



“My Right: No Violence”

How building power within refugee settlements and host communities is preventing gender-based violence against girls and women.

STORIES OF CHANGE

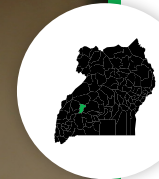
THE PROJECT:

MY RIGHT: NO VIOLENCE

Prevention of sexual and Gender Based Violence (GBV) against girls and women in the refugee settlement Kyaka II and its surroundings.

ACFODE in partnership with EIRENE International Christian Service and with financial support funding from The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation & Development (BMZ) is implementing a two-year project titled: “My Right: No Violence”- Prevention of gender-based violence against girls and women in the refugee settlement Kyaka II and its surroundings. The overall objective is to strengthen community engagement to prevent gender-based violence among young girls in Kyaka II refugee settlement and its neighbouring communities in Kyegegwa District Uganda.

Report any Form of
Violence



REACH

The project is implemented in Itambabiniga zone-3 villages of central, Humura and Ruchiga and in the host communities of Kyegegwa sub county- Kyakatwaga and Kanyinya villages.

The project target groups are:



Young People

200 youth (120 refugee youth from the settlement, 80 youth from the host communities).



Community partnerships to influence behaviour change

ACFODE collaborates closely with school administrators and local leaders to work with 5 cooperating schools and with other community structures respectively. In the cooperation schools, both boys 36% and girls 64% are represented in the GBV trainings.



Building youth power to raise awareness

Through awareness raising and capacity development, the youth are empowered to effect change and support their peers. Young people establish clubs aimed at sharing information and awareness messages about Gender Based Violence (GBV).

The background image shows a group of children in a schoolyard. In the foreground, a young boy in a light blue shirt is seen from the back. Other children are visible in the background, some in school uniforms. A weathered metal sign on a post is in the lower right foreground. The sign has the text 'My Right: NO Violence' in bold black letters. The overall scene is outdoors with a building in the background.

ABOUT US:

Action for Development (ACFODE) is a National women's rights organization founded on 19th November, 1985 to provide a platform for effective debate and action on women's rights, empowerment and gender equality in Uganda. ACFODE's vision is a just society where gender equality is a reality, and the mission is to empower women, girls and influence legislation and policy for gender equality in Uganda. ACFODE's core values are Integrity, Learning, Volunteerism, Respect, Teamwork, Equity and Fairness.

My Right: NO Violence

E.D INTRO MESSAGE

Intersections

*A closer look at refugee, host
community violence and building
community capacity to respond*

Refugees flee war, face conflict in their escape journey, and for those who make it to camps there is no guarantee of peace and safety. Rather a continuation or Women and children especially find themselves at new and expanding intersections of dynamics that breed violence.

Although refugee camps are established to accommodate, protect, and assist those fleeing from violent conflict and persecution, life often remains difficult there. Even in countries like Uganda with exemplary policies, as one of the hosts with the largest numbers of refugees on the continent, gender-based violence is common. Moreover, host communities' are under pressure as their capacity to provide shelter and basic services is nearly exhausted.

I invite you to read these stories of courageous...



REFLECTIONS:

A project coordinator pin-points winning approaches

Happy Ainomugisha is the project coordinator at ACFODE and she shares her reflections on what methods resulted in impactful change.

Significant Impact

I have observed significant impacts through our school-based engagements. By involving young girls and boys in these educational activities, we have enhanced their understanding of GBV, including its various forms, effects, and consequences. Moreover, we have witnessed these pupils develop crucial skills in communication, confidence, and self-esteem, which they effectively apply in their daily lives.

Rekindling hope- In and Out of School.

Our school-based engagements have empowered these pupils to share knowledge with their peers through poetry and school assemblies. The benefits extend beyond the school environment, reaching their homes as well. Information about children's rights and the importance of parental support in maintaining school attendance has been communicated to parents, guardians, and caregivers, fostering a broader community understanding and support for keeping children in school.

Additionally, our outreach efforts with young girls and boys outside of school have led to remarkable improvements in their self-esteem and personal reflections. Many have been inspired to rejoin formal education, while others have pursued vocational training, earning certificates in areas such as tailoring, mechanics, baking, and hairdressing. Prior to these engagements, many girls who had dropped out of school had lost hope and felt their future prospects were bleak. Our programs have rekindled their optimism and provided them with new opportunities for growth and success.



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Winning Approaches

Parental Involvement

What sets this project apart is its unique approach of involving parents in our outreach efforts. We provided them with crucial information about creating a peaceful environment and detailed the various forms and effects of gender-based violence (GBV), along with its broader consequences on both children and families. This engagement has helped parents understand the significance of providing proper care and protection for their children's rights, and the essential role they play in supporting their educational journey.

Listener Clubs

The establishment of GBV prevention clubs in schools and Listener Clubs for out- of-school youth has significantly promoted shared learning, experience exchange, peer support, and conflict resolution. These clubs are designed to continue disseminating GBV prevention information among their peers and offer mutual support, including making referrals to local community leaders and other actors.

The Model Couple Approach

The model couple approach has significantly enhanced many couples' understanding of their role in addressing domestic violence within their homes. Couples have come to recognize the importance of collaborating as a family, showing mutual respect and creating a supportive environment for their children. This approach has strengthened individual communication skills, improved conflict management, and fostered inclusive decision-making processes within households. The diverse strategies implemented in this project have greatly empowered families to adopt effective GBV prevention measures, leading to safer homes and violence-free communities.



COMMUNITY ACTION:

A Story about Teenage Pregnancy, Resisting Violence and Changing Lives.

Julia Nsuga's journey is a testament to the power of communities in preventing violence and building resilience. Julia had just completed primary school when she discovered she was pregnant. Being a teenager at the beginning of a critical part of her education it was met with disappointment especially from her mother. This led to a strained relationship. Julia became isolated and the once nurturing home environment became hostile.

Concerned members of the community recognized the need to intervene and invited Julia's mother to a training session in Kyakatwanga village. The training focused on addressing violence in homes, particularly towards children who had not met societal expectations, like Julia, who had dropped out of school. This session was a turning point, helping her mother to understand and accept Julia's situation.

Subsequently, Julia, along with other young girls and boys who had also dropped out of school, was invited to join a listener's club formed by ACFODE. The club provided them with training that Julia describes as a revival. Through this training, she learned how to navigate her new reality, and importantly, her mother also came to terms with her

situation, allowing them to rebuild their relationship.

Motivated by the support she received, Julia and the other group members reached out to others in similar situations, gathering over 35 individuals to share the knowledge and skills they had acquired from ACFODE. They opened up to each other, discussing their challenges and finding collective solutions. This group also initiated a savings club, where they agreed to work and save money from small businesses including gardening and fruit selling.

Julia credits the listener's club with opening her mind to the possibilities of living a fulfilled life despite her early challenges. She learned vital skills in child-care and family planning, which have helped her avoid rushing into having more children and considering her options for the future, including a healthy relationship or returning to school. Without the intervention of ACFODE and the listener's club, Julia believes she would be in a much more difficult situation today.



360 DEGREES:

How getting help with their conflict saved Amos and Maria's home.

Maria and Byamungu, the parents of 8 children—I boy and 7 girls—had become overwhelmed with the violence, misunderstandings, and persistent stress in the family. Nobody visited their home since the neighbours saw it as a house of war. The children lived in constant fear of their father. At night Byamungu slept with his son and Maria with their daughters to avoid fighting. The couple were contemplating divorce when they heard about Action for Development (ACFODE) and the organisation's work in promoting peace and ending violence in families.

Upon reaching out to ACFODE, Byamungu and Maria were introduced to a counselor who provided them with the support they needed. The counselor visited their home regularly, offering guidance on how to communicate effectively and resolve conflicts. Through these sessions, they learned the importance of listening to each other and addressing problems together.

The training and counseling provided by ACFODE were pivotal in helping them rebuild their relationship. Byamungu and Maria realized that their previous approach to handling issues was detrimental to their family. With the counselor's help, they began to see the

value of cooperation and mutual respect. It was as though they took a 360 degrees turn in their relationship.

Inspired by the positive changes in their own lives, Byamungu and Maria decided to join ACFODE's efforts to support other families in their community. They became part of the model couple initiative by ACFODE, sharing their experiences and offering advice to neighbors and community members facing similar challenges. They walked from house to house, encouraging others to embrace non-violent communication and cooperation.

Their advocacy extended to addressing Gender Based Violence (GBV) and promoting children's rights. Maria, in particular, took a stand against mistreatment of children, educating parents on the importance of nurturing and protecting them. She condemns acts of violence and neglect, urging parents to be more considerate and involved in their children's lives.

