




The Power to Youth Expedition

Impacting Communities

Stories of Change

ISSUE: II



We are committed to the inclusion of **adolescent girls and young women** from underserved communities in decision-making processes related to child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, sexual & gender-based violence (SGBV) and unintended pregnancies.



WHO WE ARE

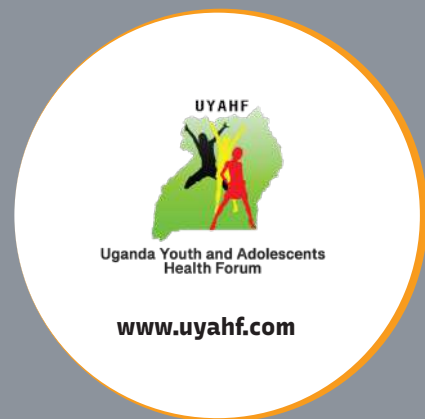
Power to You(th) is a consortium of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to including more adolescent girls and young women from underserved communities in meaningful decision-making processes regarding harmful practices (child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting), sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and unintended pregnancies. We believe in the power of young people, especially Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW), to be meaningfully included in discussions and decisions. Gender norms can be changed, and not only by AGYW but also boys and men can positively contribute to that change

process. Together we can achieve change with regard to harmful practices, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as well as unintended pregnancies. The Power to You(th) programme consists of seven country management teams [Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Malawi, Ghana, Senegal and Indonesia], four Global Partners [Amref Flying Doctors, Rutgers, Sonke Gender Justice and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs], and two technical partners [Choice for Youth and Sexuality and KIT Royal Tropical Institute]. In Uganda the programme is implemented by three consortium partners:

Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU) is an indigenous, voluntary, not-for-profit organisation with a long-standing experience and expertise providing integrated comprehensive sexual reproductive health and rights information and services which include sexuality education, family planning (FP), HIV prevention, care and treatment, breast and cervical cancer screening, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) management, immunisation, etc. RHU is proud to be associated with pioneering family planning in Uganda. For more than 65 years RHU has been involved in SRHR service provision and advocacy programmes that have defined the SRHR landscape in the country.



Uganda Youth and Adolescents Health Forum (UYAHF) is a dynamic Youth led and Youth Serving Health, Human Rights, and Girl Centred Organization that seeks to advance quality health and wellbeing for young people. Specifically, UYAHF works to address and advance young people's specific needs as regards their sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender equality and health promotion, livelihoods, climate change, and SGBV among others.



Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI) is a sub-regional, non-profit organisation that strengthens the capacity of women, youth and civil society organisations in governance, leadership, economic empowerment, policy advocacy and peace and security. EASSI is dedicated to six areas of focus as the regional priorities in the 12 critical areas of concern in the Global Platform for Action. These include education and training of women, women and health, human rights of women, women and poverty, women and the economy; and women in power and decision making.



VISION



To empower adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) from underserved communities to make informed choices, enjoy their sexuality, and be free from harmful practices in gender equitable and violence-free societies

MISSION



To raise public support, advocate for improved policies and laws, and strengthen civil society to amplify young people's voices to claim, protect and expand civic space

PROGRAMME PRINCIPLES

- Southern Leadership
- Meaningful and Inclusive Youth Participation
- Partnership
- Scale

OUR PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

1. To invest in spaces where CSOs demand accountability and state actors perform and are held accountable for their policy development and implementation duties
2. To invest in spaces where societal actors and cultural and religious leaders take responsibility to change harmful social norms and transform their communities
3. To improve women and girls' access to reproductive health services, education, information, and economic and political opportunities
4. To strengthen the civic space that young people need to engage in decision-making that affects them meaningfully



DEAR **CHANGE** MAKERS,

Welcome to a brand-new chapter in 2025! As we reflect on a transformative 2024, with its moments of challenge and triumph, we are thrilled to journey with you once again—each step powered by your passion and ingenuity.

Step into The Power to Youth Expedition, our vibrant hub of empowerment and inspiration. More than a booklet, this is your creative playground—a space where every story, every achievement, and every vision is a celebration of the change you ignite. Together, we weave a tapestry of progress, honoring the footprints of yesterday while boldly charting the course for tomorrow.

At Power to Youth, we see the pulse of progress in the hearts of young leaders, innovators, and fearless changemakers. Here, creativity meets courage, and ambition fuels transformation. The voices of the youth are not whispers of the future but the resounding heartbeat of today's change—bold, brilliant, and boundless.

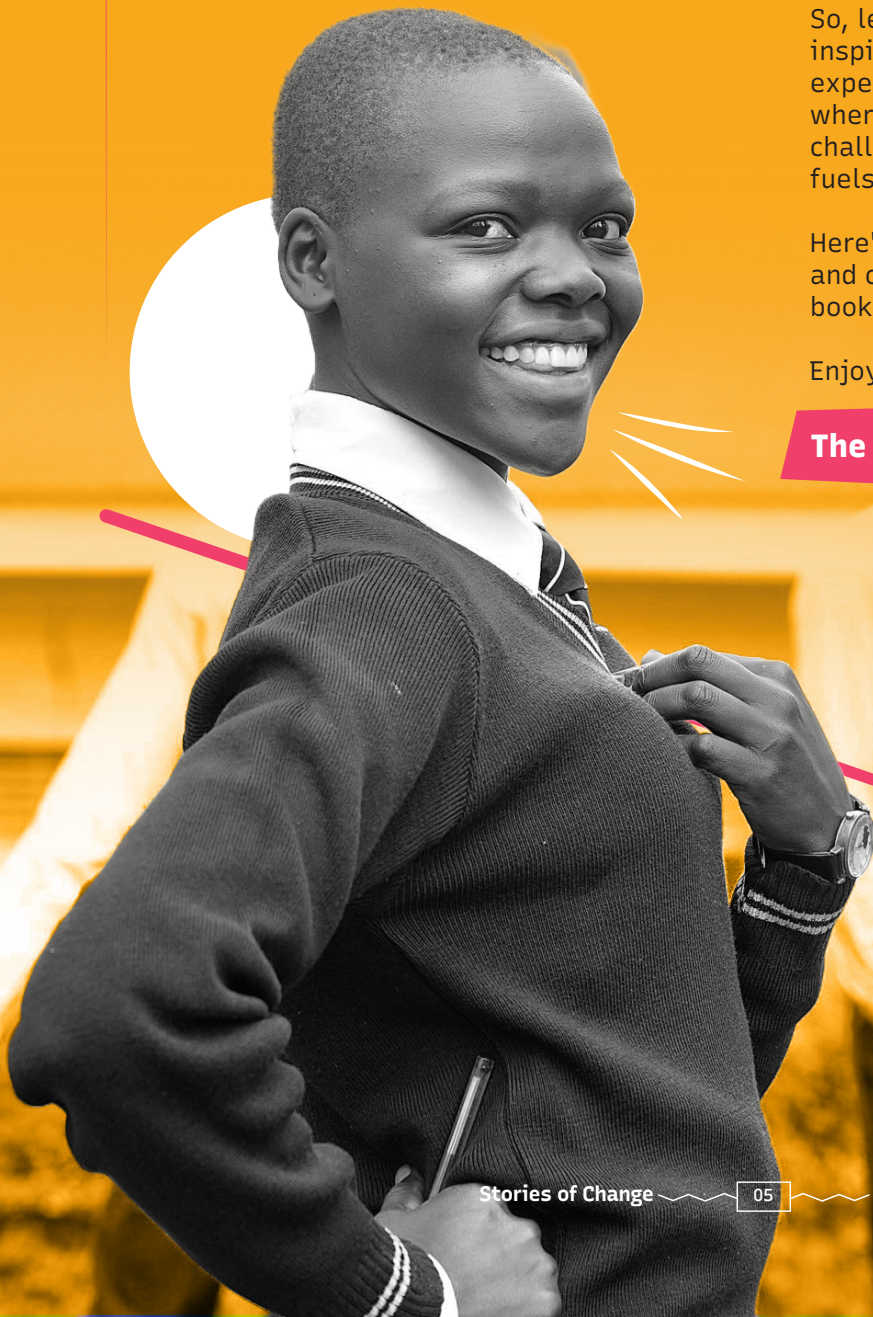
Get ready to explore tales of resilience, breakthrough ideas, and community spirit as you dive into this edition. Every page invites you to rediscover the power of your voice and the endless possibilities that come when we dare to dream and act together.

So, let curiosity be your compass and inspiration your guide. Join us on this expedition of discovery and let's craft a world where every youthful idea shines, every challenge sparks innovation, and every journey fuels the momentum of change.

Here's to a 2025 filled with creativity, courage, and collective impact in the stories of change booklet!

Enjoy the adventure,

The Power to Youth Team



A WORD FROM THE CMT CHAIR

Ladies and gentlemen, I bring you greetings from the Power to Youth Uganda Country Management Team (CMT). On behalf of the Power to Youth partners in Uganda, I take this honour to wish you a happy new year and welcome you to the second edition of The Power to Youth Expedition. I'm super excited to share our stories of change showcasing the incredible work we are doing in the six districts of implementation.

On behalf of the CMT, I am happy to give you a glimpse of what transpired in 2024, the fourth year of implementation. I take this opportunity to tell you a little more about CMT. The Country Management Team is a governing structure of the programme which brings together executive directors of the consortium partners, the grants management team and two young people representatives from the implementation districts. It is a decision-making body which takes lead on the joint programme development and management, strategic and operational planning and monitoring of the programme.

In line with this, CMT continued to maintain a strong footprint in the implementation of the programme: ensuring meaningful involvement of young people in governance, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation; cementing partnerships with various stakeholders who play a crucial role in the programme implementation. These partnerships fostered collaboration, enhanced resource mobilisation, and ensured a more coordinated approach to achieving shared goals.

Worth celebrating is the formation of coalitions among CBOs and CSOs at the grassroots level across various districts. These

coalitions became essential platforms for resource-sharing, collaboration, learning, and problem-solving. For example, the Bukwo district CSO coalition developed a referral pathway in March 2024, improving access to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) response services in the district.

We celebrate the representation of young people in CMT that created opportunities for scaling up the programme initiatives. Their involvement ensured that youth perspectives are integrated in decision making, fostering more inclusive, effective, and sustainable programme implementation.

I am happy to share that the Power to Youth National Programme Manager who is also a member of CMT, Dianah Nanyange was elected the chairperson of Men Engage Uganda. This position is highly welcome as it will strengthen our partnership with the network.

One other milestone I pride in is CMT's oversight role that ensured efficient implementation of the programme, promoted accountability and good stewardship that culminated into having unqualified audit opinion.

As we commence the last year of implementation, CMT formulated a sustainability plan and resource mobilisation strategies that will ensure the programme sustainability.

As part of the sustainability strategy, a dedicated resource mobilisation team responsible for securing funding and ensuring sustainability of PtY work will be set up. Partners have also been encouraged to actively and continuously pitch our incredible work to potential donors, various networks and learning events to show case the programme's achievements, encouraging new partnerships and funding.

