

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

# **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT PROJECT (YEPP)**

## **2022-2023**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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We acknowledge our partners IFRAD and AYDL for the effort they put in to ensure that the project implementation was a success amidst the challenges of COVID-19 and the increasing cost of living.

We sincerely appreciate the youth who were the primary participants of the YEEP project. Through their commitment and participation, it was evident that the youth have the potential and voice to influence issues that affect their lives. The youth continuously preached the gospel of youth empowerment in their communities and through this, they inspired many young people.

We also extend our heartfelt appreciation to the district's technical and political leaders who consistently participated in various project activities, such as youth parliaments, community dialogues, and radio talk shows, among others. Their active engagement was invaluable, and their involvement in monitoring visits and reviews provided crucial technical support to the project's implementation. We recognize this as an opportunity to ensure the sustainability of the project's outcomes moving forward.

Special recognition goes to the diligent Oxfam staff and leadership who ensured the smooth implementation, coordination, monitoring, and documentation of the program. Their tireless efforts have been driven by the principles of accountability, inclusivity, and the empowerment of all stakeholders.

Oxfam also acknowledges the contribution of the European Union, towards funding to improve youth livelihoods and continuously monitored the project in the different districts. Their support contributed to Oxfam's vision of creating a society where people have the power to influence decisions at the local and national level.

# ACRONYMS

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YEEP – Youth Engagement and Empowerment Project

IFRAD – International Foundation for Recovery and Development

AYDL – African Youth Development Link

GALS – Gender Action Learning System

GBV – Gender Based Violence

SOPs – Standard Operating Procedures

STRYDE – Strengthening Rural Youth Development through Enterprise  
and Business Development Services

VSLA – Village Savings and Loans Association

CSA – Climate Smart Agriculture

CDO – Community Development Officer

RDC – Resident District Commissioner

CAO – Chief Administrative Officer

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# ABOUT THE PROJECT

Improving Youth livelihoods and participation in governance and development processes in Uganda

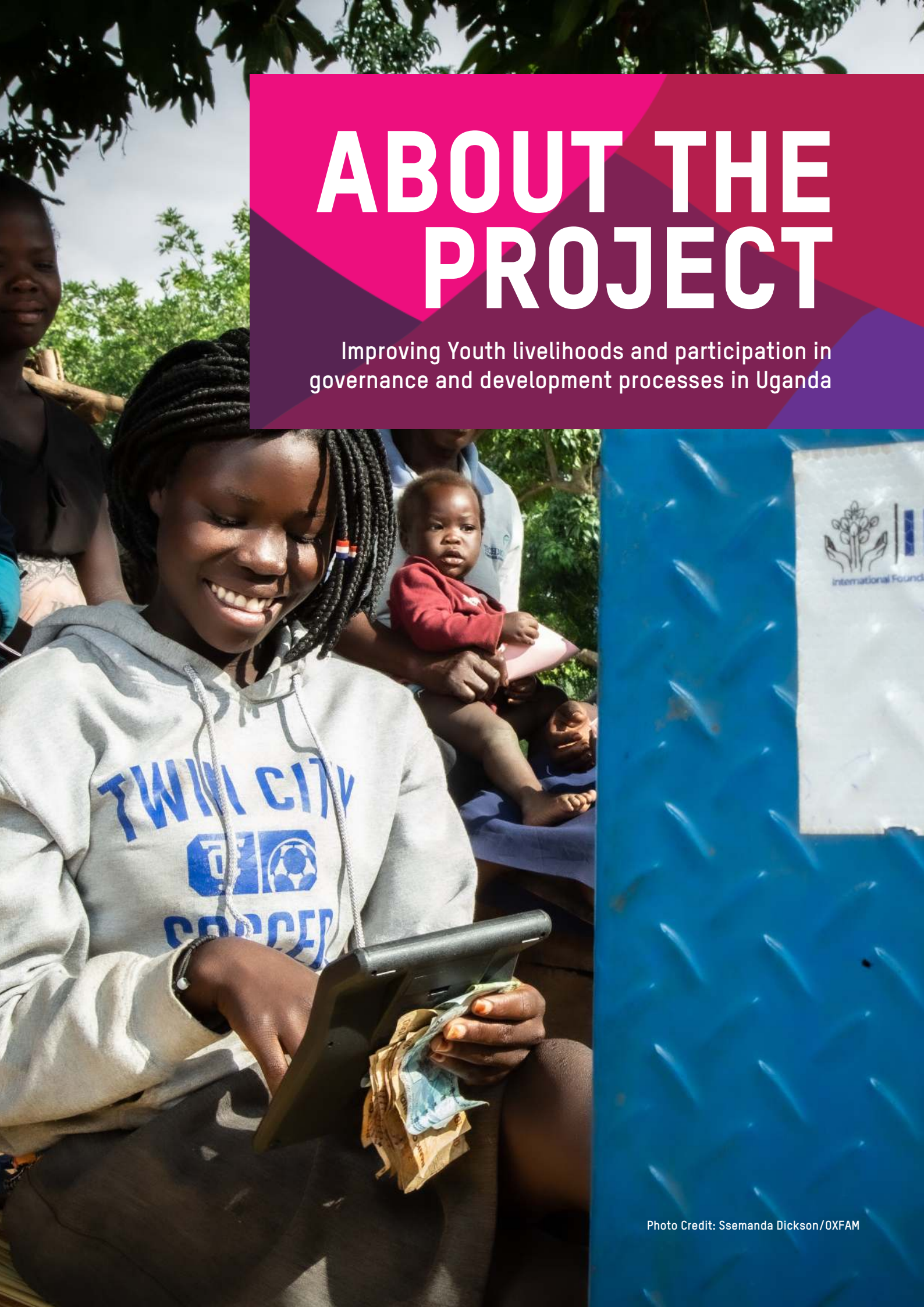


Photo Credit: Ssemanda Dickson/OXFAM

## CONTEXT

Uganda is a country with the second youngest population in the world after Niger in West Africa. Nearly 80 percent of Uganda's total population is below the age of thirty. The country's economy has been relatively stable over the last 20 years, during which the country has witnessed several macroeconomic reforms.

