



Voice in Uganda

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER



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INTRODUCTION

Voice is an innovative grant facility that supports the most marginalized and discriminated people in ten countries in Africa and Asia. It aims to amplify and connect the unheard voices with a principle of leaving no one behind. In Uganda, Voice is currently supporting various rights holders' groups facing extreme marginalization through 32 grantees under the different categories;

- Empowerment grant
- Influencing grant
- Innovate and Learn
- Sudden opportunity grants

Background to the Voice Annual Newsletter

Since August 2018, Voice through Oxfam Uganda brought on board Linking and Learning Facilitators to support the linking and learning component of the Voice program working closely with grantees. Voice linking and learning is a set of activities and platforms that bring grantees together to share and learn from each other.

The L&L Facilitators have since then been working closely with Voice grantees in advancing use of innovative approaches to linking and learning that not only amplify voices of rightsholders but also build competences of the different grantees involved to support delivery of high-quality interventions.



In order to ensure that the activities implemented in the last one year are documented and disseminated for Voice stakeholders and the wider public, the L&L Facilitators have developed an Annual Newsletter to highlight the interventions by Voice-supported projects, progress made by various grantees, their achievements, successes, lessons learnt, positive and negative experiences, promising approaches and practices from various implemented projects and other program updates.

Below are some of the articles and stories featured in this first edition of the Voice Annual Newsletter:

AGE IS JUST A NUMBER; CHALLENGING AGEISM IN UGANDA



Older women group from Kazo, present a skit depicting age discrimination faced by older persons

In Uganda, majority of older persons experience ageism, a systematic and institutionalized denial of the rights of older persons based on their age by individuals, groups, organizations and institutions. Whereas this is so, there is limited documentation on the experiences of ageism in the country and globally to inform policy and programming.

Uganda Reach the Aged Association(URAA) in partnership with Help Age international received funding from Voice, an initiative of the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs implemented by Oxfam and Hivos to implement a two year Action Research Project entitled **“Understand and Challenge Ageism Campaign”** in six purposively selected districts of Soroti (older persons in a farming community), Kitgum (older persons in a post war community), Nakapiripiriti (older persons in pastoralist community), Adjumani (older refugees), Kabale (older Batwa minority group) and Kawempe division in Kampala (urban older persons). The project aims at establishing different causes of ageism, its manifestation, effects and strategies to challenge it.

A research on the Experience of Ageism among

older persons in Uganda was conducted to understand ageism, its causes and consequences among older persons (aged 60 years and older) and to identify strategies that policy makers and other actors can employ to mitigate it in Uganda.

During a National Validation workshop held on 12th June 2019 at Piato Restaurant Kampala, findings were presented to a community of stakeholders from; older Persons, Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development (MGLSD), Ministry of Health, Ministry of Local Government, Makerere University, Mulago hospital, National councils for; older persons, Youth, women and persons with disabilities, and civil society organizations supporting older persons. The event was graced with speeches, presentations and drama by the older persons.

The older women from Kazo Angola Elderly group performed a play which highlighted different forms of discrimination that older persons face. In the play, an older woman narrated her story about how she had to pay a bribe to be let into the hospital, after which she found a doctor who did not treat her but rather, blamed her illness on old age.

The research revealed the following; only 35% of older persons have correct knowledge on ageism; 65% have wrong information about ageism e.g. related ageing with low intellectual ability, becoming more religious, reduced ability to work, Overall, 97% of older persons experienced at least one form of ageism in their lifetime e.g. being ignored, jokes that made fun of older persons, denial of accommodation, denial of adequate health care.

Consequences of ageism were; stress, poor physical health, Insomnia, memory problems and being embarrassed by younger people.

The research proposed several strategies to address ageism including; prioritizing older persons' needs in policy and development programming at all levels, sensitizing health care providers and strengthening health care system to address the health needs of older persons, Promoting Income generating activities and addressing old age poverty through the non- contributory pensions such as Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE). Sensitize media practitioners who might perpetuate ageism by use of ageist language. Improve sensitizations of young people and family about ageism and strengthen community based social support mechanism towards older persons in Uganda.