On the community level, we shall continue with our economic empowerment efforts through already established saving groups, position them to benefit from government economic empowerment initiatives thus improving household income in turn addressing critical SRHR needs.



REFLECTION FROM THE PROGRAMME MANAGER

Dear Partners and Stakeholders,
As we step into 2025, I am filled with immense pride and deep gratitude as I reflect on the journey of the Power to Youth (PtY) Uganda programme. The year 2024 marked a revolutionary chapter one that showcased resilience, collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to creating lasting, meaningful change for youth. With the strong foundation we have built, I am optimistic about the year ahead—a year that will solidify our legacy and lay the groundwork for sustained impact in the communities we serve.

The path the programme walked in 2024 was nothing short of remarkable. Together, we celebrated significant achievements, navigated challenges, and remained dedicated to empowering youth, especially adolescent girls and young women from underserved communities. These milestones are not just accomplishments; they represent the collective strength and dedication of all our partners, stakeholders, youth, and the communities we serve.

Our advocacy efforts for the East African Community (EAC) Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Bill saw substantial progress. During the EALA Council of Ministers' sitting in Kampala in November 2024, we secured commitments to support and push for the bill. Additionally, the EALA Women's Caucus pledged their support, with Hon. Amongin Jacqueline taking the lead as the mover of the bill. In 2025, PtY will work closely with relevant stakeholders to re-table the bill during the first legislative sessions in March, reinforcing our collective commitment to eliminating harmful practices and protecting young girls' rights.

Innovation was at the heart of our work in 2024. Power to Youth Uganda secured funding through the Human-Centred Design (HCD) trajectory, a component designed to support youth-driven,

beneficiary-centred innovations. Uganda emerged as a winner in this highly competitive process, with young people from Kalangala developing innovative solutions under the project "Safe Haven"—a response to the unique challenges they face. Witnessing young people lead the design and implementation of this initiative reinforced our commitment to meaningful inclusive youth participation.

We also successfully hosted the Power to Youth Annual Knowledge Sharing Conference, bringing together a diverse array of stakeholders—including civil

society organisations (CSOs), media, youth advocates, development partners, academia, and performance arts personalities. This platform fostered the exchange of best practices, facilitated mutual learning, and amplified the programme's impact. By creating a space for shared learning, we continue to sustain collective efforts and strengthen the vital partnerships that drive our mission forward.

Our partnership with Men Engage Uganda enabled us to conduct male engagement forums, fostering critical reflection on existing norms and values while cultivating male champions for gender equality and the rights of adolescent girls and young women. Beyond dialogue, these forums have become a catalyst for financial empowerment, leading to the formation of savings groups—some of which have been formally registered at the subnational level. As a result, participants can now access government wealth creation programmes such as the Parish Development Model. This financial inclusion has not only improved household incomes and living standards but has also proven to be a fundamental strategy in preventing violence.



While we have much to celebrate, we also faced challenges, particularly funding constraints that hampered some advocacy efforts. For instance, limited resources delayed key meetings with the EAC Council of Ministers, affecting the timely re-tabling of the FGM Prohibition Bill. However, these challenges only strengthened our resilience. Through the collective support of partners like UNFPA, UNICEF, and like-minded CSOs, we successfully mobilised both technical and financial resources, allowing us to sustain momentum in our advocacy and community work.

As Power to Youth approaches its close-out in 2025, our focus is on ensuring that our impacts remain sustainable. To achieve this, we are embedding critical interventions into partner organisations and CBOs across implementation districts. Our key priorities include: capacity strengthening to empower grassroots organisations to continue addressing SRHR challenges independently; documentation and visibility to capture best practices, success stories, and stories of change; and celebration and reflection to acknowledge our achievements, recognise key stakeholders, and amplify the voices of young people who have been central to the programme's success.

Our greatest legacy lies in the partnerships we have built—with district leaders, youth advocates, CSOs, and other stakeholders—who share our commitment to empowering adolescent girls and young women. These relationships are the backbone of our advocacy, driving efforts to dismantle harmful gender norms, address gender inequalities, and champion inclusive decision-making.

As we conclude this journey, we do so with a profound sense of accomplishment. The impact of Power to Youth will echo long after the programme's official closure, sparking sustained efforts to ensure that every young person—especially adolescent girls and young women—is empowered to thrive, live free from violence, and actively contribute to a community where equality and justice are within reach for all. To our partners, stakeholders, and especially to the young people who have been at the forefront of this journey—thank you. Your dedication and commitment have been instrumental in advancing SRHR and gender equality for youth in Uganda.



IMPACTING COMMUNITIES

STRENGTHENING THE CIVIC SPACE



Regional Advocacy: PtY Partnership Yield into Commitment to Retable the Legislation Against FGM in the East African Region

The East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) Council of Ministers and Parliamentarians have committed to revive and retable the East African Community (EAC) Anti-Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Bill in 2025. This commitment is a result of advocacy efforts led by the Power to Youth programme, in collaboration with UNFPA and UNICEF.

The bill, originally passed in 2017 but not assented to by the EAC Heads of State, seeks to criminalise cross border FGM across member states that including: Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania. The objective of the Bill is to harmonise anti-FGM efforts across the EAC, given the practice's cross-border nature

Speaking on behalf of the EALA Women's Caucus, Fatuma Ndongiza Nyirakobwa, from Rwanda notes, "Whether it is in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, or Somalia, they are all part of the EAC community, and we are not safe as a community as long as this harmful practice persists. That is why we, as the EAC, must champion its end," she said. "This bill is moved by myself [Amongin Jacqueline] and Hon Fatuma Ndagiza and we hope you give us all the support. This bill is still open if the council of ministers can take it up and accelerate its passing," one of the Uganda EALA representatives, Jacqueline, submits; whose call members yielded to.

Sarah Opendi, the Chairperson of the Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) notes that despite the law being in place in Uganda and Kenya, many girls continue to cross over to countries with weaker laws to undergo FGM.

"This is why the region needs to have one

piece of legislation which should be domesticated to help us end this violence against women," she emphasises.

Joseline Komuhangi, the Deputy Executive Director of the Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), one of the PtY partners, highlights that, "Our role is to bring the new members on board, let them understand the issue, and recognise FGM as a huge violation of women and girls' rights."

Komuhangi further notes that human rights violations, such as FGM, negatively impact regional integration, particularly the free movement of people. She shares that in Uganda, urban refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia continue to perpetuate the practice, sometimes through medically conducted procedures in secret clinics.

"If we don't act now, the vice could spread to other countries within the EAC, such as Burundi and South Sudan, where the practice isn't common," she warns.





Subnational Advocacy: PtY Advocacy Efforts Towards Protecting Young Women and Girls from Exploitation Gearing in the Right Direction

For three years, the Power to Youth programme has championed the ban of disco matanga- a funeral tradition associated with sexual exploitation and abuse of girls and young women. Initially intended to support grieving families by raising funds through overnight disco events, the practice has devolved into environments rife with alcohol, drugs and predatory behaviours, disproportionately affecting vulnerable youth.

In Uganda's eastern districts, particularly Busia, a border region that has seen an alarming increase in teenage pregnancies, child marriages, and sexual violence, much of which is linked to the exploitative funeral dances. Girls as young as 14 have been coerced into sexual activities during these events, perpetuating cycles of harm.

The programme has engaged in different advocacy efforts and employed community-driven approaches that include mobilising different stakeholders such as, religious, political leaders and community members to support the enactment of a legislation that outlaws the disco matanga practice.

As PtY, in collaboration with stakeholders advocated for the formulation of the Busia District Child and Family Protection Ordinance, to outlaw disco matanga, the Government officially banned the depictable harmful practice, with the Uganda Minister for General Duties, Justine Kasule Lumumba declaring:

“Matanga disco is an evil dance. We have stopped it, and those found holding it will face the full force of the law,”.

PtY developed strategic partnerships and worked with the district toward developing a comprehensive legislation to end the exploitation associated with disco matanga.

Janet Nabwire, the district focal person for PtY in Busia notes: "This ordinance is the result of years of hard work, collaboration, and dedication. It reflects our collective commitment to protecting young women and girls from exploitation and creating a safer environment for them to grow and thrive."

Power to Youth has been instrumental in building local capacity to draft and enforce gender-sensitive laws. Through workshops and trainings, local leaders have been equipped with skills to effectively implement and monitor the new ordinances.

"This practice has caused immeasurable harm to our communities, and with the new

law, we are sending a clear message that we will no longer tolerate the exploitation of our youth. Through collective action, we are building an environment where our children can grow up free from violence and abuse," Semu Okumu, the Community Development Officer for Busia district, emphasised.

Through the Child and Family Protection Ordinance and supporting the ban of disco matanga, Busia district is committed to protecting young women and girls from harm. The effort also includes continued sensitisation campaigns in the community to raise awareness about the importance of gender-sensitive laws and the risks posed by such exploitative events.

Media and Politics: A Media Champion in a New Lens and Rewed Commitment Opens His Doors for the Sake of the Girl Child

Meet Henry Lubulwa who has worn different assortment of hats, including being an "advocate" of sexual reproductive health rights and gender equality, using his platforms and newfound influence to champion the rights of young women and girls.

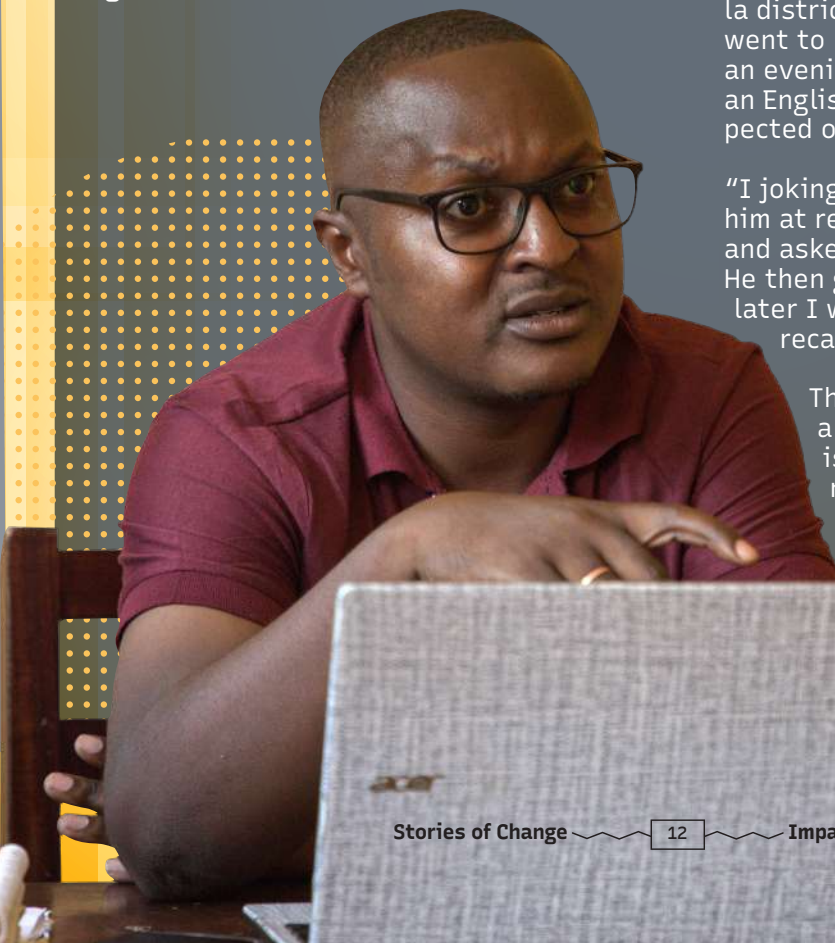
From a mason's mate to a fishmonger, then to the newsroom, and now the President's Representative.

