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Empowered Women Free



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I am a Champion against Gender

This booklet tells stories of improved public awareness and progressive change in social norms away from gender inequality and gender-based violence. SURGE (Support to Uganda's Response to Gender Equality), a five-year program (2016 - 2020) was funded by Department for International Development (DFID) to the Government of Uganda with an overall aim of strengthening efforts towards achieving equal access for women and men to opportunities and a life free from violence and, ultimately gender equality.

The program was implemented by ActionAid International Uganda in partnership with MIFUMI CEDOVIP with ministry of Gender Labour and social development and providing quality assurance to the program.

In the book, the value that UKaid and SURGE implementing partners have added through programming in the area of GBV prevention and response in the 13 districts of Moroto, Katakwi, Kumi, Pallisa, Kween, Lira, Gulu, Amuru, Nebbi, Mbarara, Masaka, Kampala and Mubende is demonstrated.

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Government not starting from zero

Angela Nakafeero, the Commissioner for Gender and Women Affairs in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, appreciates the Shelter services provided in 13 districts for the five years of the SURGE project. She commends the skills, infrastructure and methodologies left behind in the battle against gender-based violence (GBV) and promoting gender equality.

“At least we are not starting from zero after DFID (Department for International Development) and UKAID (United Kingdom AID) has laid the foundation managed ably by AAIU under the guidance of the Ministry,” said Nakafeero. “It has been such a fruitful partnership where it became mandatory for ministries to allocate resources towards addressing gender issues.”

This adds to programs that were in place to support the Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) and GBV prevention programs not only in the 13 pilot districts but all across the country.

“The WEE groups created with support of the SURGE program need not weep that they are orphaned as the program concludes its activities, because there are alternatives which include Uganda Women Empowerment Programme (UWEP), Youth Empowerment Program and many others enabling income generation to eradicate poverty in the populace,” said Nakafeero. “The focus is not only on beginners but even those who are already in business or production.”

Nakafeero emphasizes that the government is determined to deliver social protection to children, people with disabilities, those who are HIV positive and the elderly. She adds that it is the reason a law has been put in place to halt all types of GBV.

“We are aware of the existing exploitation of the children by pub owners, parents and care takers,” said Nakafeero. “We have screamed our voices hoarse to all parties that they risk the wrath of the law if caught abusing children. It is ille-

gal to marry off children below 18 years of age. They are also not allowed to serve as waiters in pubs or as prostitutes.”

She said because of the economic effects of the lockdown prompted by COVID-19, parents have been reported to send their underage girls into prostitution in order for the family to have food on the table or perish. She adds that previously parents used to connive with pub owners to employ young girls to attract patrons. Pimps are reported to be making a kill from the trade which involves businessmen, highly placed persons and local leaders operating booming businesses.

“Good enough since the start of the Support to Uganda’s Response on Gender Equality (SURGE) program, the level of awareness has improved,” said Nakafeero. “The onus is upon parents, caretakers and law keepers to prevent and report GBV related crimes before or after they are committed.”

Nakafeero said although people in some

places are aware about the rights of the women and girls, there are still hard-to-reach places with conservative cultural practices that leave a lot to be desired as far as salvaging potential victims is concerned. She said FGM and child marriages are still taking place with the blessing of parents who are expected to protect their children.

“The Ministry may have challenges in the short run when the funders pull out,” says Nakafeero. “But there is a ray of hope as the central and local governments are determined to bridge the gap left behind by the donor funded service. That is why most districts are looking for ways to sustain the Shelters that have become a fallback position for GBV survivors across the country.”

The shelters became popular with victims for providing: psychosocial support, equipping women with income generating skills, offering groups seed money to kick start business venture and enable reported cases to be investigated and pursued to conclusion. The shelters were availing the Police fuel to access hard to reach places.

A close-up portrait of Angela Nakafeero, a Black woman with short, dark, curly hair. She is wearing black-rimmed glasses and a gold pineapple-shaped earring. She is looking slightly to the left with a thoughtful expression. She is wearing a bright yellow, textured garment, possibly a traditional African shawl or wrap.

***Angela Nakafeero, Commissioner for
Gender and Women Affairs Ministry
of Gender Labour and Social Development***

Uganda needs more shelters

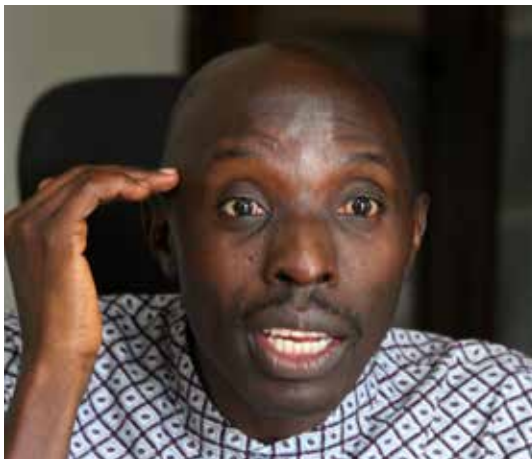
Interim Director Program and Policy Nickson Ogwal beams with smiles of satisfaction about the achievements of the SURGE program which have been an awakening of government about the enormity of GBV across the whole country. The SURGE program highlighted GBV as a key focus for attention and action.

“Since March 2020 the existing infrastructure of 13 shelters in the country was put to test during the COVID-19 pandemic threat,” starts Ogwal. “There is need for more shelters to contain the increasing numbers of victims/survivors spread all over the country where listeners have been awakened about their human rights and the effect of archaic norms.”

Ogwal says given its record as being an organization of repute AAIU is being consulted by the UNDP and other agencies on development issues in the country. They know the expertise the seasoned staff of AAIU have and how they are informed about where governments and the ministry are challenged to deliver

such an essential service.

“Before the Shelters were in place, I know Police Officers who used to take survivors to stay in theirsharks for a



Henry Nickson Ogwal, Interim Director Programs and Policy ActionAid International Uganda (AAIU)

night because they had nowhere else to go and yet the cost of accommodation would be too high for them,” said Ogwal. “It is this kind of concern that has been awakened by the shelters”.

Worse still much as local government loves the shelter services they have to take control by August this year, they have awoken to the realization that there is need for resources to keep these shelters running and thus the need for sourcing for funders. This has triggered cries from the beneficiaries of the shelter services wondering about the way forward if services like psychological support, legal aid, health care, facilitating the Uganda Police to deliver as they have been doing under the SURGE program.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has strived to ensure that the GBV shelters are included in the National Development Plan III. This is an achievement of the SURGE program which has been raising the issue of shelter sustainability with the Ministry. There are districts where the shelters have already been handed over. Concern has already been voiced by local government about the reality of having a thin tax base and delayed disbursement of funds from the central government,”

noted Ogwal.

“That aside the revolution that should have happened yesterday, concerning negative norms, has begun.” Men now know the benefits of living in harmony with their spouses and children. The SURGE method has religious leaders, elders, ordinary mortals, policy makers

and service providers engaged to change the status quo.

“This does not mean we discard even the good practices, for example, catering for divorce victims and their children,” notes Ogwal. “Before commercialization of land ownership it was communal. When a family member returned home

from a failed marriage she was given a portion and her children were automatically assimilated in the clan men and women owned the land communally. Such values have been abandoned.”

Counting the lessons learned, Ogwal said getting started on a cause and involving local leaders will automatically



Members of Branch women's group at tarak upper, Kitewoi Sub County in Kween district

attract government to intervene. There is the case with the shelter serving as a one stop center addressing the plight of GBV and FGM survivors.

“Development partners, donors and others follow suit,” said Ogwal. “That is how the communities of pilot districts have benefited directly and indirectly. AAIU introduced forensic kit to Uganda Police as a means for investigation of sexual offences. Protection of evidence was improved. The number of doctors was boosted from only six in Mulago national referral hospital to other easier to reach health centers up country.”

Talking about the history of SURGE Ogwal says builds on AAIU’s work from 2007 with only three shelters located in Mubende, Pallisa and Nebbi. Their focus was initially HIV/AIDS where gender based violence was identified among patients.

“Widows were weighed down by bringing up orphans after being denied inheritance rights,” revealed Ogwal. “WWW was born standing for Women Won’t Wait campaign. The shelter came to be as a fallback position for the affected. A lot has since changed.”

Along the way archaic cultural norms have been encountered besides FGM and GBV. For example there was a case of an uncle who adopted his dead sister’s daughter and defiled her. The innocent girl conceived. She was blamed by the community and banished as culture demanded.

“The same man defiled his daughter who also conceived,” Ogwal paused for the point to drive home. “The case got to the ears of the Shelter staff and the little girl was salvaged. She was reunited with her mother who was living under the poverty line. A pauper.”

To his surprise the law enforcers and those in the judiciary saw nothing wrong with this perpetrator before AAIU intervention. Such cases make the marriage bill very urgently needed because women are still treated as second class citizens.

“You can imagine landslides in Mount Elgon, locusts and climate change effects are being blamed on girls who have declined to undergo FGM after being sensitized,” stressed Ogwal. “Diviners say the gods of the soil are annoyed with human beings. That COVID-19 is their latest pun-

ishment given to humanity. In Karamoja they had a cholera outbreak added on the list.”

Ogwal says determined to please the gods FGM is being done in caves under the cover of darkness or in Kenya. Girls from Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan converge there for mutilation.

“There is need for all the concerned governments to link hands if it is to be halted in the entire region,” noted Ogwal. “They ought to link resources, expertise and share methodologies like SASA to stop or contain it. The men in those communities need sensitization about the health risk they are subjecting their spouse or daughter to.”

Asked what has worked in the five years, Ogwal said FGM has been replaced by other progressive norms as a rite of passage among the Sabiny and Karimojong. The male models are preaching the sharing of house hold chores and against GBV. Survivors have become partners in the fight against these malpractices.



Kween Gender Based Violence Shelter



**Tina Musuya, Executive Director
Center for Domestic Violence Prevention
(CEDOVIP)**

Child sex on the increase

CEDOVIP executive director Tina Musuya says so much has been done to inspire community activism to prevent and respond to GBV, but a lot remains to be done because the girl-child and women in general, are still not safe in a society stuck to unfair norms.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) may be dropping for as long as the threat of arrest is in place, but it can resume once the law keepers relax.

“The men simply do not know what they want but just blindly follow their culture,” Musuya says. “Polygamy is common because sex with the circumcised women is not for pleasure but recreation. After ‘sampling’ the untouched counterparts, they never want to let them go. So they end up challenged to have more than 10 children.”

Musuya says there is a new trend in Kampala where men prefer child sex. The practice involves a network of pub owners, massage parlors, schools and parents.

“These tender aged ones are enticed by

small gifts such as fancy clothes, mobile phones, food in fancy restaurants in return for sex. In the process, some get infected with sexually transmitted diseases, get pregnant or addicted to drugs. They call them misege [wild dogs] in Kampala,” Musuya says.

“Unfortunately, the criminals involved in Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) are highly placed and moneyed to buy their way out of arrest if caught in the act. We have recruited reformed pimps who have confessed details in the different areas of Kampala districts.”

“They changed SIM cards but they are still asked by their clients for young girls of certain complexions, tribe and body build,” she adds.

Talking about the shelter program, Musuya says CEDOVIP, working with AAIU, is like a marriage abandoned when it was beginning to work.



*Angakkun Lasongole, model man at
Loputiput, Nadunget Sub County in
Moroto district*

Positive use of power

MIFUMI has been instrumental in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) prevention efforts in places such as Mbarara, Moroto and Masaka using the SASA methodology to address the link between violence against women and the spread of HIV/Aids.

“People are inspired to mobilise themselves to balance the power between the sexes in relationships,” say the Moroto area coordinator Dinah Adupa Lorika.

“They are then guided to use the power positively and make the world a better



Dinah Adupa Lorika the coordinator MIFUMI Moroto district

place for the family.”

She adds that the program has ground to a halt before it exhausted the four stages of SASA! that comprise Start, Awareness, Support and Action. Just as the first fruits from the baseline, community activists and dramatists were beginning to materialise, the program ended. Good enough they have and will remain with the skills but will need facilitation or they might slide back.

“The activists have been carrying out a number of activities per month in their respective communities, along with two drama skits,” reveals Adupa. “They follow audiences in bars, homes, markets, church and gardens to deliver the message. Posters are one of the ways they communicate,” she adds.

“We used to carry out monthly training of the selected change agents after the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development provided the NGO with quality assurance for GBV prevention and response services. Coordination

with the ministries of Health and that of Justice was also strengthened across the 13 districts where the program was

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People are inspired to mobilise themselves to balance the power between the sexes in relationships

”

implemented. Today, there is a list of access to service committees forming the national GBV reference group.

“During the time of this project, we have handled cases from DR Congo, Kenya and Kayunga District in Uganda. Somehow, the children have been reunited with their families. The shelter has managed to bring to the fore issues regarding GBV, which were previously hidden as culture demands. The Moroto District chief accounting officer takes the shelter as his baby and he is determined to keep it operational.



***Residents and community activists of,
Nakwong parish, Tapac Sub County,
Moroto district***



***GBV at Jambula zone, Bwaise, Kawempe,
Kampala***

Kampala's open secrets

Kimombasa, Jambula zone in Bwaise is a slum where six or more tender aged girls share a room to have a roof over their head when need be. Most of them are in the city for a better life but end up getting involved in sex work for as little as shs 3000 to sh10, 000. Some of the clients have queer habits of inflicting pain on them before having sex. There are those who do not want to use condoms.

"If I insist on the use of condoms, he goes to another service provider," says Janet Namukwaya (not real name.) "So I have to do as the client wishes if I am to make some small money to buy food or a glass of liquor. One needs the liquor to cushion the rough world out there."

Out of the LCs office, a girl with blood shot eyes raises her arm to slap a client whom she served on credit three weeks earlier and had not paid her sh3, 000. A crowd gathers in support of the squealing assailant. Observers shake their heads in surprise about what goes on

behind the rusted rickety metal doors of nooks serving as brothels.

Ali Mukiibi, the CA working with the girls and women in Kimombasa says they have lately asked the endangered ones to submit their details before starting



Having diverse sources of income leaves one with an option on a bad day when there is no client buying. Some have taken the advice and started the 'rolex' business, charcoal stalls and corner shops



to operate there. This follows the unfortunate death of one who was popularly called Sweet Sugar.

"We advise them to prepare for retirement," says Mukiibi. "Having diverse sources of income leaves one with an option on a bad day when there is no cli-

ent buying. Some have taken the advice and started the 'rolex' business, charcoal stalls and corner shops."

"We also advise them to let a friend know where they are," said Senga Carol Karungi. "Safety first as you go out to serve different people. We also urge them to go on duty when sober. This follows incidences when some girls have fallen asleep while serving their customers, only to wake up when their mobile phones and other valuables have vanished. Their clients sometimes vanish without paying the lodging fee of between sh500-sh10, 000."

The good news is that drama groups equipped with public address systems, costumes and flash discs are sensitizing the community about GBV, the dangers of having irresponsible sex and child sex during the COVID-19 era when public meetings are not allowed.



Denis Okello, Interim SURGE Programme Coordinator ActionAid International Uganda (AAIU)

Covid-19 surges GBV cases

The SURGE program technical coordinator Dennis Okello says the achievements of the five years period are very enormous given the initial objectives.

“The acronym ‘SURGE’ stands for ‘Support to Uganda’s Response to Gender Equality’ which is a five year program from 2016 to 2020,” says Okello. “It was funded by UKAID through DFID with the aim of strengthening efforts aimed at enabling women get equal access to opportunities.”

“The first objective was to build the government capacities and enable ministries to integrate gender and equity in public finance management,” stressed Okello. “This was spearheaded by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the Equal Opportunities Commission.”

