continues to engage local leaders and communities to foster awareness and advocate for climate action that is inclusive and equitable.



Building Partnerships for Climate Change....

RHU and Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu Forge Strong Partnership to Build Resilience to Climate-related Shocks

In a new development, Reproductive Health Uganda and the Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu (Rwenzururu Kingdom) have set a powerful precedent by uniting to address the intertwined challenges of sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR) and climate change. The partnership, formalised through a memorandum of understanding (MoU), was unveiled on September 2024, as part of the activities at the launch of the Kasese District Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

The ceremony, attended by key stakeholders including the Deputy Danish Ambassador to Uganda, H.E. Adam Spliid, symbolised a pivotal moment in Kasese's journey toward resilience. RHU has been engaging communities and their leaders to appreciate the critical role of SRHR and gender equality in achieving environmental sustainability. Through gender-transformative programming, cultural and religious leaders have been equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to advocate for climate action and SRHR. "Kasese is no stranger to the wrath of climate change," noted H.E. Adam Spliid. "But the physical destruction is only half the story. The social fabric—the very foundation of communities—is being tested. This partnership is not just a response; it is a long-term strategy to ensure that women and girls, who are the hardest hit, are also the ones leading us to a more resilient future."

Her Royal Highness Nyabaghole Agnes Ithungu Asimawe, the Queen

of the Rwenzururu Kingdom further noted, "Women in our rural communities often bear the brunt of barriers to reproductive health [services]," adding, "This partnership is a significant step forward for them. Together, we can tackle issues like teenage pregnancies and maternal health with the urgency they deserve. Our people deserve a future where health and opportunity go hand in hand."

The partnership underscores the urgency of integrating SRHR into climate change programming to create sustainable solutions for the region's most vulnerable populations, particularly women and girls. "The MoU between RHU and the Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu signifies an important milestone in the integration of SRHR, gender equality, and climate change adaptation initiatives," remarked RHU's Director of Programmes, Annet Kyarimpa. "This partnership is about more than survival," she explained. "It's about leadership. Women and girls will shape the future of Kasese. We cannot address climate change without addressing the health and rights of our women and girls," Annet concluded.

The partnership leverages the influence of cultural leaders to drive meaningful change, addressing climate challenges while promoting gender equality. RHU's commitment to equipping women and girls with tools they need to thrive amid adversity has been at the core of the initiatives in Kasese and beyond. This region of the country has long been a hotspot for climate-related disasters such as floods, droughts, and heatwaves, which disrupt lives and exacerbate social inequalities

Through enhanced access to family planning, maternal health services, and comprehensive SRHR education, RHU and the Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu aim to empower women and girls to become key agents of change in their communities, thus more resilience to

...We are laying a foundation where health, education, and environmental sustainability go hand-in-hand...

climate and weather-related shocks. "The work we start today is about building something that lasts," concluded Her Royal Highness Agnes Ithungu. "We are laying a foundation where health, education, and environmental sustainability go hand-in-hand. For the women and girls of Kasese—and for future generations—this is the beginning of a better, stronger, and more equitable tomorrow."



We Shall Miss You.... She Loved Uganda and Uganda Loved her Back

Ruth Van Zorge's legacy in the field of sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR) is nothing short of remarkable. Her reputation as a stalwart advocate precedes her, and her unwavering commitment to advancing SRHR has left an indelible mark, particularly in Uganda. As a medical anthropologist, Ruth has become more passionate about SRHR, witnessing that it is fundamental for the wellbeing and prosperity of individuals, couples, families, communities and countries.

Ruth's First Encounter with Uganda

Ruth's initial connection with Uganda came during her tenure at Rutgers International, where she frequently visited the country to offer strategic support and guidance to Rutgers-funded reproductive health projects. These early engagements laid the foundation for her enduring relationship with Reproductive Health Uganda, which would later blossom into a powerful partnership. Her ability to listen, learn, and collaborate made her a trusted ally in the shared mission to advance SRHR in Uganda. For Ruth, partnering with RHU has been a deeply rewarding endeavour. Reflecting on her collaboration with the organization, she shared: "It is humbling to see the programmes I co-designed being successfully implemented by a partner like RHU. Right Here Right Now 2, Power to Youth, GUSO, and others have been executed with excellence. It gives me pride and joy."

Returning to Uganda: A Beacon of Hope Amidst Crisis

Ruth returned to Uganda as the First Secretary for SRHR and Gender at the Netherlands Embassy at a time when the world was grappling

with the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis magnified existing SRHR challenges, especially for young people. Ruth recalls the early days of the pandemic with a mix of concern and determination: "In the beginning, I was just trying to get a grasp of everything.

We were all wondering, what is this and what is happening? By and by, it became very clear what the impact of COVID was."

The closure of schools and the ensuing wave of teenage pregnancies, sexual and gender-based violence, and school dropouts painted a grim picture. To tackle SRHR issues head on, Ruth realised in her early days that partnering with local non-governmental organisations influential on grassroots to advance SRHR was paramount. Recognising the urgency of the moment, Ruth emphasised the need for the embassy to partner with strong, reliable, and efficient civil society organisations like RHU. "We needed to act immediately," she said.

Strengthening Connections and Building Trust

One of Ruth's most significant achievements during her tenure has been bridging the gap between the embassy and its partners. She made it a priority to ensure that the doors of the embassy were always open, fostering an atmosphere of trust and collaboration. "Partners are our ambassadors on the ground. It is very important we develop a close relationship with them, which builds trust between the embassy and partners," Ruth explained. Her efforts have strengthened partnerships, enhanced information flow, and created a robust network of organisations united in their mission to improve SRHR outcomes in Uganda. This open-door policy has not only deepened relationships but also amplified the impact of the initiatives supported by the embassy.

A Legacy of Excellence

Her words underscore the trust and mutual respect that have defined the relationship between RHU and the Netherlands Embassy. Ruth lauds RHU's ability to provide research, information, and clarifications whenever needed, calling them a "reliable partner" and a "fountain of knowledge."

Ruth Van Zorge's legacy is one of vision, resilience, and impactful collaboration. Her leadership and dedication have not only advanced the cause of SRHR in Uganda but also inspired countless others to join the fight for a world where everyone has access to the health and rights they deserve. As she passes the torch, her contributions will continue to illuminate the path forward, reminding us all of what can be achieved through partnership, passion, and purpose.

What they say about her

Through her five-year tenure in Uganda, Ruth has closely worked with different members of the CSOs. For them, Ruth has been an extremely reliable support system who was always willing to offer wise counsel and guidance to the CSO's. Here is what they say about her. "Ruth is very hardworking. If she says something has to get done, it must get done. She is also very loving. I was very excited when I heard she was joining the embassy. She has been a very resourceful person. Ruth, being the focal person for the Power to Youth programme, she always gave us technical support, speak good of the programme and disseminated the results shared with her," says Dianah Nanyange the Programme and Knowledge Management Manager, Power to Youth Programme. "She is a very open, magnetic, resourceful, people person and compassionate about issues of SRHR. She will achieve what she wants with the least discomfort she will cause you," says Jackson Chekweko the Executive Director of Reproductive Health Uganda. "She is open minded and would show up at our youthful events with energy. She would always blend in and speak the language young people understand. She mentored many young people that we work with," James Tumusiime, the

former Country Director, Reach a Hand Uganda.

What she says about RHU

As Ruth reflects on her time in Uganda, her pride in RHU's accomplishments is palpable. "I'm proud of the work they do and how successfully they execute the projects. This gives us confidence to continue working with partners like RHU," she shared. Her words are a testament to the enduring partnership between RHU and the Netherlands Embassy, built on a shared vision of a healthier, more equitable future for all Ugandans.



Hard Work Recognised.... The Ministry of Health and Kasese District Local Government Honour RHU's Commitment to SRHR and Climate Change Adaptation

Reproductive Health Uganda has been awarded by both the Ministry of Health (MoH) and Kasese District Local Government in recognition of its outstanding contributions to building climate-resilient health systems in Uganda. The awards were presented during significant events aimed at advancing climate health adaptation in the country, including the launch of the Health National Climate Adaptation Plan (H-NAP) in August 2024, and the launch of Kasese District Climate Change Adaptation Plan in September.

RHU's recognition by MoH highlights its pivotal role in integrating sexual reproductive health and rights into climate change adaptation strategies at both national and local levels. The Ministry acknowledged RHU's leadership in this space during the launch of the H-NAP, which is a strategic framework to strengthen Uganda's health systems and prepare them to withstand the growing impacts of climate change. RHU's work aligns with the national agenda to ensure that the healthcare system remains sustainable despite climate-induced challenges.



The launch of the H-NAP, which was developed in collaboration with Makerere University School of Public Health (MakSPH), the Rockefeller Foundation, and the World Health Organisation, serves as a landmark step in Uganda's efforts to adapt its health systems to climate change. The plan outlines strategic interventions to improve climate resilience, including the establishment of climate-smart governance structures, enhancing health workforce training, integrating climate information into health programmes, and fostering innovative partnerships for resource mobilisation.