The Journey Begins: A chance encounter

The man from the Ssesse Islands, in Kalangala district, in central Uganda, one day, he went to pick up his friend at Radio Ssesse for an evening stroll. He found him preparing for an English bulletin, which led to an unexpected opportunity.

"I jokingly told him that I was better than him at reading news. He laughed so much and asked me to go with him to the studio. He then gave me his script to read and a day later I was given a job as an anchor," Henry recalls.

This chance moment unlocked doors, allowing Henry to spotlight pressing issues in his community. From raising awareness about HIV and gender-based violence to showcasing the unique challenges of island life, Henry became Kalangala's voice to the world.





Empowered by Advocacy training Henry says, "Power to Youth came with a different way of doing things. They first trained us [the journalists] and helped us realise the power we have in society and the changes we can influence by our work."

Through these trainings Henry and his colleagues learned to harness digital platforms to drive change. Together, they launched The Entebbe Post, an online platform empowering young island writers to share stories from their communities. Impacting Youth and Communities PtY's community driven approach gave the island youth the confidence to voice their challenges and engage with leaders. "Most of the young people who have been part of the activities are very confident and can articulate their challenges and speak to their leaders about the issues affecting them." Henry shares.

Mid 2024, marked a turning point in Henry's journey as he was appointed as the Assistant Resident District Commissioner (RDC- the President's representative) of the islands adorned district. Today he sits on the other side of the spectrum which new position he says will further accelerate his resolve to protect the islands girls and bring justice to them and all perpetrators face the wrath of the law.

Even as an RDC, I will continue working with Power to Youth to ensure that girls are protected, stay in school and they get an opportunity to speak about the issues that affect them," Henry shares.

Commitment to Gender Equality and SRHR

For him, this new role couldn't have come at a better time. As part of the security team and a champion of gender equality and SRHR, he pledges to use his office to promote the rights of the girl child.

"I have seen the impact of teenage pregnancy, violence and HIV infections on teenage girls. I want to continue opening my doors to programmes like Power to Youth and link vulnerable girls to government programmes that will empower them economically," Henry commits.

Reflections on a transformative Journey

Henry's journey- from being a mason's mate earning UGX 70 000 (about USD 20) to becoming a trusted advocate for change, offers a powerful reminder of the unpredictable paths that lead to purpose.

Born in Kawempe, a Ugandan Capital suburb, Henry left everything he knew and the life he lived, hopped on the next water vessel, finding his way to the Ssesse Islands and lived happily ever after there. This was all because his friend ridiculed his UGX70,000 salary as a mason's mate.

In Ssesse, Henry started off as a fisherman where he quickly realised the sounds of the waves and saying a Hail Mary every time he laid his nets was not his calling. He however, let go of the nets and sought to start a new venture in the islands- journalism, making him thereafter champion of gender equality and SRHR.

ENGAGING CSOs: AMPLIFYING YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES



MEANINGFUL AND INCLUSIVE YOUTH PARTICIPATION (MIYP): HOW PTY IS TRUSTING AND INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN GRANTS MANAGEMENT

For Vera Tusiime, joining RHU as a volunteer was meant to be an internship to fulfill a university requirement. However, a field trip to Isingiro district, in south-western Uganda, became a turning point in ways she never imagined. The trip birthed a new passion, and today she is thriving as a young professional supporting the finance function of the Power to Youth programme, and her story is testament to the power of meaningful inclusive youth participation.

Vera had always known what she didn't want to be: an accountant or teacher. Her aversion to numbers and mathematics had shaped her academic path, steering towards social sciences and away from any profession involving formulas or spreadsheets. But destiny had other plans.

A field visit to Isingiro, one of PtY the implementing districts, where she would participate in the community-based organisation financial management training, changed all this. Initially the content seemed daunting as Vera reflects, "We went to field and all they were teaching seemed like I was seeing stars because I didn't have interest at the time. I was used to going to field and writing reports yet here I was expected to support this major office in the project."

It all started when George Sebyala, the grants manager of the programme, decided to actualise the importance of engaging young people in the project,

noting that they are an integral part of its success. George reached out to the RHU gender and youth manager who recommended Vera as a youth volunteer to "With his [George] guidance, I took one day at a time and started learning basics of procurement processes, auditing, assessing accountabilities submitted by CBO's that are granted," Vera shares.

As her confidence grew, Vera took on more responsibilities and independently reviewed financial documents and provided feedback



to CBOs to improve reporting. Her contributions were not limited to this.

She was part of a cross-functional team assessing financial statements for another project, expanding her expertise in evaluating complex reportswork in grants management.

At first, Vera was taken aback when she was told she would be required to learn basics of accounting. She dreaded accounting, mathematics and Microsoft excel. However, Georges mentorship and structured guidance turned fears into curiosity.

"I assessed all the documents and if some critical documents like delivery notes and others I would inform him [George] to guide me and that way I would be able to do things correctly the next time."

Unlike many programmes where young people are sidelined in critical discussions, PtY ensures youth inclusion at

every step of the grants management process. Vera was looped into email threads about grant disbursement, auditing process, and rating sourcing among others.

"It is cool that as a young person I am allowed to be part of all the steps in grant management. Young people are usually not trusted in monetary conversations but I'm glad that PtY is doing it differently and allowing me to represent the young people and their potential," she intimates.

Vera's story is not an isolated one. The Uganda Youth and Adolescents Health Forum, one of the consortium partners, also brought on board a young person, Nalumansi Charity who has been at the helm of supporting the financial arm. Together they embody the programme's commitment to MIYP.

Vera's journey has sparked a passion she never anticipated. From avoiding mathematics at all levels of education, she is now studying accounting at the institute of Certified Public Accountants of Uganda where she hopes to formalise, grasp and get wide knowledge in her new-found passion in numbers.

"Having young people meaningfully involved in any decision and action of the programme gives a sense of belonging to the young people and provides an exemplary position to the young people," George believes.

George has never regretted the decision. He shares that engaging Vera in the department has proven that young people are resourceful and have the potential to contribute to the success of the project.

"It has demonstrated that anyone if given an opportunity and the required support they can perform any role irrespective of your education background. She's a social worker by background but she's thriving in finance," George shares.

Vera's story underscores the value of creating spaces for young people to lead and learn. By trusting youth with critical roles, programmes like PtY are shaping a generation of future leaders.



MIYP: AN “ANGEL” EMPOWERED AND BECAME VOICE OF HOPE FOR YOUNG MOTHERS

“Pray that your loneliness may spur you into finding something to live for, great enough to die for”. (Make sure to reference Dag Hammarskjöld as the one who made this quote in footnotes.) No one understands this better than Angel Namara a youth advocate in Isingiro district. When it felt like the world turned its back on her, Angel took the opportunity which arose to, stand firm and fight back, demonstrating immense strength.

“I felt lost and alone, there was no one to turn to, and I didn’t know what the future held for me or my child,” recalls Angel, a young mother of one. It was during this difficult time that a glimmer of hope arrived. In 2022, the PtY district focal person invited Angel to a training session organised by the programme. The need for social interaction and something to distract her from the isolation she felt, Angel attended the training on smart advocacy.

“For the first time, I realised that despite what I had been through, I still had a voice,” Angel recalls speaking about the trainings she underwent under the Power to Youth programme, including: meaningful and inclusive youth participation, gender transformative approach and community sessions about sexual reproductive health, among others. “I noticed that I could make it as a young mother,” Angel says.

The engagements with PtY gave Angel the courage to actively participate further in the programme activities. She identified and worked with a group of like-minded individuals determined to make a difference within their communities.

When the programme sought to recruit more community-based youth advocates, in 2022, Angel was among the first people to express interest. She was chosen as a youth advocate becoming a

voice of hope to young mothers in her community.

The 20-year-old Angel from Isingiro district of western Uganda had experienced first-hand the struggles of becoming a mother at a young age. At 16 years, while in senior one, Angel barely had any knowledge about sexual and reproductive health. The pregnancy created a detour in her path. Once a regular student with dreams, she suddenly found herself the subject of ridicule in her community.

“People would laugh at me, saying I had ruined my life,” she recalls. “It reached an extent that even family too distanced themselves from me, and the man who impregnated me abandoned me entirely,” she says. Being a young mother struggling to take care of her baby with no support, even from her own family, Angel attempted several marriages as an option to find support for herself and her child, but every man treated her with disrespect because she came into the relationship with a child.

“Becoming a youth advocate gave me a platform not just to speak out, but to help others avoid the same mistakes I made,” she explains. “I didn’t want other girls to feel the shame and isolation like I did.”

Angel has become a force of change in her community. She holds voluntary community sessions and school outreaches, where she speaks to adolescent girls and young women on topics such as sexual and reproductive health, menstrual hygiene, child marriage, teenage pregnancies, and contraception.

Her passion does not stop at promoting mind set change among young people in her community. She started a community savings group to support young mothers financially so that they can provide for their children.

“Many young mothers, like me, had no way of supporting themselves. The savings group gives them a chance to stand on their own feet.”

Today, Angel is a role model for young mothers and girls in Isingiro District. She is no longer that girl who was scorned and ridiculed. She is a champion for change, empowering others with knowledge and hope. Her journey continues as she works towards supporting and inspiring more young women to thrive.



DIANA CHEPJUMBA: A TRAILBLAZER FOR CHANGE IN BUKWO DISTRICT

In the remote district of Bukwo, in eastern Uganda, where harmful practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage have long persisted, a young youth advocate, Diana Chepjumba, is making a notable contribution. Through her community-based organisation, the Light Community Development Foundation (LCDF), Diana is empowering adolescent girls to challenge these practices while equipping them with skills in hair dressing for self-reliance.

Diana 25, a dedicated youth advocate joined the Power to Youth programme in 2021 at its inception. With a passion for creating positive change, she has since been actively involved in the programme's activities and capacity building sessions including smart advocacy and meaningful and inclusive youth participation.

Growing up in Bukwo district, Diana notes that FGM was considered a rite of passage to womanhood thus intimately understands the struggles faced by many girls in her community. With the knowledge, advocacy skills, participation in regional advocacy spaces, and exposure gained through the PtY programme, she was inspired to create LCDF, a safe and empowering space for young girls.

"The PtY project will end, but the challenges faced by girls and women will remain. As advocates, our role is to push for lasting change. Five years isn't enough to transform a community, but empowering us ensures sustainability," Diana shares passionately.