The other objective was to make the world a better place for women and girls to live a life free from Gender Based Violence (GBV) and other forms of deplor-

able cultural Practices. The key focus was to boost public awareness, trigger change in social norms and halt GBV.

Provision of safe spaces for women through shelter services was a key component of the program. “This was being implemented by AAIU and MIFUMI by increasing women’s access to safe spaces/shelter,” stressed Okello. “The survivors of GBV were availed a variety of services comprising of: psychosocial, health, legal, and temporary accommodation.”

Upon discovering that GBV had its roots in women’s economic dependence on men, the implementers equipped them with basic skills in: income generating activities, developing a saving culture and working in groups of not more than 15 members. The groups were provided with capital, in kind, for the enterprises they selected and we have seen some groups get good returns within a very short time. “Success has been registered and the livelihoods of the beneficiaries are not the same,” says Okello. “The small business entities in place generat-

ed a profit margin of 135 million shillings in the five districts where WEE was implemented which could have been more had it not been for the COVID-19 Lock-down,” says Okello.

“Also on board was CEDOVIP that inspires community activism to prevent: violence against women and girls, Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) using that SASA methodology,” says Okello. “It has transformed mindsets in Kampala, Kween and Moroto districts.” In addition CEDOVIP supported AAIU and MIFUMI to work with SASA! to address GBV in Mbarara, Kumi and Katakwi districts. In addition AAIU and MIFUMI used alternative methods to address GBV. This is besides providing services to GBV survivors in 13 districts.

“All this is done under the guidance of Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development which monitors the quality of services to prevent and respond to GBV.

Asked about the achievements attained Okello counted and exhausted the fingers on his palm.

“Kween District local government al-

located sixty million shillings for construction of the GBV shelter over three financial years before DFID came in to provide the additional money required to complete the construction work,” said Okello. “Other similar facilities in the other districts have benefitted a total of 8, 200 GBV survivors.”

“Other districts like Kumi, Mubende and



Men and women who thought beating, hurling insults and ridiculing women is a yardstick of managing a spouse are thinking twice about their ways



Mbarara have also showed interest in sustaining the GBV shelters but they are limited by the constrained funds at their disposal.”

In addition the Community Activists in the different locations have reached 75, 000 people who have been engaged about the different types of GBV, the consequences to the victims and the

qualities of positive use of power.

Better still attitudes among conservative communities like the Karimojong and Sabiny, FGM as a ‘a rite of passage’ from childhood to maturity is being replaced by other achievements and the degree of stigma is not as it were before the intervention.

In summary men and women who thought beating, hurling insults and ridiculing women is a yardstick of managing a spouse are thinking twice about their ways after watching mobile drama and attending public debates with CAs.

The sailing has not been all very smooth during the five years as many challenges were encountered.

The program has ended before completion of all the stages in the SASA methodology. The challenge of GBV is big. As if that was not enough, it has dawned on the players that, GBV is much bigger than the 13 districts where the Shelter was operated. Most of the districts happened to be financially crippled to be able to operate the facility as has been under AAIU.



Sydney Namutebi, former street child, GBV survivor, Kawala, Kampala

Against all odds

Some of these service providers are mothers and house wives. Not so far away from Kimombasa is a success story of former street child Sydney Namutebi, who weathered all the storms to cater for her three children as a single mother. At 23 years of age she is widowed and a single mother of three.

“I do not want my children to live the life I have gone through,” whispers Namutebi in a low tone. “I never got to know either my Dad or Mom. For home was the street. Family was those rough children you see looking for food in dust bins or begging for loose change down town.”

Like fate would have it at 13 she conceived. And before giving birth the boyfriend, a Bodaboda rider died after colliding with a truck.

“I was locked up in Luzira Prison after Kampala City Council Authority (KCCA) law enforcers arrested me for hawking goods,” recounts Namutebi. “It was when I was released that I learned of my lover’s death. My stock of goods valued at sh30, 000 were confiscated. It dawned on me that I will never see him again

and neither would his child.”

Later on Namutebi met another man who promised her undying love. And when she gave birth to his baby she dreamed of beginning a family afresh. But the man devastated her by asking her to either part with her first baby or him.

“It was at this point when I learned of the services of the Bwaise Shelter,” recalls Namutebi with nostalgia. “I got such a warm reception. For once in my life I got people who loved and cared about me and my children. I was there for three months.”

Later they rented for her a house and availed her seed money which she invested in charcoal. The business is booming but she is not ready to take chances and is vending food to Bodaboda riders.

“My kids are happy in our new home,” says Namutebi. “I am living a stress free life. I do not know where I would have ended up if it were not for the Bwaise Shelter service. In future I dream of buy-

ing a plot to build my own house, educate my children and enjoy my life in my home.”

Namutebi has never forgiven the KCCA officers who continue grabbing stock of hawkers struggling to make ends meet. She was whisked away without the neighbors knowing her whereabouts. If it was not for a kind neighbor the children would have starved to death.

Asked about child sex in the area, the in charge family desk Superintendent of Police Sophia Nambala said, they are aware of the indulgence and warns the suspects that they will soon catch up with them.

“We know massage parlors, pubs and sauna service providers who operate under the guise of other traders when all they do is to sexually exploit underage girls,” says Nambala. “The unsuspecting girls are brought to Kampala after being promised hefty wages as house helps, bar maids or shop keepers. The reality shocks them when they find themselves trapped.”



**Nakayiwa Florence Meya Zone,
Kabalagala**

Kabalagala is hot like pepper

Life in Kabalagala's neighborhood called Meya zone, where rape and defilement are the order of the day, is not the place for faint hearted folks. Lifestyles are randy and raunchy. The residents face unique challenges in their lives. Pharmaceuticals selling aphrodisiac, dealers in erotic wear and pimps are 'smiling all the way to the bank' as business booms. It is this state of affairs that attracted the intervention of CEDOVIP to sensitize parents and GBV survivors about the high price they were bound to pay if they did not keep an eye on their neighborhood.

"The place has the potential to amplify health hazards as the person most likely to abuse your child is that uncle or relative enticing her with: 'rolex', ice cream and sweets," booms the public address system. "If caught in the act, report the case to the Police as soon as possible. Take the victim for medical examination before the evidence is destroyed."

The impact of talk shows, drama skits and the door to door public address

system is bearing fruit. The area LC Francis Katerega says control the intermixing between children and adults have been done by stopping movie houses from operating before 3:00pm. People under 18 years of age are not allowed to consume beer in pubs spread all over the place.

"Consequently, the rate of GBV in our midst has plummeted to having no incident in two days," notes Katerega. "The resident Sengas (relationship counselors) are doing a good job counseling the women and youths about their rights and how the law protects them. Women are opening up petty businesses like hair dressing, brewing beer and eateries to generate legitimate incomes."

This was recommended in response to research findings that pointed at GBV being related to poverty and dependence of women on men for every need in their lives. According to Community Activities (CA) Aida Nalumu bringing up children in the Meyaslum is very challenging,

"It is worse for the girl child who is de-

filed by neighbors, relatives and patrons," says Nalumu. "Worse still children are exposed to pornography on social media at a very tender age. This makes them very vulnerable, curious and confused."

Nalumu says the children in Meya have no role model to emulate or guidance to become law abiding useful citizens in life. All they have are musicians, drug addicts, criminals and street smart acquaintances.

The neighborhood is flooded with lodges, massage parlors, pubs and table dancing nooks where children are exploited by owners of the facilities. The place is stuck with low quality buildings and poor service provision. The air is scented with opium, garbage in advanced degrees of decay as paths are strewn with broken bottles and used condom wraps.

Pimps facilitating sexual exploitation of girls

Prostitution is said to be the world's oldest profession but understanding the size and scope of this secret economy, besides the actors and methods applied are still unclear. In a Kampala City suburb called Kamwokya the operations of pimps remain unclear.

Since prostitution is illegal in Uganda it transpires in the shadows of hidden nooks of a booming underground economy. There are no accounting records to trace, no receipts to scrutinize, and no legal records to analyze. It is very difficult to grasp the size of this economy.

Without information about the size of the prostitution economy, is a critical first step to crippling the law enforcement, the judicial system, and policy-makers to make informed choices about how to fight the harm that happens within their backyards.

But a reformed pimp Jimmy Kyeyune (not real name) in Kamwokya spilled the beans of what transpires in a slum where there seems to be a resemblance of sanity. In what serves as a community cen-

ter are chess boards, a basketball score board, fast food and condom dispensers to enable youths generate incomes.

"The demand for underage girls by elderly men is so high," confessed Kyeyune. "They pay between sh50, 000 – sh300, 000 a night. When I was operating I would give the girl sh10, 000 and retain the balance. Some of these girls escape from boarding school after conniving with teachers and gate keepers."

Kyeyune quit his trade when he saw some of the young girls drop out of school, become drug addicts, conceive or die young. He says there are pubs in town which use the girls as patron pullers by being fronted as bar maids dressed in skimpy frocks. Most of these girls are under the age of 18 and are not 'prostitutes' but sexually exploited children.

The Naguru Teenage Center is overwhelmed by the number of clients asking for anti HIV medicine after having live sex. Those coming for HIV or ante natal care are reluctant to bring their

partners.

"This is because of the age difference or it was a one night stand," says counselor Martin Byamugisha. "Unfortunately when diagnosed for an STD, they opt to share the dosage. When they heal partially they go back to have live sex, with the same partner and get re-infected until the medicine ceases to work."

The business season is December when Ugandans in the Diaspora are in town to make merry. They normally sweep young girl off their feet with promises of marriage and taking them abroad.

The cops are aware of what is being done right under their noses is illegal but fear to take action because the pubs, gyms, massage parlours and discotheques are owned by big shots. Some secretly continued operating behind closed doors during the COVID-19 Lockdown.



Kyutungire Zainab, Community Activist
Kamwokya kisenyi II



Male champions Women Protection Center; ActionAid International Uganda, Nebbi District

Hiring husbands in Nebbi

Nebbi is a border district, which currently is one of those with a challenge of serving a swelling population as a result of an influx of refugees from war-torn South Sudan and DR Congo. The different nationalities and tribes come with varying forms



Akoth Angella, Project legal officer, Women Protection Center; ActionAid International Uganda, Nebbi District

of GBV issues, which the district senior probation officer, Ayierwoth Yerusa, says overwhelms the district

“Besides the usual land squabbles, wife battering and child neglect by, especial-

ly the men, the volume of cases shot up during the Covid-19 lockdown. The cultural norm here has it that women do not inherit their father’s property,” Yerusa says.

“Girls belong to the family where they get married.”

Yerusa says this situation always leaves many widows without property when relatives grab family property after the demise of their ‘son’ or ‘brother’. Several widows have lodged complaints of being denied the right to inherit family property. This leaves them homeless and destitute. As a result, many orphans end up on the streets, and sometimes as prostitutes. This leaves them exposed to drugs and sexually transmitted diseases.

Polygamy is another common practice in the area. Widows and orphans are left without a home or land.

“This is what partially renders the GBV Shelter relevant as a fallback place for the victims, who include mothers and

children under 12 years of age,” Ayiorwoth says. “We have seen them fed, dressed, accommodated, given medical care and psychosocial support before reconciling them with their perpetrators.”

The Nebbi District Vice chairperson, Geoffrey Aneco, says the district has learned a lot from the Shelter, which bridges many gaps in service delivery.

The Shelter covers the districts of Zombo, Nebbi and Pakwach. The beneficiaries comprise widows, orphans, young girls and the elderly.

“There are elderly people chased away by relatives claiming they are witches,” Aneco says. “Those with a phobia for court and police are lately reporting their relationship squabbles to CA and the LCI more often than in the past. The disowned women and children know where to go when neglected.”

Aneco says Nebbi is culturally full of polygamous marriages, which makes wars for property between/among co-wives

and siblings a common occurrence. Worse still, when it comes to education, priority is given to boys. This only leaves women as house keepers, who are not even paid for the work they do.

“They depend on men for every basic life essential,” Aneco says. “This stresses the men, especially given the prevailing high cost of living. This escalates domestic violence.”

With a small tax base, the committed local government can only provide Shs5m to run the Shelter, which registered more than 800 cases since the Covid-19-induced lockdown in March. Men are reportedly abdicating their role of providing for the family.

“We have women hiring pseudo husbands when asked to be accompanied for antenatal check-ups or registering for a given service,” Aneco reveals.

“The real husbands are busy trading, watching soccer or gambling.”

Talking about the legal service offered by the Shelter, Angela Akoth says it is common for reported cases to drag on for years, besides the survivor suffering a phobia for court. That is how the

Shelter comes to guide the victims and follow-up on the reported cases to their conclusion.

“Nebbi and Zombo still need the victim-friendly Shelter as more cases are being filed. Good enough, the district leadership has recognised the services it provides and allocated Shs5m a year of its revenue towards running the Shelter every month,” Akoth says.

“

the Shelter is a place where real life stories exist and peer to peer sharing of experiences serve as learning points, the lessons there cannot be delivered in any class or workshop

”

Akoth argues that unless the Judiciary, health service providers, the police and local leaders address issues with a gender equality perspective, there is a risk of oppressing the women. She says there is still need to sensitise the citi-

zens to value the girl-child and give her equal opportunity to go to school and inherit property.

“Even those who conceive while at school deserve a second chance,” she says. “Stigmatizing and abandoning them makes their situation worse. They need a helping hand to enable their physical and mental recovery. Some go back to school and perform better.”

Trapped in a variety of religions, tribes and backgrounds, the Nebbi community is challenged to navigate their way to a future free from GBV, and giving the girls equal opportunity with the boys. The local leaders and the law keepers are bracing to continue the fight against early pregnancies and promote family planning to enable couples have children they can support.

“Somehow, the Shelter is a place where real life stories exist and peer to peer sharing of experiences serve as learning points,” observes Grace MaditKwo. “The lessons there cannot be delivered in any class or workshop,” she argues.



GBV Survivors moving out of ActionAid shelter in Nebbi District



GBV spousal dialogue experience; Patrick Agenonga and wife Maber Kayeny Parwoth, Achora village, Nebbi Sub County in Nebbi District

Unwanted pregnancy girl gets second chance

In Golli one Robina 22 conceived and dropped out of school. Her parents Patrick Agenonga 48 felt betrayed since he had invested so much money and hoped she would get a good job and uplift the living standards of the family.

"I did fore go building a better house or buying a cow to pay the school fees for Robina," recounts," Agenonga. "But she got pregnant while at Erusi Secondary School in her first year. I saw her as a bad example to her young siblings and did not want to see her again."

It was after Agenonga and his wife Parwoth were invited for training in Nebbi by Action Aid that they decided to accept Robina back and give her a second chance. She has since enrolled back to school but the COVID-19 lockdown has stopped her from continuing school.

"Our grandchild is six years old, happy and does not know her father," says Agenonga. "We learned that there is a risk of the family suffering poverty if Robina is not guided. Our grandchild will also

end up with some unwanted pregnancy and the vicious circle will be forever."