In his remarks, the Commissioner for Elderly and Disability under Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development pointed out that the research findings are going to be crucial in planning for older persons; they are educative, create awareness on ageism and tackle segregation.

The government is committed to the establishment of a law that protect the rights of older persons and a bill was drafted.

He reminded the participants not to coerce young people to take care of their older parents, instead, nurture them to appreciate hard work which will address their desire to sell their parents property leaving them homeless.

During the discussion of findings, stakeholders pointed out the need for affirmative action towards older persons; *"they have been working their entire lives, and they are weak, any income got is instead spent on their dependents (grandchildren and or orphans)"* the Executive



The Commissioner for the Elderly and Disability, MGLSD delivering his remarks at the Workshop

Secretary, National Council for Older Persons observed. There is need for awareness about the needs, responsibilities and abilities of older persons and how best they can work together with government and other actors to benefit and contribute to national development at all levels as indicated by an older person saying; *"Age is just a number, we still have the ability to contribute to this nation"*.

PERSONS WITH ALBINISM MAPPED AND GIVEN A VOICE IN EASTERN UGANDA



Phillip Makasi sharing his story during the Panel Discussion at the Report Launch Meeting

Albinism is a common condition in Uganda although the exact number of persons with albinism is not known. It is characterized by impaired melanin biosynthesis which exposes Persons with Albinism (PWA) to a high risk of developing skin cancer when exposed to the sun.

Phillip Makasi, a father of 4 children and a Primary school teacher is one of the persons with albinism living in Eastern Uganda. His experience has not been an easy one.

"I was discriminated from childhood. I was called demeaning names by the villagers. Children did not want to associate with me; it was because of having loving parents who negotiated to have me sit at the front of the class, that I was able to study. Even in my adult life, this discrimination persists, I had difficulty finding a job and later when applying for a promotion as education assistant, I learnt that I was not considered because of having albinism".

In Uganda, Persons with Albinism are among the poorest in their communities because most of them drop out of school early because of low vision



Launch of the Spatial Mapping Report

(poor sight), some are discriminated against and denied gainful employment because of their skin color, whereas others are unable to work long hours under the sun. Other challenges include; limited access to legal services, myths and misconceptions about their existence which have resulted in stigma, kidnap and their attempted capture for ritual sacrifices for blessings and riches. Existing government policies and programs such as Vision 2040, National Development Plan II and the National OVC Policy don't consider them as vulnerable persons. The poor and fragmented documentation, weak policies in existence as well as the stigma passed on by the community to people and households with albinism have led to many not to be reached with lifesaving and developmental interventions.

On the 21st May 2019, Albinism Umbrella in Uganda with funding from Voice through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands Government launched the report on the spatial mapping and profiling of persons with albinism at Hotel Africana, Kampala. The report includes community perceptions about albinism and a database of Persons with Albinism and organi-

zations serving these people in 10 selected districts of Eastern Uganda including; Budaka, Bududa, Butaleja, Buyende, Manafwa, Mayuge, Kamuli, Kumi, Sironko and Soroti.

Dr. Arthur Bagonza, a research consultant presented the research findings that highlighted the following;

67.7% of Persons with Albinism did not know the cause of albinism; 76% of PWA did not know what causes skin cancer and how to prevent it.

Mothers of children with albinism do not work while protecting their children from people in the community who wish to harm them, hence poverty levels were highest among households that had more people with albinism

Access to and cost of sunscreen remains a major challenge to households of persons with Albinism; only 11% can easily access sunscreen to protect their skin.

Most children with albinism are not in school because of; low incomes and hence unable to pay for school requirements, poor eyesight, bullying at school, fear of losing their lives due to sacrifices and limited access to sunscreen.