Diana's move to start LCDF stems from the need to continue the work that the Power to Youth programme has achieved in Bukwo district. Today, LCDF runs several initiatives, including skilling and mentorship programmes, school and community outreaches on SRH, and dialogues to challenge harmful cultural norms and practices.

One of LCDF's flagship initiatives is a hairdressing programme designed to help

adolescent girls, young mothers and pregnant teenagers to achieve financial independence. "Through the hairdressing sessions, we not only provide economic skills but also educate girls about bodily autonomy, components of sexuality education, their rights, the importance of speaking out, and linking them to essential health services," Diana explains.

Fifteen-year-old Janet is one of LCDF's young beneficiaries, she reflects on its impact on her life: "I was afraid I would have to drop out of school because my family wanted me to undergo FGM. But through LCDF,.... I was also encouraged to report to the authority including the police if they attempted to have me undergo FGM. Now, I want to become a teacher to help other girls like me," Janet says with hope.

Since its inception in early 2023, LCDF has reached over 250 girls and young women, provided critical mentorship and fostered a sense of agency. The organisation has also engaged community leaders, women's groups, and local government authorities on the key issues that affect young people. "This work isn't just about stopping FGM or early marriage. It's about building a community that values and supports women and girls. When we empower them, we empower the entire community," Diana emphasises.

Diana's work has earned her recognition as a trusted voice in Bukwo, with LCDF now hosted at the district health office. Her journey from a PtY programme beneficiary to the founder of a transformative community-based organisation is a powerful testament to the impact of youth advocacy and community driven change.



FINDING HER VOICE: DOREEN'S PATH TO EMPOWERING OTHERS

Doreen Mirembe's story is one of courage, inspiration, and transformation. Once a timid and shy girl, often felt overlooked and unsure of her ability to contribute to her community, which struggled with teenage pregnancies, young motherhood, and high rates of HIV infections, her quiet nature concealed a deep desire to make a difference, but she lacked the confidence to step forward.

Everything changed when Doreen was introduced to the Power to Youth programme. Her first breakthrough came during a podcast marking Post World Contraception Day in October 2024, where she featured as a guest to share her experience on contraception and challenges adolescent girls on the island face in accessing contraceptives.

To Doreen, this experience was a pivotal moment, and a journey to finding her voice.

"I never imagined I could speak in front of people, let alone share my personal experiences on such important issues," Doreen reflects. "When one of the youth advocates reached out and invited me to be a panellist, I was hesitant. Growing up timid and often bullied, I felt afraid. But as I listened to the other panellists express themselves during the session, I thought, 'I'm already here. After all, I'm sharing my own story—something no one else knows better

than me," she recalls this moment as.

Impressed by her insightful contributions, Doreen was selected to participate in a Community Scorecard exercise led by the Uganda Youth and Adolescent Health Forum, a partner under the Power to Youth programme. Over two weeks, she worked alongside other vibrant youth advocates, interacting with stakeholders and community groups. Through this experience, her natural strength for advocacy began to shine. Slowly but steadily, Doreen found her voice and gained the confidence to express herself with purpose.

From that point on, Doreen became an active participant in various Power to Youth-led initiatives, including youth community engagements on sexual and reproductive health issues, capacity-building sessions, and mentorship programmes. Each opportunity allowed her to grow further and cement her role as a youth leader in her community.

Today, Doreen serves as a trusted youth mobiliser, leaders and adolescent counsellor at Kalangala Health Centre IV, a local health facility on Bugala Island. She provides empathetic guidance and support to young people, helping them navigate SRH challenges. Her ability to connect with peers has made her a beacon of hope and inspiration in her community.

"When I see someone leave with a smile, feeling heard and supported, it reminds me of why I started this journey," Doreen shares. "Finding my voice wasn't just about me; it was about using it to inspire others."

From timid beginnings to a confident leader, she is fostering a transformative ground for adolescent girls and young people in her community.



CSO CAPACITY STRENGTHENING: EQUIPPED TO ATTRACT MORE, SERVE MORE AND BETTER

In the scenic hills of Bukwo town council- a Uganda-Kenyan border district, Winnie Chemutai had a vision of building a kingdom of girls who are skilled, educated and have the ability to burst through the confinements of their communities and achieve their dreams.

This saw her start the Kalyet Initiative, an organisation intended to create avenues for young Sabinu girls- from Sebei region of Uganda. She trained them in various skills, and offered them education scholarships, while empowering them to denounce harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriages which has barred the Sabinu women from reaching their full potential for a long time. This is especially true for those who experience early child marriage after undergoing FGM.

Just like any other start up community-based organisation (CBO), Winnie and her staff at Kalyet Initiative struggled to hit the ground rolling because of financial constraints, issues of strategic planning, administrative challenges,

among many other. This kept their work minimal with little impact, yet the vision was to impact more girls in the community.

The Power to Youth programme under the grants management intervention, initiated processes of empowering CBOs in the implementing districts, with financial management, governance, administration, and more, later extending grants to aid in the acceleration of their work plans.

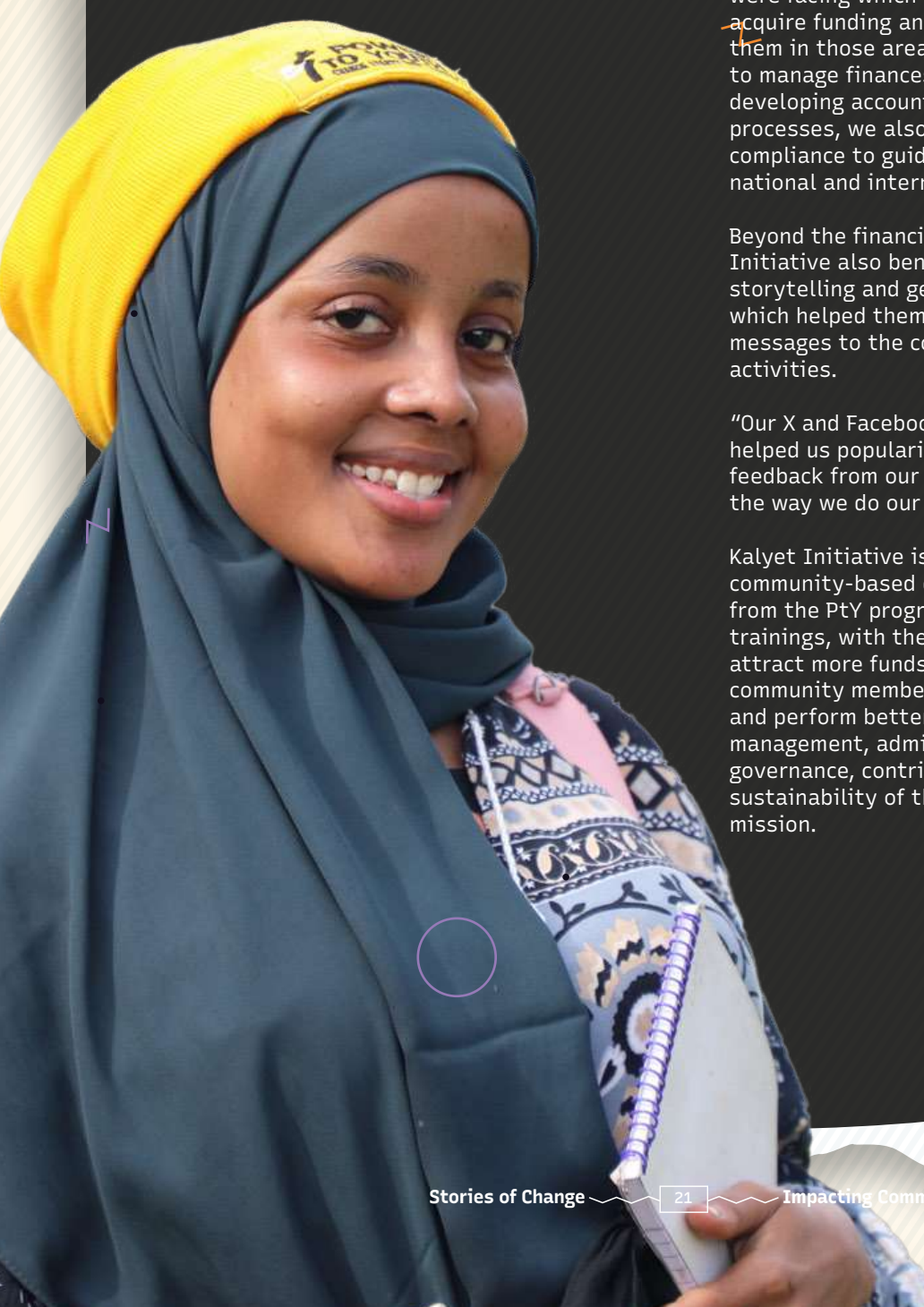
The leadership of Kalyet Initiative got to learn about the initiative. Winnie quickly expressed interest and applied for the grant. To receive the grant, all the CBOs were required to attend a training which would equip the organisations with the knowledge and skills in financial management, procurement, report writing, proposal writing, monitoring and evaluation and documentation.

"I can confidently say that Power to Youth started us off. Sometimes I look back at how we used to do things and wonder how we were getting the small funds we would get," Winnie marvels.

"The good thing is they trained us and made sure that we were ready for the grant itself and ensure that the grant was managed well," Winnie notes.

Through the guidance of the Power to Youth team, Kalyet Initiative went ahead to adopt new systems in the organisation like the procurement system, the human resource policy and monitoring and evaluation policy and plan, which have eased their work.





"Before the Power to Youth training, we only had a strategic plan in place which was also in the draft format. After the training we were able to draft the human resource policy and organise our team. This has helped us to understand our staff better and work towards improving our organisation. Most importantly, we have been able to track the impact of our work through monitoring and evaluation which makes it easy for us to see where to improve and change strategies to realise impact," Winnie observes.

She adds that the organisation has since modified their strategic plan which has helped them forecast where they want to be in five years.

"We have been operating as a CBO but since the trainings we have agreed with board to register

our organisation with Uganda Registration Services Bureau to work as a non-governmental organisation in Uganda."

At the inception of the training, the Power to Youth programme envisioned CBOs that could sustain themselves beyond the life of the project. Today, Kalyet Initiative boasts of her ability to attract new donors who have been impressed with their work and reporting ability.

The Power to Youth grants manager George Sebyala says that from the onset, the programme envisioned working with organisations that could comfortably manage finances and report with ease, undergoing training to achieve this, and building trust between the organisation and the funders.

"We identified the challenges the organisations were facing which were limiting their potential to acquire funding and we quickly worked to support them in those areas. We enhanced their capacity to manage finances from various donors by developing accounting systems, policies and processes, we also enhanced these organisations compliance to guiding policies at institutional, national and international levels," George shares.

Beyond the financial management training, Kalyet Initiative also benefited from the digital storytelling and gender transformative trainings which helped them in the way they craft messages to the community and design their activities.

"Our X and Facebook pages are active and have helped us popularise our work and receive feedback from our audiences which has improved the way we do our work," Winnie notes.