Agenonga was equipped with a cow which has since calved and they sell the

“

the Shelter is a place where real life stories exist and peer to peer sharing of experiences serve as learning points, the lessons there cannot be delivered in any class or workshop

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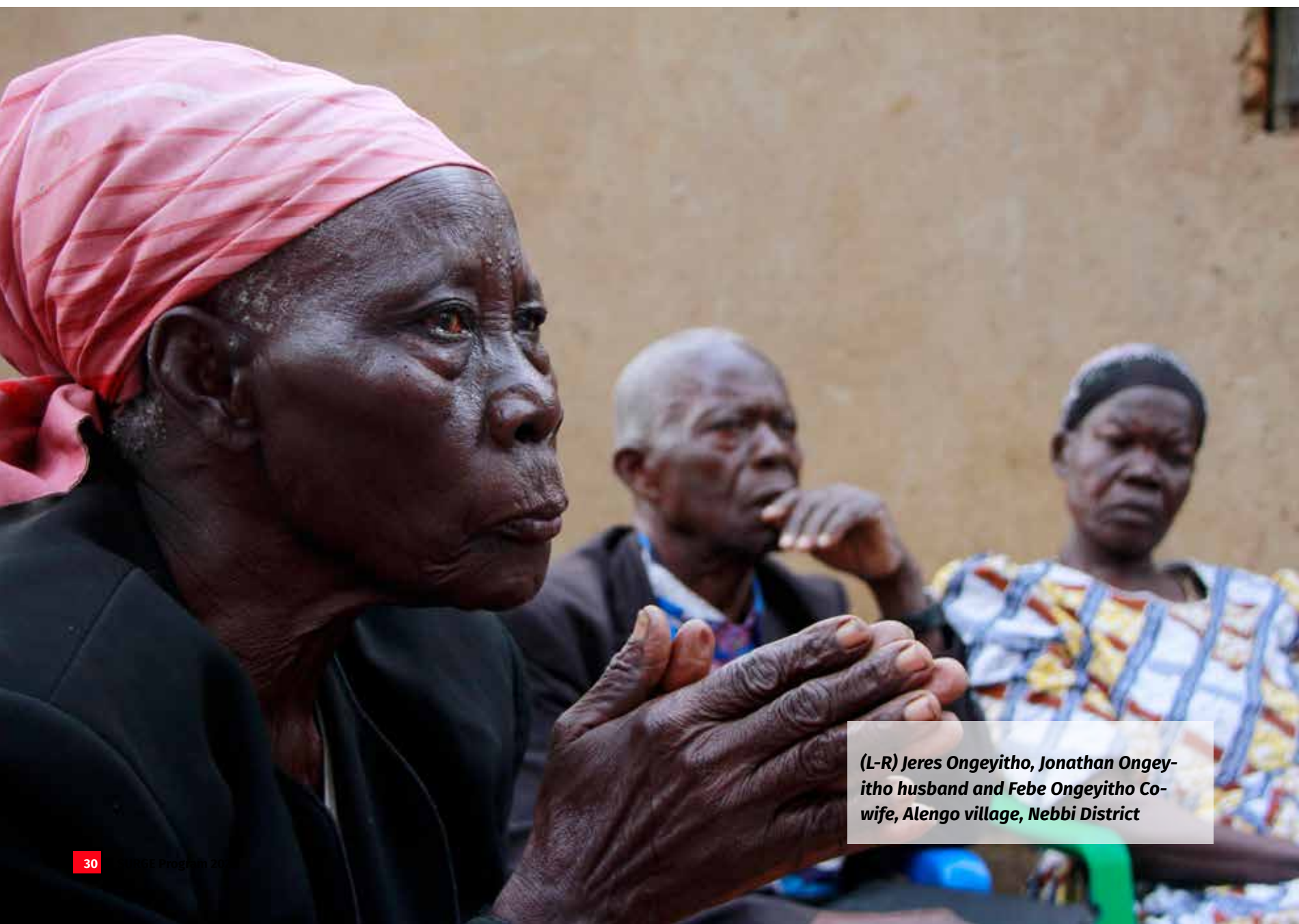
milk to the neighborhood. This supplements the income from planting other crops like sorghum, sun flower and tobacco. Parwoth says girls need family planning knowledge to be able to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

The family depends on subsistence agriculture and is now diversifying to

livestock to generate more income and improve livelihoods. The family visually looks happy playing cards in the compound, cleaning the cow's shelter and giving it water and pasture.

"The problem is this COVID-19 pandemic," confides Agenonga. "The children are missing out on education. They are prone to temptations that lead them into unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases."





(L-R) Jeres Ongeyitho, Jonathan Ongeyitho husband and Febe Ongeyitho Co-wife, Alengo village, Nebbi District

Battle for family land

Land squabble in Alengo village between Jonathan Ongeyitho 74 his first wife Jeres Ongeyitho and children. The land in question has been a point of contention between two parties. The two wives have been living in harmony for 14 years until recently when part of the two acres of land was sold and the proceeds were not shared as expected.

“My father married a second wife Febe Ongeyitho and I expected him to buy her another piece of land and build her a house there,” said the daughter Vudria Salome. “Instead he built the second wife a hut less than ten meters from our mother’s house. Her garden of vegetables and spices was encroached on and she has never had peace in her mind.”

The first wife and her seven children challenged the state of affairs by approaching The Shelter. Ongeyitho says he has owned the land since 1976 and has lived in harmony with his wife for more than 25 years.

“Poverty stricken during retirement, I

decided to sell part of the land to be able to treat my diabetic condition,” said Ongeyitho. “I know my daughters are misleading their mother to hate her co-wife. They want her to sell her portion of land I have given and use the money

between his elderly wife and her daughters on one hand and his younger wife and himself on the other. AAIU managed to reconcile them and secure a piece of land for each side of the family. Emotions were earlier on making either par-



Jerres Ongeyitho, Alengo village, Nebbi District

to service the loans they acquired from different monetary institutions. I do not want her left destitute and it is the more reason I still want her close to me.”

Ongeyitho appreciates the mediation

ty not to look eye to eye. Harsh words and accusations were exchanged but now they in agreement. The elder wife insisted that the agreements reached should be put in writing with her husband’s own hand.



Joyce Alanyo burnt with hot cooking oil during lockdown at Quoars quotas village, Kanyangoga parish, Bakeke division Gulu district.

Gulu's dawn of hope

After two decades of civil strife, archaic cultures, the effects of climate change and COVID-19, Gulu needs the services of the Shelter more than any part of the country. This is because cases reported at LCs, The Police and elders are on a steady increase. The Gulu Senior Probation Officer Jennifer Anena testifies that the facility has become part and parcel of the community since 2014.

Unfortunately, Local Government is not ready to take over the Shelters in full capacity," says Anena. "It is financially constrained besides not having the manpower to sustain the services needed."

She added that things like psychosocial support staff, legal officers, matrons, food and clothes for the victims cost a lot more than can be allocated.

"For instance there is a time the Gulu remand home failed to feed three children in custody because they lacked resources," said Anena. "The Shelter needs a lot more than food. There are judicial services, facilitating the Police and Seed

money to enable survivors get back to their community when economically empowered."

The Chairperson Dorcus Alum appreciates the life skills got from AAIU training sessions held in town. The battering of women by their husbands, in these groups, is now history.

"The land farmed is still the same but the handling of resources has since transformed," says Alum. "Members now have a saving culture in the entire family. This follows a mini training the targeted husbands of the group members."

Members now seek services of ox ploughs that cost sh40,000 for an acre instead of tractors that cost sh100,000.

The Gulu Shelter was in the news lime-light during the COVID-19 Lockdown when curfew, enforcers kicked the

steaming hot cooking oil on fire and splashed on the chest of a roadside food dealer Joyce Alanyo 31.

"It was the kind of pain words cannot describe," says Alanyo a single mother



Members of Owor Twero Women Empowerment group at Latwong village, Awach Sub County in Gulu District.

of a five year old boy. "I had no option but to go back to my bed sit residential area and swallow pain killers. When my ordeal was broadcast, the Shelter collected me and my son for custody."

Alanyo and her son got medical atten-

tion, new clothes and were accommodated at the Shelter for two months. The culprit was traced and he apologized for the cruelty he exhibited.

“While I was in Gulu referral Hospital, it was the Shelter staff by my side until I was discharged,” says Alanyo. “I and the Shelter staff feel like we are now a family. I always ask friends facing challenges in life to go there. The service is free. The doors are open.”

Asked about how the Shelter operated, Bella Eton the Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) officer says the training given to the selected people from the communities continues having a profound change in their lives. The fights between spouses have reduced and are being handled better than it was. Estranged couples have reconciled for the good of their children and families see a brighter future.

“The financial training has enabled many make informed decisions on where to invest their money, plan their future and cater for their children,” says Eton. “The life skills enrich them with a saving culture, provision of food, vegetables and sauce from the little land they own.”

Adding that making groups has enabled many able to navigate their lives through the post-civil rebellion that economically crippled entire northern Uganda. The groups have widows, orphans, GBV survivors and the economically crippled people.

“Together they will be able to boost



since GBV is known to have its roots in poverty and the dependence of women on their husbands WEE remains the solution. Diverse indulgence in livestock, crops and petty trade means if there is a crop failure, they have something to fall back on



their agricultural output and access ox ploughs to replace manual labor,” said Eton. “This will not only ease opening up new land but also reduce the cost and availability of labor. Groups are ably restoring pride and giving the populace a focus.”

Consequently, since GBV is known to

have its roots in poverty and the dependence of women on their husbands WEE remains the solution. Diverse indulgence in livestock, crops and petty trade means if there is a crop failure, they have something to fall back on.

“To have zero GBV tolerance in the community, local leaders, religious personnel, elders and politicians are being recruited to preach the gospel,” says Eton. “It is time for women to own assets by buying them if they will not inherit them.”

A Shelter Legal Officer Kevin Wanjala said they have been providing access to DNA tests where parentage is challenged besides facilitating the Police to collect evidence and investigate crimes from start to conclusion.

“The legal process is gradual and not instant,” said Wanjala. “The victims need consistent assurance of justice prevailing although their perpetrators have so much money to buy the judges. Good enough mediation often solves the child neglect cases before they are taken to court.”



Jennifer Lawil

I joined Kica Ber group of 15 members and through WEE we were equipped with skills in business management, better farming methods, planning and relating with our spouses. Life at home is now better than it were before the skilling.

The school fees are not such a big challenge as it were. We have five chicken and two pigs that we expect to multiply. I no longer under value myself but have self-esteem. I advise women out there who are laden with challenges and problems in their marital homes not to die silently but go to the Shelter where there are support mechanisms to salvage them. The sky is not the limit when it comes to how high you can fly.



Monica Apio

I am from Paromo village in Awac Sub-county where I was once resigned to a hopeless life. My husband was womanising and drinking beer every day. The children wore threadbare clothes and were stunted because of being underfed.

It was not until a friend told me to approach the Shelter for guidance. The reception I got was very warm. I was offered training in basic business management and book keeping. I was given seed money with which I started a restaurant in a trading centre. My husband reformed from his ways and built the structure. Today it generates between Shs30, 000 and Shs50,000 per day.

We are a happy family with three chil-

dren. I dream of one of them becoming a lawyer, another a doctor and the other a teacher. If God wills, we might have two more children.

Rwot Ayemu Yu Women's Group



Rwot Ayemiyo Women's Group located in Omolo district was started in 2019. Laminu Omari village where their animal traction has been appreciated by the community as the ox plough charge is sh40,000 in comparison to sh100, 000 by tractors.

"We have mastered how to handle the bulls," says the chair lady Dorcus Alum. "The demand for our service is more than the animals can handle. We intend to buy more if all goes well. Since we got basic accounts skills we manage the income and weekly saving professionally."

Besides making money the group is mediating GBV perpetrators and victims to enable them live in harmony.

"GBV reduced tremendously when our husbands recognized our contribution

to the family socially and economically," said the treasurer Ana Aceng. "We have reason to smile because the oxen plough business is the first of its kind in the area."

The women handle the animals in the gardens. It took them some time to master the art but they got it right and talk or sing to the animals kindly. They nicknamed them Actionaid. A pair has to be acquainted to each to pull the plough without going wild. From the ploughing proceeds, members get soft loans and pay back at affordable interest rates. The animals are changing human lives.

Dorcus Alum 40 has started a poultry farm individually with each bird selling at between sh15, 000-sh30, 000. Another member Joyce Akello 31 operates vegetable stall in the market and brews beer to supplement her income.

Monica Apio holding plow and Grace Lawino with stick in hand driving oxen members of Rwot Ayemiyo Women's group at Laminanami village, Taka parish, Lalogi Sub County in Omoro District



***Alum Docus, Chairperson Rwot Ayemiyo
Women's group, Laminanami village,
Taka parish, Lalogi Sub County in
Omoro District***

Gulu pace setters

Jwayo Kukukuku Me Ot Women's Group in Bucocoro village with 15 members has brought swag (style) for any occasion worth talking about. The group offers events with seats, tents and decorations and expects to provide public address systems.

According to the chairlady Rose Aciro

the group was formed in 2019 with the support of AAIU with the members being equipped with basic knowledge of accounts, marketing and managing as a way of salvaging them from the firm grips of poverty.

"Members have since got loans of sh40,000 to expand their businesses and hope

to avail every member with a goat," said Aciro. "Five have since got there's which a signal that we can get the balance."

Perpetrator of GBV like Richard Nyero who cut his wife with a panga because she declined to have sex is a member of the group and has reformed. He instead helps her with the domestic work and opening the bushy gardens for farming.

The treasurer Suzan Lakot says they are all educating their children regardless of sex or age. The LC I Patrick Oryema says the women are a ray of hope for the future of their community that is recovering from the Lord's Resistance Army civil war.

"Women more than men have the power to move mountains when they combine strength and brains," said Oryema. "I do not know where they will be in five years given the speed at which they are developing. What I see is a group of women with a vision and ambition."



Lanyero Janet, member of Jwayo kukukuku Me Ot Women's group at Gwengdiya parish, Burcoro village in Gulu district



Members of Jwayo kukukuku Me Ot Women's group at Gwengdiya parish, Burcoro village in Gulu district

Empowered Karimojong women

The Karimojong are typically a conservative community living a life where things have not changed so much from what their ancestors practiced 500 years ago. Consequently in the traditional setting, decisions that affect the tribe are made by men. Arranged marriages are still in practice and girls are seen as a source of wealth in form of dowry. It is in this closely knit community that CEDOVIP and MIFUMI are embedded to change the status quo through SASA and the Shelter services.

“CEDOVIP used Gender Based Violence (GBV) as the entry point to address bigger issues like endemic poverty, child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) that have been the way of life for centuries,” says Helen Angolere of CEDOVIP. “For instance, before our intervention women in the pilot areas never attended meetings. And if they did, they were not allowed to express their views. All they did was to listen and nod in the affirmative. Girls underwent circumci-

sion or risked never getting married or recognized in the community.”

Angolere notes that not until recently, FGM was a taboo subject to talk about. Given Community Activists (CA), this silence is slowly being broken as testimonies are told of the pain FGM victims through at a tender age of between 12-18 years of age are told.

“Now it is known that FGM makes penetration painful when having sex,” said Angolere. “The health complications suffered by circumcised women when in labor are now known. Stories of lives of mothers and babies that have been lost due to tradition are told through drama, talk shows and during funerals or Church services.”

However the MIFUMI area coordinator Dinah Adupa Lorika reveals that a lot continues to change since 2018 when the campaign began. Men now share household chore like taking the children to hospital when they fall sick. They thatch

the huts and fetch firewood, which are traditionally the duty of females in the Manyatta (traditional homestead).

“There is cooperation between government organs with MIFUMI to prevent FGM and GBV,” says Adupa. “This is besides availing victims with healing mechanism. We have received survivors from as far as war torn DR of Congo, Kenya and Kayunga.”

The detective assistant inspector of Police Johnson Omoit said the Shelter makes their work easy when investigating certain cases by transporting/accommodating the victims. This is besides enabling the writing of statements and availing medical checkup where needed.

“We have worked as partners to serve the people,” said Omoit. “It is unfortunate the funding has ended but we hope to continue working together and exploit the expertise left behind.”

