

OPEN TALK MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2022

#ISSUE 12



DARE TO THINK



The **RELEVANCY** of
Religious Institutions
Questioned

Taking **FAMILY**
PLANNING Services to
Kampala Slums

When the **CHURCH**
PUNISHES the
Victims

✓
*Tackling the
Rising Cases of
Teenage Pregnancies
in Uganda*

Teens Take on
LEGALIZING
ABORTION

Selected
TESTIMONIES
from Empowered
Teenagers.

MESSAGE
from the Editor

MESSAGE from
the Chairperson



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Editorial



EDITOR : *Viola* Namyalo

Welcome to yet another interesting edition of the Open Talk Magazine (OTM). Since its inception in 2012, the OTM has created its own reputation as the only magazine that gives young people a platform to bring out their views without censoring them because a certain section of people take them to be culturally or religiously offensive. Over the years, we have ensured that the OTM brings out issues as they are without covering them up. With us, there is no hard to discuss topic, we allow our target group have the freedom to openly discuss all matters at hand without censorship.

In this issue, we continue to bring out the salient issues regarding reproductive health and sex

related concerns that gravely affect young people and gradually force them out of school. Our current project under implementation is **“Promotion of Critical Thinking and SRHR among women and the Girl Child in Uganda”**

Schools in Uganda have been closed for two years and this has had its own toll on the teenagers. Since the lockdown in 2020, children stopped going to school, many become redundant and started engaging in sexual intimacy and as a result thousands of teen girls have become pregnant during the pandemic.

Our main concern at HALEA has remained on empowering the teenagers avoid unwanted pregnancies. We have continued to talk about sex matters openly and encouraged teenagers to openly discuss sex and reproductive health matters even during a pandemic period when meeting many people was prohibited. Our team continued to meet young people, reaching out to them, providing the much needed services.

Through small group discussions, we have been able to enable girls talk about how to stop getting unwanted pregnancies, we have talked about family planning methods including abortion but also talked about the possibility of continuing with studies as young mothers.

We have been regular visitors of Kampala's slum areas interacting with teenagers out of school and encouraging them to stay focused on their studies and avoid engaging in reckless sexual activities. We have continued to interview teenagers on their views regarding having sex education in schools, the use of planning methods, the question of abortion as well as the need to allow pregnant girls continue with

studies despite the challenges.

As an organisation, we have added our voice with other human rights organisations calling upon the government of Uganda to allow pregnant girls and young mothers go back to school as other students report to school this year. I am happy to report that this call was successfully allowed by the Ministry of Education though many religious leaders and schools have refused to allow pregnant teenagers be back to school.

In this issue, we discuss all matters mentioned above and we give space to young people, especially the concerned individuals have their say. As a means of promoting Humanism and Critical Thinking, we have added a section in which we allowed students to talk about religion. We have also guided our beneficiaries to understand the basics of Humanism as a way of introducing the subject to them.

Aware that the parents and teachers are too shy to talk about sex before teens, that the government is reluctant to include sex education in the school curriculum, we have continued to provide space for young people to air out their concerns. We are aware that religious leaders remain conservative and are not allowing schools empower children on matters of sex and sexuality and that we cannot easily have free and open debates on issues concerning sex. We have decided to continue using the OTM as the only magazine that can bridge the information gap and that is the reason the OTM exist.

In this issue, in addition to tackling the above matters, we briefly expose what has happened

to young people during the two years of the lockdown and we bring you sad stories from girls within our reach who were sexually abused. Teens have openly talked about the issue of condoms and other contraceptives, abortions, religion, culture and related matters. Our team has continued to distribute condoms, putting them into condom boxes we put at some bars and lodges within slums. We asked teenagers to give their views in regard to HALEA's role in condom distribution within slum areas. It is vital that their views are put into consideration before any policy that affects them is implemented.

The several years of working with teens have made us aware that young people are sexually active and thus need to be empowered.

In implementing this project, we have gone further to introduce critical thinking skills to our people. Thanks to Humanists International

financial support, we have been able to successfully implement this project and a selected number of beneficiaries have given testimonies how the project has benefited them. I am happy to have managed this noble project that enabled the production of this Issue. The OTM is out and HALEA is able to continue serving people within Uganda and beyond. Our copies are freely available online and copies have been given to our immediate beneficiaries. Our pledge is to continue serving you whenever the opportunity knocks. We hope that you do not only read this magazine but put into action the good lessons learnt from the project. Enjoy. Furthermore, we welcome your support and partnership with us to continue empowering vulnerable people in Uganda.