Byamungu and Maria's transformation is a testament to the power of perseverance and the impact of effective counseling. They credit ACFODE for providing the tools and guidance necessary to transform their lives.



EMPOWERING CHANGE

Stephano and Toto's Journey to becoming a Model Couple

Stephano Bashizi and his wife Toto Bashizi are one of the couples who benefited from Amos and Maria Byamungu.

Stephano and his wife Toto Bashizi had struggled to live in harmony for a long time. Stephano made decisions about money without discussing them with his wife or children. They could never question him about money.

“When we received our monthly ration (Mupo-okelo), I would use it as I wanted. If my family managed to get any money for food, it was their luck. Otherwise, they couldn't question me.”

As a result, there was constant conflict in his household. Toto was at her wits end about how to deal with her husband's behaviour. She decided to approach her neighbour, Amos Byamungu, who she knew to be a counsellor. Amos and his wife were already a model couple in the community. Toto told Amos about the challenges they were facing. Since Moses too had previously struggled with domestic violence and yet transformed, Toto felt encouraged to seek his help.

When Amos spoke with Stephano and Toto, he advised them to join the program that ACFODE runs in their community. ACFODE's interventions educate communications about rights and responsibilities, gender-based violence and prevention, as well as skill to improve people's livelihoods.

“He introduced us to ACFODE's programs and facilitators, who taught us about GBV prevention within our family and community.”

Stephano admits that it was not easy to change, at first, but with constant counselling and engagement, he began to listen and understand. He started to consult with his wife and children, including planning together for the money they got for the household.

“In the past, I never listened to my wife's opinions. But now, we discuss and plan together. We pay school fees, buy food, and ensure everyone's needs are met. We also respect each other's rights. We thank ACFODE for teaching us and our community about living in harmony.”

Since joining ACFODE's programs and receiving training, Stephano and Toto are now advocates for peace and cooperation. They have become a model couple, empowered to share what they have learned with others in their community.

“There's still much to do, especially in providing more opportunities for men and women to gain skills and work. But with ACFODE's continued support, we believe we can create a better future for our community.”

This model couple's transformation shows the power of education and community support, through ACFODE's interventions.



INTENTIONALITY:

Spreading Peace and Love, through the model couple approach.

In Rugarama Village, Kyegegwa District, Benson Byamugisha and his wife were known as one of the more peaceful couples in their community. Infact Benson is the chairperson of heir local Village and Loans Savings Association. However, when the Local Council (LCI) chairperson invited them to participate in a training program on family dynamics, they realized there was much they still had to learn.

Benson recalls, *“Even though we were selected as model couples because of our relatively stable relationship, the training opened our eyes to many things we didn’t know. We were unaware of each other’s personal rights and freedoms and how essential it is to respect one another.”*

The training was by Action for Development (ACFODE) aimed at addressing the root causes of family violence. Even though the couple worked together on their finances especially savings with their VSLA group and were respected, they agreed with ACFODE’s findings that a lot of the family conflicts stemmed from economic pressures. Training in this area was as such impactful. Benson explains. *“They taught us about financial management, saving, investing, and how to start small income-generating activities to increase our shared earnings.”*



For Benson and his wife, these lessons were life-changing. *“They say an idle mind is the devil’s workshop, and that’s true,”* he reflects. *“When you are both contributing it is different. Now, when I’m busy harvesting, my wife is making soap—a skill we learned from ACFODE.”* Soap making has become a significant source of income for their family, reducing expenses and generating profit. *“We used to spend money buying soap for the children as they went to school, but now we make our own. It’s not just for home use; we also sell it.”*

Beyond the changes in their home the couple attest to transformation in other homes.

“I’ve seen families that were struggling before the training, and now they’ve turned their lives around,” Benson says with pride. *“The LCI chairperson who invited us is thrilled with the changes. We now solve many issues within the village that would have otherwise ended up in the police or LCI office. The model couple approach is voluntary, cost-free, and fosters harmony. It allows others to learn by the example of the model couple in their village but also provides couples with support from their peers as they too start to change their relationship.”*

As a result of the program, the community formed a Model Couple Association, which has strengthened their problem-solving abilities. *“I’ve learned that when we are organized, there’s so much we can achieve,”* Benson adds. *“We have various points of reference and people we can turn to for help with supporting couples in the community to be their best.”*

Mrs. Byamugisha is besought by the intentionality in the model couple approach.

“As a woman, I appreciate ACFODE for involving both men and women. When an issue affects a woman, she comes to me; when it affects a man, he turns to a fellow man. This approach creates a balance in family leadership.”

In addition, Mrs. Byamugisha notes that money matters are at the heart of domestic violence. As such the income generating training is a game changer as it helps create financial independence for families, especially the aspect of fairness in sharing resources.

“Most of the issues we used to face as women were related to economic violence, but now we feel respected and appreciated.”

Mrs. Byamugisha expresses the couple’s collective gratitude: *“We appreciate ACFODE for the good work they are doing in helping us create peaceful families and communities. Women no longer feel manipulated like they used to; we now feel valued, thanks to ACFODE.”*



IT TAKES A VILLAGE:

Reversing the norms that marginalize and hurt girls and women in Nyakanyinya.

Denying women almost every imaginable human right was the norm in Nyakanyinya village, in Kyegegwa district. According to Sunday Christopher, the Chairman of the Local Council one (LCI), *“women were manipulated, and cultural taboos kept them from owning land. Girls were often denied the chance to go to school, and violating women’s rights was common.”*

When Action for Development (ACFODE) arrived in the village, they established the Kanyinya Listeners’ Club, targeting both men and women who would turn into change champions. The aim was clear: to educate the community about gender-based violence and promote equality.

“I was selected as one of the model couples,” Christopher shares. *“We were trained on the importance of equality in the home and the need for mutual support between spouses.”* The knowledge gained wasn’t just for personal transformation; it was meant to spread out to the wider community. *“As a model couple and a community leader, the message touched me and I began teaching others in the village about the harms of domestic violence.”*

Christopher reflects on the old ways: “Before ACFODE, when couples had misunderstandings they would rush to the police or courts of law. But this often-made things worse. You can’t send your husband to prison and expect peace when he returns.” The model couple approach introduced a new way of problem-solving—one that emphasized peer-to-peer support. “Men learnt how to use their authority to protect women, not to violate their rights.”

The impact of the training has been profound. *“We started with just 20 families, but the change has spread out to the entire village. Each of us was tasked with training others, and the skills we were equipped with have transformed our community,”* Christopher notes with pride.

The results speak for themselves. “I used to receive daily reports of domestic violence, but now I might get one case every two weeks,” Christopher says. *“Defilement cases were once almost a weekly occurrence, but I haven’t had one in six months.”* The reduction in these cases has also allowed him more time for his other roles. *“I used to be overwhelmed, handling up to five cases that would escalate to the police or probation office. Now, the load is much lighter.”*

The community has also seen a shift in how children are treated. *“Parents have learned to be more understanding of their children’s rights and needs. The children’s freedom is respected, and now they attend school regularly, unlike before when they would just loiter around the village,”* he explains. “There is so much peace in our village now, all thanks to the model couple strategy.”

Before ACFODE’s intervention, the concept of marriage and shared responsibilities was often misunderstood. *“Violence related to household finances was rampant, and both men and women suffered the consequences,”* Christopher recounts. *“Women believed that providing for children was solely a man’s responsibility. On the other hand men believed taking care of children was for women. But we’ve since learned that it’s a shared duty.”*

Christopher offers heartfelt gratitude for this initiative which he says has created a peaceful community.



CREATING SAFER COMMUNITIES:

Peter and Maria-Rose's peace building journey

Peter Kasasira was introduced to ACFODE by Benson Byamugisha, who together with his wife had been trained by the organization as a model couple. "He told us he had learned how to create a peaceful environment at home, free from domestic violence" Peter recalls. Intrigued by the concept, Peter and his wife decided to enroll for the training.

The training sessions lived up to their expectations, offering valuable lessons that differed from what they had previously encountered through church, government officials, and police. Although the content was similar, the approach—particularly the peer-to-peer method—was notably different and highly effective.

Before ACFODE's intervention, Peter admits that they didn't concern themselves with what happened in their neighbors' homes, thinking it was none of their business. However, the training made them realise that the well-being of their community was interconnected. *"ACFODE made us understand that when our neighbor's home isn't happy, our community isn't safe. The only way for us to ensure our safety is by ensuring the safety of all our neighbors."*

Maria-Rose Kyingenenye, Peter's wife, found the model couple training to be a game-changer. "There was no violence in our home, so I initially thought this training wasn't for us—it was meant for families with violent homes. But the training opened our

minds. I thought we were okay, but I realized there were things we didn't know," she shares.