However, these have not created enough decent and productive jobs to meet the needs of the high population growth rate. Ugandan youth are faced with high unemployment levels estimated at 64 percent due to a significant mismatch between youth skills and market needs. Furthermore, there is limited job creation.

This leaves youth with limited options, leading many to engage in low-paid informal sector jobs, creating under-employment.

The high poverty level in Northern Uganda has aggravated youth unemployment, perpetuating the vicious cycle of poverty for youth and their households. In addition, climate change coupled with a strong dependence on agriculture, leaves people in rural areas specifically vulnerable and prone to poverty and hunger.

## THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

The Youth Engagement and Empowerment Project (YEEP) addressed the above challenges by contributing to improved youth livelihood and prompting their active engagement in governance and development processes. The project led by Oxfam in partnership with IFRAD and AYDL mobilized youth groups and equipped them with entrepreneurship skills where the majority successfully identified business opportunities, transformed existing projects, gained access to markets for their products, and even started financial services for their communities. The major intervention focus was attitude and behaviour change towards agriculture and entrepreneurship by the youth. This triggered renewed interest and engagement in agri-business leading to economic empowerment of the young people in the targeted areas of Nebbi, Gulu, Oyam and Arua.

Based on the context, the project addressed three key challenges closely interlinked in perpetuating poverty and marginalization of youth. These included Unemployment, Limited youth participation and Sexual and gender-based vulnerability.

## INTENDED OUTCOMES

The key indicators tracked for impact included a change in incomes, businesses started, youth accessing markets and finance, awareness of Sexual Reproductive Health rights, youth with leadership and advocacy skills, and youth voicing youth concerns.



# PARTNERSHIPS

Funded by the European Union, the YEEP was implemented by Oxfam in partnership with IFRAD and AYDL. These partners brought in unique expertise and value addition to the project with each leading the implementation of specific components while ensuring integration and complementarity.

IFRAD employed a private sector approach towards development. They emphasized building and strengthening of the youth capacities for the informal and formal private sector.

AYDL focused on building youth capacities in leadership, influencing, and advocacy. They also popularized youth-related policies in communities through different channels.



Photo Credit: Ssemanda Dickson/OXFAM



## About African Youth Development Link (AYDL)

African Youth Development Link (AYDL) is a dynamic non-profit; nonpartisan youth-led development organization established in 2008 to provide a link between youth and governance policy processes in Uganda so that we are each part of something larger than ourselves. AYDL strives to advocate for implementation and reform of laws and policies for increased young people's participation in leadership and democratic governance process in local and National levels.

**Vision:** An empowered youth movement building better lives for young people through their engagement in development and governance processes.

**Mission:** Empowerment of youth to participate in governance and development through advocacy.



## About International Foundation for Recovery and Development (IFRAD)

IFRAD is an entrepreneurship development, private sector organizing and business ecosystem facilitator that supports early-stage entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses. IFRAD employs a private sector approach towards development which emphasizes the building and strengthening of capacities for both informal and formal private sector to:

**a) Organize b) Increase incomes and c) Exercise Active Citizenship.**

IFRAD supports youth entrepreneurship and agribusiness through the agricultural value chain development, market facilitation, development and implementation of digital solutions for personal and VSLA financial management as well as through local government private sector organizing aimed at improving the business ecosystem.



### TEOPISTA KIZZA

Head of Programs African Youth Development Link (AYDL)

Youth is a period of transition. It is a more fluid demographic population than other fixed age groups. Given this complexity, empowerment of youth to participate in decision making processes at the local and national level, calls for working with youth as partners and leaders in development other than just beneficiaries of our interventions.



### KAROLINE NAKALYA

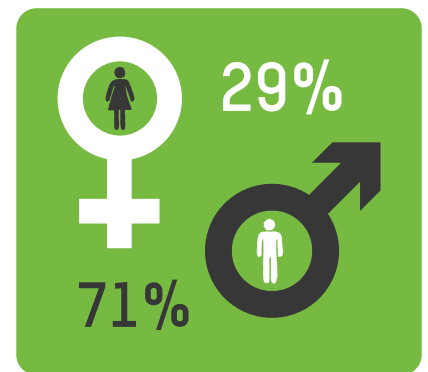
Programs Advisor-IFRAD

The YEEP was a true reflection of working partnerships. From the cordial partnership with the European Union delegation in Uganda, to the capacity strengthening by Oxfam, the complementarities of IFRAD and AYDL and finally to the district level partnerships. Beyond meeting project goals, we learned more about how to better work with each other. I am confident that we shall impact even more young people with this kind of foundation.

# IMPACT AND REACH

1,518

TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE REACHED



83%

Of Youth Reported  
An Increase In Income

825

New Businesses  
Were Started

221

Youth Were Trained  
On Using The Cash  
Time App

412

Youth Were Equipped  
With Leadership And  
Advocacy Skills

1290

Youth Accessed The  
Markets And Finance

50

Youth Actively  
Participated In  
Voicing Their Concerns

200

Youth trained in  
climate- smart  
agriculture

107

Youth were  
trained as GALS  
trainers

5 ADVOCACY PLATFORMS  
WERE ESTABLISHED

510

Participating in  
est. Platforms

67

Youth Associations Voicing  
Youth Concerns

80

Youth Holding Duty  
Bearers to account.