Olive Namutebi shares her story at the Report Launch Meeting

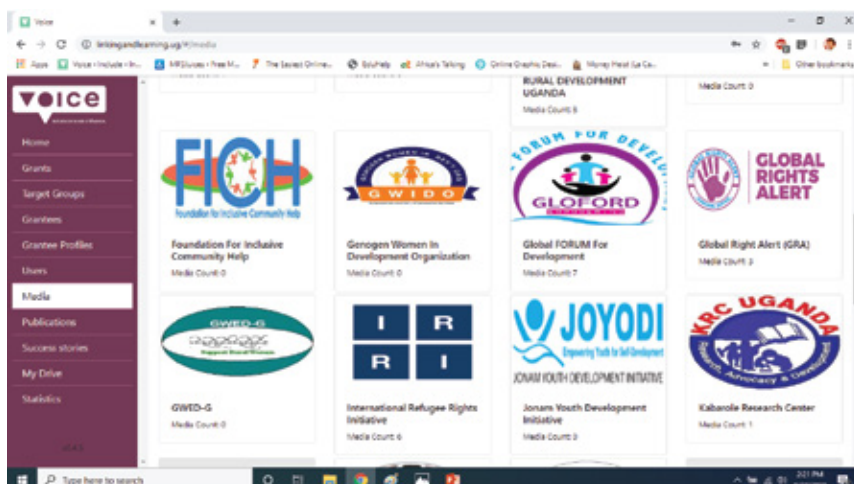
Olive Namutebi, the Executive Director of Albinism Umbrella pronounced that she started the organization to improve the welfare of persons with albinism. She observed that the spatial mapping of the PWA in 10 districts in Eastern Uganda is only the pilot, and that there is need for a nationwide mapping of persons with albinism.

The launch was presided over by Mr. Bernard Mujuni, Commissioner Equity and Rights, in the Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development who was representing the Minister of Gender, Labor and Social Development. In his remarks, Mr. Mujuni affirmed that the study would be useful in determining where the ministry needs to take affirmative action to improve the welfare of persons with albinism.

Similarly, Honorable Safia Nalule who is National Woman MP for PWD in Parliament observed that the report will be fundamental and informative for the proposed bill on persons with albinism. She further noted that the purpose of having a separate bill is that people with albinism face different challenges such as insecurity, the lack of access to the lifesaving sun screen.

The Deputy Police Commissioner, Mr. Anatoli Mulekerwa who heads community policing also assured persons with albinism of his commitment to generate more awareness among the police officials to ensure protection of persons with albinism in the country.

VOICE GRANTEES GET CONNECTED THROUGH A COUNTRY-WIDE DIGITAL PLATFORM



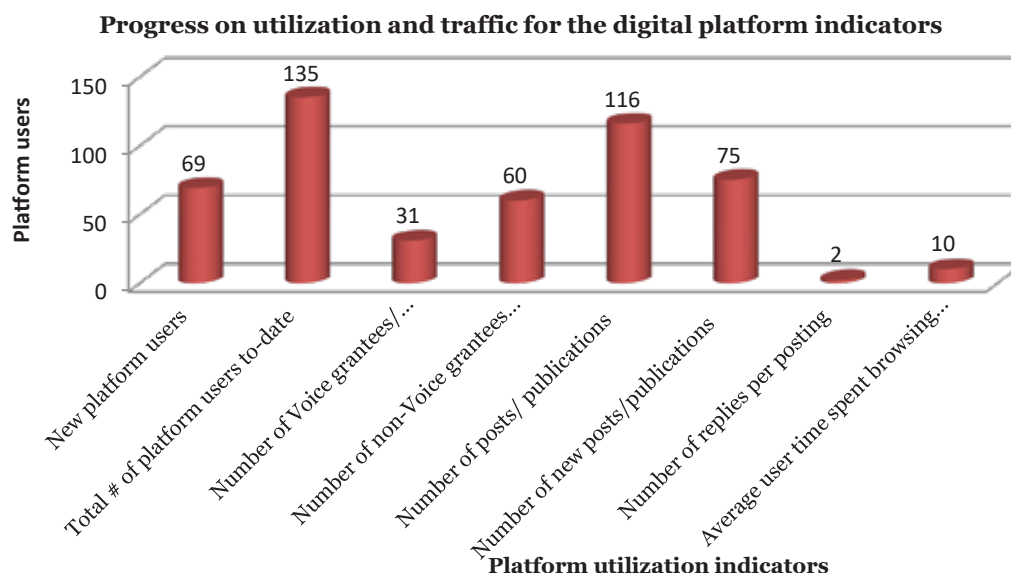
The Voice Linking and Learning (L&L) Digital Platform is an electronic repository for Voice project information sharing and learning among Grantees and other stakeholders. The Voice Grantees are supported to upload, share and access various resource materials generated from the interventions implemented as part of the Voice Project.