NAMYALO VIOLA is the SRHR Director of HALEA Youth Support Centre and Managing Editor of the Open Talk Magazine

www.haleauganda.org/

<http://humanistuganda.wordpress.com/>

<http://teenswithoutboarders.wordpress.com/>

<http://forgottenmothersuganda.wordpress.com/>

<http://haleaentertainment.wordpress.com/>

Message

FROM HALEA CHAIRPERSON



Aisha Nansubuga

HALEA has been working on creating awareness about reproductive health matters since its inception in 2008. When we started, it was very difficult to enter a school and be allowed to talk about sex and sexuality.

It was equally difficult to talk about religion in a critical way. Similarly, talking about humanism and lack of faith or being unreligious was very difficult. We were largely identified as a humanitarian organization promoting human rights. That was our soft entry point and it

worked to our advantage.

When we gained enough trust within the schools, we started talking about humanism and allowed students to criticize religion and openly talk about matters that were initially not allowed. This was never easy and it is not today.

However, with support from Humanists organizations such as HAMU (Norway) and now Humanist International, we have been able to take our message to the people that highly need it.

I am in particular grateful to Humanist International for sponsoring this project and enabling us to reach out to hundreds of people during the pandemic. We have been able to train several girls how to make own sanitary towels as well as learn other skills especially how to make clothes and bags. Besides, we organized and motivated slum women into starting a Women Saving Club and by the end of year one, they were able to raise **UGX 4, 700, 000**, an equivalent of **£1,044**. These are poor and vulnerable women who thought they were unable to save given the poor background in which they live. However, through critical thinking lessons and constant motivation, we were able to encourage them to form a saving club in which I am a member too. That is one other success of this project, motivating people to think outside the box.

Through this project, we have been able to take our message to the people and provided skills and encouraged people to believe in themselves despite the pandemic challenges at hand. Our magazine brings out some of the selected success stories from our beneficiaries. We also bring out articles from interviews and focus group discussion debates we have had with our beneficiaries.

It is my hope that all this will continue to

motivate all of us to think through better ways to make life better in pandemic situations. I am grateful to team HALEA for the dedication in implementing this project during a very hard situation in which our movements were heavily restricted but despite all the challenges, good work has been done, I thank you dear HALEA team and I continue to welcome more partners to continue supporting our work. Enjoy reading this issue of the Open Talk Magazine.

AISHA NANSUBUGA is the Chairperson of HALEA, a trained journalist and Human Rights Defender.



WHEN THE CHURCH PUNISHES THE VICTIMS -

The Case of Pregnant Girls in Uganda

Namyalo Viola

The church and several religious institutions are places where many people seek refuge in the hard times. Many of us succeeded because of the big role played by the church during our infancy. The church paid fees and housed us and their role in supporting humanity cannot be underestimated.

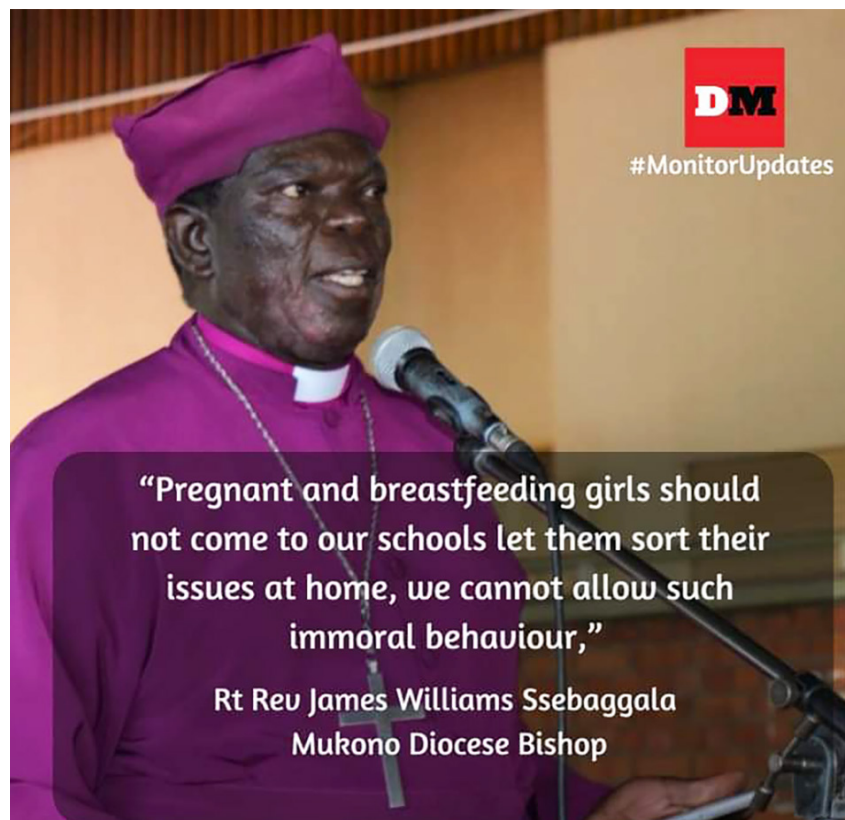
However we also expect the church and religious leaders in general to be considerate and compassionate when it comes to matters of sex. Our research shows that many girls are actively engaged in sexual affairs and they need help rather than condemnation.