Kalyet Initiative is one of the 16 community-based organisations that benefited from the PtY programmes financial management trainings, with the purpose of enabling them to attract more funds, reach out and serve more community members and perform better in terms of financial management, administration and governance, contributing to the sustainability of the programmes mission.

FROM TRAINEE TO FACILITATOR: HARUNA MUSA'S CONTRIBUTION TO MEANINGFUL AND INCLUSIVE YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Haruna Musa, a communications officer at the Uganda Youth and Adolescents Health Forum (UYAHF), has emerged as a driving force for youth-centred advocacy in his organisation. Through trainings on meaningful and inclusive youth participation (MIYP) under the PTY programme, Haruna has honed his skills and become a leader in MIYP practices, fostering innovative approaches in sexual and reproductive health advocacy including film and creative art in the form of painting and graffiti.

"MIYP was a new concept to me when I entered the public health space. The PTY programme, especially through the MIYP and Gender Transformative


Approach (GTA) trainings, unlocked my brain to the potential of youth involvement. It's not just about inclusion; it's about giving young people the platform to lead and hold leaders accountable," Haruna reflects.

His dedication to amplifying youth voices has led to numerous milestones including leading MIYP sessions and youth-led capacity building trainings on documentation, social media and digital story telling.

Recognising his expertise, the UYAHF Management entrusted Haruna with the role of MIYP focal person, empowering him to lead youth engagement initiatives in SRH advocacy and represent young people's issues at the management level.

Haruna has facilitated MIYP training sessions for the Generation G programme, an advocacy programme supported by Sonke Gender Justice and implemented under a consortium that include CEHURD, FIDA and Reach a Hand Uganda.





"I was ecstatic when I received a call from Reach a Hand Uganda inviting me to facilitate a session on MIYP. It was an incredible opportunity to build the capacity of peer educators, consortium partners, board members, program leads, and officers under the Generation G program with practical tools on how to meaningfully engage young people in their programming across all levels," he recalls.

Today, Haruna proudly identifies as a product of the programme, using his newfound expertise to champion youth-led initiatives and create spaces for young voices to be heard in decision-making processes.

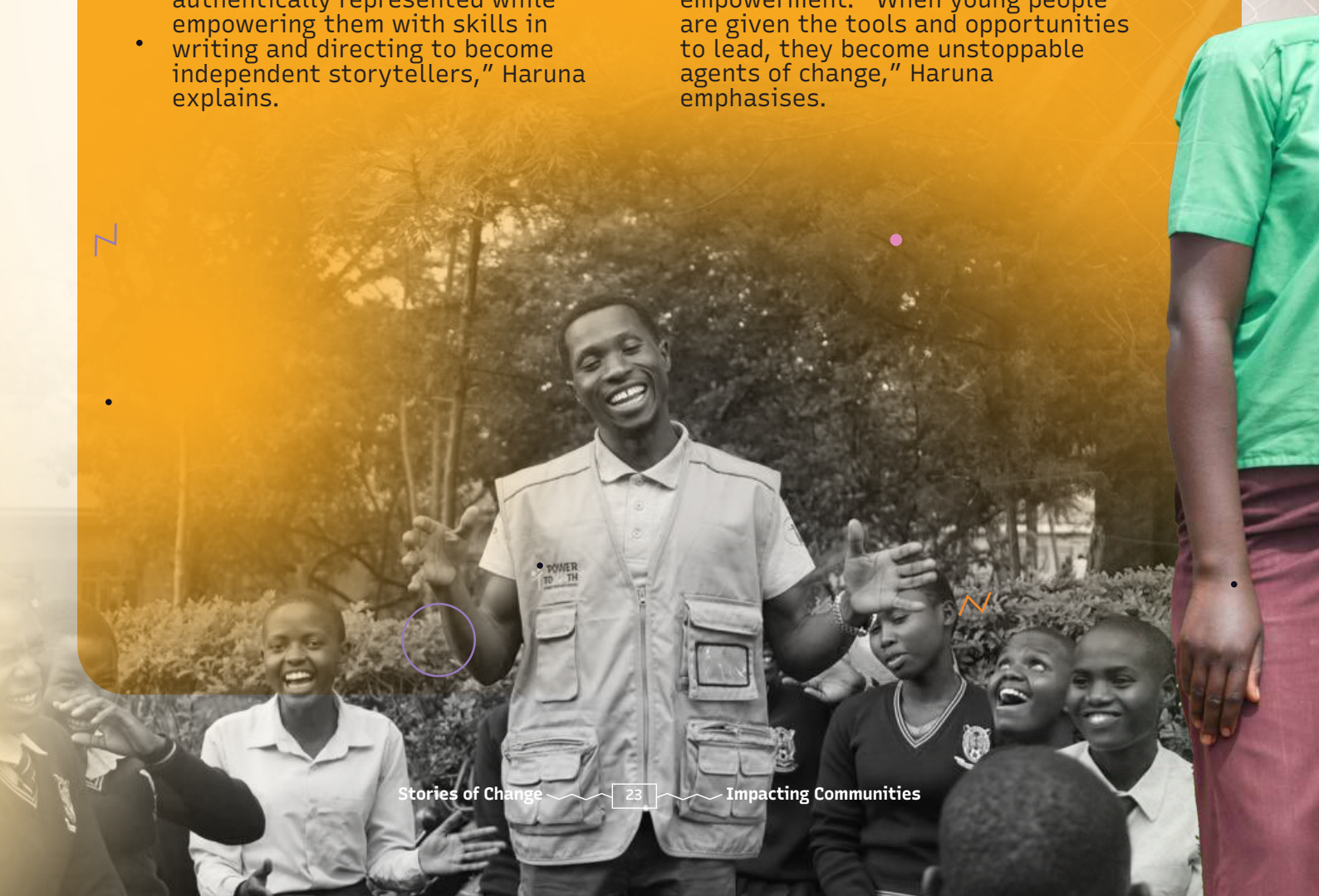
He collaborates with youth advocates to script, film, and produce short SRH films addressing pressing issues affecting adolescents. This approach not only raises awareness but also equips youth with valuable creative and technical skills.

"Storytelling through film is a powerful advocacy tool. Involving young people ensures their voices are authentically represented while empowering them with skills in writing and directing to become independent storytellers," Haruna explains.

Haruna proudly shares his recent work: "I've worked with youth advocates to develop five short films, two of which are already fully produced and circulating to create awareness. Watching young people take the lead, brainstorm on various themes, develop storylines, write scripts, and take on roles like filming and acting was incredible. It showcased their potential and passion."

He also highlights the success of PTY's podcast initiatives, noting: "We task young people to identify topics, write concept notes, mobilise participants, and even host the podcasts. Their efforts have significantly increased our podcast output this year compared to previous years."

Through his MIYP leadership at UYAHF, Haruna has built a platform that fosters youth participation in SRH advocacy while promoting innovation and inclusivity. His journey from a MIYP trainee to an MIYP facilitator and focal person is a testament to the transformative power of youth empowerment. "When young people are given the tools and opportunities to lead, they become unstoppable agents of change," Haruna emphasises.



COMMUNITY ACTORS ADVANCING YOUNG PEOPLE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS



ENGAGING POWERHOLDERS: MARRYING RELIGION AND CULTURE - HOW SHEIKH DUMBA IS INFLUENCING HIS COMMUNITY

Kalangala District, with knitted islands on Lake Victoria oozes magnificent beauty, yet faces some of Uganda's most alarming sexual reproductive health and rights issues. As of 2023, local reports indicate a surge in domestic violence cases in the district of more than 53,000 people, with more than 30 cases being reported monthly, a stark increase from the previous average of 15 cases. (Add citation in the footnotes) The island's unique geography and socio-economic challenges contribute to this rise. High rates of defilement, teenage pregnancies, and family neglect are also prevalent, partly driven by the transient lifestyle of fishermen and the involvement of workers from neighbouring countries like Kenya and Tanzania.

Against this background, Sheikh Ddumba Najib, a teacher and religious leader, emerged as an advocate of gender equality and youth

empowerment through his involvement in the Power to Youth Uganda programme, with a special emphasis on the male engagement forums.

Born in Masaka, Najib now lives in Kalangala with his wife, Zzawedde Jalia, and serves as a teacher and a spiritual guide for the local Muslim community. His leadership journey took a significant turn when he became involved with Power to Youth, a programme aimed at promoting gender equality, eliminating gender-based violence (GBV), and advancing sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) for young people. As one of the first religious leaders engaged by the programme, Najib embraced his role in reshaping harmful norms and practices, particularly through the male engagement forums.



"I was among the first people to join the Power to Youth advocacy groups as a religious leader. The programme has given me the power to make my work better and easier. Before, it was the work of religious leaders to engage the youth, but now many of the issues I used to preach about are also addressed by the programme."

Gender inequalities are well-known in the district, with men traditionally holding dominant roles in families and communities. Many women suffer in silence, and youth often adopt the same harmful attitudes they witness from older generations. As a leader within the Muslim community, Najib

always advocated for treating women with respect. However, his efforts were often met with disregard, especially when it came to encouraging men to take on household chores.

"Personally, I was already helping my wife with house chores," Najib explains. "My peers and other men would see me do chores and question it. Even when I preached about it in the mosque, many people would take me unserious." Many men in his community saw such tasks as women's work, a notion deeply ingrained in their culture.

The Male Engagement Forums offered Najib a platform to engage his peers in a more constructive manner and have open conversations about gender roles. The forums bring men from different backgrounds, including those outside the religious community, together to discuss how gender norms, harm both women and men. Through these sessions, men are encouraged to rethink their views on masculinity and take active steps toward gender equality in their homes and communities.

For Najib, one of the most compelling aspects of the Power to Youth programme is how closely it aligns with the values of Islam. In Islam, women are regarded as equal partners in marriage and family life, a principle that Najib has long championed. Through the Male Engagement Forums, he has found a way to reinforce these teachings with practical, community-driven solutions to deeply embedded problems.

Najib uses the platform provided by Power to Youth to integrate modern advocacy with traditional religious teachings. His ability to blend religious teachings with the values promoted by the programme has had a profound effect on his community. More men are beginning to understand that gender equality is not a foreign concept but one deeply rooted in their own faith.