# BREAKING POVERTY CYCLES

Arua and Nebbi districts are located in the northwest of the country and are the gateway to the other districts in the West Nile region. The location puts these districts at a vantage point and acts as a stop-over for traders entering and leaving the region.

With the advent of the YEOP, Oxfam and partners; International Foundation for Recovery and Development (IFRAD) and African Youth Development Link (AYDL) set the pace to increase the employability and income generating activities of youth in this region.



**GROWING FUTURES**

# CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE: ENHANCING CROP AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION, ENSURING FOOD SECURITY AND PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.



Photo Credit: Ssemenda Dickson/OXFAM

**S**aba Josiah, aged 22 and his wife Tiko Gladys are residents of Okaiva village in the Arua district. They are participants in the Youth Engagement & Empowerment Project. Following the death of his parents, Josiah, now a father of two married Tiko Gladys but later realised they were both in for a struggle as they grappled with unemployment. In Uganda there is a general social tendency towards a prolonged transition to adulthood for young people, studies have shown an increasing number of vulnerable youths in care who require support to transition into adult life especially orphans and vulnerable children who are left in a disadvantageous position compared to their peers.

For Josiah, after losing both his parents, he was devastated and out of grief and need for companionship, he married 14 year old Tiko Gladys, hoping that this would help him to relieve his grief. Unfortunately, he realized his mistake too

late when the young couple started grappling with unemployment.

Before being enrolled in the Youth Engagement & Empowerment Project, Tiko and her husband practiced subsistence farming to meet their daily food needs. However, they always had poor yields and most times they hardly harvested enough to carry them throughout the season because of poor farming methods and the unpredictable weather patterns.

This is why when the LC1 chairperson of Okaiva village Mr. Fema Phlianm nominated the couple to IFRAD as suitable participants in YEEP trainings, they never hesitated to participate.

Tiko acquired entrepreneurship skills and learnt how to bake cakes, making sim-sim snacks, liquid soap among others. To improve on their yields, they were advised to



**"I GOT MARRIED AT THE AGE OF 18 AFTER THE PASSING AWAY OF MY PARENTS, ACCORDING TO OUR LUGBARA CULTURE, WHEN YOUR PARENTS DIE YOUNG YOU HAVE TO GET MARRIED TO COMPENSATE FOR THE LOSS, SO I DID THAT, BUT LIFE WAS VERY DIFFICULT AS I WAS NOT EARNING ANY INCOME AND DEPENDED ON MY WIFE'S FAMILY WHICH CAUSED ENDLESS WRANGLES IN MY MARRIAGE"**

grow crops that take a shorter time to harvest yet bring in a lot of yields like sweet potatoes which they quickly adapted.

### **CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE (CSA)**

However, it was the training in Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) approaches that enabled the couple to move away from subsistence farming. Climate Smart Agriculture is a holistic approach to farming that aims to increase food security and reduce poverty in the face of a changing climate. They acquired skills in using sustainable farming practices that increase the resilience of crops and ecosystems, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing carbon sequestration.

Josiah and Tiko transitioned from subsistence farming by applying the CSA practices on their farm and were amazed by the results. They started by applying crop rotation, where they grew different crops in the same field in different years, which helped to improve soil health and increase crop yields. They also planted trees around their farm, which helped to retain moisture in the soil and provided shade for their crops.

**"I INTRODUCED MINIMUM TILLAGE AND COVER CROPPING WHICH HELPED TO REDUCE SOIL EROSION AND INCREASE SOIL ORGANIC MATTER. JOSIAH SAID."**

Their farm production increased which helped the young couple to diversify their income. They started to grow new crops including Cassava, Rice, Sugarcane, and Tomatoes that they would sell at the local market. Using the extra income, Josiah was able to construct a 1000 fish capacity pond which he manages together with his wife. His farm is now able to feed his family but can also generate extra income which is saved up in their VSLA group. At the end of every training, the youth are connected to a savings group (VSLA) so they can save the extra income which they can use to expand their businesses through the provision of loans. Josiah's village savings and loans association called "Never Give Up," provided the couple with a loan of 100,000UGX, which they used to lay bricks that were later sold for a profit.

**“ONE TRIP OF BRICKS IS SOLD AT UGANDA SHILLINGS 150,000, AND I SOLD 5 TRIPS, MAKING A PROFIT OF 750,000 SHILLINGS WHICH REALLY MADE ME SO HAPPY.” JOSIAH.**

With a stable income, Josiah plans to take his wife Tiko back to school to pursue her education, even though he has been getting pressure from Tiko’s parents to pay a dowry for her. He hopes that Tiko’s parents will give him time, to enable his wife to complete her education. “I can handle dowry later”. Josiah.

## INTEGRATING THE GALS METHODOLOGY

Tiko was among the 107 youth in Arua, Nebbi, Oyam, and Gulu who were trained as trainers of the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) methodology. GALS is a community-led household methodology that uses visual diagrams to empower women and men to take action against societal norms that drive gender inequality and plan for their futures together.

The training was conducted to integrate and mainstream gender within the project. As a result, Tiko and other trainees have trained their group members and they have adopted the use of GALS especially the Vision Road

Journey for planning and monitoring progress at the group level. The training helped Tiko build her confidence to engage with her husband and participate in the farm’s decision-making processes, which has helped the couple plan better for their future. One of the decisions that came out of the GALS training was Tiko’s start-up business of Cassava grinding.