Many times, girls are raped, defiled and forced into sex not on their own volition. Many become pregnant and its double jeopardy when church leaders resort to labelling them as immoral instead of offering them support that they need so much in such hard times.

The Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development noted that over 9000 underage girls were impregnated in 2021 and the ministry of education was concerned as activists pointed

out the need to come up with a program to stop rising teen pregnancies.

According to the Uganda Police Report of 2021, 14,220 children were defiled throughout the country in 2020. There were 14,080 girls and 140 boys. Among the victims, 1,280 were under the age of 9. A total of 2,980 victims were



between 9 and 14 years and 9,954 victims were between 15 and 17 years.

Sadly we observed that there were girls defiled and impregnated by their fathers, uncles and



close relatives and in most cases the defilers were not punished under the law. In our slum visits, we saw some pregnant girls and some carrying babies.

In one of our interviews, a pregnant teenager (Annet) said:

"It was my mother's brother- my uncle who forced himself on me. He came to stay with us during the lockdown. He was a university student. He defiled me in the night. He did it on several nights and each night, he threatened to kill me anyone if I had told anyone. When my mother checked me and realized I am pregnant, she tortured me and I revealed the person responsible for my pregnancy. My mother wanted to force me into an abortion but my father refused. My uncle ran away and there were no efforts to arrest him even when they know he is back to the village. I was in senior 2, I am 15 years old and I wish to get back to class and continue

with my studies. My wish that you HALEA may support me go back to school, my parents think I willingly accepted to have sex with my uncle, they think I am spoilt child, I should be sent to the village to raise my child and do the digging."

Such cases have been reported in several parts of the country and HALEA and other human rights NGOs have taken notice of the plight of young people.

During the pandemic, HALEA realized the need to reach out to young people even the more and talk about issues affecting them and discuss ways through which they can be helped to overcome the challenges.

We organized periodic meetings within slum areas and these could be of small groups of between 5 to ten youth because of the pandemic restrictions. We openly encouraged girls to

discuss issues of reproductive health, provide counselling to many of the youth we found in very stressful situations. We realized that many criminal elements are within society and some of the families do take advantage of the situation of the vulnerability of young people and some have abused their rights.

We have talked to young people about Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights issues

As a result, many young girls become mothers during the COVID-19 lockdowns and when HALEA and several human right activists raised concern that schools should find ways to accommodate them when they reopened in January 2022, the ministry of education finally came out with a statement to the effect that schools should not discriminate or expel students who had given birth during the pandemic.

It is very unfortunate that top religious leaders have refused the idea of allowing pregnant girls back to school arguing that they are immoral and will spoil the rest of the children. Rt Rev James Williams Ssebagala, the Bishop of Mukono Diocese strongly came out to oppose any chance of allowing pregnant and

breastfeeding girls back to school, he said the church cannot allow such immoral behavior! It now appears that despite the progress we had made with government, pregnant girls and young mothers have no clear opportunity to continue with their studies now.

Our further request was that pregnant girls who were in candidate classes should be given an opportunity to sit for their final examinations and the schools should offer the needed support. Whereas the ministry of education supported our proposals, many schools and religious leaders came out strongly to reject the proposal.

Schools are open and students are back after two years of home stay. HALEA will continue to take sex education and critical thinking lessons to schools and we shall continue to encourage many other organizations to consider taking such important knowledge to learners.

In the following articles, we bring to you some of the most outstanding interviews and discussions we had with young people during the lockdown and the best articles that were born out of such interactions.