At subnational level, the Kasese District Local Government awarded RHU for her work in establishing a climate-resilient health system within the district. This recognition underscores RHU's contributions to addressing the intersection of climate change and SRHR in vulnerable communities, particularly those in areas heavily affected by climate-related crises such as floods and droughts. Climate change has a profound impact on SRHR, with its adverse effects disproportionately impacting women and youth, further exacerbating the challenges of accessing critical health services. The combined effects of environmental disasters and gender inequality place additional strain on vulnerable populations. RHU has been at the forefront of advocating for the inclusion of SRHR within climate change adaptation policies to ensure that these populations are not left behind. In addition, RHU formed a strategic partnership with the local government in Kasese to promote gender equality and climate change adaptation, with a focus on enhancing the capacity of community leaders to engage in climate and health advocacy. RHU's gender transformative programming has also empowered cultural and religious leaders in the region to advocate for climate action and SRHR. Through capacity-building efforts, these leaders are now equipped to educate their communities on the

importance of climate change adaptation, gender equality, and SRHR, leading to a more inclusive and resilient approach to climate challenges.

A major milestone in RHU's work in Kasese was the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the King of Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu, symbolising a strong commitment to integrating SRHR and climate change adaptation into the cultural fabric of the region. RHU remains committed to integrating SRHR into climate, advocating for the rights and needs of vulnerable populations, and ensuring that health systems are resilient in the face of an evolving climate crisis. The recognition from both the Ministry of Health and Kasese District Local Government serves as evidence of RHU's leadership in creating a sustainable and equitable health system for all.



Q and A with.... Dr Gerald Pande who Has Dedicated his Efforts to Support Key Populations

Yes, Uganda passed the Anti Homosexuality Act (AHA) in May 2023. But are the people charged to ensure that the right of every Ugandan access services and live in a violent free community, without discrimination have been sleeping! We had a Q&A with Dr Gerald Pande, Head of Key Population (KP) at the Uganda Ministry of Health. Below are extracts of the interview.

Question (Q): Thank you for accepting to have this interview with us Dr Pande! We also take this opportunity to appreciate the great work you are doing! We would love to know; how long have you been working with government?

Answer (A): I have been working with the government for long. I think I started from the district [current Nakaseke] and then came to the Ministry of Health. So, since 2015, I've been at the ministry. I started as a CDC [Centre for Disease Control] fellow who was attached to the AIDS Control Programme, supporting the STI [sexually transmitted infection] programme. Then in 2017, I got an appointment as a programme officer, supporting KP STI programming at the ministry of health up to today.

Q: Was it passion or it was fate that led you to start working with key populations?

A: I think it was passion because, after my master's in public health, I

went to do a fellowship, which is a two-year CDC fellowship in epidemiology. So, during that attachment, I got interested in KPs. And because of the high burden of HIV AIDS, I felt I needed to make a contribution.

Q: And what changes are you seeing for the last 10 years?

A: When I entered the programme, we didn't have any policy documents for KP Programming, because there was one person who was working there, Dr Peter Kyambadde. When we joined, they were training health workers, but without reference materials. So, we started by developing the KP Training Manual. We went ahead to develop the Peer Training Manual to enable deliver KP-friendly services. I sat with my colleague, Dr Kyambadde and we developed the DIC [drop-in-centres] guidelines. When went gone ahead to develop several guidelines, including reviewing the STI guidelines, which were in place, but just needed review and update as WHO recommended that each country should at least update their STI treatment guidelines two to five years. We've also managed to come up with standardised key population tools that enable us to capture KP data from all the facilities. I think this is an achievement as a country. And for the facility tools, they have already been given a code. We've also managed to develop the community tools, because we have the DICs; these standardise the work that they are doing.

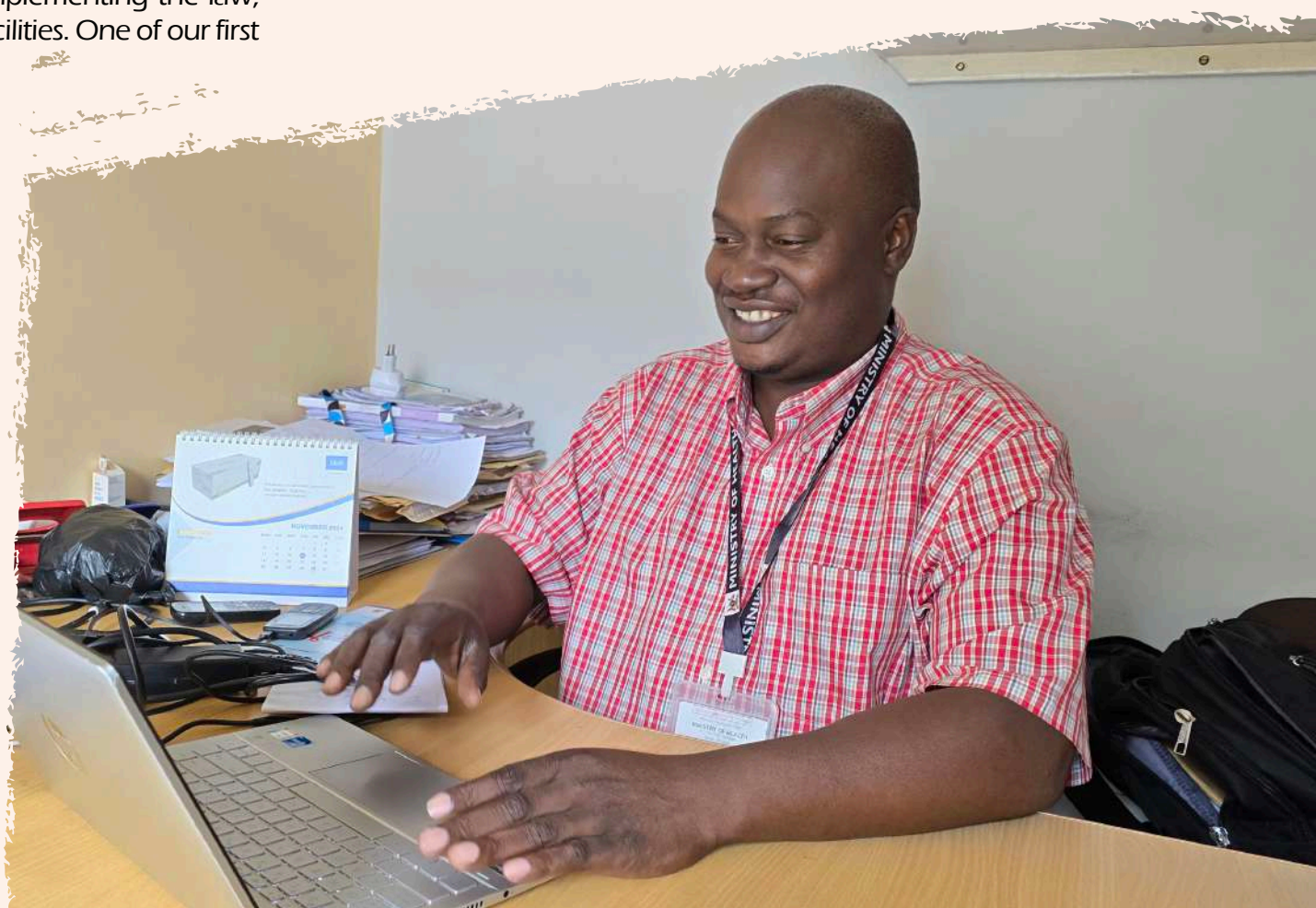
When the government of Uganda passed the anti-homosexual law, we anticipated, and indeed there were reports of disruption in service delivery. So, we sat with the leadership of the ministry and came up with an adaptation strategy. That adaptation strategy has been a response led by the ministry, but also with support from

other stakeholders, including the Uganda AIDS Commission, the donors, Global Fund, PEPFAR, but also organisations like Reproductive Health Uganda and HRAF, especially in making sure we implement what we put in our adaptation strategy. This has helped us as a country to increase the uptake, but also to reduce the violence, stigma, and discrimination. And cases of violence, you can testify that they have reduced. This is not by chance, but it's of the adaptation strategy, where we have engaged key stakeholders, including the law enforcement officers. At first, when this [AHA] was signed off, every person was up in arms. They wanted to start implementing the law, and some people even wanted to come to the facilities. One of our first engagements was in Fort Portal, where there was a lot of violence, stigma, and the DPC [district police commander] was saying, 'for us we are ready to start apprehending these people, and we want you the health workers, to clearly collaborate with us.' The situation has changed. Yesterday I was there [in Fort Portal]. People talk well, and they think of other solutions instead of taking people to court, apprehending them. And we really appreciated the adaptation strategy.

Q: What was the biggest challenge when the AHA was passed, apart from the leaders and communities rising up in arms?

A: For us as [ministry of] health, we saw a reduction in uptake of services, especially treatment and care and prevention services. And the community was violent. But also some of the law enforcement officers and community members started taking commodities that were used for prevention,

such as lubricants and condoms, as exhibits of supporting the people practicing homosexuality. To us as Ministry of Health, this wasn't good. But also, when people don't come back for their refills, especially those who are into care, even PrEP, that also brought issues. People relocating, and our health workers wouldn't follow them up. The other critical thing that happened, some of the health workers, especially those who were working on KPs (because within the law somebody had a duty to report); resigned and they didn't want to continue providing services. So that wasn't good.