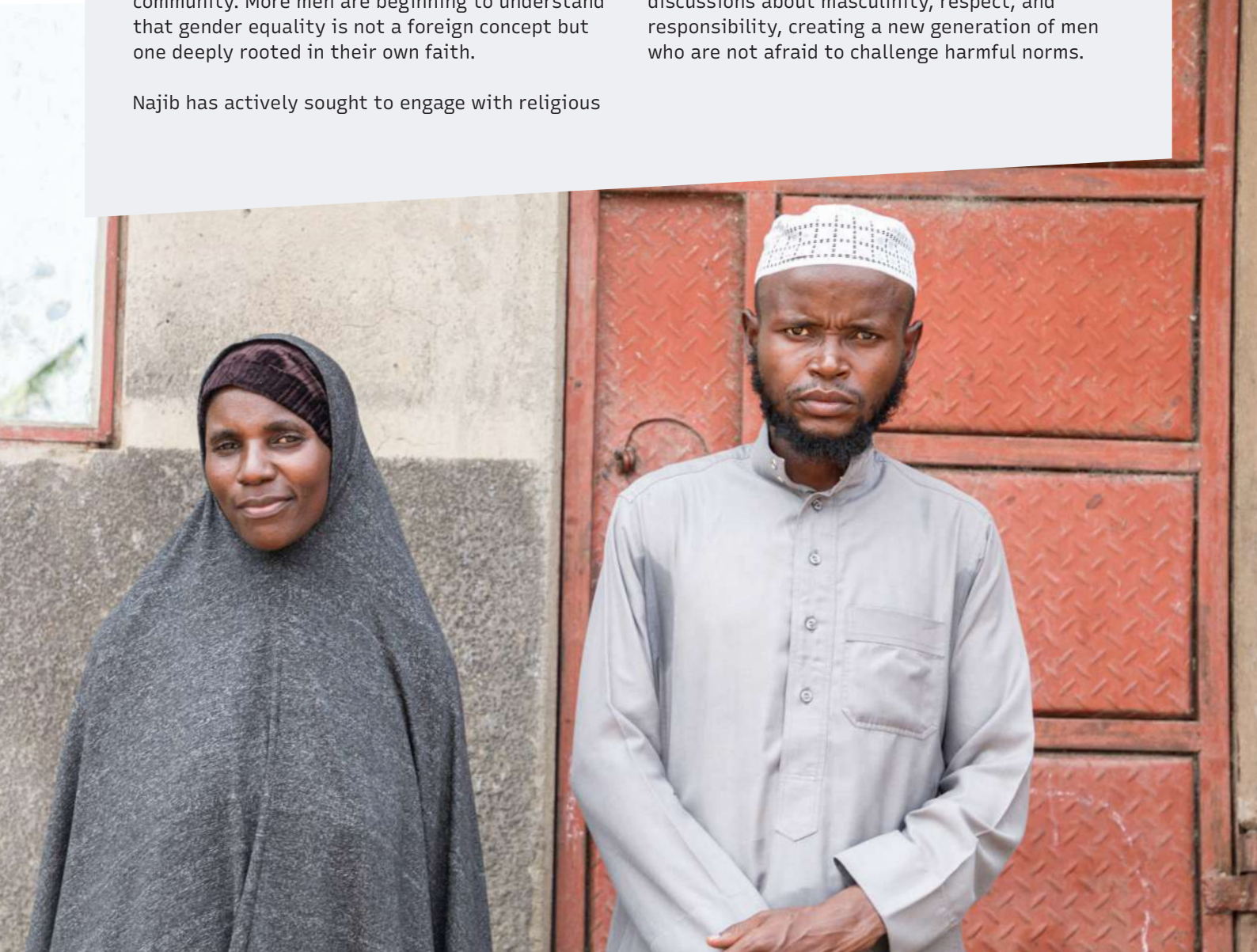
Najib has actively sought to engage with religious

leaders from other sects, fostering an environment of knowledge-sharing and collaboration. This cross-religious dialogue has encouraged greater unity among faith leaders, as they work together to address shared challenges like domestic violence and gender-based violence.

Najib's work through the Male Engagement Forums has had a ripple effect in the islands of Kalangala. Not only has he changed perceptions within his immediate community, but his influence is also spreading to surrounding areas. As more men begin to see the benefits of shared responsibilities at home and respect for their wives, these changes are becoming more widespread. (could we maybe describe how this is happening? Is it through indirect means or does Najib now go to neighboring communities?)

He explains that youth, who often fall into harmful patterns of behaviour, are now being groomed to stand against practices like GBV and other harmful norms.

As Kalangala continues to battle alarming rates of GBV, Najib is optimistic about the impact that programmes like Power to Youth will have on his community. . These platforms allow for open discussions about masculinity, respect, and responsibility, creating a new generation of men who are not afraid to challenge harmful norms.



SERVICE BEYOND SELF: A PTY YOUTH ADVOCATE BREAKING BARRIERS TO SRH ACCESS

In Bufumira, one of the islands in Kalangala District, young people have struggled to access sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, with one major challenge being the absence of a youth-friendly space at the island's only local health facility.

But thanks to one youth advocate, Matovu Atim, who offered his land to the health facility to establish a youth-friendly corner.

"Bufumira health centre III is quite small and you find that the health workers want to serve all people in the same space and yet young people often feel uncomfortable seeking services alongside elders due to fear of shame and stigma especially on contraception services," he explained. "

This gap left many adolescents shun the health facility and struggled with their health concerns. Atim, was determined to change that. Through the mentorship, knowledge and skills he gained through several PtY engagements, Atim decided to take action. He offered a free venue at his home located near the health facility to serve as a youth-friendly space supported by the health workers.

"Through the PtY community score card and the human centred design capacity building initiatives and community activities and engagements, I realised that I can actually play a part in supporting

young people in my community. Atim shared.

"These engagements opened my eyes and made me see the need to take action to address the challenges around me. I knew young people needed a safe space where they could express themselves freely and access the services they deserve. That's when I voluntarily approached the health facility and offered the available space at my home to host young people who needed exclusive health services."

Atim's gesture has been significant in the transformation of SRH service delivery for young people in his community. The space has become a hub where young people can meet, communicate, and receive guidance from health workers in a welcoming and supportive environment.

In addition to hosting the space, Atim leads weekly SRH sessions every Sunday afternoon, providing young people with essential information on topics like contraception, HIV prevention, and healthy relationships. "The weekly sessions allow us to discuss the issues that matter most to young people. We talk openly and learn from each other, and the health workers are always there to provide accurate information and support," Atim shares.

The youth-friendly space also offers recreational activities like Ludo and chess, creating a relaxed and engaging atmosphere. "Games like Ludo and chess help break the ice and make the space more inviting. It's not just about learning; it's also about building friendships and creating a sense of community," Atim says.

Thanks to Atim's leadership, young people in his community now have a safe space where they feel heard, supported, and empowered. The initiative has also strengthened collaboration between the youth and the health facility, ensuring that SRH services are accessible to those who need them most. Atim's story is a powerful example of how youth can drive meaningful change. His commitment to improving SRH access in his community is not just a success story, it's a demonstration to the transformative power of youth leadership and the PtY programme.



ENGAGING POWERHOLDERS: THE DEFENDER OF DREAMS UNSTOPPABLE FIGHT FOR THE GIRL CHILD

The Uganda-Kenya border town of Busia is a hive of activity. The streets hum with the sounds of traders shouting out prices, the rattling of motorbikes weaving through the crowds, and the blaring horns of trucks crossing between Uganda and Kenya. Amid this lively chaos, where the clinking of coins and the chatter of business dominate, one woman is quietly making a difference.

Namaganda Mwatumu, a senior woman teacher (responsible for promoting learners' emotional, social and physical well-being) at Madibira Primary School, is on a mission. In a town where education often takes a back seat to survival and commerce, Namaganda is fighting to ensure that girls stay in school despite the odds stacked against them.

Namaganda, a passionate advocate for girls' rights trained under the Power to Youth programme, is dedicated to ending child marriage in her district. She leads community dialogues to raise awareness and empower families, all while championing initiatives to ensure girls remain in school.

Spotting the Signs Amid the Noise

Busia's relentless pace reflects the struggles of its residents, many of whom are traders moving goods across the border. Parents often leave their children behind to chase a living, and this absence creates gaps that Namaganda works tirelessly to fill.

She has an uncanny ability to notice when a child is struggling—whether it's slipping grades, frequent absences, or signs of physical or mental distress.

"Many of these issues stem from broken homes," she explains. "When families are torn apart, the children suffer. My role as a teacher goes beyond the classroom—I am their counsellor, their advocate, and sometimes their only hope."

The DJ Turned Dreamer

One particularly striking story is that of a Primary Five girl who had dropped out of school to pursue work as a DJ, performing at discos and traveling as far as Kenya. Her life became a chaotic mix of music, danger, and survival. When Namaganda learned of the family's distress, she took swift action and met the girl

and her parents.

The girl's work exposed her to significant risks, including involvement in sexual activities, as it required her to travel long distances and work late into the night.

"I sat with her, spoke to her about her health, and introduced her to a new skill—making door mats," Namaganda recalls. "She began to realise that she could earn a living without giving up her education."

Today, the girl is back in school, using her mat-making skills to support herself.

A Border Town's Unique Challenges

Busia's location presents unique challenges. The border brings opportunities, but it also exposes girls to risks like child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and exploitation. Some girls drop out of school to cross the border into Kenya, hoping for a better life but often falling into dangerous situations.

"There was a girl who was married off to a wealthy man while she was in primary six," Namaganda recalls. "She became pregnant and faced violence in the marriage. Tragically, she lost her baby during childbirth. I intervened, convinced her to leave the marriage, and encouraged her to return to school."

Challenging Traditions and Beliefs

Meanwhile, at Madibira Primary School, many pupils come from Muslim families, where early marriage is often seen as a religious norm. Being a Muslim herself, Namaganda doesn't shy away from these difficult conversations.

"I go to the families, sit down with them, and explain the importance of education for their daughters. If peaceful talks fail, I remind them of Uganda's laws and even involve the police, when necessary," she says.

Her efforts extend to addressing broader issues like poverty, which forces many families to choose between feeding their children and paying for school requirements.

"I work closely with the headmaster to find ways to subsidise costs for students who are struggling," she adds.

Creating Safe Spaces for Girls

Recognising the barriers girls face, Namaganda has championed the creation of safe spaces at school. These are areas where girls can change their menstrual pads, receive counselling, and learn about sexual and reproductive health.

“We also conduct health check-ups and make referrals for girls facing challenges like early pregnancies or other health problems,” she explains.

Building a Network of Advocates
Namaganda has taken her advocacy beyond the school gates, forming a network of senior women teachers in Busia municipality. Together, they share knowledge and strategies, amplifying the impact of the Power to Youth programme across the community.



TAPPING INTO THE POWER OF MUSIC: EQUIPPED WITH KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE TO TAKE ACTION

Nestled among the serene islands of Lake Victoria, Kalangala district presents an idyllic picture. Yet, behind this tranquillity lies a community grappling with a silent sexual reproductive health crisis: soaring rates of teenage pregnancies, child marriages, and gender-based violence (GBV). With a male-to-female population ratio of 2:1, women in Kalangala face significant vulnerabilities, compounded by limited access to sexual reproductive health and rights information.

The statistics are troubling: according to the health department of Kalangala Health Centre IV, approximately 50% of teenage girls in Kalangala become pregnant, exceeding the national average of 25%. Early pregnancies often lead to forced marriages, entrenching cycles of poverty and limiting opportunities for girls. Compounded by high HIV prevalence and pervasive GBV, Kalangala's women and girls face steep odds.

Amidst the state of affairs, one man, Joseph Yusuf Mukibi, is using his unique voice and talent to spark change. Armed with a deep love for music and a mission to empower his community, Joseph turned his craft into a force for transformation, for those most vulnerable—women and girls who often lack access to accurate information about their sexual

and reproductive health.