One of the key takeaways for Maria-Rose was the realisation that it shouldn't solely be a man's responsibility to provide for the household. *"I learned that this puts too much pressure on a man, leading to stress and possibly violence,"* she notes. Additionally, she learned the importance of building a strong relationship with their children, and creating a safe environment where children can share their challenges. This was particularly beneficial in addressing issues with their daughters that might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

ACFODE's support didn't stop there. They linked Maria-Rose's daughter to vocational studies, which she has since completed and is now ready to start her career.

As a church leader and mother of five, Maria-Rose has found that the knowledge gained from ACFODE has enhanced her ability to help the women she leads. *"I have the trust of people as a leader and a mother. They come to me with their problems, and with the knowledge from both the church and ACFODE, I find it much easier to offer solutions."*



A CHAMPION OF CHANGE

Tusiime Fred champions change at Itambabiniga primary school.

Fred is full of high praise for Action for Development (ACFODE) and the impact that it has had on Itambabiniga Primary School. The school hosts learners from the community and surrounding areas, which faces significant challenges related to poverty, and sexual and Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention.

However, through the interventions by ACFODE at the school, especially in forming GBV Prevention clubs, learners have displayed change in their behaviour and attitudes. Learners and teachers went through training about how to detect the forms of violence and how they can overcome those forms of violence. They became aware of the violence going on in their homes which they did not know were violations against their rights. All the knowledge they received at the training, the learners shared with their peers, their parents, and in their communities.

One of the benefits of the GBV prevention clubs is that they have empowered learners to engage in debates, where they talk about social issues, including the idea of free menstrual hygiene kits to help keep learners in school, teenage pregnancies, and others. Students get to share their experiences and learn practical ways to manage their health and other aspects of their lives.

The GBV clubs are also growing in number.

In Itambabiniga Primary School, the club started with 28 members but has since grown to 35 members.

Other interventions that were introduced included signage across the school compound with messaging around sexual and reproductive health, as well as GBV prevention.

“During their free time, at break or lunch, learners read these messages and understand their meanings. If the sign says AIDS kills, they understand this. If they do something not okay, they know the consequences.”

The learners have also engaged in composing poems and songs about GBV prevention messages and promotion of Sexual Reproductive Health Rights, which help spread important messages creatively. These artistic expressions serve as powerful tools for raising awareness and educating the community.

All this change is thanks to ACFODE’s interventions in Itambabiniga Primary School. Fred’s story highlights the transformative power of education and community engagement in combating gender-based violence. Through the GBV prevention clubs, he and the learners have gained valuable knowledge and become advocates for positive change in their community.



A CHANCE FOR A FRESH START

Viola's transformational journey back to school

Viola Namara is the Academic Prefect and Chairperson Listeners club Kanyinya Village. But before this, Viola had dropped out of school when she was in Senior 2, after being neglected by her father. She had no interest in returning to school, when she encountered Action for Development (ACFODE) facilitators, who offered training and encouraged her to consider returning to school.

"After sitting down, seeing what all our trainers and facilitators would tell us, I saw if possible, let me go back."

Viola returned to school and even became a community mobilizer for the Listeners' Club in Kanyinya, thanks to ACFODE's programs. She took on a leadership role, encouraging others to join and benefit from the programs offered by ACFODE. She then transitioned to the Gender Based Violence Prevention (GBV) Club at Kibuye Secondary School, continuing to spread the positive influence of ACFODE interventions.

Her persistence paid off, and she is now continuing her studies with renewed vigor and confidence. Viola has become confident in public speaking and performance, where previously, she was shy.

"I couldn't stand in front of people and act in a play. But currently, we can act in churches, in

meetings. We have skills and confidence as we girls."

Their performances address issues around violence, early pregnancies, and how to protect themselves against exploitation, aiming to educate and inspire the community to make positive changes.

On top of the knowledge and skills that they have acquired, Viola, her peers, and the overall community benefit from a support system provided by ACFODE. She feels empowered knowing that there is a network of support available to help in times of need.

"The facilitator told us these things are common in our homes. If the father tries to do something to you, you can contact us, and we will help you."

Viola's story is a powerful example of the ripple effect that education and empowerment can have on an individual and their community. As she looks to the future, Viola aspires to become a veterinary doctor, driven by her belief in the importance of agriculture in her community. Her journey is a testament to the transformative power of organizations like ACFODE and the incredible potential of young girls when given the tools and support to start afresh and succeed.



A CONFIDENT LEADER

Kusemererwa Arinaitwe learns to speak up for herself and others



Before joining the GBV prevention club, Kusemererwa was afraid to report violence if/when she saw any, despite knowing who to report to and despite being the Head Girl at Bukere Primary School. The GBV prevention club at Bukere Primary School was formed with the support of Action for Development (ACFODE) to educate and empower learners about their rights as well as how to prevent sexual and gender-based violence. When Kusemererwa became part of the GBV prevention club, she began to gain confidence in herself.

“Through ACFODE’s training, I have gained self-esteem and self-confidence. I can now stand before a large group and deliver a speech without fear. I also know how to report any case of violence. If I see a child being violated, I know exactly who to report to and where to go.”

Kusemererwa’s new confidence, coupled with her character has made her an important voice in her community. She has been able to speak on radio and meet with parents to talk to them about dangers and effects associated with GBV.

She also spoke with her own parents about gender balance in their home, and as a result, responsibilities are now shared equally. She has learned and believes

that parents need to be involved in their children’s lives.

“I was telling parents that they should follow up on their children, not leaving all responsibilities to teachers. Teachers are their parents at school, but parents need to follow up at home.”

Kusemererwa recounted an incident where she had to lean on all that she had learned during her training with ACFODE and the GBV prevention club in order to make a difference.

“There was a girl who was violated, and I was able to report it. Because of that, she is now okay and continuing her studies. Creating awareness about avoiding violence and maintaining children’s rights is crucial.”

Thinking of the future, Kusemererwa aspires to be a nurse because she wants to help people.

Her story is a testament to the transformative power of education and empowerment. Through the efforts of ACFODE and the dedication of students like Kusemererwa, Bukere Primary School is fostering a generation of confident, knowledgeable, and proactive young leaders committed to fighting gender-based violence and promoting equality.



A HEADTEACHER'S WITNESS

Strides towards a Violence-Free Kabweza Primary School.



As the headteacher of Kabweza Primary School, Mugenyi Emmanuel has seen and experienced first hand the challenges that learners and the surrounding community face. Violence and a lack of awareness regarding Gender Based Violence (GBV), led to conflict and bred a hostile learning environment in the school.

This conflict even in the broader community was the norm, until ACFODE came to the school and introduced transformative initiatives focused on creating awareness and preventing violence at the school, home, and community levels. Through regular sensitization sessions carried out by ACFODE, the learners learned to detect and respond to various forms of violence.

"ACFODE has really done us a big service. It has actually dealt with the prevention of violence in school and also at home, where these children come from, and that's why we believe that this approach has been for a greater good to the community as a whole."

The approaches Mugenyi refers to are the formation of a GBV

prevention club at school, T-Shirts branded with GBV Prevention messages, training and equipping teachers to sensitize learners about GBV prevention, as well as putting signage across the school compound for awareness and to reinforce messaging around non-violence and gender equality.

Mugenyi appreciates the work that ACFODE has done to help his learners, including sharing knowledge with the boys and girls about sexual and reproductive health. The learners were empowered to make informed decisions, and the girls became more confident even during their menstruation. The sensitization further helped the boys to show support and sensitivity towards girls during such times.

"ACFODE's intervention has not only transformed Kabweza Primary School but also brought hope and a sense of security to our entire community. The journey towards eradicating GBV is ongoing, but the strides we have made so far demonstrate the power of education and collaboration in creating a violence-free future."



A LEADER NOW, A LEADER TOMORROW

Maria Learns to Lead by Example



Twelve-year-old Maria Saffi dreams of becoming a member of parliament, and it is clear she is determined to follow that dream. She is currently in primary seven and chairs the GBV prevention club at Kaburogota Primary School. But before the club was formed, Maria was surrounded by a scenario of children who fought each other relentlessly. They struggled to get along.

“Last year, children couldn’t play with each other.”

Then one day, Action for Development (ACFODE) came to their school, teaching the children about the rights of women and girls, and about GBV prevention. ACFODE helped the learners to form a GBV Prevention Club, where the children learn various skills, about reproductive health, and how to support each other.