Teens
TAKE ON
ABORTION

TEENS TAKE ON ABORTION: -

Many want Abortion to be Legalized

In six Focus group discussions with teens in slum areas of Kivulu, we discussed several thematic concerns and among them was the issue of abortion. A total of 90 participants was involved during these critical thinking discussions. In each sensitive discussions we had, teens were hesitant to have their views on supporting abortion made public mainly because of the back lash it would bring. As one participant, Leila observed:

'I support abortion but I will never tell anyone when I have one. I cannot stand a situation where I am called a murderer.'

Below we bring out thoughts as sampled from members of our Focus group discussions.

Alexa, not real name had this to say:

'I have done an abortion once but it was never my liking. I almost went down with it. I had this man who used to give me pocket money so I can manage to get the basics of life. My mom never bothered to know if I had good knickers, shoes or even sanitary towels. They never taught me any skill so I can be able to earn some money and buy my necessities or even be able to make my own sanitary towels. So because I was desperate for more money, this man made me pregnant and the age difference between us is over 30 years. The man is old enough to be my father. How would I have a child with him? So I devised means to get an abortion. It was

a near death experience that I have lived to regret but on second thought, I think I made the right choice. I believe if I had gone to the hospital to do it, it would have been much easier than using the crude ways I had. I still think abortion is necessary for girls like me to enable us have a future. Where would I be now with a child? Abortion is necessary regardless of the health and psychological challenges that are associated with it'

Jemina (not real name) says:

"Girls do not go for an abortion because they like it. No one does, it is a survival tactic, and it is another form of family planning. My experience is different. We had gone to a friend's party in April 2020. The president had just declared all movements illegal and no parties were allowed. But as being the stubborn ones, we wanted to party. So we went to a friend's house. We were 13 girls and 9 boys. There were plenty of drinks, I think I was intoxicated, I cannot remember exactly what happened but we had group sex. I never consented to anyone having sex with me. Though I remember being used and trying to resist but I was weak. I cannot even know how I managed to go back home. Two months later, I realised I was pregnant. I panicked. How would I face my parents over my pregnancy? They would practically slaughter media did not even have an idea who was the father of the child. I consulted a friend who took me to

lady who terminated the pregnancy. It was a terrible experience for me but I had no choice, I wanted to stay home and continue with my studies. I never wanted to be a bad example and an embarrassment to my family. I am happy I did it, I only wish I had done it through a proper medical centre"

In another Focus Group Discussion,

Martha (not real name) had this to say:

"I have had lot of free time during the lockdown, so I had this boyfriend for 8 months. I loved him and we had protected sex every time we met. But one day, he tricked me into taking too much alcohol and took advantage of me without any protection. When I missed my periods twice, I realised I was pregnant. A pregnancy test confirmed it. I went to my boyfriend seeking solace and support. Instead he accused me of having multiple men during the lockdown. He denied any responsibility. I am 18 years and I would have stayed with my pregnancy if he had accepted responsibility.

He left me no option but to find ways to get rid of the pregnancy. Abortion can be a good solution under such circumstances. It all goes back to choice, I do not regret the choice I made, I learnt my lessons the hard way but I am ready to move on. I will not repeat the same mistakes, I will always use contraceptives such as pills, I can no longer trust a man promising to use a condom. Using a condom is a must but I must use my pill too. I cannot risk another pregnancy"

Sherry made the following observation:

"My friend Alice was impregnated by a relative. It is her cousin who happens to be her Uncle's son. Alice stays at her uncle's home. She told me she never consented to any sexual advances from him but her cousin forced himself on her and made her pregnant. When her uncle got to know, he personally forced her to abort. She had no choice either, she did not want to keep such a child out of incest. Abortion can be a necessary evil sometimes".



HALEA's Analysis on Abortion

In our analysis, we note that as the number of pregnancies increase, many girls are forced to resort to abortion. Whereas several girls are shy to openly say they support abortion and many openly condemn the practice, we note that several girls do backstreet abortions and the consequences are dire.

Within Uganda, abortion rates vary by region and research done by the Guttenacher indicates that 77 per 1,000 persons in Kampala do carry out abortion. The right number of unsafe abortions is not known.

The Ugandan Constitution states that abortion is permitted if the procedure is authorized by law. Article 22(2) states thus: No person has the right to terminate the life of unborn child except as may be authorised by the law. According to the 2006 National Policy Guidelines and Service Standards for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, pregnancy termination is permissible in cases of fatal anomaly, rape and incest, or if the woman has HIV.