From Childhood Curiosity to a Voice for Advocacy

Mukibi's journey began with questions—questions about where children come from and the mysteries of life. As a boy, he was met with his mother's anger whenever he sought answers, creating a sense of fear that silenced him but also deepened his curiosity. Music became his refuge. Inspired by artists like Gerald Kiwewa, a Uganda musician with a distinctive fusion of Ugandan and other African music genres, Joseph realised that songs could communicate truths often left unspoken.

“I grew up knowing that music could change hearts and minds,” Joseph reflects. “It's a powerful tool to say what people fear to speak.”

This realisation laid the foundation for his journey into musical literature, where storytelling and melody became his instruments of change.

The Power to Youth Catalyst

Joseph's advocacy took a definitive turn when he joined the male engagement forums under the Power to Youth (PtY) Programme, which empowers young people to challenge harmful societal norms and advocate for change.

"They [PtY] were addressing the same issues we face here in Kalangala—teenage pregnancies, child marriages, and gender-based violence," Joseph explains. "I had seen these problems but never thought I could do something about them. Power to Youth showed me that I could."

Joseph credits the programme for equipping him with the knowledge and confidence to take action. He learned how lack of accurate information about contraceptives leaves women and girls vulnerable to unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

"Women and girls here don't know their rights or their options when it comes to family planning," Joseph says. "They deserve better, and I want to be part of the solution."

The Anthem for Change: Kisoboka
Inspired and empowered, Joseph penned Kisoboka ("It's Possible"), a song that has become a rallying cry for hope and action in Kalangala. Through emotional lyrics, the track addresses SRHR issues head-on, urging the community to confront sexual and gender-based violence, child marriages, and teenage pregnancies.

"Kalangala is unique. There are more men than

women, and this imbalance makes women incredibly vulnerable," Joseph says. "This song isn't just about problems—it's about hopes and solutions."

"I want every young person to know that change is possible—that they have the power to demand better for themselves and their community," Joseph asserts.

Though Kisoboka is his first song tackling SRHR issues, Joseph is no stranger to songwriting. His earlier works centred on love and cultural themes, but now he is determined to use his talent for greater impact.

A Song for the Future

Joseph Yusuf Mukibi isn't just creating music; he's creating a movement. Through Kisoboka, he is bridging the gap between awareness and action, empowering women and girls with knowledge, and challenging harmful norms that have held his community back for generations.

In Kalangala, a new melody is rising—a melody of hope, resilience, and the possibility of change. And at its heart is Joseph, the advocate who dared to dream of a better future and gave it a voice through song.



THE POWER OF ENGAGING MEN: THE HAND OF ANGER TRANSPOSES INTO THE HAND OF SUPPORT

Surely the skies can never stay grey! So, if the will is at bay, it matters less who you are. Transformation isn't far from being your companion. No wonder, Patrick Mangeni once upon a time a respect of no persons is a peacemaker, a preacher of equality and non-violence.

"Violence doesn't make you strong. Respect, care, empathy, conflict resolution and understanding, that's where real power lies," Patrick tells others.

This newfound character in Patrick has seen him ride long distances to participate in community gatherings to lead sessions on SGBV and marriage, where he encourages his fellow men to adopt a non-violent, supportive role in their relationships. His sessions have gained popularity, and many men in Busia districts have begun to rethink their own behaviour, after being inspired by Patrick's transformation.

Thanks to the Power to Youth programme, Patrick's story stands as a testament to the potential for change. He has gone from an abuser to an advocate, creating a ripple effect of positive change in his community.

Patrick's turning point came when a friend invited him to a training on smart advocacy in Busia town organised by the Power to Youth programme. It is through that training that he got to know about the programme.

At first, he was reluctant whenever called for community activities, but over time, he started attending both community engagements and several training sessions with one session in particular, the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) leaving a lasting impact on him.

"I had never thought about how much damage my actions caused not just to my wife, but to myself and my community," Patrick reflected.

"We were made to understand our roles as men in a home, gender roles and how important it is to actually support and protect women and girls. Growing up in a home where my father was the alfa and omega, my perspective changed after the GTA sessions," he notes.

Before these engagements, "I was feared but not respected, I realised that people around the community avoided me because I was untouchable.

"Now, I work with my wife in everything, like gardening, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of our children. That's true masculinity sharing responsibilities, not forcing dominance," Patrick reassures.

"My husband used to raise his hand in anger, but now he raises it to help. Today, we work together in everything, and he treats me with respect. The man who once hurt me is now my partner in every sense, thanks to the Power to Youth programme, because it is when he started going to Busia town for the meetings that I saw my husband changing," Gloria, Patrick's wife affirms.

Indeed, the skies are never always grey. Patrick, once infamously known in his community as an abuser, chaotic and violent is a transformed youth advocate in Busia district. He said no to the deep-rooted destructive cultural beliefs that perpetuated the dominance of men over women. He turned and said yes to promoting equal partnership, speaking against SGBV and other harmful practices in his district.



THE POWER OF ENGAGING MEN: MUHAMMAD, THE EPITOME OF CHANGE IN HIS COMMUNITY

In the ranges of mountain Elgon in Mbale district of eastern Uganda, Muhammad Nabudere was known for his carefree attitude- spending his days hanging out, drinking his favourite local brew, locally known as Malwa. It would be the moment to catch up with friends in the trading centre and sometimes stuck in ridges after missing his way back home in the wee hours of the night.

Growing up in a community that glorified men and sidelining women, Muhammad grew up to believe that a man is treated like a “king” and they were never questioned. No wonder, his married life reflected what he witnessed while growing up.

Born in an extended conservative Muslim family, Muhammad spent a lot of time around his father listening and learning how to be a man. His father, a coffee farmer married four wives as the religion would permit. He boasted of how men could be measured by the number of women they had and the ranches of coffee trees they owned.

Fast forward in 2022 during the COVID 19 lockdown, Muhammad went drinking at a local bar where he locked eyes with Hawa Namataka a waitress at the bar. A week after their first meeting, Hawa and Muhammad agreed to move in together and start a family. This was the beginning of what Hawa describes a regrettable decision at the time. For Muhammad, responsibility was a foreign concept, especially when it came to his family.

“I would leave the house at seven in the morning and return home drunk after two [AM, the following day] or even four [AM] and find her [Hawa] asleep,” Muhammad says. He adds “I would be irritated every time my wife asked me where I was coming from. I would always tell her that it’s wrong to ask a man where he is coming from because a man is never wrong.”

Muhammad made it a routine to wake up his wife every time he returned to prepare or

warm him food. “I did not care whether I left food at home or not, but I expected to find food. I would even remind her that I was doing her a favour to return home because most men stay in the centre or get other wives who can cook for them,” Muhammad shares.

As if that wasn’t stressful enough, Muhammad would sell every household income generating goods ranging from his wife’s gardening harvest, to the coffee drying up in the compound and banana bunches from their plantation, and never accounted for the money from the sales.

One day, one of his friends invited him for a meeting. For him, this was another link up with his friends but to his surprise, he was going to attend the Power to Youth male engagement forum.

“During the meeting, men who had been attending the forums started sharing testimonies of the things that have changed in their homes after applying what they had been taught.”



From the testimonies from the different men some of whom he knew, he realised that their families were thriving and happier. After attending a couple of the male engagement forums, and interacting with his fellow men who had been there before him, Muhammad started reflecting on his life and he started the process of change. The transition journey was the hardest part for him. He did not know how he would let go of his friends and the drinking and go back home early.

Walking in his home today, the change is visible. He carries his baby, washes utensils and provides for his family. He gardens with his wife and the two have started a business together in the same trading centre where he once stayed to drink. "I have a lot of peace in my family. We are happy," Muhammad says.

He is most proud that he gets to watch his daughter grow and is excited to teach her how men should treat her when the time comes.

The 25-year-old and the wife started planning and saving together. "When we sell coffee and bananas, we save half of the money because we want to build and make sure our children access the best education.," he says.

Muhammad shares the sentiments his fellow men in the village have towards his change. "Since I no longer go to the bar to drink or even return home late, some of the men I used to drink with say that my wife bewitched me. He has therefore, made it his duty to engage as many men as possible to ensure that families get to experience the joys of a happy family.

Muhammad's wife Hawa is filled with gratitude for the change in her husband. "He used to quarrel

and shout at me all the time. He would not even spend time at home even when the baby was sick. After the trainings he changed, he listens to me when I am speaking, we agree on things together and we are at peace," Hawa says

"The Power to Youth people helped me a lot because I would have left the marriage by now," she recalls, before adding, "I am happy we have peace at home. Some women come and ask me what I used on him to change but I tell them it was the engagements with Power to Youth which changed him. I wish all men can become like my husband."

Muhammad and Hawa are a beacon of hope, proving that with the right information, knowledge and guidance like the Power to Youth male engagement forums, men stuck in the shackles of patriarchy can transform to be the best version of themselves for transformative and progressive communities.



THE POWER OF ENGAGING MEN: FROM MISOGYNY TO EQUALITY - KYARIMPA'S JOURNEY THROUGH MALE ENGAGEMENT FORUMS

In Majanji, the Uganda-Kenya border Busia district of eastern Uganda, a quiet revolution is happening among young men, due to the male engagement forums spearheaded by the Power to Youth (PtY) Uganda programme. At the heart of this transformation are young men such as Abudulatifu Kyarimpa. The 25-year-old has undergone a personal evolution, shifting from a life of anger, misogyny, and domestic violence to becoming an advocate for gender equality and a leader in his community. His journey illustrates the profound impact male engagement can have on individuals and the

communities where they live.

The Role of Male Engagement Forums

The male engagement forums, organised by PtY, are designed to challenge harmful gender norms and equip men with the knowledge and tools to foster healthier, more respectful relationships with women. The forums create a safe space for men like Abudulatifu to express their thoughts and reflect on their actions. Discussions centre around understanding gender dynamics, the harmful effects of toxic masculinity, and the importance of respecting women's rights.

Abdulatifu first heard about the male engagement forums through community leaders who were working with PtY. Intrigued but skeptical, he attended his first session.

"At first, I didn't understand why they were talking about gender equality. In my world, men were supposed to lead, and women were supposed to follow," he recalls, before adding "But the more I listened, the more I began to question my own beliefs."

One of the most transformative aspects of the male engagement forums is their focus on personal accountability. Participants are encouraged to think about how their actions affect those around them, particularly women.

The Transformation Begins

Armed with this new understanding, Abdulatifu began making changes in his life. He started by helping his wife with household chores, something he had never done before. "At first, it felt strange," he admits. "I had always seen housework as women's work, but I realised that my wife was doing so much, and she was always tired. I decided to help her."

The impact of this small change was profound. Not only did it lighten his wife's burden, but it also improved their relationship. "Our marriage got better," he says. "We started talking more, and we became closer. Even our sexual life improved because my wife wasn't always exhausted."