Maria shared that the GBV prevention club was very beneficial in that she learned to share her challenges without fear, to advise others, and to understand her reproductive health better than she used to.

“During my menstruation period, I

know how to help myself and care for other girls when it happens to them.”

The formation of the GBV prevention club has empowered Maria and her peers so much so that they take their knowledge and skills to their community.

“We go into the community to share what we have learned so that people can also learn. We perform skits showing that violence is not good and how people should care for their wives and children.”

Maria’s confidence has also been boosted through participating in the debating events, which is beneficial for her as a current and future leader.

“Last year, I couldn’t speak in public and was very afraid. But the debating club has made me natural in public speaking. When they arranged a competition, I was almost fearing, but I reached there, and I was okay.”

Maria’s journey and the impact of ACFODE at Kaburogota Primary School showcase the importance of education and empowerment in transforming lives and communities.



A MECHANIC WAITING TO LAUNCH

The Transformative Impact of a Listener's Club on Ubemoti Ivan in Itambabininga

Ubemoti Ivan is proud to be a member of the Listener's Club at Itamba-Biniga Central. The club was established by Action for Development (ACFODE) to support out-of-school girls and boys and the overall community. Before joining the club, Ivan and most of the youth did not have good practices. They did not know how to save money, could be found in bad groups or idly roaming the streets, and engaging in unproductive activities.

The Listener's Club brought tangible change to the community by impacting the lives of these youth. They now know about conflict resolution, peer support, techniques for GBV prevention and saving money.

"If a friend has a small amount of money and wants to start a business, we support them financially to ensure they can achieve their goals. This community support has strengthened our bonds and improved our collective well-being."

There have been significant behavioral changes among the children and youth in the community. They participate actively in church and community events, which keeps them away from negative influences such as early marriages and teen pregnancies.

The club provides guidance on various aspects of life, including how to go to church, how to pray, and in the case of parents, how

to raise children while respecting their rights. Even more, youth who had dropped out of school have been able to return to school and be reintegrated into the community.

Currently, the Listener's Club has several groups, each comprising twelve members. In Itambabininga Central alone, there are twelve members in the group, with additional groups in other zones like Rukinga.

The impact of the Listener's Club can be credited for getting Ivan to focus on school and complete a course in mechanics. Even though this is a great thing, he lacks the tools needed to start and run a mechanics business, a common issue among many who have undergone similar training. He believes that providing the necessary tools and resources for vocational training graduates would give them the ability to start working and contribute to their communities sustainably.

ACFODE's support has been instrumental in this community. By documenting and sharing the experiences of beneficiaries of ACFODE interventions, they ensure the voices of refugees and their host communities are heard.



AN ASPIRING IT PROFESSIONAL

Godfrey Irumba transformed after attending the Listener's Club at Itambabininga

Godfrey never listened to his parents and often neglected his responsibilities at home. The parents would send him to school, but he would not go. Living with his parents became hard. Away from home, he and his age-mates often got into conflict, never knowing how to resolve their disagreements.

Godfrey heard about the Listener's Club, an intervention by Action for Development (ACFODE), and where other youth from the settlement and host community were learning life changing skills. Upon joining the Listener's Club, Godfrey began to learn practical skills, such as making liquid soap, which then provided him with a means to earn income, and the value of self-reliance.

Among the things he learned was what it means to listen to his parents.

"Initially, living with my parents was challenging as I often did not listen to them or help with chores. However, through the guidance of the Listener's Club, I learned to respect and listen to my parents, hence improving our relationship."

One of Godfrey's biggest regrets was missing out on a football scholarship which he had received because of his outstanding performance, but lost because he hadn't completed his primary seven. While at the Listener's Club Godfrey remembered the experience and committed to heeding the advice he received to change his story.

He is more responsible and committed to his education and is currently in primary six, determined

to complete his education. Many children, including Godfrey, who had dropped out of school have returned, inspired by the club's activities. Godfrey has learned to counsel his peers and employ the conflict resolution skills he learned from the Listener's Club. When he sees boys insulting each other, he intervenes, discouraging them from the behaviour and its repetition.

"Sometimes I use my small resources to share with my friends as we talk about personal challenges."

This fosters a sense of community and mutual support. One of the other significant benefits Godfrey gained from the Listener's Club is how to save money. Before, he had no idea how to save, but now, he saves 2,000 shillings every day. He participates in a savings group called Kikundi, where they pool their savings and support each other financially.

On weekends, Godfrey works to earn extra money, which he saves. He engages in computer-related work, sharing and selling songs, which provides him with additional income. He has learned the value of hard work and financial management.

Because of ACFODE, the future now looks bright for Godfrey. He aspires to become an Information Technology (IT) professional after completing his education.

"The skills and lessons I have learned from the Listener's Club and ACFODE have given me the confidence and determination to pursue this dream."



AN IMPACTFUL PRESENCE

Ayebare's psychosocial skills support communities

It is not easy to come into a role where the complexities seem insurmountable. Prossy Ayebare, a Psychosocial Counselor with ACFODE has had a unique experience trying to handle gender-based violence issues in both the host community and the refugee settlement. At the start of her role, she handled two to three cases per day.

But all that has changed with the GBV prevention interventions by ACFODE, to the point that she now sees one GBV case per week, which is a significant shift from the two to three per day she was handling.

“This change is most noticeable during the last week of the month when refugees receive their cash distributions, and we might handle one or two cases per day during that period.”

Most of the cases Ayebare now receives centre around economic violence, which has increased due to reductions in food and cash distributions. Initially, everyone received 24,000 UGX, but now they only receive 12,000 UGX, which has increased economic strain. Economic violence is fundamentally tied to psychological, physical, and sexual violence, which begs for a holistic approach to benefit these circumstances.

The dynamics in refugee and host communities are different, requiring tailored approaches. In the refugee community, the rate of reporting is higher, partly due

to the presence of a Peace Hut, which makes it easier to provide support. In contrast, the host community's reporting mechanisms are less efficient, often involving delays and cases only being reported when they are beyond the capacity of the police to handle.

ACFODE conducts awareness sessions and continuous sensitization about GBV prevention, while also promoting the model couple approach as an intervention towards psychosocial support when cases arise in the community, thereby reducing the incidence of GBV. Interventions that include engaging parents and adolescents through training, have enabled them to understand their responsibilities better, which has decreased violence in their homes.

“ACFODE educates them about their responsibilities, GBV prevention, and the various forms of violence. They also inform them about referral pathways and where to report challenges. This comprehensive approach, which includes psychosocial support, has been instrumental in addressing and reducing GBV cases.”

Ayebare remains an impactful presence in the refugee settlement, offering support to those who need it. While challenges remain, there is clear evidence that ACFODE's interventions toward educating and reducing GBV incidents in the refugee settlement as well as the host community work. When the right support is provided, refugees and host communities can live harmoniously.



CHALLENGING GENDER NORMS

Teacher Masereka and the GBV prevention club at Kaborogota Primary School

Teacher Masereka is a dedicated patron of the GBV prevention club at Kaborogota Primary School. In his tenure, he has witnessed significant changes in the school and community since ACFODE began its interventions. ACFODE aims to empower women and girls, addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality.

Before ACFODE's interventions in the school, dropout rates were high, made worse by gender-based violence in homes, and socially constructed norms.

“These norms dictated that boys and girls had different roles. Girls were seen as only fit for marriage.”

Girls did not feel comfortable solving maths problems in front of the peers, and many felt shy to speak in public. The boys, on the other hand, did not seem to realise their privilege and could not sympathise with the challenges girls faced.

But all that changed when ACFODE supported the formation of a GBV prevention club at Kaborogota Primary School. While change does not happen overnight and takes time to reach everyone, there has been noticeable transformation, whereby girls now

participate and enjoy the same rights as boys.

The GBV prevention club has developed students' skills, particularly in public speaking and debating, enabling them to effectively articulate their views and address real-life issues.

“Last Friday, we had a competitive motion between teachers and learners on whether teenage pregnancy is the only reason for school dropouts. The students' perspectives were enlightening, showing that ACFODE's initiatives have a positive impact.”

The broader community has seen the benefits of the GBV prevention club because their children are now in school and can address the issues affecting them. They understand their responsibilities, and boys and girls now perform tasks that were previously gender-restricted. Even more, girls and boys share their challenges and support each other, which fosters a more inclusive environment.

“ACFODE has done a lot for us, and with more efforts, especially in community outreach and public education, we can achieve even greater results in combating gender-based violence.”