Abortion is illegal unless performed by a licenced medical doctor and only in a situation where the life of the woman (not a girl) is deemed at risk. Because abortion is largely illegal and is not legally accessible to many young people, those who engage in it use the illegal means.

We further note that research done by our partner organisation, Safe2Choose reveals that 40%

pregnancies worldwide are un planned and many women do not know how to have an abortion with pills or an in clinic abortion.

We have encouraged women within our reach to embrace safe abortion and dispelled the myth that abortion leads to infertility. We have explained to the women that safe abortion does not impact on a woman's fertility and a woman can get pregnant soon again. We have also explained that after safe abortion, the woman's next ovulation cycle can start as soon as 8 days after an abortion. If you do not want to get pregnant again, it is wise to start a contraceptive method to avoid getting pregnant.

Abortion can be done with pills (such as Mifepristone and misoprostol or dimethylamino) or through manual vacuum and it is important that a person intending to abort seeks counselling to get supported mentally to make a right decision without judgement. Abortion complications if done in a safe way has less than a 1% risk of having a medical complication and even when such complications arise, with

According to the 2006 National Policy Guidelines and Service Standards for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, pregnancy termination is permissible in cases of fatal anomaly, rape and incest, or if the woman has HIV.

the right medical support, they can be easily managed.

It is important to note that according to the 2003 national abortion incidence study, 15 out of every 1,000 Ugandan women of reproductive age were treated for abortion complications that year. Such treatment may require hospital care, blood transfusions and antibiotics—scarce resources in a country with limited health care funding and insufficient medical personnel

HALEA research has shown that many teens who abort do not bother to seek thorough medical and indeed many delay seeking care for post abortion complications because they fear that they will receive judgmental or abusive treatment from health care providers. Our research has shown that making abortion illegal has not stopped hundreds of girls procuring unsafe abortions and as you read this, several others are struggling to get rid of that unwanted pregnancy.

Our research over the years have indicated that teenagers go for unsafe abortion and they do it ,much of the time on their own and they cannot afford to get safe abortions.

Our research has shown that the amount a teen will pay for a clandestine abortion is about shs 300,000 or US\$88 if performed by a professional medic but one performed by a traditional healer will cost about US\$20.

The cost to the healthcare system of treating complications from unsafe abortion is on average, nearly US\$130 per patient a figure that cannot be affordable to many Ugandans be it teens or adults, married or not, the figure is far too high to be managed by a people who cannot even earn a dollar in a single day! The state spends colossal sums of money

treating abortion related complications and significant proportion is spent treating more serious complications, such as sepsis, shock, lacerations and perforations.

We call upon our government to ensure that free family planning services reach all teens to reduce unmet need for contraception and lower the unintended pregnancy rate. We should have programs that offer comprehensive family planning services, including counselling, and a wide range of contraceptive methods, to enable these young folks to choose the best methods for themselves, to use methods effectively and to switch methods when desired.

Furthermore, we call upon our government to our government must make deliberate efforts to improve health care providers' ability to offer abortion services within the confines of the law. It is vital to raise providers' awareness of the content and scope of Uganda's abortion law and to equip them with appropriate training to provide safe abortion services in legally permitted circumstances.

It has been our clarion call over the years that sex education is taught in school and we are saddened by the fact that the new curriculum still has not incorporated sex education within it.

We submit that sex education should be put on the primary and secondly school calendar and syllabus and should be a compulsory subject regularly taught and examinable by the Uganda National Examination Board. It is important that children are taught to know all they ought to know about sex and all the ABC about it should be openly taught at the earliest stage of their sexual lives. We encourage the teaching of the use of contraceptives such as condom, how

to use it and how to use contraceptive pills or how to know the so called safe days and the danger days? What would be too bad if a girl child knew how to read her body temperature and the warning signs that she is within her fertility days so she must not have sex without a condom or using other contraceptives?

Finally we call upon all stakeholders to consider

taking the Ethiopian way on abortion. Young people deserve to be allowed to access safe abortion and save life and their future. It is important that we realised that time is now to scrap the abortion law and recognise the full rights of women over their bodies.