A tour of neighborhoods like Camp



*Helen Angolere, programme staff CE-
DOVIP Moroto district*

Swahili, a busy slum on the outskirts of Moroto town is a revelation of LC, elders and religious leaders having their knowledge enriched with details of GBV and how they engage the citizens. Haji Akidi Mohamed who is the District Khadi says change is slow but visible in the area.

“While preaching the word of God I always mince it with respect for the other sex, I challenge men to provide food, education and social support to their family as the solution to crime and street kids which are on the increase nationally,” says Hajji Akidi. “Crimes like child abuse, rape and defilement that were seen as normal are now outlawed.”

Akidi says he is preaching to his 2700 Muslim followers, no marriage until a girl is 18 years of age and victims are asked to seek help from the Shelter or Uganda Police.

“Unfortunately the victims are stigmatized in the community where they live,” observes Hajji Akidi. “Instead the victims are blamed for having invited the criminal by wearing skimpy clothes. It is a moral decay that needs immediate attention before it gets worse. That is how

the culture of wrestling an admired girl to sexual submission was outlawed.”

LCI Richard Lokeris says violence remains the order of the day in his area of administration. Beating is still seen as a necessary disciplinary action to put derailing women back on track. This is

made worse by the dowry paid for the woman during the traditional wedding ceremony.

“As a result wives are taken as property of the husband who has a right to treat them the way they feel like,” says Lokeris. “Saying no to having sex by a woman



Tinna Segal treasurer Kitetennae women's group; cattle trade at Acholi inn village Rupa parish Rupa Sub County in Moroto district

is not accepted among the Karimojong when the man wants sex or she risks the mother of all beatings and refund of dowry for failing to deliver what she is supposed to.”

Lokeris says girls who conceive out of wedlock are still stigmatized and seen as unclean and spoilt.

“This was being addressed by the Shelter,” observes Lokeris. “There is still need for more than one Shelter in Karamoja. The existing one is overwhelmed by survivors from all over the region and from South Sudan, Mukono and DR of Congo.”

Lokeris recommends a Toll free call line for GBV victims and rapid response from Police. He also advocates for economic empowerment to free women from dependence on men financially.

“I dread the idea men have of making many children saying government is supposed to feed, educate and treat them when sick” said Lokeris. “The Karimojong love their children passionately. Let us do it like our ancestors did. Protect and provide them with food, shelter and love.”

A MIFUMI WEEofficer Ema Risa Bole

says initially they got about ten groups of women each having between ten to fifteen members. The group initiative dates as far back as 2016 when GBV was traced to poverty and dependence of women on men for their welfare.

“This time round in 2018 the chosen members were skilled in petty business management and income generation. The target beneficiaries were HIV positive women, GBV survivors, widows, girls with unwanted pregnancies and school drop outs,” said Bola. “That is when we introduced Positive Masculinity and picked some people to undergo training.”

MIFUMI works with the Local Government, Religious Leaders, The Police and others from different communities to change the people’s mindset.

“Asked to identify small businesses the 120 benefactors came up with buying and selling livestock, running retail shops, brewing Kwete (local maize brew) and Motor bike transport ventures,” adds Bola. “Today some of them are struggling but others are prospering. The good thing is that they are focused and determined to succeed.”

The men who were impressed by the saving scheme and wanted to join were requested to bring in their wives to represent them. They were told to watch the market dynamics like peak harvest seasons when the market is flooded with cheap grains, keep an eye on market prices and livestock dealers were taught symptoms of ailing animals.

According to Bola, livelihoods have not been the same in some homes. Decision making is no longer for only men but women and children are consulted. However all has not been a bed of roses as challenges were encountered in the process. Interviewing the women about their ventures was a revelation of what is on the ground.



Nankwangale Logir, 63

I am an opinion leader from Kapretuko Village in Tapac Sub County. I have learned many new things about domestic gender based violence lessons. The change in me begun with my family when I begun sharing ideas with my wife.

Today we are both opposed to early arranged marriages in which the bride has no say. We hate seeing our daughters spending the rest of their lives with husbands they never had an opportunity to select but were chosen for them. I now know that the child does not belong to an individual when born but the state. Forced under age marriages are out-lawed where parents and the suitor caught doing it to a minor risk court action. I know where to report GBV and FGM surgeons, those escorting or celebrating the occasion.



CA Elizabeth Amuge, 38

I was selected by CEDOVIP to undergo training and become a change agent (CA) in the community. By coincidence I also happen to be a survivor of GBV which makes me the best person to address the dreaded habit. The method I use is to entertain my audience with oral literature.

I tell listeners both fiction and real life stories. Going by the response, the listeners are touched and cannot help identify with some characters. I have seen listeners cry and being accused to be telling a community person's real life experience.



Alice Moru, 48

I am from Obwamake Village where I was widowed and left pregnant. Like culture has it I was inherited by the brother of the deceased. The new husband subjected me to GBV until I flew back to my parent's Manyatta.

After reporting the case to the Shelter he was summoned and we were mediated. We were reconciled and he no longer beats me. Instead he brings me stuff and beads as symbols of affection. He stopped consuming beer which would make him very violent.



Lokwi Natalia, 40

I am a catechist who has seen my flock change for the better since they got seed money to buy ten cows and 15 goats. Three of the cows calved. Unfortunately came COVID-19 in March, we could not reach buyers during the Lockdown.

Some of the two cows that were in calf gave birth. But we are not seating back idle as each is having an independent venture to keep meeting their individual needs at home. However, all is well save for the cattle theft and the prevalence of animal diseases that keep occurring. We are determined to continue operating even after DFID stops funding the project. We meet once a week.



Lugel Lucia, 30

Before joining the group my brother kept beating me and forcing me to get married. He blamed for him not getting married because the dowry would be used for him paying for a bride. He feared aging to a ripe old age of 28 years without a wife.

It was not until I became a CA did the beating stop. When MIFUMI placed a sign post near our manyatta residents there was fear that I was a government spy halting Underage marriages, GBV and FGM. The community feared being arrested by the Police once informed.



Members of Etiyata Kaapei Opoloutu women's group dance at Loputiput village, Nadunget Sub County in Moroto district

Nadunget cereal banking

Village savings and loan (VSL) groups comprising of women buying grain at low price during the harvest season and sell it when the drought commences. In store is sorghum, dried cassava and maize. The secretary of Etiyata Women Saving Group (EWSG) Martha Nakut says they have 15 members.

“We saw a business opportunity where we buy when the prices are still low and sell after they shoot up,” says Nakut. “Given the prevailing effects of climate change, food security remains alien to Karamoja. Therefore, we are assured of market for the stock.”

Adding that, COVID-19 left them trapped with their stock and unable to restock. As if that was not enough, there was a cholera outbreak that led to a halt of brewing and consumption of Kwete. This implies continued payment of rent when there is no turn over. Worse still when it rains the leaking roof leaves the stock soaked.

Besides economic emancipation, the

chair lady Ikela Abra ESWG says the trainings were delivered with messages of de-campaigning GBV and FGM.

“Traditionally, in a Manyata (Karamojong



We saw a business opportunity where we buy when the prices are still low and sell after they shoot up. Given the prevailing effects of climate change, food security remains alien to Karamoja. Therefore, we are assured of market for the stock.



homesteads) a granary is where women store dry grains. With time they have proven small, vulnerable to pest attacks which destroy the food. The stock is often depleted during the dry season, exposing families to severe food shortages,” says Abra. “EWSG is targeting this

period of scarcity, between May and July, when accessing food is challenging and costly. The prices almost double.”

After selling, the profit is shared, loaned or ploughed back in the mother business empire. The welfare of group members is given first priority, with the option of borrowing food from the cereal banks and paying back in kind in the subsequent harvest season.

Better still, families are able to lend money, to buy missing essential commodities. One Kwete brewer Regina Lok-erisis one of the beneficiaries from the cereal banks. She borrowed sorghum valued at sh50, 000. After brewing Kwete she bagged sh100, 000. This is twice the invested money. After harvest her own sorghum she paid back the loaned grain.

According to the MIFUMI WEE officer Emmanuel Risa Bola, the group is assured a market and a profit. At the end of the year, members share the profits. Some of them decide to invest in individual ventures.



Members of Oruchokinos women's group at Nadunget village, Nakapeli-men parish, Nadunget Sub County in Moroto district



Multiple Investors: Oruchokinos Women Saving Group

The group has been in existence since 2018 and the profits made from trading in agricultural produce have been utilized to respond to urgent requirements like burial of loved ones, treat sick family members and start individual ventures. Regina Lomongin speaking on behalf of the group says where one is hard up financially the group helps.

“Among the Karimojong is a saying that when a family member dies, do not feed mourners with food in the granary,” says Lomomgin. “Or you risk endangering even the few family members. A loss in our group is everybody’s concern.”

Consequently when there are threats or opportunities in the market, the group meets once a week to update each other about the latest. Instead of sending vul-

nerable girls to hawk charcoal in town, the men are doing it.

One thing the group celebrates is taming their husbands who were alcoholics and/or GBV perpetrators. They have since transformed and do some household chores instead of lying under tree shades to gossip all day long.

Regina Lomongin member of Oruchokinos women's group at Loputiput village Nadunget Sub County in Moroto district

From retail to supermarket: Kitogongoi Women's Group

Based in Acholi Inn Rupa division Kitogongoi Women's Group is prospering under the leadership of Betty Ariokot the chairlady. The choice of a retail shop was as a result of having a dense population without a corner shop stocked with basic homestead essential commodities like: sugar, salt, soft drinks and soap.

"Business has been good so far and the profit margin is good," says Ariokot. "The only problem is there is now a stiff competition for customers as more shops are being opened up. They engage us in a price war and customer care service."

Asked about ambitions, Ariokot dreams of the group saving enough money to construct its own supermarket as Moroto is destined to become a city.

"Transporting stock from Camp Swahili to Acholi Inn cost the group a lot of money," laments Ariokot. The more reason we are saving sh3.2m to buy our own motor bike to minimize costs. When free it will ferry passengers."



Margret Layuge secretary Kitogongoi women's group Acholi inn village Rupa parish Rupa Sub County in Moroto district

Katakwi waves off old ways

Katakwi is appreciating the change brought about by community activists and the services offered by the Shelter. Traditional practices like inheriting of wives of the deceased are no more. The refund of dowry upon separation is no longer a compulsory thing to do as it was between 50-100 years ago.

“Through trainings facilitated by AAIU the chosen participants have been equipped with life skills and knowledge about human rights,” said the Shelter Psychosocial officer Angiro Sarah. “The message is being driven home strongly by mobile drama clubs that take theater to the audience for free.”

The audience become part of the actors when they ask questions about the storyline, why a certain character did what they did and is it a story generated from occurrences in their village.

“People have come forward saying they admire a family portrayed on stage and want to know how they can live it in real life,” said Angiro. “Others confess they

saw themselves on stage battering the spouse or hurling insults at the children.”

The Male Champions idea is to pick changed agents in the community who serve as relationship counselors. They



Through trainings facilitated by AAIU the chosen participants have been equipped with life skills and knowledge about human right. The message is being driven home strongly by mobile drama clubs that take theater to the audience for free



exude masculine positive behavior that is aimed at. It involves being caring, considerate, kind and loving.”

That way the society power dynamics are being changed in Katakwi. Some men no longer have hard feelings fetching water

for domestic use, cooking food or taking a sick child to hospital for treatment.

Mzee Agiro John 72 the head of IworopomlgaraGiri clan. At his age he thought he had learned and mastered all there was in life. It was in a AAIU workshop that it dawned on him that had he got less children they would have had a better life than the 12 he had.

“Today I advise the youth to have the number of children that they can educate, feed and dress,” says Agiro. “Times are gone when a man’s social status was determined by the number of wives he has married, how big the kraal is and the number of children fathered.”

Agiro says times have changed where the quality of children one has not the number matter. Adding that, he sees people with one cow harvesting more than 30 liters of milk from a cow while those with ten get the same amount.

“Quality and not quantity is what counts in the new world order.”



*Clan leaders at Amorungora village,
Palam Sub County in Katakwi district*



Mzee Agiro John 72 the head of Iworopom Igara Giri clan

I thought I had learned and mastered all there was in life. It was in an AAIU workshop that it dawned on him that had if I got less children they would have had a better life than the 12. Today I advise the youth to have the number of children that they can educate, feed and dress.

Times are gone when a man's social status was determined by the number of wives he has married, how big the kraal is and the number of children fathered. What counts is the quality of children one has not the number matter. When it comes to cows, the amount of beef and milk harvested makes economic sense.



Elder Silas Engole 78

Another elder Silas Engole 78 counts on his fingers the benefits from SASA teachings until he exhausts the fingers.

"I know the negative effects of GBV," starts Engole. "Then there are all the advantages when it comes to making decisions. There are perspectives that women are endowed with which the men lack. So their consultation is positive because it benefits the entire family."

Engole says he has colleagues who invest money got in a given season's crop harvest in marrying second wives when the first wife was demanding for a permanent iron sheet roofed house to replace the grass thatched hut.



Juliet Amongin 37

Juliet Amongin 37 thinks SASA is the right way forward if communities are to improve their livelihoods. After trainings she learned about the untapped power embedded in her and waiting to be put to good use.

"I question the time and money wasted by the youth on gambling, beer and drugs," says Amongin. "If the same was spent on digging –the world would be a better place to live in with plenty of food and sell to buy what is missing in the home."



Charles Angois

Charles Angois was a habitual spouse beater because he believed it was the way to keep his wives well behaved and respecting him. But to his surprise the entire family feared and dreaded his presence at home.

“When I was home the children vanished to play in the neighbor’s home,” recounts Angois. “It was after trainings about gender balance that I realized that women also have brains. At first I thought I had to think for them.”



Frances Adilu 50

Frances Adilu 50 has nine children aged between 14 – 30 and knows the weight on his shoulders.

“Education is too expensive,” starts Adilu. “All the children need equal opportunities be them girls or boys. That is why we have female members of parliament and ministers. I am now a community preacher of gender balance. I meet people in church, market or any gathering and deliver the message. It is working wonders.”



Agnes Acen 34

Agnes Acen 34 with her four children was abandoned by her husband who left no forwarding address. Challenges in her home came in a convoy. The children kept on falling sick. They had no clothes and beddings or food to feed on.

“Challenged I dug gardens in exchange for maize flour and picked akeyo(vegetable) to make sauce,” recounts Acen. “It was tough when the children asked me where there Dad has gone. I contemplated putting poison in our food so that the entire family perishes but thought twice.”

Today Acen is rearing goats, sheep and poultry and is the village CA who counsels warring couples.



Joyce Akoda 42 leads the Ikera Woko Isureta clan

Joyce Akoda 42 leads the IkeraWokol-sureta clan is the first woman to rise to such a position in the entire tribe. She was picked after an entire generation of successors passed on and continues to ask her subjects to keep the pride of the tribe.

“A child was for the entire village not for individual homes,” narrates Akoda. “It is time for a rebirth of having good for all. We should respect everybody regardless of their sex, size, religion or nationality. Our fore father only drunk ajon (local brew) to celebrate a good harvest, the birth of a new born or marriage – today it is consumed like water.”



Joseph Akoda 36 a catechist at St Stephen Church

Joseph Akoda 36 a catechist at St Stephen Church uses the pulpit to preach against GBV telling the congregation to treasure what God made out of their rib.

“I urge them to sit on a round table and resolve any misunderstanding in their relationship,” says Akoda. “But people now gossip about their private matters on social media. They ashame the people they promised undying love in public. Social media is the latest form of GBV where intimate nude photographs go viral.”



CA Moses Imalingat

CA Moses Imalingat says men now value the opinion of their wives and help with household chores when need be. He says there is more to a relation than paying or not paying dowry.