EMBRACING CHANGE

Racheal learns her rights and shares the knowledge.

Racheal Namuga is a bright and articulate primary seven student, and the head girl at Kabweeza Primary School. She and her peers had long struggled with self-confidence. Being in a community with various challenges, especially related to sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), many of them lacked the knowledge, tools, and confidence to report what they saw or experienced.

All this changed when ACFODE came into the picture, introducing and supporting the formation of a GBV prevention club at Kabweeza Primary School. Racheal's life and that of her peers has been transformed since joining the club and participating in its activities.

The club's activities and training sessions have played a significant role in their personal development, empowering Racheal and her peers with knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, as well as their rights and responsibilities, whether they are in or outside school. The changes in these learners have extended to their communities whereby they share their knowledge with

their parents and neighbours, which has allowed for discussions of issues such as early marriage, corporal punishment, and other forms of GBV to take place and be addressed openly.

Even if she has not seen every case resolved, Racheal's advocacy and integrity in pointing out these issues have made a noticeable difference. In situations where she encounters rights violations, whether by students or teachers, Racheal knows exactly what steps to take.

She is prepared to make an alarm to alert others, report incidents to parents or school authorities, and ensure that the affected individuals receive the help they need. Her proactive leadership within the school and club have made her a trusted figure at school and in the community.



FINDING PURPOSE

Gloria Katinisa's self discovery

Nineteen-year-old Gloria Katinisa lived discordantly with her parents and was not in school. She did not listen to her parents, which affected the atmosphere in the home. She lacked skills to solve everyday problems. In a village defined by poverty, her life seemed to be headed nowhere, without purpose. If anything, idleness was the order of the day.

Then, she heard about ACFODE and that the organisation was teaching girls in her village about Gender Based Violence (GBV). She learned from the community that ACFODE had started a Listener's Club, which offered training in some skills. Out of curiosity, she decided to join it.

Upon joining the club and attending the different sessions that were held, Gloria began to learn new skills, about life, as well as how to be disciplined both at home and within her community.

"Through ACFODE, I learnt how to live and be disciplined at home and in the community."

She also realised that because of her age, it might be challenging for her to join a primary school. With the support of her mentor, Gloria opted to attend a school in Sweswe to study tailoring. After successfully completing her training in tailoring, she found work with a tailor's

shop, which has given her a sense of purpose.

"I now have peace at home, and I have a career."

Gloria did not stop at learning tailoring. She continued to attend the Listener's Club where she learned to make liquid soap and and reusable sanitary pads for girls.

"Before, I didn't know how to solve some of my problems, but now I can make liquid soap, which is not only useful but also can be a source of income."

One of the most inspiring things about Gloria's story is that she is now the chairperson of the group, overseeing activities around making soap and reusable sanitary pads for sell, and ensuring continuous growth and success. Since the inception of the club, they have saved a significant amount of money from their sales.

Gloria's transformation towards purpose shows the real impact that ACFODE programming has on individual lives and communities. Many girls' lives are improved as well as their families, thanks to ACFODE's initiatives.



FROM CONFLICT TO COMPASSION

Learning to embrace change and difference

Before joining ACFODE, Peter Orombi spent more days getting drunk at the bar than he could afford, often spending nights away from home. If he came back home from the bar, he beat his wife and children. As if that was not bad enough, his drunken behaviour also led to strained relations with the rest of the community. He got into fights with people who were different from him – people who were from different tribes. He did not believe that they deserved to be treated like other human beings, like people of his own tribe.

Peter's life turned around when he met his friend Salongo, who had a background similar to his. Salongo told Peter about ACFODE and the positive change he had experienced in his life since joining ACFODE and how he and his wife were now a model couple. He encouraged Peter to join ACFODE so that he can also experience this positive change, and that he would save money.

Peter was motivated and decided to join and participate in ACFODE's training. At the training, Peter began to realise that the things he was doing were not good.

"I had very bad behaviour and a heart of discrimination. I realised my faults and there and there, I decided to change my life."

Through ACFODE's training, Peter learned about Gender Based Violence (GBV) and why it is important to stop it from happening in his family and community. He learned about law awareness,

conflict resolution, and the rights of women and children. As he continued to be trained, he began to show respect for his wife and children.

"Every month, WFP gives us UGX 240,000. Before, I would just spend the money in the bar. But now we sit and plan as a family and use the money for school fees, food, and other needs."

The transformation in Peter's life led to more changes in the family. For example, his daughter, who had dropped out of school previously, returned to school to pursue technical training, following the encouragement of ACFODE staff. Then, both Peter and his daughter learned how to make and sell liquid soap as a resulting of ACFODE training, and together joined a group in the community. The main learning from ACFODE paved way to be noticed by other organisations like ALIGHT, i now volunteer as a community legal facilitator, and i also represent some cases in court community which produces liquid soap for sell.

This joint effort from father and daughter has benefitted the family by increasing the household income as well as giving them some financial stability.

Among the things that changed for Peter is his attitude towards those in his community who were different from him. There was a lot of hostility between the different tribes prior to Peter's training.

"People were fighting like a war," he notes.



GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Creating safe spaces against all odds.

Teachers like Abigaba Leonard, who is the Senior male teacher at Kibuye Primary school are at the forefront of influencing the young lives that they meet in school establishments. Their role complements that of parents. Leonard has witnessed the many damaging practices in the surrounding Kyaka Settlement in Kyegegwa, including violations against the rights of women and girls.

“In the past we had many forms of violence, both physical, economic, and psychological. Even teachers could abuse learners without knowing they were violating their rights.”

However, things began to turn around when ACFODE came into the community, sensitizing them and training others on gender-based violence and the rights of women and children. Leonard is one of the teachers who received training from ACFODE, leading to transformation in the school where he teaches as well as the surrounding community.

Leonard says the activities of ACFODE have helped him and his colleagues very much, making them more aware of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and student rights issues. They have taken steps to educate fellow teachers about the effects of such violence and taught parents about their rights and responsibilities.

“We had pupils dropping out due to early pregnancies, but now it has reduced because we have sensitized parents on how to report these cases and focus on the future of their children.”

Leonard and his colleagues go the extra mile

in community outreaches. For example, they carry out home visits as a crucial approach to addressing issues faced by students. He recounted a case where a child's mother remarried, and the stepfather attempted to have sexual relations with the child.

“We talked to the parent, and the child was moved to the grandparents' home. Now, she is safe.”

Whereas facilitation to carry out home visits remains a challenge, Leonard is committed to supporting his students. He uses phone calls to follow up with parents and conducts home visits whenever possible, with or without money. Because of this dedication, some of the reward is seeing out-of-school youth return to school after attending village meetings or listening to Leonard's encouragement.

There are also GBV clubs that have been set up at school, which educate students about sexual and reproductive health issues. “Our club members are trained and then they go on to train others. We have seen an increase in reporting cases, which means our training is helping.” The clubs have created safe spaces for students to learn about their rights and how to protect themselves from violence.

Leonard credits the positive change in the community and school to ACFODE. His commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment for learners is a testament to the positive change that can be achieved through education and community involvement.



IT TAKES PARTNERSHIP

Jerome Mukunda weighs in on the challenge of GBV in Kyaka II Settlement

It is difficult to watch donors pull out of an area on the basis that there are no new incoming refugees, despite the glaring needs of the current refugees in the settlement. Mukunda Jerome, a GBV Officer with Alight Uganda, the implementing partner for protection in the Kyaka II refugee settlement, has seen the challenges and successes of addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in this community.

“When you talk about 130,000 refugees in Kyaka II, a settlement that has existed for over 15 years, you begin to understand the magnitude of the situation.”

There is high prevalence of GBV within the settlement. The reported figures are merely a snapshot of the actual scenario due to the under-reporting nature of GBV cases.

“The figures we have do not reflect the real extent of GBV. They only show the impact and how it affects lives in Kyaka. In May, for instance, 31 cases were reported, with 21 involving intimate partner violence.”

Since the beginning of the year, Alight has documented 233 GBV cases, a figure that underscores the severity of the issue. However, Alight faces significant challenges in responding to these cases due to being

understaffed. In March, IRC and Save the Children withdrew their operations because Kyaka II was no longer receiving new settlers. Alight had to fill the gap with limited resources.

Despite these challenges, Jerome appreciates the support from partners like ACFODE, who focus on GBV prevention. They come in to fill some of these gaps and in that way, communities can be assisted more sustainably.

“ACFODE’s interventions take some load off the implementing partner, allowing us to cover more areas. Their model couple approach is particularly impactful. It addresses the critical issue of intimate partner violence, which is a significant part of the GBV cases we handle.