We had to move around, train and orient them. And this was with support from different organisations; like Reproductive Health Uganda that organised trainings in Hoima that we facilitated. We also held trainings with the peers, because some of the peers had lost interest, because they were being looked at as promoters. But, the leadership of the ministry issued a circular, which turned around many of the things that were happening, especially to build confidence within the health workers to continue providing services, but also the confidence in the peers to continue providing a service. The peers help us a lot in the refill and follow up of the lost clients, because they stay with these clients within the community where they are.

Q: And in this period, what kept you going? Weren't you frightened of the backlash from different players and the community?

A: Yeah, at first, some people did not understand why we had to continue engaging. But we were so lucky that (I think it was during [the International] Labor Day [national] celebrations) our President [of Uganda] talked about the need to provide services to everybody without discrimination. And he was clear and said nobody should be deterred from going or accessing services. Because I work for government, I now had the government mandate to provide the services; my duty is to ensure that there is continuity of services. The community out there thought it [the AHA] was targeting people with unwanted manners, including sex workers. So, when you show them the burden of HIV and why you need to protect them, and if they are protected, in the end they are also protecting themselves, because you don't know who is paying for the services of the sex workers. These sex workers are there because they have a market. If they go to the street and they don't get customers for a week, they use up what they have and fail to get transport to go back. And really, when you bring in the response from the health perspective, most of the people do accept, including the religious leaders. The emphasis has been that, let each

one of us do their worker. We are not fighting the law. But for us, who are supposed to provide health services, let us provide, as we wait for the law to do its work. So, what kept me going is that having facts on the table, and with the support of the mandate by the ministry, but also our leaders [at the ministry of health] gave us the circular, which circular was important, because it showed that every person has a right to health. And the President came in and addressed the nation about it, which was good and timely. And really, people appreciated that we should give a service. Then, we had the coordination meetings. These coordination meetings were so critical, because they brought together all the different stakeholders including the donors, the implementing partners, where people could report cases of violence. So it is in these meetings that we would plan and say, we are having a lot of violence in this place, so we would go as a team. Teamwork played a very critical role in this fight of making sure that people have access to services, regardless of what they have done. Really, the support from all the stakeholders has been critical.

Q: So, in the last ten years, what is that one thing you celebrate. Is there anything you think about, and you give yourself a pat on the shoulder?

A: I think one of the first things I would celebrate: when this law was signed last year there was a lot of anticipation. Donors threatened to reduce funding to the country, but because of the adaptation strategy, we've continued to implement smoothly. Although we may be having challenges, but I'm happy that at least the drugs are there at facilities, which is very good. Then for the first we established a MAT (Medically Assisted Therapy) centre, to help and rehabilitate people who inject drugs. Previously, we've been having private people, I think around three private people, but not also doing real rehabilitation and it was costly because they required each person to pay a boarding fee of [UGX]60,000 per day,

which is costly and for at least six months. But we've established a MAT centre, one which is in Butabika [national mental referral hospital], with our support. Last year, we established one at Mbale Regional Hospital, which is functioning, and we are trying to help people injecting drugs, and some of them have stopped. They have been integrated back into the community. As a country, we didn't have anything about MAT. So, we developed the SOPs, the tools, and everything from scratch. So, I'm happy.

So, what makes me feel happy is to make a contribution. It makes me proud that you know I have saved a life; I have helped such and such a person to live meaningfully, and if I help one person to live meaningfully, this person is able to also help others. Really, I think that is the main reason why we are on earth- to make this world a better place.

Q: Thank you! And my last question, what has been your experience working with RHU?

A: I think we've had a very good working relationship. RHU has helped us a lot as a ministry. One, it has helped us to conduct the coordination meetings, facilitating our coordination meetings at the national level. You know, these coordination meetings are very important. They help to streamline KP programming, but also find solutions if some people are facing issues during implementation. So, this helps us as a team to do the coordination. And RHU has always facilitated our meetings. They've also had a task to do capacity building. For example, in Hoima, they are training health workers who are within the government facilities to offer KP friendly services, which is a very good thing. They have also facilitated us to do policies and guidelines. I remember when we started the discussions of developing the guidelines for safety and security, we reached out to RHU and it facilitated some of us to come up with the first draft that has helped us to move. But that also helped us, for example, to do support supervision and mentorship, especially in

the districts where they are implementing. If we are doing mentorship, that is a plus for us as a government to make sure that we improve on the quality of services being provided.

Thank you so much Dr Pande





FACILITATING PROVISION OF CLIENT- CENTRED SERVICES



Skilling Public Health Cadres.... **RHU** Equipped me to Influence Communities

“It was last year [2023] when I did the trainings on post abortion care, logistics management with Stand-Up project which encouraged me to do my work and also built my capacity in areas I did not know about,” says Santa Draru a midwife at Ombi health centre in Arua district. Santa Draru is one of the health workers across the different partner health facilities in Arua city and district who received training in provision of SRHR

services, administering family planning services, logistics management and youth friendly services among others.

Stand Up for SRHR is a Global Affairs Canada supported project through OXFAM Canada and IPPF. In Uganda, the project is implemented in a consortium consisting of RHU, OXFAM Uganda, and Makerere University School of Public Health. It is implemented in West Nile and Busoga regions of Uganda, with the main aim of improving provision of quality, gender-responsive, inclusive and accountable SRHR services and information by health care providers for diverse groups of women and adolescent girls. As part of ensuring health care providers offer quality and accountable SRHR services and information, the project trained health



workers in various areas. Before the training, Santa shares that they used to offer basic services without paying attention to the needs of the community and the unique issues that affect young people. “You know the attitude people have about public health facilities. We used to do things the same way we found people running the facility no wonder we had few clients,” Santa recalls. “I did not know the indicators I was working for not until the project came,” she adds.

Santa shares that the training in long and reversible family planning methods yielded results for the facility because, more people visit the clinic for the service. She adds that satisfied clients have been vital in achieving this. “If you take Ombi [health facility] starting from 2023, the uptake and consumption of long-term reversible family planning methods. The project also supports us with outreaches which have helped us interact with the community more,” she shares. “Before the training I would send away mothers telling them that I don’t know how to administer or remove the specific family planning methods. This is because I did not study these things in [the nursing] training. The project has made sure I know everything about family planning,” she adds.

The nurse says that the outreaches have been integral in accelerating and raising awareness about different SRHR issues in the community. They speak to the communities about sexual and gender-based violence, drug abuse, importance of children staying in school among other things. Priding herself in the work they have achieved, she recalls the number of times men would storm into the clinic and the cases she received stemming from husbands finding out that their wives use family planning without their knowledge. She says these cases have

significantly reduced because of the Stand Up for SRHR project awareness.

Their work has been made easier with the placement of village health teams (VHT) in key catchment areas who raise awareness and mobilise communities to take up SRHR services. The VHTs also administer short term family planning methods in the community. Beyond the trainings, the project provided health facilities with key medical equipment and commodities to ensure continuity of quality services. “When we are out of commodities we run to RHU. They gave us IUD sets, sterilisers, delivery beds which have really helped us as a health facility,” she intimates. “Our customer care has improved because they took us through client handling which makes them comfortable to come back again,” she reveals. For Santa, one of the major wins is the ability to keep, process and share data with ease. “Collecting, keeping data and sharing data has become easy because we were given extensive training on data and how to use data to inform the services we offer,” she shares.

She adds that they have seen a surge in young people seeking family planning services which she says will help in reducing teenage pregnancy in the locality. “Most of the young people don’t like speaking to people older than them even worse in government hospitals. I try and attend to them, keep their information confidential. They go and bring their other friends to get family planning which means they are trying to keep themselves safe,” she shares. Today, Santa is proud of her evolvement from a timid nurse who was scared of administering family planning methods to being a mentor of many others in her facility whom she trains and ensures they offer the services with ease.

Navigating Hard-to-reach Areas.... Bringing Healthcare to the Margins: How RHU Mobile Clinics are Saving Lives in Kisoro

Tucked away in the rugged hills of southwestern Uganda lies Nkuringo Town Council in Kisoro District a community perched at the edge of the breathtaking Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. Here, the majestic peaks of Mount Muhavura stand sentinel, casting shadows over rolling green landscapes that seem to stretch forever. It's a postcard-worthy paradise, but for its residents, the beauty belies a harsh reality: accessing healthcare in this remote and mountainous region is a daily struggle. The roads to Nkuringo are narrow, winding, and untarmacked, where vehicles often falter, and motorbikes—the main form of transport—barely manage to maneuver the steep, rocky trails. For decades, this isolation has left residents with limited access to essential health services. But, Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU) is rewriting their story through its mobile clinics.