“What counts is either party’s happiness in the relationship,” says Imalingant. “I know couples who are happier with friends but stressed when with their spouses. This should not be the case if you respect and carry eachother in high esteem.”



LCI Samuel Agiro

LCI Samuel Agiro recounts how before his exposure to SASA handling GBV cases was challenging.

“All I tell warring couples is to quit beer if they cannot control themselves, share business and personal ideas,” said Agiro. “I urge couples to talk about their insecurity feeling in a relationship instead of wasting time spying on their spouse. Fights have occurred because of messages posted on mobile phones. Social media is another GBV cause.”



Father Simon Opio of Christ Disciples Church

Father Simon Opio of Christ Disciples Church says the AAIU training has enriched his knowledge when it comes to relationships related stresses and strains.

“In a home one party ought not to be superior or inferior,” says Opio. “Instead either party should serve as a compliment of the other to deliver one whole good product – a home. To avoid GBV all folks have to do is live their lives to the Biblical guidance.”



Cultural leader George Ocan

Cultural leader George Ocan observes that in the past before diseases like HIV erupted it was normal in Teso to inherit a widow to continue reproducing and swelling numbers.

“This is worse than suicide today,” says Ocan. “Besides there being no treatment for HIV, women know their rights and will not be inherited when they have laws protecting them. There is a toll free number if one is being subjected to forced marriage, GBV or inheritance. On top of that there is a Family issues desk in every Police Station.”

Kumi for shelter

Satisfied with the benefits of Shelter service Kumi LC V Christine Apolot says the local government has been preparing to inherit responsibility by availing sh10m per year. This is in addition to proving a reception center in the administration block.

“The house serving as the Shelter was also offered by the Local Government but renovated, fenced, furnished and equipped by AAIU,” said Apolot. “During the pilot period of the Shelter, it has come to our knowledge that there are different types of GBV suffered by men and women alike. Now we know the worst time for women in Kumi is during the harvest season.”

Explaining that while opening up the farm, planting, weeding and drying the harvest the men are very friendly. But come selling and they get mood swings. They ask their wives to go back where they came from.

“What follows after selling the produce is marrying a second wife,” narrates Apo-

lot. “Soon the party is over and the new wife is challenged to do what her predecessor did. Another wife follows – it is a vicious circle of poverty and GBV.”

“This is the reason the district appreciates the Seed money methods which kick starts petty business that can help the women be economically independent,” said Apolot. “It has worked wonders where it was tried. There are thousands of women out there dying silently while they are trapped in similar circumstances.”

Talking about the challenges women in Kumi suffer Apolot said property grabbing is paramount as the widow and orphans are left destitute.

“This makes The Shelter useful because it is a one stop center for victims as it offers them: shelter, food, peace of mind. legal and psychosocial services to the victims,” said Apolot. “The challenge in our hands is footing the related bills. The district can only afford to contribute sh10m per month which is a drop of wa-

ter in the ocean.”

The Community Development Office Alex Okirigi through experience he has learned how important the Shelter and Surge programs are for Kumi district.

“Our challenge upon taking over is to keep the service as efficient as has been,” said Okirigi. “The district has identified two staff who are supposed to be retained in addition to sh10m and the house where the Shelter is located.”

The Community Development Officer Samuel Osiro revealed how the existing structure was challenged when GBV cases shot up during the COVID-19 Lock-down effected in March.

“Because victims were not able to travel to the Shelter CA, LC and other traditional leaders opened reception desks of victims in their communities. They received on average 5-10 cases per day.

“Since The Shelter was established the culture of victims keeping quiet is no more when their rights are violated,” said Osiro. “Reports are filed at the Po-

lice Station, CA has some solved before being mentioned in court and the Probation Office has an exodus of complaints.”

The Shelter Psychosocial Officer Angela Akello concurs COVID-19 took the district by surprise but the foot soldiers, CAs managed to ably bridge the gap. They mediated warring couples, reconciled some and referred those above them to courts of law.

“Generally GBV numbers reported have dropped in Kumi thanks to the talk shows aired on radio and mobile drama that follows the audience where they are,” says Akello. “Cultures that have been accepted for more than 500 years are being questioned.”

ActionAid GBV shelter kumi district



**Mwajuma Achola, Asinge village, Kumi
sub county Kumi district**

Mwajuma's new hope

Mwajuma Achola, 29, a resident of Asinge Parish got married and was abandoned after six months. This happened after being beaten every night and called all sorts of names. She started eating at a kind neighbor's home. Soon the grass thatched hut which was her home was leaking.

While in hospital with a sick child Achola got a message from Joseph Elianunot to return home. Achola had no choice but to report her eviction to the LC. A village CA heard about our condition and intervened immediately.

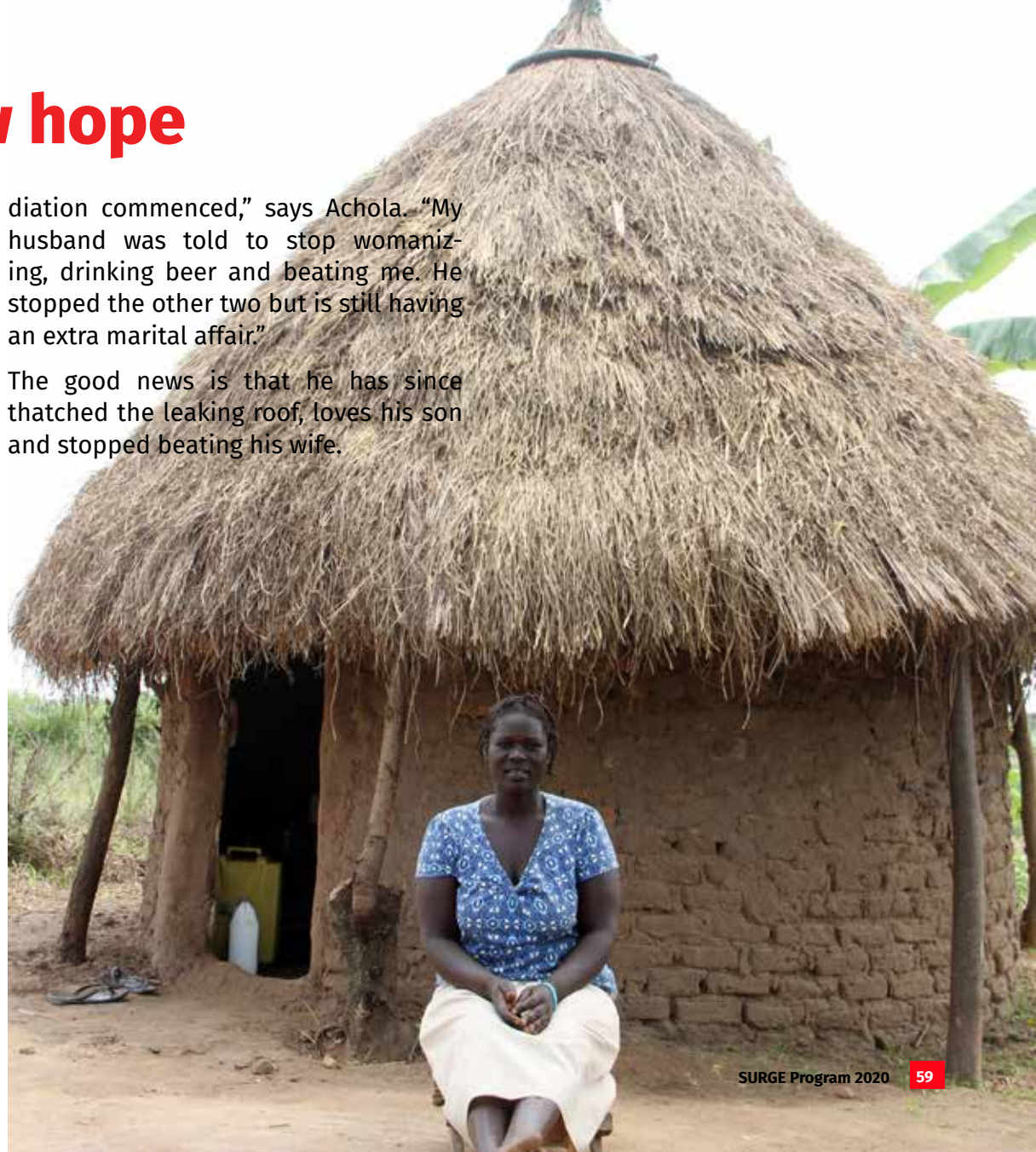
"I had no choice but pack up my dress and sandals to go back to my parent's home," narrates Achola. "At one time our six months old son fell sick. His temperature was very high. Afraid he was dying I could not stop tears running down my cheeks."

Like fate would have it life went on for a month, two and on the sixth things changed.

"Both of us were summoned and me-

diation commenced," says Achola. "My husband was told to stop womanizing, drinking beer and beating me. He stopped the other two but is still having an extra marital affair."

The good news is that he has since thatched the leaking roof, loves his son and stopped beating his wife.



Kumi canes for love

The Gender Based Violence case involving Opio Besweri 39 and his wife Florence Ikiring 33 hit headlines and became talk of the village paths when he passed a “by-law” not allowing her to bathe in his absence. The giant of a man stands above six feet in height. He commands a giraffe’s view as he walks balancing on the balls of his feet like a rugby player. His grip when shaking hands is firm.

“It took me by surprise to learn that when I went to fetch water Besweri always stalked me,” narrates Ikiring. “I used to be hit by stones in the buttocks. When I checked for the stone, I got a clay marble under my feet. A look at the trees and bushes revealed nobody.”

Ikiringi suspected it might be some jinni (evil spirit) following her every move. She suspected a grandmother who loved her so much before she passed on in 2018. She never went for burial.

“Rest in peace” Ikiringi mumbled as she balanced the pot on her head without touching it.

“Amucalat(my wife) did I not tell you to stop going to the well with other women?” asked Besweri in a deep baritone.

“It is because I am always hit by stones from nowhere!” answered Ikiringi. “That is why I went with our son.”

Shortly after the interrogation, while cleaning the house Ikiring got more than thirty similar bullets (dry clay marbles and a catapult. She suspected her husband to be the one raining them on her backside.

To crown the GBV Besweri came out of the bathroom with a basin half full of used tea brown water. He raised it and splashed the dirty water on his wife who was preparing vegetable sauce for dinner. This was followed with a volley of insults.

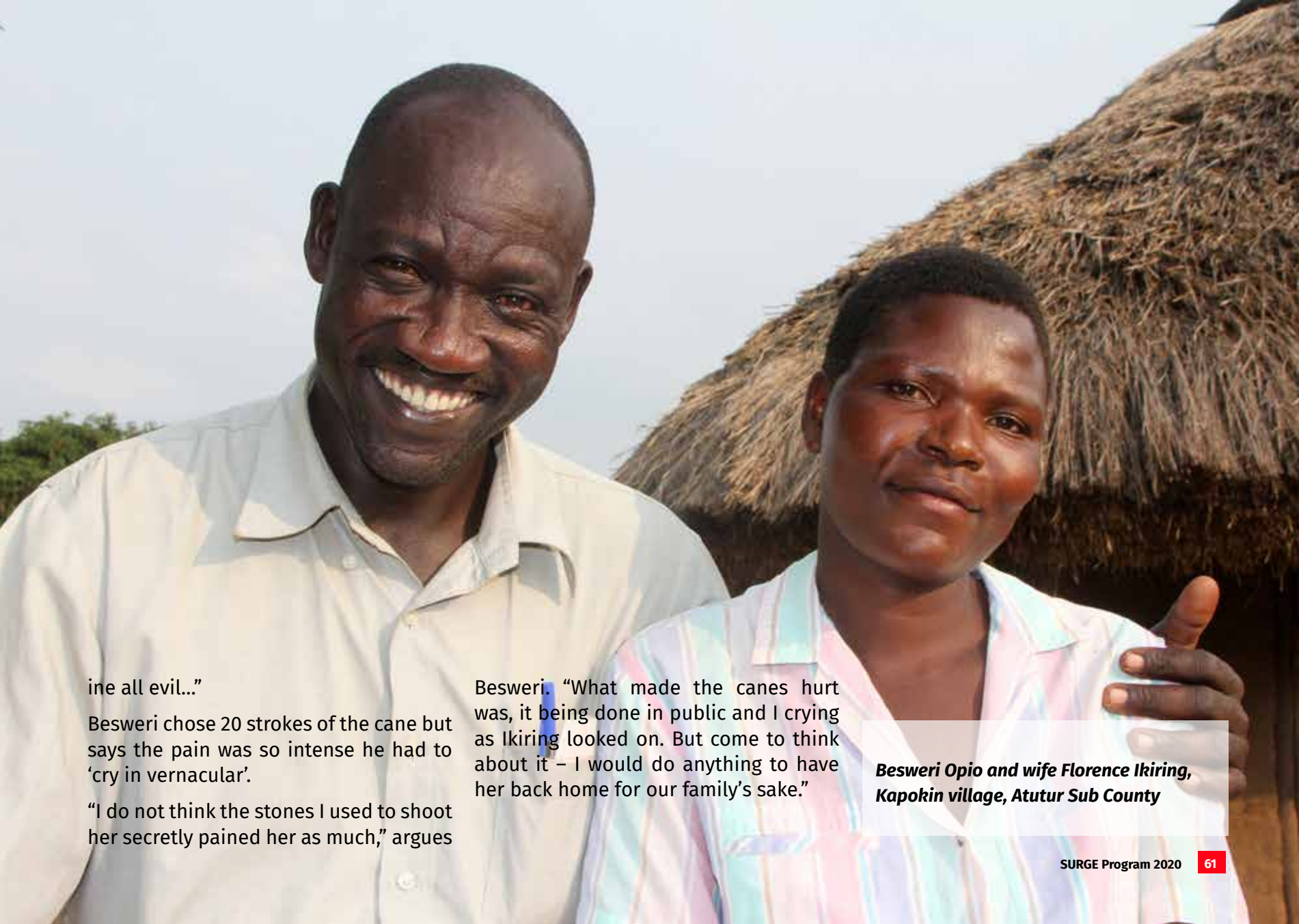
Ikiring reported her ordeal to the LC Martin Opio and notified him about leaving her marital home. To cut the long story short, after a month Besweri went dragging himself on his knees for her to return.

“Amucalat come and look after our children,” begged Besweri. “The children need your love, care and attention. Being a Bodaboda rider I come back home to find them hungry, dirty sleeping hungry.”

Ikiring said she would not return unless Besweri promised to change and pay a fine of his choice for the GBV she had gone through. The elders were summoned and he was challenged to choose the punishment befitting the torture he had put his wife through.

Before lying down, Besweri revealed to the clansmen gathered under a tree shade that Ikiring had cheated on him when he suffered a male dysfunction three months after their marriage. She was dating a certain man who made her pregnant.

“I accepted the son as my own and named him after my father,” confided Besweri. “Shortly after, she gave birth to twins who look like me. This made me love Ikiring to bits. Every moment she spends away from me makes me imag-



ine all evil...”

Besweri chose 20 strokes of the cane but says the pain was so intense he had to ‘cry in vernacular’.

“I do not think the stones I used to shoot her secretly pained her as much,” argues

Besweri. “What made the canes hurt was, it being done in public and I crying as Ikiring looked on. But come to think about it – I would do anything to have her back home for our family’s sake.”

***Besweri Opio and wife Florence Ikiring,
Kapokin village, Atutur Sub County***



CA David Atingiro

We tell our community, especially the women, to stop making shopping list for their husbands to provide but help generate some income. The men should also allow their wives to meet other people and join groups that can enable them become productive.

Misunderstandings should be resolved through dialogue and the children need a better education for them to compete favorably in the job mart.