**“AFTER A DISCUSSION WITH MY HUSBAND JOSIAH, WE PURCHASED A GRINDING MILL AND STARTED MILLING CASSAVA INTO FLOUR AND ALSO MAKING CASSAVA CHIPS WHICH WE SELL IN OUR RETAIL SHOP.” TIKO.**

She also started milling Cassava for other local farmers at a cost after she realized there was no mill in her village yet there was a demand for cassava flour. In the West Nile region of Uganda, Cassava is a vital food and cash crop, contributing significantly to the basic food requirements of smallholder farmers. The potential for growing cassava in the West Nile is high due to the favourable climate, Soil fertility providing adequate nutrients for crop growth. There is a high market demand in West Nile, providing a market for farmers to sell their produce. The grinding mill now provides a substantial income for Tiko



Photo Credit: Ssemanda Dickson/OXFAM



## **BREAKING BARRIERS** HOW PATRICIA OVERCAME HER ADVERSITY THROUGH TIMELY BUSINESS SKILLING

Patricia Ayulo, a 22-year-old school dropout, felt like her future was bleak.

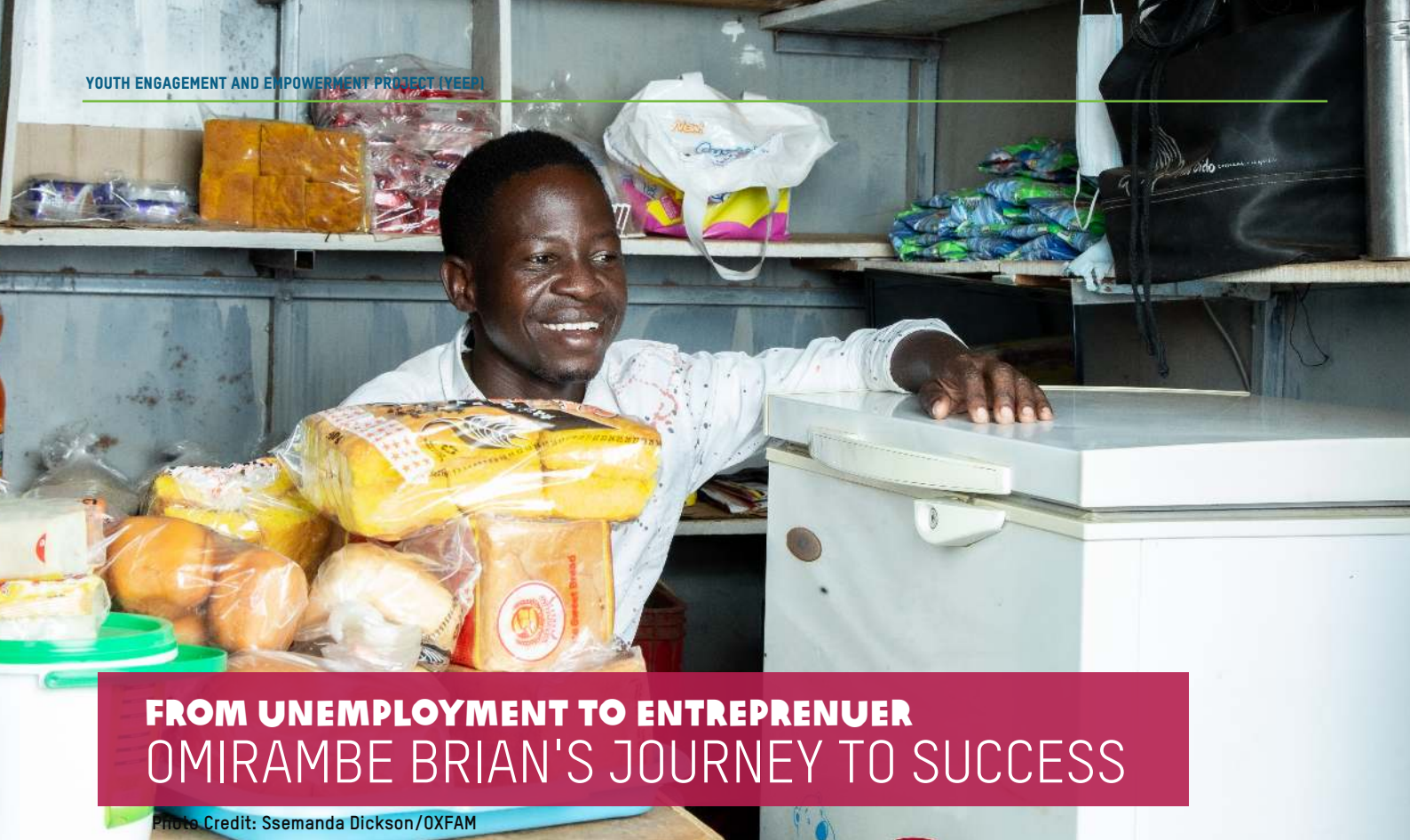
**“ONE DAY, I STUMBLED UPON THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT PROJECT, IT WAS HOW THE PROJECT OPENED UP MY MIND ON HOW TO DO BUSINESS THAT REALLY HELPED ME TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP.” PATRICIA**

In a fortuitous turn of events, Patricia's life took a remarkable trajectory when she discovered the Youth Engagement and Empowerment Project. The project opened her mind to new possibilities and provided her with invaluable knowledge of entrepreneurship.