Through its innovative outreach programmes, RHU's mobile clinics have become a lifeline for marginalised communities in Kisoro. Providing reproductive health services, ranging from family planning services to conducting lifesaving cervical cancer screenings, these clinics are breaking through barriers to bring healthcare to the heart of the communities. For Evelyn Nkwanzu, a resident of Nkuringo, RHU's mobile clinics have been life-changing. "We have always struggled to get care," she says. "Now, for the first time, we feel seen and heard."

The challenges faced by the residents here are immense. Limited public health facilities often run out of supplies (the situation is dire for

reproductive health commodities) and the cost of reaching these centres—up to 30 kilometers away—is prohibitive. Women, including those who are pregnant, endure grueling treks on foot, navigating steep slopes to access healthcare—efforts so arduous that many are ultimately forced to forgo care altogether. Yet, RHU's mobile clinics have managed to defy these odds, traveling into the remotest corners of Kisoro District. By setting up medical camps in Nkuringo and surrounding areas such as Nteko and Mabende, RHU has reached thousands who would otherwise remain underserved.



A critical focus of the mobile clinics has been cervical cancer screening, an often-overlooked service in Uganda's rural areas. During recent outreach events, RHU screened 1,089 women, a monumental achievement for a community that previously had little access to such care. Among those screened, 25 positive cases were identified. Out of the 25, 22 women tested positive for cervical cancer lesions and received immediate treatment using cryotherapy, preventing the disease from progressing and three women who tested positive for cervical cancer were referred to Mbarara hospital for further management, showcasing RHU's dedication to comprehensive care. "For many of these women, this was their first opportunity to be screened," says Loyce Tusiime RHU service provider. "It's not just about the numbers; it's about giving these women hope they may not have had otherwise."

The mobile clinics must navigate treacherous roads that wind through steep hills and muddy trails. Vehicles often break down or get stuck, forcing RHU teams to carry equipment by hand to the designated camp locations. Despite these obstacles, the clinics arrive equipped with trained healthcare providers, medicines, and a steadfast commitment to serve.

In 2023 alone, RHU's mobile clinics reached over 7,915 people in

Nkuringo, delivering a range of sexual reproductive health services. Beyond cervical cancer screening, they provided family planning services, counseling, HIV testing, STI treatment, and maternal health support. "RHU's efforts in Kisoro have been remarkable, reaching some of the most hard-to-reach communities in our district," says Dr. Stephen Nsabiyumva, Kisoro's District Health Officer, before adding, "Their dedication to delivering essential healthcare services, even in the most remote areas, has not only saved lives but also brought hope to those who had little or no access to health care."

"RHU complements the government in healthcare provision; where the government has limited resources to reach, it is such partners like RHU that fill the void. We appreciate their commitment to improving the well-being of our people," Stephen says.

RHU team also trained 45 healthcare providers from public facilities in Kisoro, enhancing their skills in cervical cancer screening and family planning services. This ensures that even after the mobile clinics leave, the local health facilities remain better equipped to serve the community. For the people of Nkuringo,

RHU's mobile clinics are more than just a service—they offer a commitment to creating healthier communities. They represent a lifeline for women who now have the opportunity to plan their families, detect health issues early, and access the care they rightfully deserve.

...RHU complements the government in healthcare provision; where the government has limited resources to reach, it is such partners like RHU that fill the void. We appreciate their commitment to improving the well-being of our people...

**Working with Community Resource
Persons.... Dedicated to Creating
a Healthier Population**



David Wilson Anguzu has dedicated his entire adult life to serving his community as a village health team member, a role he says has fulfilled his heart. "I picked interest in being a VHT because I realised that the ignorance in the community is very high. I have love for my people so I have come out to help them so they can come out of that ignorance especially things to do with reproductive health care," he narrates. David shares that the first story that shook his heart and bloomed his desire to educate his community was when his neighbors' child who had been impregnated by a boda man sought abortion services from a traditional birth attendant (TBA). Because of the rudimentary methods used by the TBAs, the young girl lost her life and this never left him the same. So many girls would go to TBAs for everything. To give birth, terminate pregnancy and most of them have lost their lives. "Now I bring them to sister (nurse) who further counsels them and they start taking antenatal and after birth they get family planning [services]," he shares.

David shares the unpopular opinion of ensuring that teenage and adolescent girls access modern contraceptives to avert teenage pregnancy. He notes that in his village, the future looks blurry because many girls have dropped out of school because of teenage pregnancy. "When I move in the community, I see them coupling. They go to the night dance and get impregnated from there but if we

educated them about family planning, it would help in protecting them," he exclaims.

David is one of the members of the movement of village health teams whose capacity was strengthened under the RHU Stand Up for SRHR project in Arua district. He received training in administering short term family planning methods, health education, referral pathways, data collection and reporting. "This was my very first-time learning about those three-month injections. I am now very good at it," David reveals. He says his knowledge in SRHR has improved the quality of information he shares his community and allowed these family planning services to get close to his community members.

...I picked interest in being a VHT because I realised that the ignorance in the community is very high. I have love for my people so I have come out to help them so they can come out of that ignorance especially things to do with reproductive health care...

"We were given training in family planning and now I move from door-to-door teaching families," he says "The good thing is I am a man and I talk to my fellow men about family planning. It becomes easy for them to support their partners when I share all this information," he reveals. David adds that "Now women call me when 3 months are done to get another method. They don't have to walk to the health centre." David is grateful for the trainings because they enabled him network with other VHTs creating a movement of change makers in



INNOVATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT



Knowledge Sharing.... Connecting for Women, Girls and Youth: Are We Getting it Right?

Yes, it happened. High profile Government officials were present and made their contribution. The donors were there and made their contribution. The media was very present, and we shared and exchanged some learnings. The CSO- national and subnational level graced the occasion. And the young people: definitely didn't

disappoint. They were amazingly present- learning, sharing their experiences, and enjoying the fun...

In the heart of Kampala, at Hotel Africana, we converged. We gathered for the first **Annual CSO Knowledge Sharing Conference on SRHR, Gender and Youth Programming**. We discussed the key SRHR issues that affect women and young people. It was time to connect- connecting for women, girls and young people guided by five conference tracks: Meaningful and Inclusive Youth Participation; Gender Transformative Approaches; Media and Innovations; HIV, SRHR and Climate Change.



gathering. It's crucial for CSOs to unite, share knowledge, and The state minister for youth and children affairs, who graced the opening session as the chief guest, applauded the organisers for what he terms as a vital gathering. "Appreciation to the Power to Youth Programme and partners for organising this vital collaborate to address pressing issues like teenage pregnancies, child marriages, and gender-based violence," he stated, on his X page, after the function.

"CSOs are invaluable partners to the government, supplementing our initiatives and ensuring a multisectoral approach to tackling these challenges," Hon Balaam said.

He emphasised the importance of the conference because of the alarming statistics that needed solutions. He mentioned the 43% of women married before 18, the 24% teenage pregnancy rate, and 51% of women experiencing physical violence. "It's time for collective action! Uganda has a strong legal framework supporting girls' education, but we must ask ourselves: What are we not doing right? Why are the statistics stagnant? Let's face reality, plan, and build our nation together!" the minister concluded.

On her part, Dr Betty Kyaddondo, who gave the keynote address applauded the initiative of having a knowledge sharing conference, moreso, the media session. "A robust partnership between CSOs and the media is essential for effectively promoting SRHR. By working together, CSOs can provide media with reliable data and insights, amplifying the impact of their reporting and advocacy efforts," Dr Kyadondo said.

The ministry of gender, labour and social development, assistant commissioner for youth and children's affairs, Mondo Kyateka,

challenged participants to facilitate inter-generational dialogue between older people and young people in order to bridge knowledge gaps.

The conference objective was to facilitate knowledge-sharing among CSOs working on gender, sexual reproductive health and rights, and other issues affecting women and youth in Uganda. During his opening remarks, at the media session, the Co- Executive Director for Gender Justice, Bafana Khumalo emphasised the urgency to involve women and girls. "Women and girls often play central roles in their communities. By involving them in CSOs, these organisations can leverage their networks and influence to foster community engagement and cohesion," he noted.

Different participants shared their experiences and called on different stakeholders to effectively execute their roles. This was during the plenary session, and at the side events. " many of us don't have access to proper information about our bodies and sexual health. The little we know often comes from friends or the internet, but it's not always accurate or helpful. In school, sex education is often skipped or only briefly mentioned, leaving us confused and scared about what could happen if we make a mistake or someone takes advantage of us," Shirat Namayanja, representing young people, pondered.

On his part, the RHU executive director, Jackson Chekweko demanded action from Government on these dire issues. "Uganda's government must create and enact a thorough sexuality education programme to offer young people the necessary guidance, safeguard their values, and empower them to make positive contributions to the country," he demanded.

Innovative SRHR Information Sharing....

RHU Empowering Youth to Make Informed SRHR Decisions Through an Interactive Card Game

In a world where young people are increasingly faced with decisions that impact their sexual and reproductive health, it's crucial to equip them with the knowledge and tools they need to make informed choices. One such initiative, is a unique platform for young people to learn about family planning, financial management for children, and other key aspects of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). Organised by RHU, the event engages young people through an innovative and interactive card game aimed at teaching the practicalities of decision making. At Mpanga Beach in Namayingo district, the event gathered over a dozen young participants, all tasked with making decisions about managing families, from selecting the number of children they would like to have, managing finances, healthcare, and other family needs. Through the game, participants were encouraged to think critically about family planning, understanding the economic and emotional responsibilities associated with having children, and developing a deeper appreciation for SRHR issues like contraception and menstruation.