The Digital Platform was developed by the Linking and Learning Facilitators and is managed on a day-to-day basis by Digital specialist from Strategic Link. The Digital specialist is supported by the rest of the Linking and Learning facilitators to ensure the platform is maintained to allow grantees to easy access to Voice materials for both online and offline for the hard to reach grantees and their stakeholders.

As of 31st August, 2019; a total of 31 grantees accounting for 69 users (Voice grantees and their partners) had been connected to the online digital platform. The available statistics show that steadily increasing utilization and traffic for the digital platform indicators.

The figure below highlights the progress made on the utilization of the Voice digital platform in Uganda:

Figure: Progress on utilization and traffic for the digital platform indicators for the period January – August 2019:





As highlighted in the figure above, to-date (end of August, 2019), there are a total of 135 platform users (69 for the digital platform and 66 for WhatsApp). The current statistics also show that there are 116 posts/publications made on various topics/themes/ discussions, 60 guests (non-Voice grantees) amongst platform users as well as 75 new posts/publications per topic/theme/ discussion threads recorded to-date.

The above statistics show that there is an upward shift in utilization and traffic on the

platform given the fact that this platform is barely a year old since it was developed at the end of January 2019.

The platform is serving both Voice grantees and non-Voice grantees. Feedback and evidence on its utilization from the various stakeholders show that the platform is serving its intended purpose i.e. a repository for information sharing on Voice-supported interventions, as well as serving as a tool for enhancing learning among grantees and other stakeholders. Below are testimonies from some Voice grantees on the digital platform:

Box 1: Feedback from an Influencing Grantee:

The usefulness of the platform is realized from the feedback and information requests we have been getting from fellow grantees and random people who have seen the information we have shared on the platform.

To us, this is evidence that the platform is useful and we encourage others to utilize it.

Box 2: Feedback from an Empowerment Grantee:

The Voice online platform has offered us as grantees a resourceful avenue where we can freely deposit reports, success stories, photographs, videos and other information about our work and at the same time share and learn from our colleagues implementing similar or slightly different projects.

However, as much as good progress has been made on the utilization of electronic resource repository and communication channels; more effort is needed by the Linking and Learning Facilitators to make the platforms more interactive and increase their utilization and traffic not only among grantees but also for other Voice stakeholders in Uganda and beyond.

Grantees are encouraged to maximize the utilization of the digital platforms for archiving, sharing and learning and to reach out to the facilitators for support as much as possible.



THE APAA CRISIS: “ACTION-AID INTERNATIONAL UGANDA MEETING SPARKS A SERIES OF ACTIONS”



Leader of Opposition in Parliament Hon. Betty Aol Ochan (centre) makes her submission, sided by fellow Members of Parliament during the meeting

40 Civil Society actors and some of the area Members of Parliament including the Leader of Opposition in Parliament (Hon Betty Aol Ochan), the woman MP for Aruu North Hon Lucy Aciro, the Kilak South MP; Hon Gilbert Olanya, Kilak North MP, Hon Anthony Akol and the Gulu Municipality MP Hon. Lyandro Komakech.

In January 2019, Action-Aid International Uganda (AAIU) held a meeting with different stakeholders from areas like Apaa, Amuru, Gulu, Adjumani among others. The meeting was attended by over

The participants discussed the proposed Land Acquisition Bill and the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy. This availed an opportunity for participants to discuss the Apaa land crisis after a short video on the updates of the people's suffering in the area was displayed. The MP's were touched and they pledged to fight for their people in Apaa to get their land back.

As a follow up action, the Members of Parliament under their group (Acholi Parliamentary Group) held peaceful demonstrations on 4th February 2019. In response, on 5th February 2019, the Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda Hon Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga recommended that parliament sets up a committee to establish the truth behind the unrest. *"We have debated this issue for a long time".*

Therefore, in this circumstance, we shall set up a select committee to establish the truth," said Kadaga during plenary sitting on 5th February, 2019.