Motivated by her newfound insights, Patricia and her fellow trainees formed a Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA), with Patricia being appointed as the group's chairperson. Drawing from the resources of the VSLA, Patricia secured a loan and invested in a sow, an adult female pig capable of reproduction, worth 200,000 UGX, marking the beginning of her piggery venture. Patricia's piggery project gained momentum when the sow

gave birth to a litter of eight piglets. As she pens her story, the market value of a single piglet, priced between 80,000 UGX and 150,000 UGX, can reach a remarkable value of up to 900,000 UGX within six to eight months. Recognizing the potential in her expanding enterprise, Patricia enlisted her brother's support to effectively manage the piggery farm. Empowered by her achievements and newfound confidence, Patricia decided to explore new avenues. Thus, she embarked on a mobile money business, diversifying her sources of income.

Now self-sufficient and capable of meeting her basic needs, Patricia's aspirations have grown further. With an eye on expanding her business empire, she intends to venture into the field of tailoring. Patricia's remarkable journey, fuelled by her participation in the Youth Engagement and Empowerment Project, serves as a shining example of how knowledge and support can unlock the potential for transformative success in business. Her story is a testament to the power of empowerment initiatives in driving positive change within communities, paving the way for a brighter future.



## FROM UNEMPLOYMENT TO ENTREPRENEUR OMIRAMBE BRIAN'S JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

Photo Credit: Ssemanda Dickson/OXFAM

Nebbi District - Brian Omirambe, a 29-year-old businessman, has defied the odds to create a path to success. Married with one child, his journey began after graduating from Uganda Pentecostal University in Fort Portal in 2018. Despite a relentless search for employment, jobs remained elusive until he found a life-changing opportunity through the YEEP project. Prior to his participation in the project, Brian faced mounting pressure from his father to establish his own household as an adult. He made the bold decision to sell his smartphone for 150,000 shillings and embarked on a journey toward independence.

**"I ACQUIRED PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE IN BUSINESS OPERATIONS, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, AND MARKETING." BRIAN SHARES, REFLECTING ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF HIS TRAINING.**

With new-found confidence and armed with the knowledge acquired from AYDL and IFRAD, Brian secured a loan of 250,000 shillings from his saving group to establish a small merchandise shop in his village. Applying the skills, he had honed, he expanded his operations by setting up a modest shed at the front of his shop where he sold sacks of charcoal to local retailers. As time passed, Brian's business flourished, enabling him to repay his loan and break even. Today, he stands tall as a self-reliant individual, no longer dependent on his family for support.

Brian also became a community influencer in his community and his success inspired other people to start small businesses, leading to job creation and economic growth. By applying leadership and entrepreneurship skills, Brian was able to improve his life and lifted others out of poverty. He started advocating against early marriages by highlighting the consequences thereof and educating young girls about sexual reproductive health and how they can protect themselves.

**"I HAVE SO FAR MANAGED TO ENCOURAGE 7 PREGNANT GIRLS TO RETURN TO SCHOOL BY INFORMING THEM ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW POLICY THAT ALLOWS PREGNANT GIRLS TO RETURN TO SCHOOL."**

Brian felt strongly about issues of teenage pregnancy in his community. He decided to use his voice to make a difference through participating in radio talkshows to further create awareness on the causes of teenage pregnancies. Brian also led a campaign to end child marriage in partnership with the Alur kingdom. During the campaign, a bicycle race competition was held to create awareness about the effects of child marriage.

**"I AM REALLY HAPPY TO SAY THAT WE ARE AT LEAST STARTING TO NOTICE SOME CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY" BRIAN.**



## **SHEILA OWASHANGO** POSSIBILITIES I ONLY DREAMED ABOUT

Photo Credit: Ssemenda Dickson/OXFAM

Sheila Owashango a businesswoman based in Nebbi district was struggling with her tailoring business. She had to hire a sewing machine to make Kitenge attires, a popular African print. After undertaking the entrepreneurship training with IFRAD, she learnt how to save money through saving groups (VSLAs).

From her savings group, she acquired a loan of 300,000 to purchase a sewing machine, and sub-rented space in one of the shops in town where she started making and selling Kitenge. Her business grew and she eventually rented a bigger shop where she sales her clothes. For

Sheila, owning her business is a very rewarding experience.

Sheila is now able to take care of her children and pay their school fees. She is also planning to build her own shop and stop renting. She dreams of supporting other members of her family to also overcome poverty.

**“IT HAS GIVEN ME EXPOSURE, I HAVE GAINED CONFIDENCE FROM BEING A BUSINESSWOMAN, AND INTERACTING WITH DIFFERENT PEOPLE, SHE NOTES.”**



## FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS MAKING EVERY SKILL COUNT

Photo Credit: Ssemanda Dickson/OXFAM

Scovia Adania, a 28-year-old mother of two was running a retail shop in her village which hardly brought in any income due to limited resources. She received training and mentorship from IFRAD in the areas of market survey, customer relations, how to identify the needs and problems of customers, and how to manage her finances. She also received a small loan from her VSLA which she used to buy supplies to re-stock her retail shop, and also acquired a new sewing machine.

She explained that learning how to calculate her profits and how to separate them from her costs was pivotal in turning her business around. Today, her business is a thriving enterprise that supports

her and several other young girls in her community who look up to her. She has expanded her product line into agri-business and now sells chicken, goats, and pigs.

Applying her newly acquired ability to identify customer needs, Scovia bought a grinding machine after carrying out a business survey indicating an increasing demand for cassava flour.

Scovia has been able to overcome the challenges of poverty and limited opportunities to build a brighter future for herself and her family. She is encouraging very many others to emulate her.