A Discussion

ON THE RELEVANCY OF
RELIGION
AND RELIGIOUS
INSTITUTIONS
DURING THE PANDEMIC

A DISCUSSION ON THE RELEVANCY OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

During our critical thinking sessions, we asked participants to share with us their views on the relevancy of worship centers and religious leaders during the lockdown. We also asked if it would be good to give donations and tithes as demanded by church leaders. Below we bring out some thoughts from key selected participants:

NANGUDI REHEMA,
18 YEARS

'During the lockdown, all places of worship were closed by the president and for over a year, I never attended a mosque. Like did not stop to go on because I did not go to worship centers. In any case I continue to say prayers at home and I often forgot to meet the numbers required of me to pray each day. When I joined HALEA, I was meant to think through my actions and consequences. Today I feel that going to the mosque for prayers is not mandatory for my life to continue, If I avoid doing bad things, if I do good to others and live my life without hurting others, I will be at peace with myself and those around me. This is my perception now thanks to HALEA for engaging us in such important mind opening discussions. I now know better than wasting too much time worshipping Allah.'

NAKUBULWA HARRIET,
19 YEARS

'I used to be a member of Pastor Bugingo's church because my mother could take us there for prayers. When churches were closed, my mother was saddened. I was relieved that I will no longer go a distance to stay in the hot sun and dust praising God. I also realized that the church collects lots of money from people but still they did not help our struggling families to survive. When I attended the critical thinking lessons organized by HALEA, I started asking my mother why we would continue sending money to pastors who would not support us in our time of need. At first, my mother was hesitant, she said she wanted to support the building of the church but when the very church had scandals and got divided as the lead pastor got another woman out of wedlock, I told my mother that church was not holy after all. My mother stopped sending money to the church and I felt that was good enough. Now the churches are open but I am not going back. I told my mother that it feels good to stay home and worship from home, after all, it is said that God is everywhere. Thanks to the open discussions we have had on so many topics, I am happy my mind set is gradually shifting to thinking stuff I did not think about before'.

AMONGIN JOVIA, 20 YEARS

We have been part of the church all our life. When we came to town Kampala, we joined several churches hoping from one church to another. From Kayamja, to Yiga to Ssenyonga and now to Kayiwa's. Church. Over the years, I realized that our challenges did not go away despite the many pastors we have gone to, prayed and given out money in donations and tithe. We did not attend church throughout the lockdown and I think we were able to save the little money we had left. I am now encouraging my mother to think twice before spending. The critical think discussions we have had with HALEA members have encouraged me to continue thinking for myself, work hard and save and I now think it is important to believe in hard work than miracles.'

GRACE AYIMBISIBWE, 18 YEARS

'There is too much in fighting in church and between churches. I always wonder why pastors are fighting over the sheep. All church leaders want to have huge numbers and they keep on attacking each other openly. I now think twice many pastors, church has become a business and it is not worthy following people whose aim is to milk cash out of you. Critical thinking discussions have enabled me to start question things I would otherwise not have questioned before. When we had the pandemic

and all worshipping places were closed, we realized that certain diseases cannot be healed by prayers but by following the given standard operating procedures. No one told us to pray but everyone told us to use a face mask, wash hands and self-distance and finally get immunized. I think this is the way to go'

NAMUJJUZI IRENE, 19 YEARS

'What I know is that religion can be a force for good and bad, It is good for bringing people together and be one family with love. Most fundraising are done through religious places of worship. Several schools are built by churches. However, religion can also be a point of divisions and war.

Today the world is at war because of religion. Recently the bombs in Kampala were blamed on Muslims. I cannot tell if indeed it is true but it is not good for people to think that killing others is good as long as it makes God happy. All over the world there is war because of religion: I have read about jihadists, I know Muslims who hate Christians and Christians who hate Muslims just because of religious differences. What I have learnt through such discussions is that we can live happily without antagonizing each other because of our differences be it religion, race or association. It is important to know that we can all live peacefully if we chose to think things through, especially things that divide us'.

PROTECT YOURSELF &
YOUR LOVED ONES
USE A CONDOM
Correctly and Consistently!

Taking
FAMILY PLANNING
SERVICES TO
KAMPALA SLUMS

TAKING FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES TO KAMPALA SLUMS-

Key Lessons Learnt



In 2017, we started on a campaign to promote family planning methods within the slum areas of Kampala. We teamed up with Reproductive Health Uganda who offered us several boxes of condoms. We created condom boxes which we installed at bars and lodges and we would regularly check on them and provide more supplies whenever necessary.

We were given training by **Safe2Choose** and individuals like Dr. Andrew Twinamatsiko joined our team and equipped us with more knowledge on reproductive health and more so on female family planning methods that we had no skills to

implement.

We learnt more about safe abortion and how to provide lifesaving referrals to individuals suffering from abortion related effects.