On 25th February 2019, Cabinet resolved to resettle victims of Apaa land conflict with building materials and money after assessing damages. According to a Cabinet memorandum, residents were to be given a package of Shs10 million, 20 iron sheets, 20 bags of cement and Shs2 million for those who do not have National Identity Cards.



The processes of compensation and resettlement would be spear-headed by the Office of the Prime Minister, Lands ministry and Minister for Northern Uganda, Ms Grace Kwiwucwiny. This initiative failed and the government then resolved to form a new committee to resolve the issue.

In March 2019, a team from ActionAid International Uganda and PELUM Uganda were invited to make submissions about the situation in Apaa to the parliamentary committee that was appointed by the Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda Hon. Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga to investigate the issue further and on 17th April 2019, the committee held consultations with the people of Apaa.

On 12th May 2019, the president announced a new committee to handle the crisis and it is led by the Deputy Speaker of Parliament Hon Jacob Oulanyah and he will be deputised by the Prime Minister of Uganda Rt.Hon. Rugunda. Other members of the committee are General Moses Ali, Minister of Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees Hon Hillary Onok, the state Minister for Lands Hon Betty Amongi, Hon Ephriam Kamuntu the Minister for Wildlife, Tourism and Antiquities and Hon Sam Cheptoris the Minister for Water and Environment. We are awaiting the findings and recommendations of the committee to come up with a perpetual and favorable end to the crisis.



VOICE GRANTEES IN UGANDA LINK AND LEARN DURING THE FIRST-EVER ANNUAL EVENT



A group photo of participants at the Annual Event

The First-ever Annual Linking and Learning Event for Voice Grantees in Uganda was held in Uganda from 14th -18th at The Ankrah Foundation located at Besania Hill in Mukono Municipality. The 2-day Annual Event for Voice Grantees was organized and facilitated by the L&L Facilitators (Legal Aid Service Providers Network – LASPNET and Strategic Link) with the additional support from the Voice Team, a Creative Thematic Facilitator as well as a Visual Note Taker.

In Uganda, Voice has a total of 32 grants which cut across different thematic areas including empowerment, influencing, innovate and learn and sudden opportunity. The Voice grantees are connected into a uniform Voice L&L platform which allows them to share and learn from each other.

In order to enhance connectedness and sharing of lessons, experiences and successes, Voice organized an Annual Event that gave the grantees a platform for experience sharing, linking and learning. The 2-day event was delivered using highly interactive and innovative approaches that allowed for sharing and learning by grantees from

their varied experiences in implementing the



Grantee Discussions in progress

Voice-supported interventions in Uganda
The participants during the Annual Event were engaged into interactive discussions to share their experiences in implementing different grants and they drew lessons on promising methods/ approaches of work, as well as success stories that have potential for scale up within their organizations, within the country and in other Voice project countries.

The Annual Event was attended by a total of 75 participants altogether who included 60 project officers and project participants (rightsholders) representing 30 Voice grantees, and 15 other participants that included L&L Facilitators and Oxfam Uganda Representatives.

The table below shows the Voice grantees who participated in the Annual Event:



Old Grantees	New Grantees
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Albinism Umbrella 2. Global Rights Alert (GRA) 3. National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda (NUDIPU) 4. Uganda Reach the Aged Association (URAA)/ HelpAge International 5. Sorak Development Agency (SORAK) 6. Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC) 7. Action for Development of the Local Communities(ADOL) 8. Center for Governance and Economic Development 9. (CEGED)/ Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment (RICE) 10. Community Empowerment and Rehabilitation Initiative for Development (CERID) 11. Global Forum for Development (GLO-FORD) 12. Partners for Community Health and Development Organization (PACHEDO) 13. Passion for Community Development Organization (P4C) 14. Children's Chance International (CCI) 15. LUTINO-ADUNU 16. Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Arua District Blind Women Association (ADBWA) 2. Cheshire Services Tororo Project. 3. Destined Women (DW) 4. Facilitation for Integrated Community Rural Development (FIRCD) Uganda. 5. Foundation for Inclusive Community Help (FICH) 6. Genogen Women in Development Organization (GWIDO) 7. Gulu Women's Economic Development and Globalization (GWED-G) 8. Jonam Youth Development Organization. 9. KSO Foundation. 10. Platform for Labor Action (PLA) 11. Uganda National Action on Physical Disability (UNAPD) 12. Women Nutrition and Sanitation Project (WNSP)
International Grantees	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) 2. Benet Lobby Group 	