# THE ROLE OF VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOANS ASSOCIATIONS IN EMPOWERING RURAL COMMUNITIES



Photo Credit: Ssemenda Dickson/OXFAM

**"I WAS ALONE  
AND PREGNANT,  
I STRUGGLED TO  
MAKE ENDS MEET"**

**KNOT BY NOTE**  
**HOW MERCY STARTED  
HER BUSINESS BY  
SAVING**

Photo Credit: Ssemenda Dickson/OXFAM

Amviko Mercy's life took a dramatic turn when she realized she was pregnant at the age of 17. Her parents were devastated. Mercy was forced to leave school, her family, and her dreams behind. She went to live with the father of her child who was also 17 years old. He later abandoned her since he couldn't take care of her, leaving her to face the challenges of single motherhood. She was discriminated and judged by her community, which regarded her as a "fallen woman". With very limited options, Mercy returned to her parents and asked for forgiveness.

**"I CAME HOME OUT OF DESPERATION TO EXPLAIN TO MY PARENTS BUT NO ONE UNDERSTOOD MY SITUATION AND MY PARENTS DIDN'T ACCEPT ME BACK. IT WAS MY UNCLE (NOW DECEASED) WHO TOOK ME IN AND SUPPORTED ME DURING MY PREGNANCY."**

It was during her stay at her uncle's place that she got an invitation to attend one of the trainings under the YEEP. After the training, she started working as a shopkeeper in her uncle's shop while at the same time selling her own merchandise in the same shop. Unfortunately, shortly after that, her uncle passed away in a car accident, and the shop was taken over by her uncle's relatives.

Most women have limited access to financial services and are unable to borrow money from traditional banks, which is why all trainees under the YEEP were introduced to Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs).

VSLAs are community-based savings and loan organizations that are typically composed of a group of people who come together to save and lend money to each other. They support youth employability by providing financial services like access to their savings, loans, and insurance, which can help young people start and grow their businesses.

Mercy was able to borrow a small start-up capital of 100,000ugx to start up her own business. VSLAs also build the financial literacy of their members by training them in financial management skills, such as budgeting, saving, and managing debt, which can help them make informed decisions about their business ventures. The formation of a VSLA under each group enabled members to save money regularly and eventually use those savings as collateral to borrow larger sums of money and this is how Mercy got start-up capital for her business. She used the funds to buy threads and silver, raw materials she uses to make craft shoes, earrings, and doormats. Even though Mercy already had the skill of craft-making she had never envisioned it as a lucrative business until she attended the YEEP's training.

As Mercy's business prospered, she shared the skill with her uncle's widow so that together they could increase their output and grow their business' income, especially during the festive season when there is high demand for her products.

Mercy's VSLA also helped her to improve her status as a woman in the community because she became a leader and role model to other women who witnessed her financial transformation. The leadership role was elevated when she was chosen as the chairperson of the Aga-khan Foundation in her community and started hosting community dialogues to engage and sensitize young girls about gender-based violence as well as counsel victims of child marriages. Mercy shared that she had so far counselled and supported 5 young girls who were victims of child marriages.

Mercy now plans to open up a crafts shop in Arua City, and also start training people on how to do crafts. On the side, Mercy is also practicing climate smart Agriculture, focusing on planting vegetables and selling them to local hotels. Mercy has also managed to reconcile with her family. She is planning to return to school to complete her education.

A smiling man with short dark hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, holds a green smartphone in his right hand and several yellow and orange tomatoes in his left hand. The t-shirt features a large white number '1' and a circular logo that reads 'THE CAPITAL CITY HALF MARATHON 10th ANNIVERSARY'. The background is a clear blue sky.

## CASH -TIME APP

# MAKING VILLAGE SAVINGS MORE ACCESSIBLE AND EFFICIENT WITH THE MOBILE PHONE TECHNOLOGY

Photo Credit: Ssemanda Dickson/OXFAM

The Cash-time app platform provides a mobile-based solution for VSLAs under the Youth Engagement and Empowerment project (YEEP) to manage their savings and loan activities, allowing them to easily record transactions, track repayments, and communicate with members. The platform has been successful, with over 515 youths who were trained in the VSLA methodology using the Cash-time app platform.

Through this App, VSLA members have continuous access to credit, improved loan repayment rates, and enhanced financial literacy. Additionally, the app has helped to increase financial inclusion by reaching underserved communities that may not have access to traditional banking services.

Ceaser Opar, a member of the Pilolonyo Youth Group is one of the beneficiaries of the VSLAs who has been using the Cash-time app. He says that the app enables him to market and sell his produce to buyers and suppliers. Ceaser further revealed that the app can also be used to deposit and save money via mobile money platforms.

The app also keeps track of the user's loan limits, and sends reminders for loan payments and saving goals set up by each user according to their individual needs.



EMPOWERING  
YOUNG LEADERS



Photo Credit: Ssemenda Dickson / OXFAM

## A JOURNEY OF MENTORSHIP AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION.

The Youth Engagement and Empowerment project (YEEP) was designed to address the challenge of poor youth livelihood and to elicit their active engagement in governance and development processes. Basing on the success stories above, it is evident that, many youth groups were empowered through access to training opportunities that equipped them with entrepreneurship, leadership and vocational skills.

The mentorship and influencer programs linked youth with experienced leaders like the Community Developed Officers and cultural leaders from their communities who guided, supported, and encouraged them. The leadership workshops and campaigns like the Youth Parliament exposed the young people to novel leadership concepts and opportunities for networking and collaboration.