Abdulatifu didn't stop there. He realised that his extended family, who share the same compound, also needed to embrace these new values. He began mentoring his brothers, encouraging them to help their wives and treat women with respect. "Now, our family is a violence-free family," he proudly states.

Recognising the need for more young men to be part of the conversations, he formed a group of 10 young people in Majanji to share the knowledge he had gained from PtY trainings.

To create tangible change in the lives of young people, he decided to turn the group into a youth livelihood initiative, where members could save money to improve their economic situation. "I realised that if young people had financial stability, they would be more likely to take care of their sexual and reproductive health," he says.

The group started by pooling their savings to buy goats. Every two weeks, they purchase a new goat, with the goal of each member owning at least four goats by the end of the year - 2024. The group registered with the district, opening up

opportunities for further support and training, including access to government programmes like the Parish Development Model (PDM), which aims to provide skills and financial resources to local communities.

A Lasting Impact

Through the male engagement forums, Abdulatifu redefined what it means to be a man in his own life and has become a role model for others in his community.

"Now, I know that being a man means respecting others, helping those around you, and being a leader in your community."

Abdulatifu's upbringing mirrored the traditional patriarchal norms that prevail in many rural communities across Uganda. Raised in an extended family that brewed alcohol and sold fish for a living, Abdulatifu's world was one where men held power and women were considered inferior.

His home environment reinforced these beliefs constantly exposed to scenes of domestic violence, particularly from his father, who regularly beat his mother.

By the time he married, Abdulatifu had adopted the same attitudes he had been exposed to while growing up. He saw his wife as someone who existed to serve him, and he never once considered that she, too, had needs or that she would get tired.

The Power to Youth programme recognised that to achieve meaningful change in gender dynamics, men like Abdulatifu needed to be enabled to have safe spaces, engaged in the conversation to unlearn their harmful practices.



PRIORITIZING YOUNG PEOPLE'S SRHR



THE POWER OF ENGAGING MEN: FACILITATING YOUNG PEOPLE TO DEVELOP SOLUTIONS FOR THEIR OWN UNIQUE CHALLENGES

In the central district of Uganda Kalangala, woven into 86 islands, this uniqueness of the island district presents unique challenges for young people. Inaccurate information on sexual reproductive health, high rates of GBV, teenage pregnancy, HIV are among the challenges young people grapple with in the islands.

Behold, the Human-Centred Design (HCD) initiative, emerges as a powerful ray of hope for young people in the district. HCD is an initiative of Power to Youth (PtY) global to fund beneficiary centred innovations that Uganda won after a competitive process.

With this funding young people from Kalangala came up with innovative ideas to implement interventions under the code name Safe Haven as solution to their challenges. After gathering

valuable input from adolescents and young women (AGYW) in Kalangala, Uganda's winning prototype, now known as Safe Haven, was created.

What makes Safe Haven truly unique is that it was born out of a revolutionary, youth-driven design process. Under the HCD funding young people were called upon to design prototypes that directly addressed their own sexual and reproductive health needs.

"Unlike other projects that have come to Kalangala, Safe Haven was crafted by the very young people it seeks to serve. Their insights were crucial in designing a solution that directly addresses their challenges, making it both relevant and impactful," said Jonathan Kiboneka, Power to Youth District Focal Person in Kalangala.



This transformative programme stands as a lifeline, offering young girls a chance at a future filled with possibilities, standing firm between them and the harsh realities they face.

The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2022), indicates that 24% of pregnancies occur in women under the age of 20. Kalangala's situation, however, is even more alarming, with teenage motherhood rates reaching a staggering 48.7%, nearly double the national average.

This can be explained by the barriers young people face in accessing contraceptive services, limited knowledge on reproductive health, unwelcoming healthcare environment, and the absence of functional youth-friendly places.

In Kalangala's remote landing sites, many girls were resorting to dangerous practices, such as mixing Panadol tablets with milk as a means of preventing unintended pregnancies. These primitive methods, rooted in misinformation and desperation, highlighted the urgent need for accurate information and accessible reproductive health services.

To combat this crisis, Safe Haven was crafted with extensive input from AGYW, ensuring the solutions directly address the barriers affecting them.

Safe Haven aims to dismantle such harmful practices by fostering partnerships between AGYW, peer educators, and healthcare providers while building community support for modern family planning methods. The initiative strives to eliminate the stigma surrounding contraception use and offers youth-friendly services that are accessible, inclusive, and welcoming.

Hatim Matovu, a peer educator under the programme, emphasised the transformative impact Safe Haven is

having in Kalangala: "The Human-Centred Design approach has brought hope to Kalangala. The programme has dispelled long-standing myths and misconceptions about contraception, empowering young people to make informed, decisions about their health."

Safe Haven employs a multi-faceted approach, incorporating three innovative prototypes designed to address the unique needs of AGYW: Peer Model a peer-to-peer system that facilitates the sharing of information and access to services; Power of Options ensuring high-quality, youth-centred services within inclusive environment; and empathy 360 a community-driven hub offering accurate SRHR information and support.

These models work together to provide comprehensive support to young people, empowering them to take control of their reproductive health. In addition to these core components, the programme includes capacity-building efforts for healthcare providers, and dialogues with community members to reshape attitudes toward contraception. Healthcare providers are trained to deliver non-judgmental, responsive care, ensuring that AGYW are treated with respect and dignity.

"Safe Haven isn't just about providing contraceptives—it's about creating a supportive environment where young women can make choices about their sexual and reproductive health without fear or stigma," said Jonathan.

Local healthcare providers have reported increased uptake of youth-friendly services and a positive shift in community attitudes toward contraception and family planning.

Kalangala's success with Safe Haven offers a scalable model for other areas facing similar challenges. By centering the voices of AGYW and fostering community engagement, Power to



Youth is tackling the root causes of teenage pregnancy while promoting gender equality and reproductive rights.

"The Human-Centred Design approach has transformed Bufumira Health Centre III and the way we serve young people. With the establishment of the youth corner, adolescents now have a safe and welcoming space to access youth-friendly services," said Jude Matovu, In-charge of Bufumira Health

Centre III.

"The training we received on providing responsive and inclusive care has made a huge difference—young people feel heard and respected, which has significantly increased their uptake of services," Jude observed, before adding, "This initiative has truly empowered us to meet the unique needs of our youth and create an environment where they can make informed decisions about their health."



UNFILTERED VOICES

It is deeply concerning that some cultures still uphold FGM as acceptable. This harmful and dangerous practice has no place in our society. As Parliament, we are fully committed to working with partners like Power to Youth to eradicate FGM in Uganda and protecting the rights and dignity of our women and girls

Hon Davis Namara

Chairperson General Purpose Committee



"PtY has helped us in popularising the government laws like the policy on ending teenage pregnancies and early marriages and Female Genital Mutilation laws which has helped the parents and cultural leaders understand the importance of keeping their girl children in school and protecting them from those who want to take advantage of them

Kiplangat Morris

Principal district community development officer

"Achieving the Vision 2030 agenda requires the active involvement of men alongside women. While FGM predominantly affects women and girls, its eradication cannot be realised without the commitment and cooperation of men

Hon Sarah Opendi

Chairperson Uganda Women Parliamentary Association



"PtY has empowered me and I'm now confident and able to reach out to other youths about issues that affect them like teenage pregnancy, early marriages among others.

Isaac Ojambo

Youth advocate Busia District

"We did not know about streamlining of GTA in our implementation and now I do it everyday. PtY has also helped me to focus on the young people to ensure that they are part of government programmes. From planning, implementing and monitoring, their voices are included and considered."

Okumu Ssemu
DCDO Busia



"The Power to Youth programme has been a transformative force in my life and the lives of many young people in Busia. It has not only mobilised us but also empowered us to recognise the strength and potential we hold as youth. Through capacity-building sessions, we've gained the skills and confidence to amplify our voices on critical issues affecting our communities, especially in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

What's even more remarkable is how the programme encourages us to take ownership of advocacy. It has provided us with the tools to initiate our own campaigns and strengthen our organisational structures for more effective lobbying and advocacy. We've learned how to engage with stakeholders, influence policies, and create safe spaces for dialogue and change.

Power to Youth isn't just a programme it's a movement that equips young people with the knowledge, skills, and platforms to be agents of change. Today, I stand not only as a youth advocate but as someone leading a network of young voices demanding a better future for our communities. It's empowering, it's impactful, and it's just the beginning of what we can achieve together."

Wandera Michael
Youth advocate Busia

"Leading a community-based organisation like the Mbale Network of Young People Living with HIV was not an easy task when I first started. I had the passion and determination, but I lacked the administrative and advocacy skills needed to push the organisation forward.

There were moments when I felt overwhelmed and unsure of how to navigate the challenges of managing programmes, mobilising resources, and amplifying the voices of young people living with HIV. However, the Power to Youth programme has been instrumental to me. Through its capacity-building sessions, mentorship, and advocacy trainings, I've gained the knowledge and skills to not only lead but also to empower others within my organisation.

The programme introduced me to a network of youth advocates who have become an integral part of our organisation. With their energy, creativity, and shared commitment, we've been able to design and implement impactful initiatives that address critical issues like stigma, access to healthcare, and SRH education for young people living with HIV. I now feel confident not only as a leader but as a changemaker who can inspire others to take action."

Mweru Peter
Youth advocate Mbale and Team Leader, Mbale Network of Young People Living with HIV(MNYPA)





SNAPSHOT OF PTY EVENTS

Commission on the Status of Women

We were present at Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) held at United Nations Headquarters in New York under the theme "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."



The Power to Youth Gender Transformative Approach Symposium in Nairobi

PtY Uganda participated in the Power to Youth Gender Transformative Symposium held in Nairobi. The symposium was an opportunity to share our GTA journey with a focus of how we are integrating GTA in critical areas like Advocacy to foster better adolescent sexual reproductive health and rights. We were also able to learn PtY partners.



PtY Country Learning Exchange in Ghana

PtY Uganda participated in the country learning exchange visit in Ghana. The visit brought partners from Uganda, Senegal, Malawi and Ghana as the host. The teams dived into PtY Ghana community led initiatives which included a courtesy visit to a young queen mother who is working to protect and elevate women with in her community. The partners also witnessed the model gendered family household a unique gender transformative approach used to encourage household change. Uganda adopted this model and has since been integrated in the male engagement forums.





AIDS Conference 2024

PtY Uganda was participated in the AIDS Conference 2024 held in Germany. We hosted a pivotal session titled "Challenging the Script: Designing Gender- Positive Interventions for HIV Prevention in Young People."



CSO Knowledge Sharing Conference on SRHR, Gender and Youth Programming

We organised the inaugural Annual CSO Knowledge Sharing Conference on SRHR, Gender and Youth Programming under the theme "Connecting for Women, Girls and Youth: Sharing Knowledge to Lift CSOs to Great Horizons of Success. "



Inter University Dialogue

Power to Youth participated in the Inter University Dialogue on Sexuality under the theme "Promoting Young People's Sexual Health: Leveraging the Digital Space." This event brought together students from various universities to deliberate and explore how technology can be harnessed to promote access to SRHR information.





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