CA Debora Acom

It is time for men to share household chores. It not human for the woman to fetch water, cook, clean the house and go gardening in 24 hours while the men go watching soccer or gambling. The onus is on both parents to educate their children and bring them up well.



CA dramatist Julius Ejangu

I appreciate what AAIU is doing in our community through drama, training and the Shelter. Our mothers have a shoulder to cry on, a roof to shelter them and access to capital to enable make income of their own. This way, women have become assets not worth losing in a home.



LCI David Opolot

As an LC the work load of GBV related cases has reduced. Either people solve their misunderstands at home or the CA are mediating them. Good enough most men know the benefits of a happy marriage and the bad that comes out of a bitter one.



Martin Opio, LCI chairperson Kapokin Village

My home has become a mini Shelter. A child recently died while I kept a survivor after she ran away from her husband who was raining blows on her. It was very cold I feel the child died from exposure to the cold for so many hour as the mother fled home without a sheet to cover it. I had to counsel the man and reconciled the couple. But I am challenged reaching distant areas because I do not have a bicycle or motor cycle. Feeding an extra mouth is another challenge when the cost of living is too high.

FGM knives in Kween caves

T rue to the old adage, old habits die hard; the outlawed Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) practiced among the Sabiny has gone underground following threats to have the surgeons and celebrants imprisoned if got doing it. The candidates have resorted to doing it when giving birth, in the caves under the cover of darkness or in Kenya.

District Planner Robert Mangusho says the relevance of a Shelter has never been as urgent as it is today when 96 percent of the reported Gender Based Violence is women with only four percent being men.

“This has an effect on academic performance in schools which needs urgent response,” stressed Mangusho. “This is the reason Local Government contributed sh60m out of sh600m used to construct a shelter which will handle an average of 500 cases per year.”

The construction is in advanced stages of completion. It has a spacious and private reception area. The hostel section

will have toys, television and beddings to cater for survivors under the care of matrons.

“The achievements of the Shelter are not easy to quantify,” said Mangusho. “But women are able to talk openly about their plight today. Although the district is financially crippled, AAIU has been at hand to inject in resources to enable us deliver services.”

There are saving groups for women in Bukwa, Kween and Kapchorwa that target their empowerment economically. The district focal point person Rebecca Kayinza lamented that at this point in time, women are still subservient to the men.

“Owning property by women is so alien here,” lamented Kayinza. “FGM is still being done secretly while in labor. Others do it under the cover of darkness in the caves. Worse still the stigma in society is still in place.”

Besides GBV and FGM there are many more issues that need to be addressed

like having more Shelters serving a fall-back position when rejected by their communities for championing the fight for respect of their human rights. Landslides, the COVID-19 Pandemic, effects of climate change, death and any bad omen are blamed on those women who have not been cut. “Human nature is paying the price of annoying the gods by having uncircumcised women in their midst”.

“FGM has reduced but there are pressured Sabiny who will do anything to have it done and be free in the community,” points out the Kween CEDOVIP program officer Aisha Chamutai. “One is stigmatized by family members, in-laws and friends. They are called girls, not allowed to access food from the granary or enter a kraal.”

“Contrary to expectations, most of the tribesmen who insist circumcision must be done do not know how it looks physically,” stressed Chamutai. “This is because local belief has it that seeing the private parts of a woman is taboo and can result in hazards like landslides,



Stella Chebet, Moyok village, Moyok parish, Moyok Sub County in Kween district

climate change and crop failure.”

Consequently the dangers associated with FGM remain unknown to the tribesmen who agitate for it.

“The number of girls nabbed going for FGM has dropped compared to those nabbed in the caves with their surgeons in 2018,” observed Chamutai. “The FGM practice is evidently diminishing. Confessions are told by Sabiny men who have married uncut spouses and produced babies.”

Another CEDOVIP officer Benjamin Mark Sabila attributes the fall in numbers to the SASA methodology that is extricating women from being economically dependent on men.

“We initially tackled GBV while preparing for FGM,” revealed Sabila. “This change will be gradual because it has been around for more than 500 years. One just cannot wish it away. As per the SASA methodology we are starting by informing the activists about the risks involved.”

After being told the act narrows the passage of the private parts causing difficulty when playing sex or giving birth,

attitudes are fast changing and many are denouncing it. Determined to contain all forms of GBV the local government invested sh60m in the construction of a Shelter. The balance was footed by AAIU with support from DFID.

Opinion leader in Moyok village Edward Chewanjar Araptai say the mobile drama skits are triggering the populace to think twice before taking archaic cultures for granted.

“It is ridiculous for one to be denied social belonging because of not cutting their private parts. Times have changed,” asserts Araptai. “I do not see why we subject our people to body harming practices. We ought to add value.”

“The Shelter here has been serving victims from neighboring countries besides those from Buganda and Ankole,” said the piloted project officer Deborah Lwanga. “We have started engaging elders, youths and children about no FGM as the new normal.”

Adding that, the campaign is being done on talk shows, using public address systems and going through religious and tribal leaders. Lwanga said for a start,

12 groups have been given seed money and have showed phenomenal success in their business ventures.



**Benjamin Mark Sabila, programme officer
CEDOVIP, Kween district**

Women value added

Mengya Women Saving Group of 17 members was formed in 2018 but has transformed homes in such a short time. According to the treasurer Alice Chemusto their children are no longer sent back home for defaulting on school fees.

“We have planted onions, potatoes and tomatoes,” says Chemutso. “The market is not a problem as long as there is no Lockdown on vehicles ferrying agricultural produce. Unfortunately the prices have lately dropped.”

Alice Chemusto, secretary Mengya Joint Women's group mengya village, Benet Sub County

Great expectation from farming

Nyalil Women's Group consists of 17 members with one and a half acres of onions, one of potatoes after bagging sh7m from 70 bags previously. The secretary AnnetCherop says they have bought eight calves with the proceeds given to the first benefactors. They have also built four residential houses for themselves and accumulated sh2m in weekly savings.

"Plans are underway to purchase land for the group instead of renting as has been," says the chairlady Juliet Chelimo. "We are trying to minimize costs and utilize every coin sparingly. This is the only

way to benefit from agriculture which is the life blood of our area."

The members contribute sh2,000 per week and embark on opening up the land jointly. The same happens when it comes to weeding and harvesting. A tour of their projects was a revelation of blossoming maize, potatoes, wheat and onions.

"We have the potential to buy a vehicle that will deliver our harvest to the consumer and eliminate the services of middlemen who get amorphous profits," said Chelimo.





Members of Nyalil women's group walk through their onion garden in Benet Sub County, Kween district

'Scientific' FGM

FGM victim Rose Cherop 65

I think unlike most children I had reason to cry when I was born in 1956. At the age of six I was fully orphaned. Good enough my grades in class were good. I dreamed of becoming a lawyer but my brother started pushing me for FGM in 1970.

I kept on giving lame excuses until I run out of them and fled to an Aunt. Like culture would have it I soon out lived my welcome. The question of circumcision was again raised as eligible men were asking for my hand in marriage on condition of being circumcised. I rejected many elderly suitors.

I eventually got a man of my choice. He loved me for what I was and unlike typical Sabiny men he never treasured the FGM. But little did I know that there was a bigger obstacle in our relationship. His mother discovered that I was not cut yet and wept as if someone big in the clan had died. She asked her son to get another woman who will produce legitimate children.

"Are you blind?" she cried. "Do you know the gods can wipe your entire family for bringing such an abomination in their midst?"



I lived in a community that gossiped about me being the cause of malaria, bad harvest in the garden, falling coffee prices, landslides and fatal lightening. On top of that I was not allowed to attend parties or serve Komek a popular local brew. I gave birth to health children but that did not stop the stigma I suf-

fered. It reached a point when I could not live in such isolation. I requested for a scientific circumcision. Today I am an ardent campaigner against FGM be-

cause I suffered the rejection. This is the reason I appreciate the Shelter services that can salvage people whose rights are being abused. All the five girls I delivered were not circumcised as a passage into womanhood. Better still they were all married to changed Sabiny men.



***Rose Cherop, Community Activist Kabe-
lyo village, Moyok parish, Moyok Sub
County in Kween district***

Mubende's melting pot of cultures

Mubende, one of the largest districts in the country is a melting pot of cultures given a variety of tribes found there. This leaves it challenged by archaic cultural practices that oppress and violate the human rights of not only children but women as well. During the handover of the GBV Shelter to Mubende Local Government, the district LCV Chairperson, Francis Kibuka Amooti was not surprised to be told that a total of 2, 813 gender based violence cases have been handled since 2018 when the Shelter was established.

"It is not surprising that a majority of the cases are in the category of family property ownership, marital disputes, domestic violence and child maintenance," said Kibuka in his keynote address. "This is because of the diversity of tribes and cultures living here. One thing they have in common is oppressing the women – Batooro, Baganda, Bagisu, Sabiny, Luo or Iteso."

Adding that they all have archaic cultures that are seen as normal but going by the exposure and changing trends

they violate the human rights of the victims who happen to be women and girls.

"Good enough SURGE has availed the lucky ones legal services, psychosocial support and prevented GBV by economically empowering some," said Kibuka. "Mubende is not the same again but a lot is still desired by GBV survivors out there as what has been touched is a



Amoti Kibuka, LC5 Mubende district

small fraction."

A random tour of the beneficiaries was a revelation of giant strides taken after training and being availed seed money through the SURGE women economic

empowerment component. Livelihoods and incomes of the beneficiaries have dramatically transformed for the better. Permanent houses have been built, petty businesses have been started and food is more available than it were before.

"It is obvious Mubende still needs the shelter services but the Local Government with a low tax base remains challenged to foot the bills of legal service providers, facilitating the Police to investigate reported cases and sustaining the psychosocial professionals in place," said Kibuka. "Worse still we have not got the resources to continue paying sh1m for rent of the current shelter which has been managed by Action Aid. The reception building availed by the Local Government is in disrepair."

Kibuka lamented that trapped in the COVID-19 Lockdown effected in March 2020 and the volume of GBV has consistently short up lately. The consumption of liquor has followed suit.

The Principal Women in Development



Happy bee keepers, members of Gayaza friends group, kyejunga village, Bageza Sub County Mubende district.

Officer at the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Idi Mayanja Mubarak assured the worry district leaders that the situation is under control and the fight against GBV is strongly entrenched in government plans and programs.

“Plans are in place to sustain the pilot Shelters and many more are going to be established across the country,” said Mubarak. “Shelters are relevant and we badly still need them to attain the government anti GBV and poverty alleviation goals.

Adding that since government was signatory to a memorandum of understanding where it declared to take over the services of the Shelter, it is going to continue operating them given the human resource and expertise left on the ground.

“Shelters are part and parcel of the National Development Plan III together with development of ICT centers,” stressed Mubarak. “What we ought to be discussing now is managing the transition and get the districts prepared. I hope the selling of Form 3 at Police Stations to the victims does not resume.”

The District Community Development Officer Maria Ndagire said so far so good because the victims/survivors know where to go when harmed. Adding that they will continue updating the database as the Shelter has been doing in order to plan better in future.

On a teleconference the AAIU Country representative Xavier Ejoyi hailed government for providing an enabling atmosphere for the services to be delivered to victims of GBV. Asserting that there will be continuity given the foot soldiers left on ground.

“There are community activists, drama groups, elders and opinion leaders who are determined to continue driving the anti GBV message home through different mediums,” stressed Ejoyi. “In addition to them are converted and informed personnel in the: judiciary, Uganda Police and Ministry of Health officials. They are equipped to halt GBV and sexual exploitation of children’.

The Shelter Manager/Legal Officer Esther Kisembo says it is time the people got to know that dignity is a human right and the Shelter has been providing a safe space for GBV survivors before tak-

ing them back to their communities.

“The common cases here are child neglect by bodaboda and taxi drivers who entice their victims with small gifts for sex,” said Kisembo. “As we celebrate Women’s Day annually, we urge men to be responsible. Girls are urged to be achievers because they can do everything that a man can do.”

The chairperson NGO monitoring committee Mary Nankabirwa challenged the central government to consult local government before making uninformed decisions that do not address issues on the ground.

“That is why the Shelter in our district is rented instead of constructing one,” observed Nankabirwa. “There is need for us to have our priorities right next time.”

A random tour of women’s saving groups was a revelation of their impact on livelihoods, achievements and challenges being faced. Those in saving groups have individual ventures and general ones. They are no longer making shopping lists but generate income and contribute to their family livelihoods.



***L-R –Esther Kisembo programme officer,
Catherine Tusime Psychosocial officer
and Nantingo Faith project legal train-
ee, GBV shelter hand over, Mubende
district.***

United against challenges

Located in Mugungulu village Zone B, Bageza Sub County is Mugungulu Twegate Women's Saving Group chaired by Joyce Nabulime. The membership comprises of: widows, school drop outs, GBV survivors and women with disabilities. The group was initially given basic accounts training after which they formed the group and had it registered.

"When asked to identify an income generating activity in 2018," recounts Nabulime with nostalgia. "Given the seed capital we opted for events managements. We were given tents and chairs; every occasion in the village was hiring our seats and tents. We had great expectations during the presidential campaigns in 2021."

That is when government announced a COVID-19 Lockdown and the group business ground to a halt.

"Our chairs and tents have been gathering dust," lamented Nabulime. "We need the intervention of the Almighty to get

back in business since all the capital is tied down. Those of us who had ventured in subsistence farming have not been spared by the effects of Climate Change as our gardens are drying."

The secretary of the saving group Annet Nawera, 38, says joining the group was her exposure to a better life and discovery of the power embedded in her. Today she does not make a shopping list for her husband to provide but generates income and shares footing bills.

"I know how to make myself look better, plant vegetables and spices for delicious meals," says Nawera. "This puts smiles on the faces of our five children who we would like to study and get good jobs. The group has saved us from Loan Sharks and Monetary Institutions whose policies are beyond our reach."

Juliet Namulime, 19, is the youngest member of the group whose dream is to study nursing. She says the training has enabled her to be focused, ambitious and confident to achieve her goals while

living in a rural area.

"I come from a family of nine children," says Namulime. "It is apparent my father is overwhelmed by the high cost of living as the price of food crops dropped during the Lockdown. A banana that used to cost sh10, 000 at the farm gate dropped to sh3, 000 as a tray of eggs dropped from shs 9, 000 to shs 3,000."

Given a loan of sh100, 000 Namulime with her acquired accounts knowledge, saving culture and ability to generate income has bought goats that are heavy with kids. Once she gets six goats her aim is to convert them into a cow.

"I will be the sole supplier of milk," says ambitious Namulime. "I have also started a vegetable and spices garden. We buy these things from elsewhere yet we have the soil to produce them here. I intend to go commercial,"



**Twegate women's group, Bageza Sub
County Mubende district**

Agree to develop

Tussekimu Women Development Group in Kinoni village, Kijojo-lo parish, Bageza Sub County, was started in 2018 with 15 members of whom two were men. But for fear of them dominating the women they were politely requested to have their wives take their places.

“Our main engagement has been planting maize,” said Suzan Nabukera, the chairperson. “This one was contested with investing the Seed capital in live-stock and poultry. A majority preferred maize which is more familiar a crop.”

Availed a grinding machine valued at sh5m by AAIU the group is pregnant with great expectations to start adding value to their harvest. They want to get a brand and pack a state of the art maize flour for ‘posho’ and porridge.

Unfortunately their dreams have hit a dead end as a result of climate change. The rains are so erratic lately. They fall so infrequently. Worse still they at times fall too much and flood the gardens. COVID-19 has made movement impossi-

ble for cross border trade. This has made prices come tumbling so low.