The Card Game

The card game is designed to give participants a hands-on learning experience. Each card in the deck represents a specific number of children, ranging from 1 to 7, and players must make decisions on how to provide for these children. Key elements such as healthcare,

education, financial stability, and emotional well-being all factor into the game. The goal is not just to decide how many children one can have, but to reflect on the responsibility and foresight required to raise a family in a sustainable and healthy manner. The game also introduces real-world challenges such as saving for children's education, budgeting for healthcare, and making informed choices about reproductive health. Participants are encouraged to consider various SRHR issues such as contraception, family planning, and reproductive health services. The emphasis is on teaching young people the practical side of making reproductive health decisions—not just based on personal desires, but also on financial and emotional preparedness.

Impact on Participants

Brian Mwagusi, a 22-year-old from Namaingo, says before playing the game, he had no idea how much responsibility comes with raising children. "I used to think that having children was just about providing the basics, but the game showed me that it's about long-term planning like saving for their education, providing healthcare, and ensuring they have a good quality of life. It was eye-opening for me, and it made me realise how much more I need to think about these things before making any decisions about having children," he says.

Justus Sanya, another participant, expresses how the game challenged him to think more carefully about his future family. "I used to think family planning was just about preventing pregnancies, but after playing the game, I now understand that it involves thinking ahead about how many children I can afford to support. The game made me realise that family planning also means budgeting for things like education and healthcare, which I never really considered before,"

he says. Sarah Taaka, an active youth advocate, shares that the game helped her recognise the social implications of family planning. "The game made me realise that family size is not just an individual choice but a collective decision that affects society as a whole," Sarah says. "I learned that the decisions I make about family planning today can influence not only my family's future but also the well-being of my community and the country. The game taught me how to balance personal desires with the practical realities of raising children," she concludes

Linnet Auma, a participant in the game adds, "In the game, we had to make tough decisions about family planning and resources. It showed me that without the basics like education, good healthcare, and financial stability it's easy to fall into situations that put you and your family at risk." "It made me see that when you marry young, you're often forced into adult responsibilities without the skills or resources to handle them. And when you're lacking these essentials, you're more likely to face health risks or financial instability. The game helped me understand that being intentional about when to start a family is key to avoiding these dangers," Linnet notes.

Doreen Nabwire, another participant, says understanding sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is so important. "This game helped me see that. I used to have some misconceptions about these issues, especially when it comes to things like pregnancy and sexual health. For example, I once believed that you couldn't get pregnant if you slept with an uncircumcised man, which I now know isn't true. These kinds of misunderstandings are very common, and they can have serious consequences for people's health and lives," she observes. Asharaf Kabooda, who is in charge of organising the games, emphasises how the game fits into RHU's broader strategy for educating

young people about SRHR. "Our aim is to make SRHR education more accessible and engaging for young people. By incorporating games like this, we allow participants to actively experience the challenges and rewards of right decisions," Asharaf explains. "You saw the game spark important conversations among young people, and their feedback has helped us improve it to make it even more relevant and impactful. We're constantly looking for ways to make SRHR education more interactive and accessible, and this game is a big part of that," he says.



Innovative SRHR Information Sharing....

RHU Uses Sports to Fight Teenage Pregnancy and Promote Sexual Health Awareness

In Mayuge District, RHU has found a powerful way to address the rising issue of teenage pregnancy through sports. Football, netball, talking cards and other physical activities which are transforming into platforms for young people to learn about their sexuality, access healthcare, and engage in meaningful discussions about sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR).

Through these initiatives, the young people are not only staying active but are also gaining the knowledge and tools to make informed decisions about their lives and bodies. Rashid Kasango, a young person and football player explains how sports has helped him and his peers better understand their sexuality and sexual health. "Football has become more than just a sport for us. Through it, we have learned a lot about sexual health and our rights. It's not just about kicking a ball, it's about understanding how to take care of ourselves, making informed decisions, and knowing how to avoid the pitfalls of early pregnancies and diseases," says Rashid.

He continues, "We have regular discussions with health workers and facilitators about issues like consent, safe relationships, and how to prevent pregnancy. These sessions are integrated into our football practice, which makes the learning process much more engaging and relevant to our daily lives."

Sarah Mutesi, a netball player, recalls how sports has helped keep her busy and away from risky behaviours. "Netball has really kept me focused. When I'm on the court, I'm not thinking about anything else except how to work as a team and improve my skills. This has kept me away from bad influences and given me the chance to learn more about family planning, the dangers of early pregnancy, and how to stay in school," Sarah explains. She adds, "Through netball, we have also learned that our bodies are valuable, and it's essential to respect them. Our coaches and community health workers regularly educate us about how to make the right choices. Being busy with netball has also kept us from falling into relationships that could derail our futures."

Joseph Wandira, a local youth, discusses the broader advantages of sports in the fight against teenage pregnancy. "Sports is a powerful tool for change. They teach us not just physical fitness but mental resilience as well. I've learned a lot about responsibility, leadership, and self-discipline through football. These lessons directly impact how we manage our personal lives, including our relationships and sexual health decisions," Joseph says.

He continues, "The key advantage is that sports give us an outlet for our energy. Instead of spending time in unproductive ways or engaging in risky behaviours, we are channelling our time and efforts into something positive and educational."

Annet Bayilo, a youth advocate, speaks about how improved access to health services has brought more young people

into the programme. "In the past, getting health services was a challenge. Young people had to travel long distances to access basic sexual and reproductive health services. But now, with services much closer to us through VHTs, many of my friends have been able to get information and treatment for family planning and sexual health," Annet explains. She adds, "When youth see that health services are available, free, and easy to access, they feel more comfortable seeking help. It's been a game-changer for us because it ensures that we stay informed and avoid risky situations."

Valentine Owere, a Village Health Team (VHT) member, emphasises the important role that sports play in bridging the gap between healthcare and the community. "Sports events are a powerful way to bring young people together. Through these activities, we have been able to discuss sensitive topics like contraception, HIV prevention, and the importance of mutual respect in relationships. As VHTs, our role is to ensure that these messages are communicated effectively," Valentine explains.

He further elaborates, "When we meet youth in a sports setting, they're more receptive to learning and engaging. It's a casual and friendly environment that helps us break the ice and start important conversations about sexual health and rights."

Miremember Oliver Cathy, a healthcare provider attached to Muayge health centre IV and who was also trained in youth-friendly services, discusses the improvements in healthcare delivery for young people. "Before we received specialised training, many young people were reluctant to approach health facilities. They often felt that the services were not tailored to their needs or that they were being judged," Cathy says. She continues, "Since the training, we have implemented

youth-friendly services, which are not only more accessible but also more welcoming. The change has been remarkable, more young people are now coming for services like family planning and STI testing. They trust us more because we understand their concerns, and we provide them with the tools they need to protect themselves."





INVESTING IN SYSTEMS AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Health Systems Strengthening.... Impacting the Refugee Community Through the Community-Based Model for Sexual Violence Survivors in Crises Project

Since the dawn of time RHU has served the people of the West Nile region of Uganda, targeting both refugees and host communities. RHU also always been committed extend its SRHR clinical services into refugee settings, recognising the unique challenges faced by such communities RHU has always made a significant positive impact on the reproductive health outcomes of refugees, contributing to their overall well-being.

And, in 2022, RHU, with financial support from Women's Refugee Council, implemented the Community-based Care Model for Sexual Violence Survivors in Crises Project in Adjumani district. The project aimed to strengthen the capacity of community health workers and organisations in GBV prevention and response, with the ultimate objective of improving safety and well-being of refugees.

Unfortunately, in March 2024, RHU witnessed the closure of the project that left behind a trail of impact in the district. "It's remarkable to see the positive influence of the project on health workers, leading to a significant mindset change through tailored trainings and interventions. The shift in approach, allowing health workers to provide immediate care to victims even before police involvement, has undoubtedly improved response times and support for [GBV] survivors. This proactive approach is a testament to the project's

effectiveness in enhancing victim care," noted the Adjumani district chairperson Hon Charles Drichi, at a ceremony to celebrate the impact of the project and see it official closure.

In the two years of implementation, RHU and partners registered several accomplishments that included: enhanced coordination between

the police and health facilities that facilitated improved access to services by GBV survivors. There was also increased awareness among community members about the range of services available to survivors beyond just health services and safety measures; and then strengthened collaboration between community leaders, VHTs, and church leaders, resulting in more efficient referrals for survivors in seeking support.

The RHU director of programmes, Annet Kyarimpa, underscored the importance of survivors accessing key services promptly, especially those that are time-sensitive, to ensure their well-being and recovery. "As SGBV remains a pressing issue within the community, it is essential to delve deeper and ensure that women's issues are effectively addressed. By exploring new strategies and solutions, we can build on the foundation laid by the project and empower women to overcome barriers to their well-being," she observes.