We teamed up with Kawaala Health Centre 3 which provided us with female condoms and counsellors who have since been helping our teens and women who need their services.

We have continued getting support from Reproductive Health Uganda who have provided condoms which we supply to slum areas.

We have continued to partner with Kawaala



Viola and Farida distributing condoms in slums

Health Centre 3 and have continued to give us female condoms and provided counselling and other referral services much needed by teenagers and women during the pandemic.

We have guided women on safe abortion and how and where to get such services legally and more so, the counselling services needed before and after abortion.

Thanks to Humanist International, we have been able to keep our team on the ground and we have been active during the pandemic. We have continued working together with several players providing reproductive health services and our services have benefited several people.

We have had situations where men do not allow their women to take contraceptives and in such cases, we have had to buy the pills and secretly provided them to women to enable them avoid unwanted pregnancies.

There are teenagers who are sexually active. Whenever we engaged in discussions with them, they expressed their desire to have contraceptives but could not easily access

them. We realized that it was difficult buying pills without money and girls could not tell their guardians or parents that they are actively engaging in sex affairs and need such protection.

We have been careful as we gave counselling services to the girls. Despite the challenges, we have endeavored to persuade girls below 18 years to abstain from sex. But there have been scenarios when some girls started having sex at 12 years and they are having multiple partners within the slums. Realistically speaking, telling such a teenager to abstain from sex may not yield practical results. Our team has had to advise such teenagers to use the other family planning methods. Often we have had to refer such teenagers to counselling centers within government health facilities such as that in Kisenyi, Kamwokya, Mulago and Kawaala.

More often, members of our counselling team have had to escort the teenagers to referral points to ensure that they get the needed services. The whole arrangement is done privately as many of the affected young people are under the care

and control of their guardians or parents who cannot allow them to have contraceptives.

That is the dilemma we find ourselves in. On one hand, we have young people who need family planning services to save themselves from diseases and unwanted pregnancies. On the other hand, we have a conservative community which cannot allow young people access these services even when all indicators show that young people are sexually active and urgently need such services.

It is important that community members are involved in the provision of family planning services. Health Care Providers need to be more youth friendly. It is important to serve people that passing blame. We have faced instances where the youth we send to some public health centers are ridiculed by the very people meant to serve them. Calling

them names such as 'you are a prostitute' cannot motivate them to gain the carriage to go back again to the same health center to seek services. We have had incidences where we had to report rude security officers, nurses and administrators who had made it difficult for young people seeking family planning services.

Despite the challenges, we are grateful that we have been able to enable several young people access reproductive health services during a time when it was extremely hard to get them.





How
HALEA EMPOWERED
ME DURING THE
PANDEMIC -

HOW HALEA EMPOWERED ME DURING THE PANDEMIC - Selected Testimonies

Below we share some testimonies from the beneficiaries of our SRHR services.

NALUMANSI. K,
22 YEARS

'I was working in the bar before the pandemic. Bars were closed by the president as a way of containing the covid-19 pandemic. I had no job, no income therefore I would not afford the basic necessities of life. I ended up sleeping within different men to get some money. I was desperate. A friend told me about HALEA and their work in supporting vulnerable girls and women. So I reached out to them and they encouraged me to join the tailoring classes which I immediately joined. They taught us how to make sanitary pads, dresses and bags. I started learning these basics but in the meantime, I was still sleeping with different men to earn some income. One day as I was out with a certain man in the lodge, I realized that he was on medication for HIV and he had not used a condom on me. I confronted him, he said he was infected but he had been told that being on medication was enough protection for others, he would not pass on HIV to me.

I was scared. I went back to HALEA and consulted the counsellors. Both Ms Viola and Farida were very helpful. I was sent to Makerere University Hospital and upon examining me, they made phone calls and I was taken to Mulago Hospital

at the department of HIV Prevention. There I was checked and they did not find the HIV but immediately put me on medication that prevents HIV exposure. I have been taking a single tablet each day for the last 7 months and I have tested 3 times, I am negative.

I am grateful to HALEA for saving my life. I was exposed to HIV but their timely support helped me to avoid the infection. I used to engage in prostitution recklessly but I am now a very responsible person. Besides, I am now concluding my skills training at HALEA. I now know how to make dresses, bags and sanitary towels. I look forward to getting a sewing machine and start employing myself. I do not feel comfortable going back to work in the bar and I no longer want to engage in the risky business of prostitution. HALEA has enabled me to have self-confidence and now I believe in me doing better today than yesterday.