Harriet Nabakoza was widowed and as she was weighed down catering for her nine children as a single mother, she was invited to join the group. She started saving and soon got a loan to buy a goat while buying coffee berries from

farmers.

“I wish I had more capital from our saving group in future,” confides Nabakoza. “I am overwhelmed by the supply of coffee from suppliers. If I had more cash I would buy more and increase my profit margin. There are opportunities, waiting to be exploited, right under my nose.”



Nabukere Susan, chairperson Tuse Kimu women's development group Kinoni village, Bageza Sub County, Mubende district



**Tuse Kimu women's development group
at Kinoni village, Bageza Sub County,
Mubende district**

The sky is the limit

Kalagala Women Farmer's Group has a total of 15 members since it was formed in 2018 with each of them saving sh5, 000 per week. Among this group is a GBV survivor Justin Nampera after having a rocky relationship with her husband who was abandoned responsibility.

"My husband preferred a polygamous life when and yet the three children we already had overwhelming his capacity to provide," narrates Nampera. "I sought for odd jobs on people's gardens to cater for the family singly. It was at this time when I was lured to join the Kalagala group."

This became a turning point in Nampera's life. Soon they were availed book keeping skills, record keeping and watching out for existing business opportunities.

"I started saving sh5, 000 per week. Soon we were harvesting our first crop of maize which sold and each of us got sh50, 000 with which I bought ten iron sheets," narrates Nampera while stock-

ing the firewood stove. "The next share of the profits made I bought bricks. That is how I managed to put up a business unit with two shops."

Today the single mother is happy with her three children seen as her insurance

in old age. They can afford to have two meals per day and are happy. The children are in primary school well dressed and healthy.



Justine Nampera house, secretary Kalagala women farmers group, Kalagala village Bageza sub county Mubende district



Members of Kalagala women farmers group, Kalagala village, Bageza sub county, Mubende district

Life goes on


Marita Nakalega 34 is a disabled lady whose lover dropped her like red hot piece of charcoal when she told him about her pregnancy. Today the child is 20 and has never seen him. The saving group has become her savior.

“The Kalagala Women’s group has since restored my pride. I have the power to do anything although I am disabled,” says Nakalega. “When it is a rainy season the group teams up and helps me open up farm land, sow grains, harvest and sell. I dream of putting up a house of my own in the near future.”


Sauda Nabukera 25 was initially a professional housewife after her husband refused her to work because he feared she would fall in love with other men. The insecure husband was summoned by the group chairperson who talked to him and explained what the group is doing. He understood their purpose after which he allowed her to join the saving group.

“Today he is very supportive and mys-

teriously lends a helping hand in the family business. He has no problem going to wholesale shops to buy stock for our retail business,” boasts Nabukera. Our love life has never been better than it is.”“Looking back this shop kicked off with my first loan, of sh30, 000, from the group.

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a bright yellow polo shirt and a patterned skirt, stands outdoors. She is holding a long wooden staff or handle. The background is a blurred natural setting with green foliage and hills.

Marita Nakalega, disabled, member of Kalagala women farmers group, Kalagala village Bageza sub county Mubende district

A close-up portrait of a woman with dark skin, wearing a black and white patterned headscarf. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a building with a sign that is partially legible as 'Kalagala'.


***Suda Nabukera, member Kalagala
women farmers group, Kalagala village,
Bageza sub county, Mubende district***

Modern model men

AbubakarNsubuga 50

I am struggling to change the mindset of 500 fellow taxi drivers whose lifestyle is randy. Having multiple partners is the envy among our peers and GBV is seen as a way of putting spouses back on track.

But I am preaching the sharing of household chores for a change. I have no problem taking a child to hospital if my wife is doing something else. I am struggling to change the attitude among us. It is not instant but gradual where in Buganda tradition a woman's role is to manage the kitchen and bedroom affairs leaving the rest to the man.



Abubakar Nsubuga, Model man; taxi driver, Lwabagabo LC1, Mubende district



John Kasumba

The good things about gender balance out weigh the bad ones because everyone is happy and productive. In their wisdom our ancestors coined a proverb, behind every successful man is a woman. That is why I urge men I meet, to listen to views of their wives and help them. Try it out if you want enormous joy in life with your family. It is time to think out of archaic ways. ”



Marcel Epudu

Where I come from in Teso, a woman is tested if she is wife material by giving her grains to physically grind on a stone, brew ajono (millet beer) and make merry with all family members. Traditionally widows had no choice but, to be inherited by their brother in law if death occurred. I see life different and as a model man, I urge people in my circles to avoid gender based violence of any kind.



Collins Muhangi

I grew up in a polygamous family and I saw how my father’s harem rivaled each other to humiliation. I dread the idea of subjecting my fiancée and children to such a life. I have known women who believe that if not beaten by a spouse, they are not loved.

I have encouraged my fiancée to work hard, develop her career and make something of herself. I am a changed Munyoro. In the past men were supreme and their spouses had no say when it came to decision making.

Mbarara's tears of joy

Elevated to city status the Local Government is challenged to prevent the ever swelling GBV at the miniature Shelter that dates back to 2018 when MIFUMI commenced implementing SASA (Start, Awareness, Support And Action) as a prevention method in Nyakayojo Division. Addressing the link between poverty and violence against women groups in Rwariire and Biharwe villages have jointly invested in pigger-

ies and poultry.

"The members have understood they have the energy and brains to change the status quo which favors men in the community," said Edna Kusasira. "With better purchasing power the members have registered positive results economically and socially."

To involve the community in change there were selected religious leaders,

elders and community members - 24 members to volunteer as Community Activists (CA.) The volunteers own the project and view at it as their own as they carry out public performances that are identified as activism by six local leaders and ten drama groups with five members attracting the audience to cards and more visual aids.



Tukundane Women's group- Events- Buremba 1 village, Kakika Sub County, Mbarara district.



***Kabucebebe Ahabwe women's group
– piggery, Biharwe division Mbarara
district***



Dicken Rwaliire Mujulizi, 52, LCI

I joined MIFUMI at a ripe old age of 50 and a father of eight children. At my old age I am still learning new things that I thought I knew. There is something I took for granted but have now mastered and switched my perspective and views. This implies to how women are taken traditionally. It has made me able to resolve domestic misunderstandings without favoring the male party as it were.



Sylvia Nahwera, religious leader

My new interpretation after being part of the MIFUMI select group trained my religious knowledge is seen through the SASA lens. I preach to my sheep the word of God alongside the power in humans that can make life more enjoyable for all. Much as a man heads the home he ought to respect the partner whom God created from his rib.

On the other hand I urge women too to exploit their potential to make ends meet. I have learned to use photographs or illustrations to drive such message home. Poverty is as a result of people not exploiting the existing opportunities right by their own eyes."



Evelyn Akankwasa, 35

I appreciate the work being done to change fortunes and state of affairs in most of our homes. I still recall how my husband used to be a heavy consumer of liquor 24/7. It made him violent towards his peers and most of all the family.

When the children heard his voice, out the door, they would vanish with lightening speed. The house would become as silent as a cemetery in his presence. It took my reporting the horrible state of affairs to a CA for mediation from the Shelter.

Today we are a happy family that talks, prays and plans together. The children are going to school and we plan the future together.



CA George Bankandema, 27

I appreciate being picked to participate in the training because my life has never been the same again. Ever since then I have been mobilizing people to be educated about GBV suffered by many women in our society.

I have since discovered the power in me and I use it positively. I now know the different types of GBV out there and how it is manifested under the guise of control mechanisms. I work with LCs, opinion leaders, health workers and the police to help victims. This network was built by MIFUMI.

I am a common guest for talk shows on the local FM radio station and I contribute my opinions in Orumuri which is a local weekly tabloid with a wide circulation.



CA Barbra Nyamwiza, 34

I want my freedom to express my views after discovering my “obushoborozi” (power.) I advise women never to consider their male partners as meal tickets or ATM dispensing money all the time.


In a home, either party ought to contribute to the economic and social welfare of the family. Both parties should learn to be flexible and accommodative of varying views.

Time is ripe for change

Caroline Abilat AAIU coordinator of women/child protection centers being run by the SURGE program says in the past some people viewed beating of wives as an expression of affection but after sensitization the public is getting informed it is a violation of human rights and negatively affects the victims.

“Even after the end of the SURGE program the perception will stay in place with a section of people in the community seeing GBV criminal. Better still both the perpetrator and victim now know the consequences and response respectively. The options in place being the Probation Office, The Police or the Shelter,” says Abilat. “The function of these local structures proved very relevant during the COVID-19 Lockdown has the prevalence shot.”

Abilat says initially the mobilization and sensitization of women got a back-

A portrait of Caroline Abilat, a woman with short, dark, curly hair, smiling. She is wearing a yellow and green patterned top. The background is slightly blurred, showing some papers or posters.

Caroline Abilat, Coordinator for Women Protection Centers ActionAid International Uganda (AAIU)

lash from men who were angered the attention they were getting. This attitude changed when the men were also brought on board by having male champions in the community. This has proved that peer to peer communication is more acceptable between men.

“It has been effective in Kween, Mubende and Kumi offering guidance to struggling couples,” says Abilat. “The Male Champions will continue doing a commendable job. Already there are changed men who now respect the views of their spouse, support their economic ventures and care for the children.”

She says the men are proud to be part of successful economic empowerment ventures carried out by their women.

“Such attitudes will continue long after the SURGE program ends. Today there are community members who are able to report when GBV occurs to them or their neighbors,” notes Abilat. “This will continue among the youths, religious leaders, elders and opinion leaders.”

“There are also Women Economic Empowerment projects will continue bringing women together and provide a foun-

dation to fall back on,” said Abilat. “This will shape conversations with men to be supportive and not sabotage women’s enterprises. After being brought on board, the move has worked wonders. Many men got out of their comfort zones and help with house chores or take sick children for treatment to hospital. The changed men now use their power pos-



In the past some people viewed beating of wives as an expression of affection but after sensitization the public is getting informed it is a violation of human rights and negatively affects the victims



itively to support instead of sabotaging women activities.”

“The enterprises managed by women are prospering in livestock trade, crop agriculture and events management,” sums up Abilat. “All the local governments where the Shelter was piloted have embraced and appreciated the services provided. Most of the piloted districts

intend to continue enabling the victims access legal aid, shelter when needs and psychosocial support.”

Adding that, this has been evident by budgeting between sh10m –sh20m per year from their small tax base to help foot the Shelter operation bills. Others have constructed or provided reception and shelter space for the purpose.

Many a survivor has seen their lives transform for the better through economic empowerment programs in place. Besides developing a saving culture, they now have alternative sources of income as security against inevitable eventualities like floods, droughts and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Generally there is a consciousness about traditional negative practices like GBV, FGM and widow inheritance by relatives.

“In a nut shell we now know that social norm change does not happen overnight but is a gradual process,” says Abilat. “The other achievement being the local structures already is in the community and will continue to reach the target people.”

Trays of eggs change lives

Katojo United Women's group Poultry has a chairlady Turyatunga Ampurire who says the group harvests nine trays of eggs per day fetching sh10,000 each. The market for their eggs was affected slightly by COVID-19 when consumption dropped and sent the prices lower by more than 50 percent.

"But we are ready to brave all the odds to reach our goal of each of us having as many as the 400 birds that we own jointly," revealed Ampurire. "This business venture has propelled us from nowhere economically to somewhere on the rungs of business."

The members are not solely dependent on the poultry as they individually bake chapati, operate retail shops, run vegetable stalls in the markets and operate restaurants. On a personal note Ampurire said in the beginning her husband had mixed feeling about her engaging in a business venture.

"But on learning they were adding value to me by mastering basic accounts, cus-

tommer care and agriculture knowledge which would indirectly benefit the home he embraced it," recounted Ampurire. "He does not mind preparing his bed and breakfast when I am home or away for training or some other business."

“

This business venture has propelled us from nowhere economically to somewhere on the rungs of business

”

In the beginning, the poultry venture was not all smooth as they initially lost 30 chicks before they mastered handling them efficiently. The COVID-18 Lockdown crowned their business hardships as their clients cancelled orders. Storage of the eggs was a challenge and the chicken feed shot up in price.

The group's secretary Agnes Nabukenya appreciates the change in their lives and

says there are many women in the village who envy them and request to join but they were taught to admit numbers they can control.

"The on lookers say there is some form of magic in our group because all the members have peaceful relationships with their spouse," said Nabukenya. "They believe we have a Senga (relation counselor) who gives us tips on relating. But economic empowerment is the magic."

The treasurer Ephrance Nakanwagi says before creation of their group there was nothing to write home about them. But in a time of less than two years and they see the sky as the limit when it comes to how high they want to soar.

"Empowered to a degree level, we want to educate our children, avail them-homes with solar power and build decent homes to host them when they graduate or bring home spouses for Okuhingira (cultural wedding.)



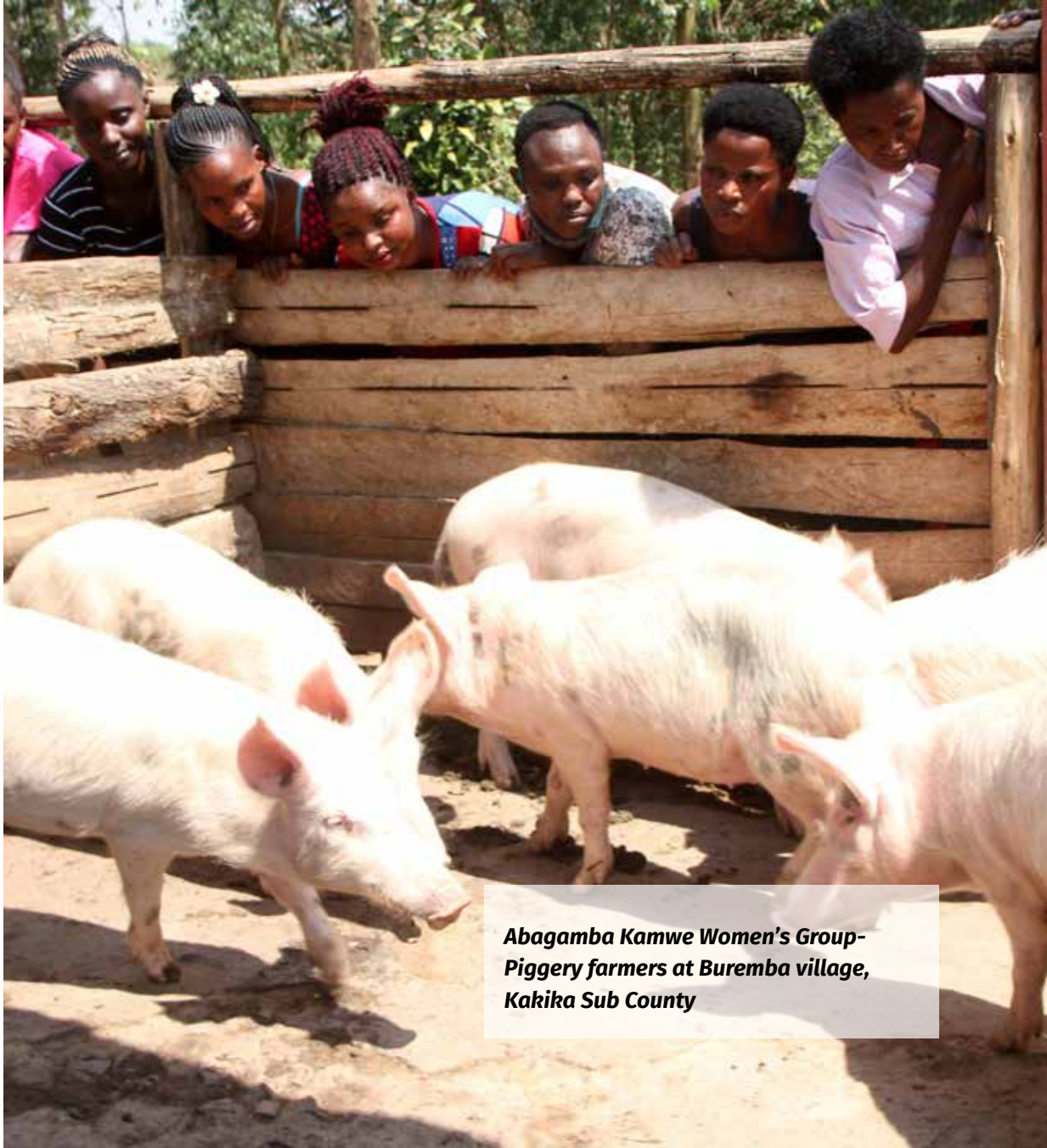
Katojo United women's group, chicken farming carry eggs for sale at Katojo Nyabuhama village, Biharwe division Mbarara district

Pigs for cash

Bagamba Kamwe Women's saving group, in Buremba village in Kakika Sub County translates to having a Common Say. They have more sows than their male counterparts as the management prefers selling piglets than rearing them to maturity. This makes economic sense because they cannot control their birth rates which would overwhelm their capacity.