Consequently, majority of young people who participated

in the YEEP have transformed not only their lives, but also their families, their peers, and their communities. Many youth influencers, their contributions and achievements are celebrated and recognized by their communities. The YEEP provided the youth a foundation to launch and further pursue their education, and gained access to resources, to develop community projects and start new initiatives.

The above impact on the lives of the young people and their communities in Gulu, Nebbi, Oyam and Arua districts resulted in many taking up leadership and elective roles in their communities.

Those who took up public office reported being more empowered to tackle the challenges facing their communities.



### **MS. ASIBAZUYO LOYCE**

#### **THE NEW SECRETARY OF FEMALE AFFAIRS OF ARUA CITY COUNCIL**

"Before, as a woman I had no experience in leadership, but the AYDL training enabled us to compete with our male counterparts during the training which boosted my confidence. Previously councils, would offer 9 positions, and only the position of secretary would be the only position left for female contestants. However, after the training Women got the courage to break the glass ceiling. Right now, we have 3 females occupying positions that used to be a preserve of male candidates and this is a great milestone on gender equity."



### **DROTI DENIS**

#### **YOUTH ACTIVIST**

"Before participating in the Youth Engagement & Empowerment Project in 2020, we as youth leaders were unable to identify our weaknesses in activism and advocacy, however during the youth parliaments, we were able to know what change we needed to make. We realized that there wasn't a communication flow from the district to the council, and as youth leaders, we were unable to organize meetings with young people in the communities due to financial constraints. After the youth Council was formed, five youth-led Community-Based Organizations were formed in Arua district which has immensely supported youth leadership initiatives under the YEEP. After the youth parliament, youth leaders further advocated for more youth positions to be introduced in the region."



### **ENATU SIMON**

#### **MALE YOUTH COUNCILLOR ARUA CITY**

"As leaders we were able to host Radio talk shows, we have advocated for the parish development model to prioritize the youth since they contribute more to society and have the largest population. We are looking forward as Youth Leaders to move forward up to parliamentary level."



### **FRANCIS BAYO**

#### **YOUTH COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON**

"Youth constitute 75% of the population meaning they contribute to the workforce and tax returns which further adds to the GDP of our country. The youth also need to own their space to advocate for their needs and participate in leadership."

Through these stories, the YEEP has demonstrated that it is important to involve young people and community members in the planning and implementation of projects to meet their needs. Because project implementation happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, OXFAM and its partners had latitude for flexibility and adaptability in responding to the changing needs and circumstances of the participants.

# EMBRACING GENDER INCLUSIVITY TO EMPOWER YOUTH



Photo Credit: Ssemanda Dickson/OXFAM



Photo Credit: Ssemenda Dickson/OXFAM

# GIFT AYERANGO

## A COMMUNITY INFLUENCER

Like the other female participants of the YEEP got married at an early age, dropped out of school prematurely, and struggled to raise children without any income. For a young girl who had dreams of becoming a successful businesswoman, giving birth and marrying at a young age was a big barrier to her dreams. Today, at 28 years Gift tells her story of social-economic emancipation and how she is championing efforts to influence opportunities for other young women.

Gift's background, just like many young girls in the various districts of Uganda played a big role in hindering her dreams. She comes from a poor family of six children, living in a rural area that is vulnerable to economic, and environmental shocks. In early 2020, shortly before the outbreak of COVID-19, Gift observed several social-economic empowerment trainings for youth groups in Nebbi facilitated by the African Youth Development

Link (AYDL) and International Foundation for Recovery and Development (IFRAD). She was impressed by the youth who had acquired skills and owned small businesses which they started in her village.

### **"OH GOD HOW I ADMIRER THEM AND WANTED TO BE A PART OF THIS TRAINING TOO!" GIFT.**

But because she was married, it wasn't easy for Gift to attend the training without the approval of her husband. Gender roles in Uganda are still heavily inclined toward traditional roles. For most of the women living in rural areas like Gift, their roles are largely domestic including housekeeping, childbearing, collecting water from the well, cooking, and tending to community needs. Therefore, Gift's position in the community could not allow her to fully participate in gainful employment and this was a barrier to her personal development.

However, the YEEP was specifically targeting disadvantaged youth like Gift with an overall goal to improve their livelihoods and participation in governance and development processes in their communities. When Gift approached the IFRAD team on the ground, she was immediately supported to join the training. The local leaders including the community development officer and LC1 chairperson supported Gift in convincing her family to allow her to attend the training. The training and mentorships were a great way to connect with women who have made headway in predominantly male trade and to shed some light on ways women and girls can participate and successfully run their own businesses.

Upon successfully completing the training, Gift joined the Piryemocan Youth Savings Group, affectionately known as "Chasing Away Poverty," where she was voted as the group's inaugural chairperson. Because of Gift's leadership skills, she was further selected as one of the influencers for the YEEP. This

appointment enabled her to collaborate with local partners in advocating for gender inclusivity forward in the Nebbi sub-county.

As a community influencer, Gift has successfully sensitized communities in Nebbi District about the harmful effects of child marriage and helped secure commitments from local and traditional leaders to end the practice in their communities. Gift and the other Community influencers convinced the district leadership during the youth parliament debates to come up with ordinances to reduce the number of days traditional marriages are celebrated from 3 to only 1 day to reduce the instances of young girls and boys getting intoxicated and engaging in anti-social behavior, making them vulnerable to teenage pregnancy. These ordinances were also endorsed by the Alur King.