While there remain constraints faced by ACFODE, which is currently operating in only one of the nine zones, and with a need to cover more zones, the effort and work towards eradicating GBV and training community members in GBV prevention is significant. Collaborative efforts with different partners and donors contribute to handling what feels like mammoth task.



LASTING IMPACT

Empowering Communities to eradicate Gender-Based Violence
in Kyaka II Settlement

Twinamatsiko Alex is the ACFODE Field Coordinator who has witnessed the challenges with Sexual and Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the Kyaka II Settlement. The community is made up of refugees and interacts with locals from the surrounding area. Part of his role is to ensure that interventions that target GBV prevention are brought to schools and communities. For example, when ACFODE first started working with the schools in and around the settlement, it was evident that many children and teachers lacked basic awareness about gender-based violence.

“I asked a teacher if they had a GBV prevention club, and he didn’t even know what GBV was.”

However, through ACFODE’s efforts, they trained 28 learners and eventually expanded to form two GBV prevention clubs per school to accommodate the high student population. They also introduced 16 message signages across school compounds to reinforce the GBV prevention messaging. These messages have had a significant impact, with some students sharing that they were about to drop out of school, but reading the messages about staying in school encouraged them to rather stay in school.

In the community, ACFODE established listeners’ clubs in each village, training 12 members from per village. Due to many dropouts, every village now has two listeners’ clubs. These clubs help report cases and address GBV issues among their peers. Listeners’ clubs have proven sustainable, leading to formation of savings groups among the community members which save money weekly or monthly. The members were trained

in making reusable sanitary pads, which they sell to generate income for their savings groups. These activities ensure that community members continue meeting even after the project ends.

The role of eradicating GBV primarily has to start within the home. As a result, ACFODE tuned into the needs of the community and listened to what the children were saying to them.

“We trained the parents of listeners’ club members, as the children recommended this. Many challenges that caused them to drop out of school were related to GBV issues at home.”

Twinamatsiko believes that because of the training given to the parents, there have been improvements, with some of them becoming model couples in the community. To reinforce the effects of the training, drama groups were formed from listeners’ clubs and model couples. They use their training to convey GBV prevention messages through drama, reaching 10 churches (six in the refugee settlement and four in the host community).

The project has achieved significant sustainable success through the formation of GBV prevention clubs, listeners clubs, and drama groups. The collaboration and participation of the community and various stakeholders to educate and empower learners and community members have been crucial in addressing and reducing GBV cases effectively in the Kyaka II Settlement.



MISSION FOCUSED

Teacher Margaret is committed to Transforming Lives Through Gender Equality and Education

Teacher Margaret has seen her fair share of violence against women and girls. But she has also worked hard to see that change in her community and in the schools she teaches at. When she was still at Kibuye Primary School, long before ACFODE brought interventions into communities, violence was the order of the day. Margaret noticed that women and girls suffered most of this violence without recourse.

“Men often tortured women and girls, with no avenues for reporting or seeking help.”

But then ACFODE introduced interventions in schools, to educate learners about their rights and prevention of gender-based violence. ACFODE taught teachers how to handle gender-based violence (GBV), where to report it, and how to respect gender equality. These interventions were effective and brought about change in Kibuye Primary School while impacting the community too.

When Margaret was re-posted to Kibira Primary school, she carried with her the learnings about GBV and how to prevent it. For her, the mission to empower learners and communities against gender-based violence could be duplicated elsewhere. She set about forming a GBV prevention club, continuing the work she had done in Kibuye Primary School.

The club engages in debates, essay writing, drama, and sensitization activities whose content centres

around GBV and sexual reproductive health (SRH). Parents have been appreciative of her efforts, showing openness to learning about violence and how to address it. She has facilitated discussions on girl-child and boy-child education, ensuring no child is left behind.

Margaret also provides guidance and counselling to learners, teachers, and parents, visiting families to educate them on resolving violence. Since ACFODE equipped her with core values like integrity, respect, and teamwork, enabling her to handle diverse aspects of life and work effectively in a community affected by violence, Margaret goes the extra mile. Through her dedication, she has become a vital resource in her community.

“I normally pay some visits to parents to teach them how violence can be solved. When they have problems, they come to me, we talk, and we handle those problems together.”

Thanks to ACFODE's training, Margaret's work has inspired others, including the headmaster and fellow teachers at Kibira Primary School, who have been impressed by her efforts. The children eagerly participate in the GBV club, which has 45 members. It has become a platform for students to learn, express themselves, and advocate for gender equality.



EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES

How meaningful inclusion is a winning strategy

Juliet Okwui is the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer of Kyegegwa district, where the Kyaka II Refugee Settlement is located. The leader is particularly impressed by ACFODE's inclusive program design to address gender-based violence (GBV) and enhancing educational standards both within the refugee settlement and host community.

Juliet appreciates ACFODE's partnership and support in fighting GBV in a district hosting refugees, making it prone to various forms of violence, including physical, emotional, psychological, and economic. She emphasizes the severity of emotional violence and believes that ACFODE's approach which has involved both women and men, has contributed to a notable reduction in GBV incidents.

Reflecting on the progress made, Juliet notes a decline in severe violence cases compared to when she first arrived in the district. She acknowledges ACFODE's contribution to this positive change but emphasizes the need for continued and expanded interventions. Juliet suggests that peer-to-peer approaches and formal justice systems are used together to address the different parts of GBV response.

Juliet does not shy away from the complexity of the challenge within the refugee settlement, particularly economic hardships, which escalate violence levels. She highlights the need for expanded project coverage to reach more sub-

counties, as refugees move across different areas seeking work. Juliet advocates for involving more men in the fight against GBV, as they are often the perpetrators. By engaging men, she believes it will help reduce GBV incidents significantly.

In terms of educational initiatives, Juliet praises ACFODE for organizing a debate program with several competitions. These revealed the disparity between learners in the refugee settlement and those in the host community. She points out the high level of support and confidence among refugee learners, contrasting with the limited resources and support for host community learners. Juliet stresses the importance of balancing allocation of resources and support between refugees and nationals to prevent long-term negative impacts on local learners' competitiveness and future opportunities.

Lastly, Juliet advocates for the strengthening the debate program through partnerships with the education sector and government to adopt best practices for sustainability. She believes that transforming the thinking of young learners can lead to broader societal changes, as these children can influence their families and communities positively.



NO GOVERNMENT JOB, NO PROBLEM!

Eliya Learns skills to improve livelihoods in Itamba-Biniga Village.

Eliya Bahizi, first heard about ACFODE from his peer, who had mentioned that there was an organization in Itambabininga that was teaching young people about GBV prevention and poverty eradication. Intrigued by the possibility of learning skills to address these issues in his community, Eliya decided to join ACFODE's activities. Maybe he too could learn something to improve his life.

When Eliya started attending training carried out by ACFODE, he learned about the importance of respecting his parents and others, which was a shift from his previous behavior. He also learned about financial responsibility, yet he had previously been careless with money. This training taught him the value of saving. Additionally, he learned from ACFODE about the importance of vocational skills and enterprise development. To this end, he and his peers were taught to make liquid soap, which is a skill that he could use immediately.

“This training was important, especially for those of us who can not secure government jobs.”

Eliya took his newfound knowledge and formed a savings group, training others in making liquid soap, and saving money. The group grew to 20 members, comprises

both boys and girls. Each member saves 5,000 shillings per month, with weekly contributions ranging from 1,300 to 1,500 Uganda shillings.

The group started making and selling liquid soap, which not only benefited the community but also brought financial gains to the members. From an initial investment of 60,000 Uganda shillings, they produced 40 liters of liquid soap. They sold 1.5-litre bottles at 3,000 Uganda shillings each, making a profit of 1,000 shillings per bottle. Over time, their savings grew from the initial 60,000 Uganda shillings to an impressive 300,000 Uganda shillings.

The community has begun to see tangible benefits from these efforts, and parents had previously been ignorant about the rights and responsibilities of children, are more supportive and have stopped sending their children out at night to fetch water, ensuring their safety.

Eliya appreciates the work ACFODE has done and hopes it can continue to make a profound difference in their community. By providing ongoing education and support, the organization can further reduce GBV and improve economic conditions, ensuring a brighter future for everyone in the Itambabininga village.



NUMBERS DON'T LIE

A reduction in GBV Cases in Kyegegwa

Kyegegwa sub-county was grappling with rampant Gender-Based Violence (GBV), a crisis that severely disadvantaged the community's socio-economic development. Conflicts over resource ownership, particularly land, sparked frequent domestic disputes. Families torn apart by violence saw their children's education disrupted and their ability to invest in their futures diminished. With over 50 GBV cases reported from the community annually, the situation seemed dire and unmanageable.