During the Annual Event, the L&L Facilitators specifically engaged grantees in sessions where they got to know each other, agreed on participants' expectations, participated in trust building activities, planning for the unconference approach to sharing and learning, pitching for the unconference sessions, leading discussions and information sharing during the unconference, participation in sessions on harvesting of learning, involvement in the speedy market exercise for information and experience sharing between grantees, wrap up sessions as well as the final evaluation annual event.

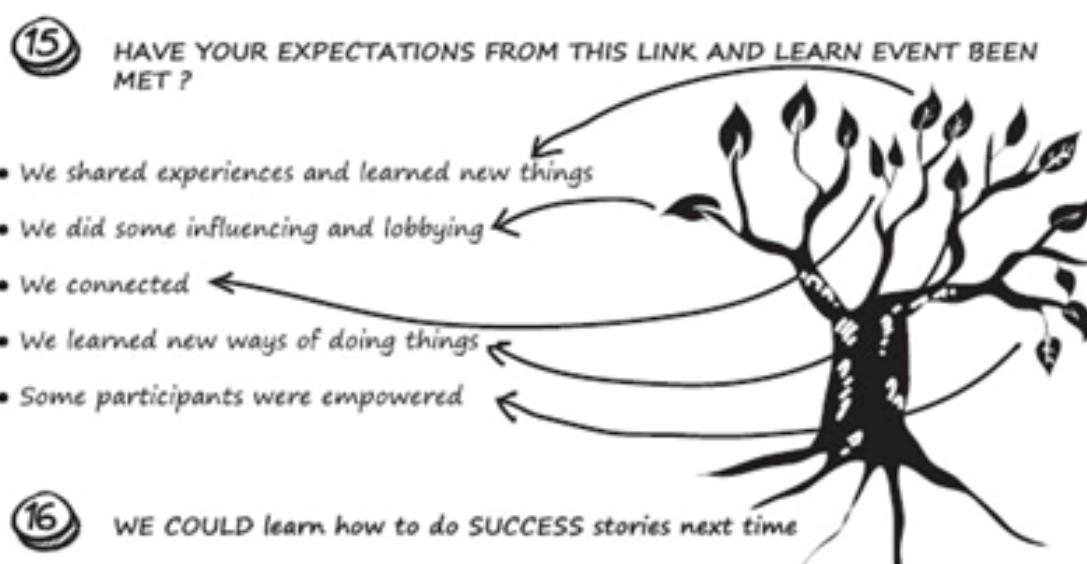




Key highlights from the Annual Event:

« The use of highly interactive and innovative approaches such the unconferencing and speedy market concepts provided an environment that allowed free interaction, direct question and answer with the main presenters, and allowed the participants to obtain first hand information and experiences from those who are living marginalization and discrimination in various parts of the country.

« The idea of working with a visual note-taker at the annual event was applauded by the participants as the visual illustrations made it easy for participants to learn more. The participants were really mesmerized by the visual illustrations as some of them were experiencing it for the first time. It was noted that this was a great way to summarize information and ensure learning in a pictorial context for even those who were not able to attend the event. For example, the visual illustration below gives a summary of the annual event evaluation by participants.



Illustrative summary of the Annual Event evaluation by participants

"Before coming to this meeting, I didn't know that someone could do a fine job by summarizing all that has been said in a few visual illustrations but at the same time highlighting the whole discussion. It is a powerful way to communicate" Female project participant from a Voice Grantee, Kampala

« The Facilitators employed the 'speedy market' concept that enhanced learning, information sharing among grantees, enabled people to interact and network. The idea of the **speedy market** was to give the participants an opportunity to interact and share information about their organizations and interventions in the shortest time possible.