"The group started with 12 members but three dropped out given their religious affiliations," says the chairperson Sarah Nshemerwere. "Today they have multiplied to 18 as two of them died. We have plans to avail each member a piglet to go solo in rearing after mastering the ropes here. Already we have added three pigs from the seed collection"

The secretary Justine Teshobya observes that it seems much as the hygiene of the animals and their habitat is good they eat twice a day. The maize harvest last year was processed into flour for the feed.



***Abagamba Kamwe Women's Group-
Piggery farmers at Buremba village,
Kakika Sub County***

Events handlers of the village

Tukundane Women's Group members were the apple of many a Biharwe resident. They are brain teasers to on lookers. Their view is if you do something that keeps you happy then stick on it for forever. The chairlady Allen Wamboka says the passion they have for delivering services has them involved in cleaning their chairs, mounting the tents and removing them.

"That is how we raised sh1.6m which we divided and started individual ventures before the COVID-19 Lockdown left us struggling to get business," said Wamboka. "The trainings we had have given me confidence. I am contesting for the position of women's Member of Parliament."

The operations have taken a lot of creativity and personal involvement to save so much. For instance, instead of renting storage the group kept the seats and tents in their individual homes.

"I know what the ordinary woman in my village goes through to get food on the table or a roof above her head,"

says Wamboka. "Having met all walks of women at the grass roots – I guess I will be the solution to their plight using the SASA methodology."



**Alen Wamboka, General Secretary
Tukundane Women's group- Events-
Buremba 1 village, Kakika Sub County,
Mbarara district**



Miria Nyereba

Miria Nyereba got her Seed money from MIFUMI and started selling beans. The weekly trainings in basic accounts, markets and curiosity for opportunities in existence exposed her more information. That is when it dawned on her that the GBV she suffered in her marriage was wrong.

“I reported the frequent beating, insults and economic denial to the Shelter. My husband was invited for mediation,” recalls Nyereba. “There after he was a different man. We shared household chores, the violence halted and the family was ever so happy. “Today if she encounters another victim of GBV, Nyereba knows where to direct her for help as long as the Shelter exists.



Beatrice Bwasisi

Beatrice Bwasisi learned about the services of MIFUMI when her husband chased her out of the home and he married another woman. She left behind more than ten acres of land and rented a bed/sit unit down town Mbarara. Feeding was a challenge because she had no land to cultivate her own food as she used to do.

“It was during this period when a stranger got me stranded at The Police station trying to file my case when she directed me to MIFUMI,” recounts Bwasisi. “Once at the Shelter I got accommodation for longer than I was supposed to. The reception was something out of this real world, they made me feel at home and open up like I was narrating my story to

someone who knew me.” Efforts to mediate and counsel her husband to reconcile hit a dead end. The claim for a portion of the property for her and the six children was filed in court. The phobia she had for courts was no more as a legal officer did the talking of jargons and paper work required.

“I never paid a shilling for the service but celebrate getting back five acres of land which I sold and managed to build a house where I stay with my four grandchildren and a tenant,” says Bwasisi. “I will never forget the job done to my life by MIFUMI. Today I am a member of the saving group and continue reaping the Shelter fruits. What more can one ask for.”

AAIU Country director Xavier Ejoyi in a question and answer interview shares his views about the success and challenges of the Support to Uganda's Response to Gender Equality (SURGE) program as it ends. This is in addition to articulating what they have learned and the way forward beneficiaries who feel abandoned before they get firm on their feet.

Q. What is the impact of this program on GBV?

A. SURGE has been tested for the last five years. It has been an eye opener in the effort to strengthen gender equality across the country. AAIU has been a catalyst of sorts to address deep seated big issues. Policy documents have been gathering dust on the shelves. But this program has changed policies and norms that have not been talked about. We deepened intervention by working with Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), Makerere University School of Women and Gender Studies on how to plan, budget and address gender issues. We were elated when Parliament and MoFPED challenged ministries to address gender issues. That has sent ripples across communities and ministries to react and cease being complacent. Having good laws in place is not enough.

There is hope for survivors who now have access to legal aid, accommodation and

more. There are people on the ground that serve as deterrent to GBV perpetrators. There are communities that are enlightened about GBV not being a sign of devotion. In addition there is hope for the victims from the village level to the national level.

We have been urging government to capitalize on training staff about gender and have a budget to foot required bills incurred in addressing pressing issues like enlightening the populace about GBV. People are now freer to talk about FGM and other practices than they were before. There is hope for a dispossessed widow in Katakwi, a defiled girl in Nebbi or an FGM victim in Kween – we put a face to the malpractice. We addressed the perpetrators as well.

Q. What has been the response among the people?

A. People now know that GBV is not a sign of love but has negative effects on the victims. They openly talk about the different forms and how to avoid them.

AAIU is not stopping impacting the people with SURGE. This fight is in the DNA of our organization. This is now a deterrent towards perpetrators. We are reflecting on what is next and the response. Through internal reflection we are taking stock of benefits from partnership before we plot a way forward. We want implementation of laws not leaving them in the book for impression.

Q. The SURGE program funding by UKAID through DFID is ending, what is the way forward?

A. Unfortunately GBV in our midst is far from being over. Good enough we appreciate the inroads made so far but it is apparent AAIU transcends SURGE. We are ready to continue engaging government, districts, NGO, and traditional leaders to continue the crusade as we celebrate these achievements. Good enough we also plan a way forward as GBV has surged because of COVID-19.

We also noted that GBV occurs beyond the 13 districts focused on by the SURGE

program. The question what do we draw from the challenges encountered. Through internal reflections we are going to engage with players at a different level to proceed. We appreciate local governments that have ploughed resources against the cause, offered structures and staff. The successful women's groups should continue networking and support each other. We are at that stage before engaging at a different level.

The good news is that the foundation is firm enough to hold against the winds blowing. We are not ready to rest until GBV is wiped out. The network of agitators includes: policy makers, the judiciary, the Uganda Police, health officers – we are still on the ground.

Q. What has AAIU learned from the/ SURGE program?

A. We have strengthened gender equality ably through a variety of methods but continue to learn more options in place waiting to be used to get to the desired end. Through talk shows about GBV ripples are sent down the spines of policy makers and conservative citizens who pretend to have changed.

The program is proud to have been in-

strumental in giving the GBV survivors hope in lives of survivors who had surrendered. This is after the shelter has become a one stop center where the victims access psychosocial support, accommodation, health care, legal services and had grievances redressed. The program has put a face to these strange practices that include: domestic violence, FGM and rape that were taboo to be talked about in public. The other lesson is the upsurge of GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic as evidence that the load is still enormous for the services available. That is significantly an achievement.

Q. What are you leaving behind?

A. Forged partnerships between government organs, religious leaders, elders, community activists and others who are capable to continue with the struggle ably. The women groups engaged in planting potatoes, onions, and in cereal banking and livestock trade continue generating funds. The women are role models and support each other when need be. Permanent houses have been built; couples have been reconciled and are living happily with their children. There are male champions spread

across the country. CSEC, FGM and GBV are openly discussed on talk shows, in the market places and public transport. There are police officers, the judiciary and those in the medical circles are part of the anti-GBV crimes team.

Q. What worked well?

A. Empowerment of women economically, the shelter services, CA and drama groups have made GBV an agenda in the communities they live in. Traditional leaders, the religious leaders, politicians, elders and youth are all on board in the fight against this malady. These are in addition to Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, the Judiciary, MGLSD and Equal Opportunities Commission.

Sexual violence is no longer tolerated. The 13 shelters are eye openers that every district deserves one. This was proved during the COVID-19 pandemic when victims walked more than 60km to the shelter when there were no vehicles moving during the lockdown. The shelters had to keep victims for three days but we found ourselves bending the laws as cases drag on in Court and investigations take a longer time. How

A portrait of a man with dark skin and short, dark hair, smiling slightly. He is wearing a white shirt with a grey, textured collar. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

***Xavier Ejoyi Country Director ActionAid
International Uganda (AAIU)***

do you send a victim back to the home of a perpetrator? The community is enlightened about GBV, FGM and what to do if there is a victim in the community. The LCs know the limits of the cases they can handle and those that need either medical attention or Police action. Victims were given hope for another life. Our staff is commended for a job they have done well. They worked at awkward hours to save lives.

Q. Did you encounter any challenges during the implementation?

A. In the beginning men were scared of women getting economically empowered. They had to be brought on board. They have proved supportive. Some reformed husbands share household chores, ferry goods to the market and appreciate living in a happy home. There are politicians who are double faced and say different things when talking to conservative voters and others when in parliament. Protocol is another stumbling block when we want things done as soon as possible.

Q. What is the future of Shelters, CA and Drama groups after UKAID/DFID stop funding?

A. SURGE has enabled AAIU to discover different ways of preventing or addressing GBV and FGM. They now have human faces and real life stories to prove. It has broadened our knowledge and widened our network.

The other lesson being that the battle ahead requires more funds than those DFID has injected in the five year program if the entire country is to be served effectively. Government needs to continue the crusade against oppressing women and girls if the country is to develop economically as proved by the small income generating groups with minimal capital.

What the women need are security and basic knowledge to manage business to improve the livelihood of an entire family or community. They need security assurance. Most of these community structures like 'Sengas', CA and mobile theaters are voluntary. They are committed to seeing their communities free from GBV and having better livelihoods and incomes. The future for them is as

wide as the eye can see. And if they want to get there nothing can stop them.

Q. What is the way forward?

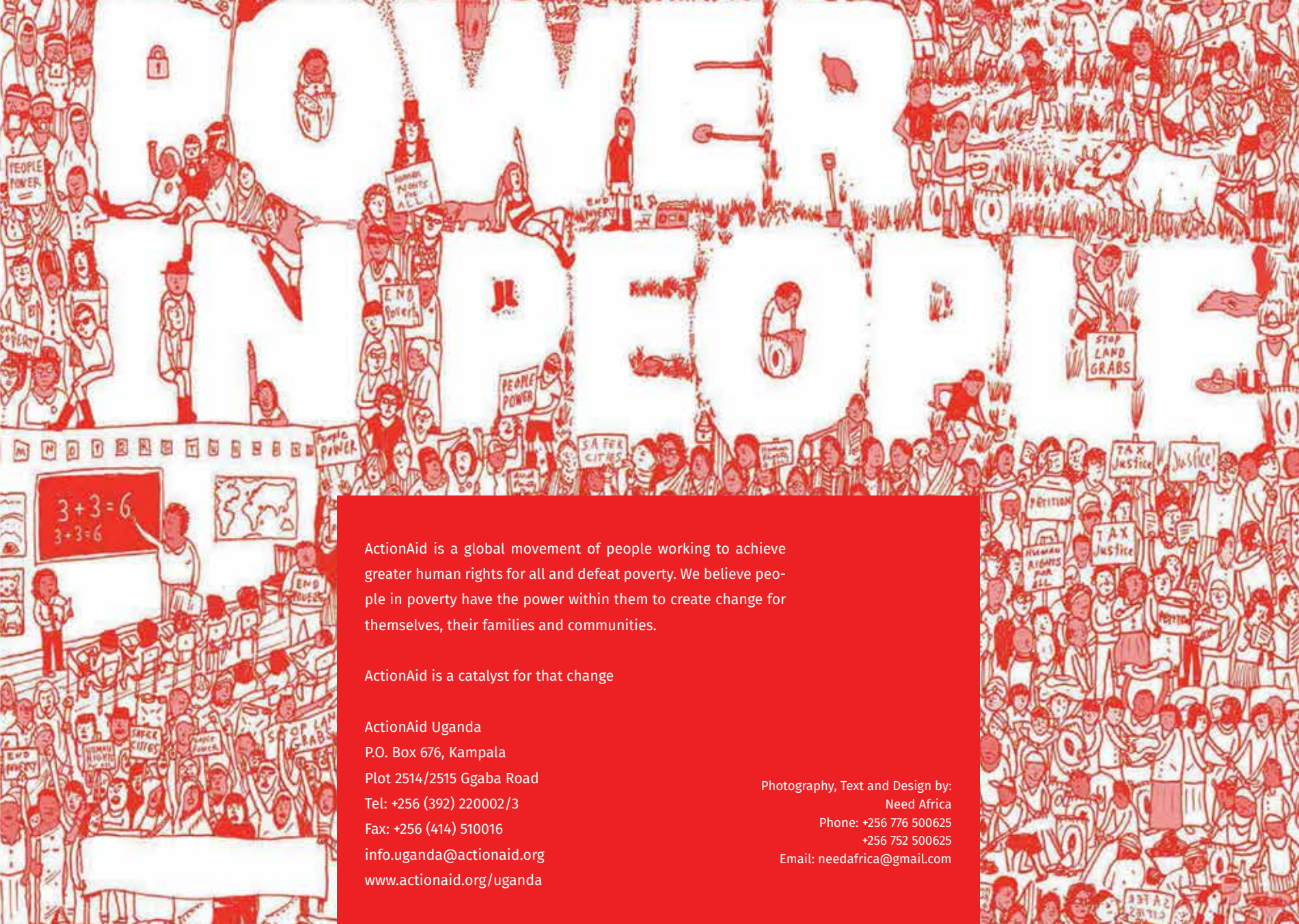
A. To continue providing the survivors hope where we can. The survivors need it to forge a way forward. Continue enlightening communities about GBV. Tell them about the pain FGM survivors or a defiled child goes through. Put a face to this narrative and make the community react positively. The prevention methodology is now ingrained in the AAIU mode of operation where we have mastered the art of inspiring survivors to use their power. The men are challenged to use theirs positively.

Q. What have you got to say to districts asking for more time?

A. Every program has a beginning and close. AAIU remains not a project but has the potential to continue fighting GBV and FGM. The trick is to exploit the means in your reach before we can lend a helping hand. But get started before ministries, NGO, CBO and others come on board. Rest assured we stay with you in this endeavor.

A group of women, members of a branch women's group, are shown in a rural setting, displaying their Irish potato harvest. The woman in the foreground is smiling and holding a large bunch of potatoes. She is wearing a yellow lace top, a blue and white patterned shawl, and a colorful headwrap. In the background, three other women are visible, also wearing traditional attire, standing in a field with hills in the distance.

Members of Branch women's group display Irish potatoes harvest at tarak upper village, Kitewoi Sub County in Kween district



ActionAid is a global movement of people working to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities.

ActionAid is a catalyst for that change

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