But Ategeka Deus, the Senior Assistant Secretary (SAS) of Kyegegwa Sub-County, says the situation began to change when ACFODE introduced interventions targeting both the refugee camps and host communities. The interventions included sensitization programs aimed at educating community members about the dangers and consequences of GBV.

"Our collaboration with partners like ACFODE has been instrumental. Community sensitization and forming GBV prevention clubs in schools have been key in spreading the message against GBV, first among learners, and across the community."

There have also been extensive training sessions and quarterly review meetings, bringing together refugees and host community members to share experiences and strategies for combating GBV. These interactions fostered a deeper understanding and collaboration across different cultural backgrounds, creating a unified front against violence.

"Before ACFODE came in, we were recording

around 50 cases annually, but this year, we received only 12 cases. That is already positive progress."

Families that were once embroiled in conflict are now finding peace, with parents able to focus on providing for their children and investing in their futures. Children, who previously suffered due to their parents' conflicts, now have the opportunity to concentrate on their studies and thrive academically.

The impact of ACFODE's interventions is also visible in the community's overall well-being. The time and resources once wasted on resolving conflicts are now redirected towards productive activities, leading to better harvests and improved livelihoods. The message of GBV prevention has permeated the community, with local leaders and parents alike advocating for a violence-free environment.

Looking ahead, Ategeka and other collaborators are committed to ensuring the sustainability of the positive changes they have registered in the communities. They plan to train parish chiefs and parasocial workers to continue these efforts and extend the programs to additional schools, which serve both nationals and refugees.

"Our goal is to maintain the momentum and continue fostering an inclusive environment that addresses the needs of all community members, including those with disabilities and other marginalized groups."



PRIZE WINNERS

Asiimwe Anet is empowering students through GBV Clubs at Itamba-Biniga Primary School

Asiimwe Annet is the Patron of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention clubs and a former Senior Woman teacher at Itambabiniga Primary School. The school has two active GBV clubs, each comprised of 56 members, with plans to launch a third one soon. These clubs have been instrumental in ending violence among children and within their communities by promoting awareness about children's rights, responsibilities, and educating them about reporting mechanisms.

“The GBV prevention clubs have empowered students to understand their rights and responsibilities, making it difficult for anyone to violate their rights without consequence. This has also boosted learners’ confidence and self-expression. For instance, during school debates and other activities such as poetry, students who were once too shy to speak are now confidently expressing their opinions in public.”

It is also gratifying to see teachers reaping the benefits from the presence of GBV prevention clubs. The work of educators has become easier, especially regarding discipline, because club members educate their peers about the dangers of violence, including fighting, stealing, bullying, and teasing. The entire school has embraced mechanisms for GBV prevention and management of cases, with the club being the most recognized and celebrated among Itamba-biniga Primary School students.

The school environment is now more engaging and informative, with posters provided by ACFODE turning the school compound into a ‘talking’ one. It

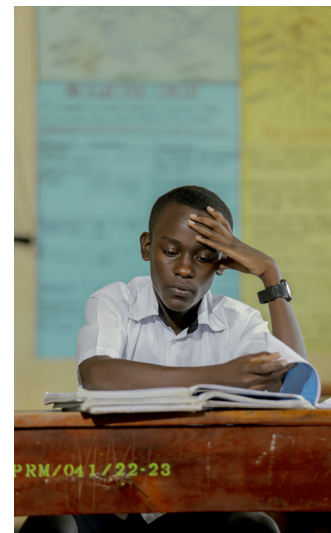
gives the students a chance to interact with messages about non-violence, thus reinforcing the club's values, and even reducing dropout rates and absenteeism.

There have also been efforts to promote sexual and reproductive health (SRH), whereby girls are taught how to manage changes like menstruation without missing school. There is a plan for the club's members to start making reusable sanitary pads to support girls even more. The boys are also being educated about menstruation to foster understanding and support among peers.

Of the many activities, the clubs have won prizes through their participation in debates, which is inspiring for the learners, and has fostered cooperation, competition, and strong relationships. Outside of debates, peer-to-peer learning is emphasized, leading to discussions around preventing early marriages and managing sexually transmitted diseases.

“We ensure correct referral procedures for students needing medical or counselling support, working closely with health workers and other professionals.”

The GBV prevention clubs at Itambabiniga Primary School have created a safe and supportive environment for students. The positive changes seen in the students and the community affirm the vital role of these clubs and interventions by ACFODE in fostering a culture of non-violence and mutual respect.



Martin Muhairwe is a 15-year-old learner in P6 class. In his community, GBV previously went unchecked. Like many of his peers and his community, he struggled with bad behaviour and lacked the knowledge and tools to take action if he saw something that did not seem right. When ACFODE introduced a GBV prevention clubs at his school, he joined and participated in its activities.

The club's training sessions and activities have brought about a change in Martin, challenging him to improve his behaviour, and fostering harmony among his peers and their community. He and his peers learned basic essential behaviour such as not stealing, being kind, and respecting each other. They have learned to take responsibility for themselves and for one another.

"For me, the club helped because if we don't respect one another, it can lead to something bad. If I see someone mistreating someone, I have to report. It becomes a good thing when we take action."

Martin spoke of how beneficial the GBV prevention club activities were, recalling a school term where debates were held. These debates allowed the learned to delve into issues affecting them and their community, and to learn new knowledge and skills. Even though this experience was transformative for Martin and his peers, he believes that providing uniforms for GBV club members and increasing the visibility of GBV prevention messages in the school compound could strengthen their efforts as a club and community.

"I would like to bring more motions so that we can train ourselves, debate about those motions, and teach other people."

Martin's transformation and proactive approach to addressing gender-based violence show the impact of ACFODE's interventions, such as the GBV prevention club, on individuals and the broader community. Through education, advocacy, and a commitment to moral values, Martin and his peers are working towards a future where gender-based violence is a thing of the past.

RESPECT ONE ANOTHER

Martin Muhairwe learns the value of respect in the community



SAYING “NO” TO WHAT IS WRONG

Biira Prossy and Godfrey Tusingwiire learn to advocate for themselves

Biira Prossy and Godfrey Tusingwiire are 14-year-olds that attend Kibuye Primary School. Like many children in Uganda, they did not know their rights and did not have the tools to effectively stand up for themselves, whether at home or in the community. Because of the school they attended, they became beneficiaries of some of the interventions introduced by ACFODE to educate communities about Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and how to prevent it.

One of these interventions is a GBV prevention club that was formed at Kibuye Primary school. Biira and Godfrey are members of the GBV Prevention club. For Biira, ACFODE helped her to know her rights.

“Now, nobody can abuse my rights because of what I have learned. If you abuse my rights, I can report to the teachers.”

The learners who attend the GBV prevention have been taught the importance of knowing where to report any form of abuse, including reporting to teachers and the Community Development Officer (CDO).

The children now also know about their right to education, food, play, and clothing, and this is reflected in Godfrey’s understanding of these rights.

“I have the right to move freely around my home or school, and the right to speech.”

The intervention targets a more holistic approach, which includes teaching the children how to form friendships and visiting other communities by participating in debates and touring new places. They also now know and understand the importance of parental involvement in children’s wellbeing, guiding and counselling them about their rights.

It is gratifying to see how confident Biira and Godfrey are in the knowledge that they have acquired. They are self-assured that they can report perpetrators to teachers, the police, or the Local Councils (LCs). In addition, the children have taken the knowledge and are using it to help their peers. Biira recounted an instance where she helped a neighbour’s child who was being forced to take goats to graze, and fetch water before attending school.

“I told him to stop abusing the child’s rights. Now, he doesn’t send her to graze goats or fetch water before school.”

Godfrey is just as confident in his assertions, “I told my friends that in life, there are two words: no and yes. If something is not good and abuses your rights, you can say no.” Biira and Godfrey are evidential voices of the transformative power of education and empowerment provided by ACFODE, with far-reaching impact.



COMPLEX CHALLENGES, DYNAMIC RESPONSES

Augustine Nyakabwa sees the transformation through empowerment and education

Augustine Nyakabwa, the probation officer in Kyegegwa district, where Kyaka II Refugee Settlement is located, is a keen observer of the transformative impact of ACFODE initiatives in the region. His role as probation officer positions him to see many challenges reported by community members. That is why it is gratifying for him to see ACFODE's dedication to addressing sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), empowering women, and improving educational standards. The result is in reduced cases of sexual and gender-based violence.