Gift has further used her new position to mobilize, inspire and speak against, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, and how to break the stigma surrounding it whenever she gets the opportunity. She supported young girls who are survivors of gender-based violence through counseling. Together with other YEEP influencers, she advocated for a policy change to protect survivors of domestic violence and provide them with the resources they need to recover. Gift believes that their voices through the campaign also made a contribution to influencing the Ministry of Education's change of its policy to allow pregnant girls back into school after the COVID-19 lockdown was lifted. The number of teenage pregnancies across the country shot through the roof during the COVID-19 lockdown.

## FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION

## YOUTH PARLIAMENT TAKES THE LEAD IN COMBATING TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND CHILD MARRIAGE IN WEST-NILE



Over the period from 2020 to 2023, the African Youth Development Link (AYDL) has spear-headed a series of annual youth parliamentary debates.

These debates have served as a platform for young individuals to deliberate on critical issues that directly impact their lives and were organized at the district level between the youth and local leadership. In particular, the debates among other issues addressed the pressing challenges of teenage pregnancy and child marriage in the West Nile region and the significant impact achieved through the engagement of youth voices and the collaboration between AYDL, community influencers, and local leadership.

The Youth Parliament debates influenced policy change by bringing the voices and perspectives of young people to the forefront of the policy-making process. The issues that the youth groups raised during the debates arose from a baseline survey conducted by the YEEP's community influencers who designed the study to find out the root causes of teen pregnancies and child marriages and their effects on the lives of young people. The survey results were used as a basis to debate and provide factual information to policymakers based on what is happening in the local communities.

This resulted in the development of policies that are more representative of the needs and aspirations of young people and led to more inclusive and effective policy-making processes. AYDL and the community influencers from the YEEP worked together with the leadership in West Nile together with Alur King and his

cultural institutions to come up with key policy resolutions. It was agreed that ordinances and resolutions issued as a result of the youth parliamentary debates are endorsed by the Alur cultural institution.

At the village level, a resolution was reached to enhance the safety and well-being of young girls by implementing proactive measures. The local police have committed to conducting regular patrols and apprehending individuals who contribute to the abuse of young girls. To mitigate the potential risks associated with teenage pregnancy, traditional marriage ceremonies, traditionally spanning three days filled with revelry and excessive alcohol consumption, have been restricted to a single day. This limitation aims to reduce the likelihood of young individuals succumbing to intoxication, engaging in anti-social behaviour, and becoming more susceptible to teenage pregnancy. Furthermore, organizers of traditional marriages exceeding the designated timeframe will face legal repercussions as the police are authorized to arrest and charge them.

Additionally, a resolution has been adopted, urging parents to enforce appropriate dress codes for their children. Failure to comply with this requirement will result in further disciplinary measures imposed by the local leadership. The district, in collaboration with youth influencers, has also committed to routinely conducting awareness campaigns on local radio stations to highlight the dangers associated with teenage pregnancies.

# BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY, ORGANIZATIONS, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND EN  
(YEPP)

"improving youth livelihoods and participation in governance"  
Implemented in partnership with





**MS. ALESI BARBARA**

**ACTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER OF  
OLUKO DIVISION, ARUA DISTRICT**

# GIVING YOUTH PRIORITY IN DECISION MAKING

The leadership of Oluko sub-county has played a key role to ensure that the Youth are given priority when implementing government programs such as the Parish Development model.

Through our meetings with youth leaders, we encouraged the youth to own their programs and also made sure they are not neglected when government programs like the parish development model are implemented. We are encouraging teenage mothers to go back to school and sensitizing the community about the importance of empowering young girls. The community got funding from the central government which has been used resourcefully and invested into the business. For instance, we gave a youth group in Bunyu a grant which they used to start up a goat farm. As we speak, the farm that started with four (4) animals now has 57 goats” Alesi stated.

The leadership also trained young girls in making sanitary towels using local materials. This has ensured that girls have enough sanitary towels, to use during their menstruation period so that they don’t miss school. A by-law has also been passed where any parent who fails to send their girl child to school is fined 40,000 Uganda shillings. The law is being enforced with

the help of the police.

**“THE YEEP PROJECT HAS DONE A TREMENDOUS JOB WITH A 75% INCREMENT IN CAPACITY BUILDING OF YOUTH, 65% HAVE CURRENTLY OPENED UP BUSINESSES UNLIKE BEFORE WHEN THE YOUTH WOULD SIT BACK AND WAIT FOR GOVERNMENT HAND-OUTS. BECAUSE OF THE MINDSET SHIFT, THE YOUTH ARE NOW SELF-SUFFICIENT.”**

Our community no longer registers reports of petty crimes because there is peace, as the youth are working hard to change the world thanks to the skills imparted during the YEEP ” hardworking, and ready to change the world all due to the YEEP.

# A CALL TO ACTION

## FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Following the successful completion of the project, a number of achievements have been registered as highlighted with immense impact in the lives of many youths.

Given the high population of the youth in the country, there is a need to provide more young people with the tools, resources, and support they need to thrive, to create a generation of leaders well equipped to tackle the complex challenges in Uganda.

We call upon the stakeholders, partners, and the governments to scale up projects that are focused on empowering the youth holistically like the YEEP and others. This will ensure that all youth have opportunities and chances at becoming self-reliant and empowered to take charge of their lives as well as effectively participate and contribute to the development of the country.

Empowering youth in Uganda through resilient livelihoods and participation in governance and development processes is critical to building a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future. The success stories highlighted above demonstrate the transformative impact of entrepreneurship and community engagement on young people's lives, and the potential for youth-led initiatives to drive positive change in their communities. The youth have great potential. They need the opportunities.



Photo Credit: Ssemanda Dickson/OXFAM



**TOGETHER, WE FIGHT  
INEQUALITY TO END  
POVERTY AND INJUSTICE.**



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