In response to the project's closure, Michael Kizito Mawadri, the Adjumani Chief Administration Officer affirmed the district's commitment to sustaining the structures established by the project. He pledged to "ensure that these structures are effectively integrated into the community, with a specific focus on reducing

instances of gender-based violence and promoting a safer environment for all community members.”

The Adjumani Chairperson, extends gratitude to RHU for the support, stressing “the importance of men understanding the impact of their actions on women and the family unit, and advocating for a more equitable distribution of responsibilities.”

“The project’s legacy of trained VHTs and strengthened community structures is invaluable in ensuring continued assistance and support for the community. Collaboration with RHU and other IPs further enhances our collective efforts in addressing ongoing challenges, particularly in combating sexual gender bases violence within the community,” he concluded.

The project facilitated establishment of a community advisory board comprising representatives from the district health office, office of the prime minister and other key stakeholders. This board was instrumental in providing guidance and shaping the project’s implementation, fostering collaboration and ensuring that collective efforts yield meaningful results. On her part Brenda Tideru, the project coordinator, noted that, “The project’s impact on empowering women to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health is crucial, especially in challenging cultural norms that limit women’s autonomy. Addressing barriers to accessing family planning services and

combating gender-based violence are essential steps towards promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment within the community.”

At the project closure event, RHU highlighted key project outcomes, demonstrating the effectiveness of the evidence-based toolkit developed for survivor care and leading discussions on how to sustain these vital support systems. The gathering underscored the project’s role in delivering high-quality, stigma-free medical and psychosocial care, fostering a sense of shared commitment to ongoing service



Strengthening Health Systems.... Health Workers Skills Strengthening: Boosting Client Trust



To enable easy accessibility to services, RHU focuses and invests in enhancing the capacity of health workers, especially those in public health facilities, in several key areas, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet the needs of their communities. Health workers are trained in topics such as cancer (with a bias i reproductive health cancer) awareness, prevention and screening, attitude transformation, family planning, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) response, and effective logistics and management of resources.

Additionally, village health teams (VHTs) receive specialised training on short-term family planning methods and how to properly refer clients for long-term family planning options. These trainings have greatly improved the way health workers provide services. For example, cancer awareness training has equipped them to identify early warning signs and refer patients for further care, catching cases early and improving outcomes.

Carol Tesa, a nurse at Bukimbi Health Centre IV, in Namayingo district shares how the training session helped her engage with young people more effectively. "The training we received through RHU has made a huge difference in how we work. Before, we sometimes struggled to provide the right support to our communities because we lacked the latest information and skills. But now, after the capacity

building, we feel much more confident and prepared to handle a wide range of issues, Carol says.

She notes that reproductive health cancer awareness, prevention and screening training taught them how to identify early signs and refer positive clients for further testing. "This has been so important because early detection can save lives," she says. "The attitude transformation sessions were also really helpful, they taught us how to approach young people with more empathy and respect, especially when discussing sensitive issues like family planning or gender-based violence. This has built trust with the people we serve and made them more willing to talk openly about their needs," Carol adds.

Carol believes the trainings on family planning methods—both short-term and long-term—have been incredibly valuable too. "We now know how to provide better counselling on different methods, ensuring that young people can make informed decisions. When someone needs a long-term method, we know exactly how to refer them to the right health facilities," she says. she also says that the trainings on logistics and management helped them keep better track of supplies.

"All these skills have not only improved our work but have also made family planning services more accessible and effective for young people in our communities. We're able to provide more comprehensive care, and we're seeing real improvements in their health and well-being," she concludes.

...We now know how to provide better counselling on different methods, ensuring that young people can make informed decisions. When someone needs a long-term method, we know exactly how to refer them to the right health facilities...

Environmental Sustainability.... Health Workers Skills Strengthening: Boosting Client Trust

In the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of sexual reproductive health and rights, RHU Learning Centre has emerged as a cornerstone of innovation, excellence, and impact. Since its establishment in 2016,

the Learning Centre has served as a hub for capacity building, technical support, and knowledge exchange—not only strengthening RHU’s internal structures but also transforming the broader IPPF network and other SRHR stakeholders.

A Trailblazer in Governance Training

One of the pillars of the RHU Learning Centre’s success has been its focus on good governance, a critical foundation for effective SRHR programming. This year, the Centre ramped up its efforts,



making strides both locally and internationally. In October, RHU's Executive Director, Jackson Chekweko, led governance training missions to Zambia and South Sudan, sharing best practices with IPPF Member Associations (MAs). "Governance is the backbone of effective service delivery," Jackson said, emphasising the importance of transparency, accountability, and a unified vision for advancing SRHR. Closer to home, RHU's Governor of Human Resources, Robinah Nambooze, reiterated the importance of continuous governance capacity building. "When new committees are formed to govern RHU branches, we ensure they receive regular training. This keeps our systems robust and aligned with our mission," she explained.

Beyond Governance: Expanding the Scope

The RHU Learning Centre has also widened its scope to address critical areas such as monitoring and evaluation (M&E), financial management, and leadership development programmes (LDPs). Under the oversight of Peter Mark Mutebi, the RHU Director of Finance and Administration, in 2024, the Centre conducted a financial management and accountability training targeting consortia partners that included the Power to Youth and Right Here Right Now coalitions. "Accountability is not just a requirement; it's a principle that drives trust and partnership," Peter Mark remarked. These trainings have equipped partners with the tools to manage resources efficiently, ensuring transparency and fostering stronger collaborations. Similarly, in the same year RHU Learning Centre facilitated a training of partners in leadership and governance that participants defined as impactful and profound. Nakato Joyce, Executive Director, of the Uganda Youth and Adolescent Forum, a Power to Youth Programme partner, described the training as transformative. "The governance and leadership training we received from the RHU Learning Centre has been a game-changer," she said. "It has aligned our goals with actionable

strategies, revolutionising the way we manage our programmes."

Fostering Knowledge Exchange and Regional Impact

The Learning Centre has become a platform for the interchange of ideas and experiences. Member Associations from the IPPF network routinely visit RHU to draw from its expertise, while RHU staff travel to share their knowledge and practices. In 2024, the Learning Centre adopted innovative strategies to enhance learning for all stakeholders, enriching their practices and fostering sustainable change. "The exposure to diverse experiences has strengthened our work and amplified our impact," noted Robinah.

Catalysing Regional Leadership in SRHR

The Learning Centre's influence has solidified RHU's position as a regional leader in SRHR, catalysing positive change within the broader IPPF network. It has supported partner organisations in refining their governance structures, streamlining accountability mechanisms, and bolstering leadership capabilities. IPPF takes pride in RHU Learning Centre for its practical, impactful approach to capacity building. The Centre operates under a philosophy of continuous improvement, ensuring that every training session builds on the last, with a clear focus on sustainability.

Looking Ahead

As the RHU Learning Centre continues to innovate and expand its reach, it remains dedicated to its mission of strengthening SRHR systems and empowering organisations across the region. Its visionary approach and commitment to excellence have made it an invaluable resource—not just for RHU but for partners within Uganda and the entire IPPF network and beyond.

The Power of Volunteerism.... From Vision to Reality: The RHU Wobulenzi Clinic

to ensure that we provide the highest standard of care,” Jackson Chekweko, the RHU ED reassures.

In central Uganda in the heart of Luwero, a town steeped in the legacy of Uganda's liberation heroes and heroines, RHU has unveiled a new clinic— a powerful symbol of greatness and practicality of RHU volunteers, their resilience, collaboration, and dedication to advancing community health. The journey to establishing the RHU Wobulenzi Clinic was marked by vision of the volunteers, and resource mobilisation, demonstrating the power of collective effort in addressing community healthcare needs.

Volunteers Lead the Way

Just a pivotal reminder! RHU is volunteer-led organisation founded on the principle of community-driven solutions, that have rallied, networked and mobilised resources to ensure money is not spent on renting, but rather establish RHU owned clinics across the country. RHU operates under a dynamic, volunteer-driven governance system anchored on dedicated volunteers across the country, who play a vital role in overseeing and guiding the operations of RHU, to deliver essential healthcare services to their communities.

In 2017, RHU Luwero volunteers lobbied the Luwero Town Council, successfully acquiring land and transferring its title to RHU. The ground breaking for the clinic was done by RHU patron, Rt Hon Rebecca Alitwaala Kadaga, the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of East African community Affairs. “We are thrilled to mention that the clinic will fully be operationalised to deliver an expanded range of quality SRHR services in 2025. Across our clinics, we have upgraded our service delivery by onboarding more medical officers and specialised equipment to improve diagnostic services all intended

“Our volunteers were relentless,” adds Robinah Nambooze, the RHU's Governance and Human Resource Manager. “They went above and beyond—engaging politicians, decision-makers, and other stakeholders to ensure this dream became a reality. It's truly inspiring to see what dedication can achieve,” she expresses her mesmerisation.