A central component of ACFODE's work in the Kyaka II Refugee Settlement is the implementation of the model couple approach to address GBV. The approach has had a significant impact on the community. Augustine, with the support of ACFODE, trained community members on women in leadership, driven by data, to ensure that their rights are protected. Through these trainings, both men and women learn about gender equality, healthy relationships, and the importance of mutual respect.

In addition to leadership training, Augustine has been involved in school-based activities facilitated by ACFODE, such as the GBV prevention clubs. These clubs educate young people about gender-based violence and promote gender equality. The learners are thus empowered to speak out against GBV

and become advocates for change. The clubs also engage the learners in debates, which help them to learn to articulate issues related to GBV and other social challenges.

Augustine has seen teachers transform after learning about GBV and its prevention through ACFODE's interventions. The teachers are more confident about the knowledge they now hold and share it with peers and members of the community. Even though there are gains made from the various interventions by ACFODE, Augustine believes that more needs to be done, including creating safe spaces for GBV survivors.

“Right now, there are no facilities. So, we need to go back to the drawing board and come up with solutions.”

He also raises the plight of boys and men, who can also become survivors of GBV. A comprehensive approach to gender issues that includes the protection and support of all individuals, regardless of gender is needed.

“GBV is also turning against men and the boy child. So, as we move, as we push for the emancipation of women against GBV. Can we solve a problem by not creating another?”



SUSTAINING GOOD CHANGE

Benson Natuhwera is optimistic about addressing SGBV in Kyaka II

It is not easy to watch help come and go out of a community whose circumstances remain delicate. Such is the plight of refugee camps. Benson Natuhwera is the Community Based Protection Officer with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in Kyaka II refugee settlement. During his time there, he has observed many challenges as well as efforts towards addressing GBV within the refugee community. Sexual and gender-based violence is driven by factors such as inadequate livelihoods and reduced support for refugees, especially denial of resources, which heightens vulnerability.

It is not just external factors that impact these communities. There are also diverse backgrounds and cultural beliefs of refugees, which often clash with local policies, thus complicating efforts to address GBV. Despite various interventions, many refugees have not yet abandoned traditional practices that perpetuate violence. As if that is not enough, poverty exacerbates the situation, highlighting the need for continued efforts and mindset changes to effectively combat GBV in these communities.

Despite these challenges, Benson has also witnessed the impact of interventions by ACFODE, towards preventing GBV in the Kyaka II settlement. There has been a reduction in various forms of violence, including sexual abuse, because of sensitization efforts by ACFODE.

“We have established structures to continue sensitizing and intervening whenever GBV cases occur.”

Even if there are structures, Benson is not oblivious to the challenge of sustainability. These structures are often seen as part of the partner’s responsibility, not the community. When the partner leaves, the structures often become demoralized and stop working. There are also issues around resource constraints among partners, with projects being implemented in phases.

Nonetheless, Benson is optimistic about the involvement of organized community groups such as NGOs and CBOs, because these groups take initiatives as part of their programs and have some resources to support themselves. They employ educated individuals who serve the community better.

Activities implemented by ACFODE have contributed to GBV prevention through sensitization, capacity strengthening, and forming GBV prevention groups in schools. Benson would like to see future programs focus on improving livelihoods to address GBV, because such programs bring financial literacy, financial capacity, and food security.

Benson’s insights highlight the complexities of addressing GBV in Kyaka II and underscore the importance of sustainable, community-driven interventions and comprehensive livelihood programs to mitigate these challenges.



THE LOAD GETS EASIER

Musabyimana Esperance is Transforming Lives Through Education and Awareness

Musabyimana Esperance teaches English to Primary 4 learners and is the senior woman teacher at Bukere Primary school. Like many teachers, she has had firsthand experience of the challenges students face, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). She took it upon herself to do something about it. She became a patron of ACFODE GBV prevention club as part of the interventions towards eradicating violence faced by communities. She now has directly seen the transformative impact of the GBV prevention club. Learners in her school are now aware of different forms of violence, where they occur, who perpetrates them, and how and where to report them. The examples of this impact are hard to ignore.

“A P4 student was attacked by neighbours while her parents were away. The girl developed wounds on her face, but other learners, who were not even club members, reported the incident.”

The parents were informed, and the girl received the necessary support from the appropriate agency.

“In another case, a girl was kidnapped on her way from school. The first people to inform us about the incident were her fellow learners, even before the parents knew. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of the police and the UNHCR, the girl was found and safely returned to her parents.”

ACFODE's awareness programs have helped learners to know what they are supposed to

do and what they are not supposed to do. The cases of violence that used to be reported to Musabwimana have reduced significantly, with learners living more harmoniously.

“I used to receive many cases of violence among the learners, almost like the whole day. However, since the trainings, learners now know that if they get misunderstandings, they have to report, not fight.”

Learners have been trained in reproductive health, which has been beneficial for learners. If a girl experiences her menstruation, even if unexpectedly, other students have been able to seek help for her, which demonstrates their understanding of what is being taught. The learners are more confident, and as club members, Musabwimana has instilled in them a sense that they must be exemplary leaders.

The club meets every Friday to discuss issues, organize debates, and plan activities, and its members are role models to their fellow learners. Musabyimana Esperance no longer carries the load of educating people about violence alone. Her story is a powerful testament to the positive changes brought about by education and awareness. Through the dedicated efforts of teachers, learners, and organizations like ACFODE, schools are becoming safer and more supportive environments where students can thrive and become confident, responsible, and proactive members of their communities.



PEACE AND POWER

Solanje learns to control her temper, harness her strength and support others.

Iratukunda Solanje, a 17-year-old student in Primary 6 at Itamba-Biniga Primary School lived her life unaware of her rights and responsibilities, and how to conduct herself properly. She would work at night not knowing that it was unsafe for her to do so. She also had a temper, often getting into fights at the slightest provocation. The community from which she came was also in disarray.

However, things changed when she joined the Sexual and GBV prevention club at her school, which was formed with the support of ACFODE. The club educates learners about their rights and responsibilities and empowers them with information about reproductive health too.

Since Solanje joined the GBV prevention club, she has made changes in her life including how she relates to peers and other people in the community.

“The club’s lessons on protecting ourselves in various situations were eye-opening. For instance, I learned to avoid accepting gifts

from strangers, as they could lead to harmful situations. We were educated about the dangers of unprotected sex, including the risk of diseases and unwanted pregnancies, which could disrupt our education.”

To date, the GBV prevention club has grown to 35 members, who are all committed to spreading the knowledge and values learned from ACFODE’s trained. Being part of this club has helped Solanje to manage her temper.

“Before the club, I was very emotional, you could step on me and I would fight back. But now, if you step on me, I will take time to find out why.”

Solanje aspires to become a doctor. Her life and that of many of her peers in the GBV prevention club are a testament of the power of education and empowerment provided by ACFODE.



GBV PREVENTION STUDENT CLUB

Shaping mindsets, envisioning the future

When Joshua Amanyire set out to establish the GBV prevention club at Kabweza Primary School, he knew that the school grappled with low enrolment and persistent issues of GBV. The school lacked resources it needed to function well.

“The environment was not conducive to learning and the community did not understand the importance of preventing violence.”

However, with the support of ACFODE, Joshua established the GBV prevention club at the school, incorporating outdoor activities and ultimately fostering a sense of togetherness. The club teaches children about rights and responsibilities, the dangers of early sexual behaviours, and how to stand up for themselves and each other.

Word got around and more learners began to come to the school. It turned out that when learners from the GBV prevention club returned to their community after programming and wearing the club T-shirts, they inspired other children to want to join.

“Whenever we came to the school and met as the GBV prevention club, the number of children increased. Members of the club were inspiring their peers.”

ACFODE was also able to introduce messages that could be placed across the

school compound and other visual aids, which transformed the school environment and boosted the morale of the children.

“When they came and found the compound full of educative messages in the school, they were very happy. They said our school is now shining, it is beautiful.”

While there have been some challenges, such as a group of young men who would come to the school fence and make ‘cat calls’ the girls to distract and lure them, the GBV prevention club’s impact was observed in the learners standing up for themselves as well as immediately reporting the culprits.

The club’s success is reflected in the support from parents, who, having seen the positive change and growing confidence in their children, encourage their children to attend club meetings and activities. The learners have begun to participate in debates with other schools, which is exposing them to even more ideas about the world outside of their community.

The success of the GBV prevention club at Kabweza Primary School is a testament to ACFODE’s commitment to community engagement and education in combating violence and promoting peace.