Overall, the Annual Event achieved its purpose of facilitating shared learning and experience sharing of promising practices among Voice grantees. The participants got opportunities to interact and share information about their organizations and interventions.



ARUA DISTRICT BLIND WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION GIVES HOPE TO VISUALLY IMPAIRED GIRLS AND WOMEN



Jean Ayikoru; Executive Director of ADBWA at their Office in Arua Municipality

In 2015, Jean Ayikoru and other women living with visual and physical impairment registered Arua District Blind Women's association (ADBWA) to amplify voices of women and girls with disabilities. Through the voice funded project ***"Amplifying the voices and rights of blind girls and women"*** that commenced in November 2018, the organization is advancing the empowerment process of women and girls with disabilities and equipping them with appropriate skills to enable them to engage in viable self-help initiatives as a way of improving their lives. Women and girls with visual and other physical disabilities from the Sub-Counties of Aroi, Pajulu and Arua Hill Division in Arua District are reached through interventions on; Reproductive health, hygiene, and sanitation, HIV and AIDS awareness, Advocacy and lobbying skills, Human and health rights for the blind girls and women, Entrepreneurial and leadership skills.

In order to create a favorable enabling environment for women with visual impairments, the organization engages duty bearers, community leaders and builds

essential inclusive skills to uplift women and girls with disabilities

The capacity building efforts of ADBWA have had positive effects of creating awareness on discrimination at workplaces, within homes among relatives and family members, within communities as well as among service providers in public places.

The organization has highlighted the many challenges that blind girls and women face such as lack of opportunities for going to school, lack of learning materials, discrimination and stigma in public institutions and workplaces, lack of access to medical and financial services, theft of their property and street begging among some and risks of accidents from other road users. Besides, there no arrangements for the visually impaired girls and women to access many public places.

With support from the Voice Project, ADBWA has managed to support the visually impaired girls and women to address life-threatening challenges they face on day to-day basis.

"Because of the efforts of Jean and ADBWA, we get special treatment at Arua Hospital and other health centers. The health workers know this, and they attend to us before anyone else apart from emergency cases" **Member of ADBWA**

One area that has stood out among the capacity building interventions by ADBWA is the entrepreneurship training which has so far reached 240 women. Many women with disabilities have confessed that the training added value to their lives, equipped them with customer care skills, self-awareness, branding, savings, having a positive attitude towards business.



As a result, the women with disabilities have formed groups and selected leaders at sub-county level. Three of these groups have evolved into village savings and loans associations (VSLAs).

They are now able to start their own businesses or boost the existing ones. With the empowerment that ADBWA has given the visually impaired girls and women on human rights and self-awareness, they are now able to even participate and present at district-level activities such as the International Women's day.

Despite the achievements, the visually impaired girls and women still face challenges including; limited access to technology, difficulties in running income generating activities/ businesses with ease, lack of a stand-alone fund to cater for their needs, business enterprises run by visually impaired women are still very expensive and risky.

The "amplifying the voices and rights of blind girls and women" project has during the last one year reduced the gap between the visually impaired girls and women and the general public. ADBWA is continuing to empower her members by linking them with other stakeholders for various forms of support, creating awareness campaigns on visual impairment as well as delivering targeted capacity building interventions to empower them with the much-needed life and survival skills.



USING VSLAS TO ECONOMICALLY EMPOWER VULNERABLE WOMEN IN LOBULE SUB-COUNTY, KOBOKO DISTRICT BY CERID

Koboko is one of the districts in the West Nile region where women are still struggling with land ownership challenges which has retarded their capacity to attain self-reliance. Women's participation in agriculture is largely constrained by limited access to grow food and feed their children despite being bread winners in most of the families.

Community Empowerment and Rehabilitation Initiative for Development (CERID), received funding from the Voice in April 2018 to economically empower women and youth, through formation of women village savings and loan schemes, training and equipping the rightsholder groups with money saving kits and other livelihood skills.