Building Brick by Brick

Resource mobilisation took many forms. Volunteers raised funds through stakeholder engagement and associations, buying over 12,000 bricks for construction. They collaborated with Luwero Town Council to secure an architectural plan for the clinic, which received swift approval. Initially, the district had envisioned a hospital, but RHU volunteers proposed a more attainable level IV health centre to meet immediate community needs. Construction began in 2020 amidst the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the odds, the facility is now ready to offer high-quality reproductive health services to residents of Luwero and beyond.

“As the Director of Finance, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated volunteers who contributed their time, energy, financial resources and skills to the clinic construction project. Your selfless efforts have been instrumental in bringing this initiative to life, not only saving the organisation resources but also fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. Your commitment underscores the values we hold dear and reminds us of the power of collaboration in achieving our mission. Your efforts have created a lasting impact, and this project stands as a testament to what we can

achieve together. Thank you for being a vital part of this success story," Peter Mark Mutebi applauds the RHU volunteers.

A Torch of Transformation for Luwero

Its strategic location ensures that underserved populations can access vital healthcare without traveling long distances. "This clinic is more than a building—it's a lifeline for many families in Luwero," emphasises Sherina Kyeswa, the in-charge of Luwero RHU clinic. "It is evidence to what we can achieve when we come together as a community."

Sherina echoes this sentiment, highlighting the clinic's impact on local youth: "We are now able to offer services tailored to young people, empowering them with the information and care they need to make informed decisions about their health."

Looking Ahead

The success of the RHU Wobulenzi Clinic has sparked conversations about replicating this model in other regions RHU serves. "This is just the beginning," says Robinah. "We hope to inspire other communities to take charge of their health systems, proving that with the right support, anything is possible."

As the clinic continues

to serve the people of Luwero, its story serves as a reminder that sustainable change is possible through collaboration, vision, and determination. "The RHU Luwero Clinic stands as an example, symbolising our collective duty to create a community where everyone can access sexual reproductive health services in communities," Sherina concludes





THEY SAID IT: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I applaud RHU for its remarkable contributions since its founding in 1957. The organisation has been a steadfast advocate for universal health coverage in sexual and reproductive health and rights. Through its community-driven approach, RHU has successfully brought vital services to young people across Uganda, making a tangible impact on countless lives-

Hon Jacqueline Amongin, MP East Africa Legislative



Lyndah Birungi, Service Provider, RHU

We aim to ensure that communities have access to accurate information to dispel the myths and misinformation surrounding contraceptives. Our priority is to provide comprehensive knowledge upfront, empowering individuals with the right information before offering services-

Many women, particularly in rural areas, face immense barriers in accessing sexual reproductive health services. We urge your [RHU] continued support in expanding education on family planning, maternal health, and efforts to reduce teenage pregnancies-

Her Royal Highness Nyabaghole Agnes Ithungu Asimawe of Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu



At RHU, the Youth Action Movement (YAM) [the youth arm of RHU] empowers young people across Uganda by advocating for positive SRHR changes and directly involving them in programme development. Through this platform, YAM ensures that young people are not just beneficiaries but active contributors to shaping healthier communities-

Eliya Ayebazibwe, YAM President



In Nkuringo, Kisoro District, many women typically have an average of six to seven children, often due to limited access to contraceptives and family planning information. Thanks to RHU's outreach services in our community, women now have the opportunity to have children by choice, not by chance- **Evelyn Nkwanzi, Resident, Nkuringo, Kisoro District**

We commend RHU for its efforts in bringing sexual and reproductive health services closer to internally displaced persons affected by floods, as well as to vulnerable adolescents, young women, and the surrounding community- **H.E. Adam Spliid, Deputy Ambassador of the Royal Danish Embassy in Uganda**



RHU programmes, such as the RHRN project, have been instrumental in addressing critical SRHR challenges, including menstrual health management, by teaching young people how to make reusable sanitary pads. The project has also facilitated the establishment of a savings group, creating a platform for youth in Kagote [Fort Portal] to address and discuss SRHR concerns- **Siyama Asimwe, Peer Educator**



As young people, we have long needed a platform where we can openly share our concerns on our SRHR and collaborate on solutions. The youth corner, conveniently located at the RHU Clinic and near my school, makes it easier for us to access support, share ideas, and create the meaningful changes our community needs- **Kelvin Ian Mugambwa, Student Mpanga SSS**



I was wondering how RHU was addressing issues of climate change. However, when I saw the realities faced by displaced people due to floods—particularly lactating mothers struggling to access essential services—it became clear how critical your work is— **Eriyab Ntarwete Begumya, Deputy CAO Kasese**



Through RHU's efforts, we are now better prepared to guide our students, correct any misinformation they may have, and help them make informed decisions about their health and well-being. This support is so important for us as senior women teachers, as it allows us to play a more proactive role in shaping a healthier, more informed generation— **Bridgette Kansiime, Senior Woman Teacher, St Peters Primary School, Kijura Town Council, Kabarole**

RHU gives young people a safe space to learn about their sexual and reproductive health—conversations they often cannot have freely at home. Here, they find accurate information, support, and the confidence to make informed choices about their well-being— **Martha Mugabe, Youth Volunteer RHU**



**THEY CAME,
THEY SERVED
AND THEY ARE
CELEBRATED**



What a year it has been for us at Reproductive Health Uganda. Saying goodbye is the hardest thing to do and indeed we held back and held onto the core memories while bidding farewell to some of our long serving staff.



Thirty-two years.... Pilot Opio, senior driver, Joseph Opio on the wheel, the man of all seasons, he combed every corner of this country with the RHU brand on his sleeves until he completed his mileage. Opio who joined as an accountant quickly fell in love with the steering wheel guiding many of our

staff, donors, partners and clients to and from the field. Quick response when called upon and oh, you can't forget to mention his tales during the long drives to the field? A true RHU man from the core, he was just not a driver, he was a champion of SRHR. If you are careful, you will stumble upon his face as a vasectomy champion on some of our IEC materials. After serving the organisation for three decades, Opio hang up his driver seat to enjoy his retirement. We shall always be grateful for your service.

And how can we forget the 27 years of service for Abooki, Musawo Lucy from the beautiful terrains of Fort Portal! She was a force to reckon



with. Before the birds started chirping, Lucy would be at her duty station ready to serve. A dedicated lady who did not just take no for an answer but rather challenged herself to do more. Her voice would be heard from meters, her dedication to serving her clients at RHU Fort Portal clinic, then Katego clinic in Kampala preceded her. A mother to those who cared, Musawo to those she treated, a friend to those whose friendship strings pulled hers, a mentor to those who showed interest and dedicated

Twenty-three years of service.... Samuel Mwandha is a man with few words, very focused, determined and kind, Sam was an exceptional driver for more than two decades at the organisation. Fast to carry branding materials at any given event, knowledgeable about family planning thanks to hanging out with service providers; a more careful drivers who combed many corners of eastern Uganda with the RHU mission on top of his mind. Sam, we are grateful for the services you offered to this incredible institution.



And then 35 years for Mama Demeter as most staff referred to her. Motherly, soft spoken yet vocal with her work, Demeter Namuyobo laid down her lab coat to enjoy her life thanks to her contribution to the popularisation

of family planning in Uganda. Bumping into Demeter in the corridors would come with a fine-tuned "heeeeellloooo my daughter/son" with a very big smile. She traversed every meter of this country with the gospel of SRHR. Oh, how she passionately talked about her dear sons, she loved them so much and desired to spend more time with them and voila, with retirement she will enjoy all the snuggles with them. What a woman, what a journey it has been.



**CHRONICLES
OF MEMORABLE
MOMENTS IN
2024**

In 2024, we had our boots of ground being part of different events at sub national, national and global levels. Here is a snapshot of the spaces we created, influenced, participated and impacted



The White Ribbon Run 2024:

In February, RHU organised the White Ribbon Run - Uganda Chapter held in Fort Portal Tourism City. This annual event, held in honour of International Women's Day, aimed to raise awareness about reproductive cancers affecting women in

Uganda. The run brought together participants from various communities to promote early detection and treatment, and support for women impacted by reproductive health challenges.

EXCOM Parliamentarians: From the beautiful land that hosts the Tourism City, in the same month of February, we had the privilege of hosting a delegation of EXCOM Members from the African Parliamentarians' Forum on Population and Development. This visit was designed to give the members a perspective on RHU's ongoing efforts to promote and deliver essential sexual and reproductive health and



rights services to communities throughout Uganda. During the visit, RHU showcased a range of impactful programmes and initiatives focused on expanding access to SRHR services,

particularly for underserved and vulnerable groups. The delegation had the opportunity to hear directly from beneficiaries, listen to young people's testimonies, and engage with community members who have been positively impacted by RHU's work. Through these personal interactions, the EXCOM members gained valuable insights into the challenges and successes of delivering SRHR services on the ground.

Women's Day: In March, off we went to the north-eastern district of Katakwi for the National Celebrations for International Women's Day 2024: RHU was part of the events organised by the Office of the Vice



President and Visionary Women Uganda in Katakwi District. The event focused on empowering young women and girls with essential knowledge and practical skills to manage their menstrual health confidently. RHU facilitated a training programme that equipped over 500 students from four schools in Katakwi with the skills to make reusable menstrual pads, providing them with a sustainable option for managing their periods. In addition, RHU offered information on menstrual hygiene and health management, reaching both students and teachers. The one-week long event emphasised the importance of accessible menstrual health education and affordable products in enabling young women to continue their education and pursue their career goals without interruption.



ABSA Run: There was no time to relax, from the land that gifted us the Vice President of the Republic of Uganda, we wore our gears to take part in the 2024 Absa KH3 – 7 Hills Run, being part of the runners (were we really runners or walkers!!) Anyhow, at least we provided SRHR services to participants. The 2024 Absa KH3 – 7 Hills Run, is an event dedicated to supporting girl-child education initiatives. The proceeds from the run were directed towards empowering young girls through education, helping them overcome

barriers to learning. At the RHU tent we provided valuable information on topics such as family planning, menstrual health, and sexual health, offering attendees the tools and knowledge to make informed decisions about their health. Through this engagement, RHU contributed to raising awareness about the importance of sexual health while supporting a cause that uplifts the education of young girls.

DFPA Partners Conference 2024: In the same month of March, we never disappointed. We successfully hosted the DFPA Partners Conference 2024, it attracted partakers from six countries: Denmark, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Tunisia and Uganda. The convening attracted more than 50 participants from the five countries. These included representatives of the five DFPA Uganda partners- CEHURD, FUE, HRAPF, RAHU and yours truly- RHU. The conference was a platform for knowledge sharing, especially on how to enhance organisational learning and growth. Under this, there were different thematic sessions where RHU explored normalising discussions on contraceptives including condom use....



World Population Day: In July, as planned, we found ourselves in the West Nile commercial district, Arua. Reason! Taking part in the National Celebrations of World Population Day 2024. In the lead-up to the main

event, RHU participated in pre-event activities accelerating access to SRHR services to marginalised communities across Arua. These outreach efforts aimed to break barriers to healthcare access, especially for those in remote areas who face limited access to SRHR information and services. During the National Celebrations, RHU showcased its work through an exhibition booth. The booth highlighted RHU's innovative use of digital technology to make SRHR information more accessible. Among the tools on display were audio and visual tablets- "talking cards" containing essential SRHR information designed to engage audiences on different SRHR topics. These digital tools exemplified RHU's commitment to accelerating SRHR access, especially for young people, marginalised populations, and other underserved groups.



Alliance Week 2024: Barely a month, from the district that provides passage to markets of South Sudan and DRC, we returned back to Kabarole district of Tooro Kingdom- this time round- for the SRHR Alliance Week 2024, an annual event to mark the International Youth Day where partners under the SRHR Alliance engaged in a range of impactful activities. These included SRHR service provision, in- and out-of-school SRHR information sessions, community gatherings, and access to legal aid services. This week-long event was strategically designed to address gaps in SRHR knowledge and services within communities. With Kabarole district as the focal area, RHU and other SRHR Alliance partners worked together to bridge SRHR knowledge gaps and make youth-friendly SRHR services more accessible. A key highlight of the event was the platform created for young people to express their perspectives directly to leaders, who, in turn, made commitments to actionable steps toward advancing SRHR. RHU and Alliance partners play a crucial role in following up on these commitments, providing mechanisms for young people to hold leaders accountable and ensuring ongoing advocacy for their sexual and reproductive health and rights.



Empaango: The month of August didn't only give us an opportunity to serve, through the SRHR Alliance Week, RHU was honoured to be back in the Tourism City, **Strengthening Partnerships and part of the Omukama Oyo Nyimba Rukidi IV's 29th Coronation Anniversary.** Celebrated under the theme "Promoting Heritage for Livelihoods, Identity, and Development," the event highlighted the importance of cultural heritage in driving community progress. RHU's participation reinforced her ongoing collaboration with the Kingdom of Tooro, as she continues to work alongside cultural leaders to enhance access to sexual and reproductive health services in communities.

The Tooro magnetic waves were so strong. They kept attracting us back to the Tourism City. What it was this time: we were honoured to attend **a dinner hosted by the Ambassador of the Netherlands in Uganda,** H.E. Frederike Quispel who had just arrived in the country. During her visit to Fort Portal, the Ambassador expressed a keen interest in engaging with Dutch-funded projects in the region, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of their impact and explore potential opportunities for further collaboration. This provided an opportunity for RHU to showcase the best practices and successes for the interventions in Uganda, emphasising the positive outcomes and progress achieved on the ground.



Annual General Meeting: We landed back to Kampala from the city with a rich culture, natural beauty, and a gateway to many national parks- Fort Portal- for the 67th RHU Annual General Meeting (AGM) under the theme “Transforming the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Ecosystem.” At the AGM we celebrated 2023 achievements, acknowledged the challenges faced, and engaged in strategic discussions to refine and strengthen efforts for the coming year. Prior activities included orientation session for both board members and staff, focusing on critical topics such as safety, security, and safeguarding. This aimed at ensuring all team members are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to uphold RHU’s commitment to creating a secure and supportive environment for both staff and beneficiaries. In addition, the event honoured long-serving employees who had shown exceptional dedication to RHU’s mission. Recognising the invaluable contributions of people and organisations, RHU also awarded outstanding people and partners who had significantly supported and advanced its vision of improving sexual and reproductive health and rights across Uganda.



Safe Motherhood Conference: Since the RHU 67th AGM is out of the way. Time to engage another gear. And we find ourselves at the Speak Resort Hotel, Munyonyo for the National 4th Safe

Motherhood Conference under the theme “Strengthening Community Engagement for Sustainable Maternal and Child Health.” RHU highlighted her impactful work in sexual reproductive health and rights including family planning through an exhibition booth, providing attendees with resources and information. Additionally, RHU presented two abstracts that showcased its initiatives and successes in advancing reproductive health services across Uganda, emphasising her commitment to improving maternal and child health through community-focused approaches.



Hoima Youth Parliament: From the Speak Resort Hotel, we land in the Oil City- Hoima. What brings us here! It is the second Youth Parliament. In November, RHU hosted a Youth Parliament in Hoima City bringing together young people across the district to openly discuss and address the root causes of sexual reproductive health and rights challenges facing their district. The event also

provided a platform for youth to hold local leaders accountable for advancing SRHR support and services. Key district leaders in attendance included the Mayor, the LC5 Chairperson, and the Resident City Commissioner. In her remarks, the Area Woman MP, Hon Asinansi Nyakato, aka Kamanda, expressed sincere gratitude to RHU for her commitment to supporting young women and girls in her district. She highlighted RHU’s efforts to connect young women with local healthcare facilities, ensuring their access to vital SRHR services. The leaders committed to enhance policies and expanding SRHR resources. This Youth Parliament not only strengthened the bridge between young people and policymakers but also emphasised the power of youth voices in shaping their SRHR.

On the Global Stage: Well, We Are RHU. And our feet were not limited to national engagements. The Chronicles of our presence extended to the global spaces. We trotted the globe from city to city, country to another, bench marked, learned, shared, and strengthened partnerships.

Since we are made for big stages, in March we united for a cause, to end poverty among women at the 68th Commission on the Status of Women. The theme resonated with the work that we do on a daily basis.

“Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.” Our presence at CSW in New York City, was reaffirmation of our commitment to harness the full potential of empowered women and girls who will spearhead socio-economic transformation in our pearl.

Then, at the end of April and beginning of May, we catapulted into the skies towards the mystical city of New York for the 57th session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD). In the city of arts, fashion, and international diplomacy, we engaged in discussions on integration of SRHR and climate change at events like the Population Council and Women Deliver side event. We also participated in the Uganda side event (with the leadership of National Population Council- Uganda) in partnership

with governments from Ghana, Nigeria, South Sudan, and others.

The momentum continued at the IPPF Regional and Youth Forum in Nairobi, Kenya starting on the twenty seventh day of May 2024. The RHU's Executive Director stirred the congregation into a fire discourse on SRHR and climate change. Highlighting our work under the PROMISE II Programme, we showcased how we are leading in integrating SRHR and climate change. This event amplified our voice on a global stage,

spotlighting the importance of SRHR in climate change resilience and adaptation. RHU's advocacy odyssey found itself at Folkemødet, Denmark's largest democratic event, from June 12-14, 2024. This festival was a crucible of dialogue and cooperation, and we were right at the heart of it. Our Executive Director, delivered a powerful address, igniting discussions on countering the anti-rights movement. His words resonated, evoking empathy and unity among participants.





“Climate change does not affect everyone equally—its impacts are deeply gendered. Women and children, particularly those in vulnerable communities, face disproportionate risks, including increased exposure to gender-based violence, higher rates of teenage pregnancies, and school dropouts due to climate-induced displacement and economic hardships. These challenges threaten not only their well-being but also their access to essential health services, including SRHR.

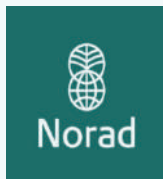
To build resilience, we must strengthen the health workforce, ensuring that SRHR remains a priority in climate adaptation and response strategies. Integrating SRHR into climate policies is not optional—it is a necessity to protect the rights and dignity of those most affected. The time to act is now.”

Jackson Chekweko

Executive Director, RHU



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