To date, the project has reached women in Lobule and Kuluba Sub-Counties (*in rural parts of Koboko District*), introducing the Village Saving and Loan Association (VSLA) approach and interesting women to form groups of between 10 to 30 members. In both Lobule and Kuluba sub-counties, 10 groups were formed, trained and equipped with VSL kits, a money metal safe, ledger books, and other book keeping materials. The training for these groups also included training on group formation, management of finances, business skills as well as monitoring of the groups and activities.

CERID has also supported and encouraged the women to start initiatives in order to meet their economic and livelihood needs. This was intended to reduce the discrimination that women face and help in creating break-throughs to the much-needed financial capital to start their own businesses and meet their needs since financial institutions were not willing to give them money without security.

With their savings, women can invest and are in position to meet their livelihood needs including setting up family agricultural projects such as cassava, maize and tobacco growing. One such VSLA groups set up by women in Lobule Sub-county is FEMANIKU (*no one can give you what you want*) women VSLA. This is a group of women and some few men that was solely set up as a result of CERID's intervention.



FEMANIKU members during a savings session on a meeting day

FEMANIKU is one of the 10 groups registered at the sub-county and can now access funds from Microfinance Institutions. They are benefiting from low interest rates, and limited loan security pre-requisites since it is a registered group. This has helped many women to boost their income or start businesses since most of them don't own land as a security that Micro-finance Institutions normally asks for.

The women groups have been equipped with business skills, business selection, planning, and organization management through trainings conducted by CERID. The members of these groups have been equipped with financial skills to run their own business both as groups and as individuals or families.

"The women now are able to work together as a group, they regularly meet and through these trainings they are now able to select and plan their own businesses as from their group's savings" **CERID Project staff.**

Also, four (4) VSLAs have benefited from a Government Support Fund with support and recommendation from CERID since they are now recognized legal entities. As a result, the groups have been encouraged to continue building relationships with other governmental and non- governmental entities in the district.

The members of the VSLAs have also benefited from the loans they get from the groups to develop their families. For example, one member of FEMANIKU group reported that ***"she got so excited to buy a solar panel that helped her to light up her home giving the children an opportunity to able to read their books at night"*** as a result of getting a loan from the group.

Another group member reported that ***"she was able to till her land with a loan from the group to produce enough food for the family and for sale as a source of income"***. The proceeds from sale of extra produce, enabled to keep her son in school.

Overall, VSLA groups supported by CERID are bringing a smile to the vulnerable women of Koboko district. The support has helped to lessen the burden that many women and their families previously shouldered with limited means of support.



‘WE ARE ONE!’ AND ‘DON’T JUDGE ME’ ARE POEMS TOUCHING ON ISSUES AFFECTING RIGHTSHOLDER GROUPS SERVED BY VOICE GRANTEES

The poems below were composed and presented by a Creative Thematic Facilitator (Namiiro Leah Tamale) at the Voice L&L Annual Event:

WE ARE ONE	WAIT DON'T JUDGE ME
<p>We may not be the same colour or size But we are one! We all bleed red. Our tears are the same. Our smiles all warm. We are one!</p> <p>We may not come from the same region Or even belong to the same religion. But we are one!</p> <p>Our struggles relate. Our hearts connect. They all beat to the same rhythm. The resounding drumbeat of love. We are one!</p> <p>We may not speak the same language. Or even have the same courage. But we are one!</p> <p>We all need a listening ear. We all have excellent ideas. Let's hold each other's hand. Why leave anyone behind? We are one!</p>	<p>Come with me, Take a look at my world; Step closer and smell the wounds. Do you feel my pain? Do you now understand? What I go through to live? How I manage to smile. Wait, don't judge me! You don't know my reality yet!</p> <p>Don't hold back – soldier on with me, I want to parade for you what it means; When I say no one seems to care. I see you giving me a cold stare. Do you now feel my heart aching? Can you imagine yourself in my shoes? Wait, don't judge me! Let me first tell you the whole story.</p> <p>"She is victimising herself" You say, "He is always craving for attention," You curse "They just want free money", you gossip. I want you to take after my footprints. And let me then hear you say that again. Wait, don't judge me yet! First try to fit in my shoes.</p>





For more Information please visit; www.voice.global