KYATEREKERA. M,
21 YEARS

I was forced into marriage at 17 years because I got pregnant and my parents were very disappointed in me. So I went into this marriage with a man I was not ready to have many children with because his income is very low. Unfortunately when my child was only one year old, I conceived again and nine months later I was having a second child. I felt very

disappointed and did not have any help. The father of my children belongs to a religious sect which does not allow women to have contraceptives, he refused to use condoms too. One day as HALEA team distributed condoms in my area, I got the courage to ask them if I would be helped. I went to their offices and the counsellor took me through several family planning methods. I did not have money to buy the pills and besides, I feared that my partner would see them at home. So they took me to a clinic where I got the injection which would keep me safe from pregnancy for at least 3 years. I was properly counseled and prepared before I received the family planning services and I am happy I have no complications and I am sure to space my children. Besides, HALEA encouraged me to join the saving club and in December last year, I was surprised with myself. I had saved UGX 431,000, I used it to start a small business of selling charcoal. My life has greatly improved, I am less worried about the future, and my children are also growing up well.

NINSIMA. H, **17 YEARS**

During the first lockdown in May 2021, I had a sex affair and gotten myself pregnant. I panicked. My mother, who is a single mother would not hear of it, I had no place to go and the person responsible for the pregnancy denied responsibility. I approached a friend who took me to HALEA for counselling and further support. I was divided between keeping the pregnancy and aborting it. I feared the effects of abortion especially because I could not do it through hospital and it is illegal for teenagers to do abortion.

After receiving counselling from HALEA, I decided to keep the pregnancy. HALEA Staff made an

arrangement and met with my mother. I then opened up to her about my pregnancy. She was furious but thanks to the presence of Ms Viola and Ms Hellen who helped in calming down my mother. They convinced her that I would be able to have the baby and continue with my studies. They also offered to give me tailoring skills during my pregnancy.

I am happy that I delivered my baby well and I completed my six months training in tailoring. As I take care of my baby, I keep on practicing my tailoring skills and I have hope to go back to school next year. Through HALEA, I have been promised a bursary at Pearl Vocational Training College where I have been assured that young mothers are given an opportunity to continue with their studies. I have high hopes that I will join Pearl Vocational Training College, study for more few months and sit for the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) exams. I have not lost hope for a better future even when I had so many challenges during the pandemic.

PHIONA, **19 YEARS**

I am grateful for HALEA for the skills training services given to me and my family during the pandemic. We are a family of 5 girls with a single and struggling mother. Getting to know HALEA is the best thing that happened to us. I and my siblings were enrolled into the tailoring program and we benefited a lot. We learnt how to make sanitary pads, dresses and bags. We were all kept busy during the lockdown and we were not distracted by men and boys. I personally joined the saving club and despite not earning a regular income, I was able to save UGX 224,000 at the end of the year and I received the money in December 2021. In addition HALEA gave us a

Christmas package composed of food items to enable us go through the festival seasons. This was extremely helpful to struggling families like ours. All my sisters are back to school with no pregnancy or diseases and we are very happy for HALEA's timely intervention. We were all worried how we were to cope up as girls staying in Kivulu slum. We thank all the partners of HALEA especially Humanists International for all the support given to me and my family.

NANUDDU JANE,

I am a struggling mother with several children (biological and adopted) that I take care of. I got to know HALEA way back in 2015. I encouraged my children to embrace all the services offered by HALEA. During the lockdown, I encouraged my children to continue utilizing all the services offered by HALEA. I allowed them to join the discussion groups organized by HALEA and I am happy whenever I interact with them I learn that they know many issues especially about personal health which I would not easily let them know yet these are important matters to know.

I dropped out of primary school and married early. There are many things I do not know so it is a blessing to have an organization standing with poor parents and supporting us and our children.

I joined the Savings Club in 2021 and together with a group of women, we believed in ourselves and kept on pulling money together and getting small loans which would be invested in our business. My small restaurant has survived and thrived during the lockdown because the HALEA Saving Club kept on assisting me with cheap loans and by the end of the year, my business was much stronger.

Through my personal savings with the HALEA Savings Club, I was able to get UGX 372,000 which I immediately used to buy bigger saucepans, some plates and a few chairs to support my restaurant business. I am happy that HALEA has also taught us the importance of saving our money than taking it to church as offertories or buying things like cosmetics and other luxuries. I now know the value of saving and investing in a money making venture. I started with a very small road side make shift restaurant but due to HALEA's advise, my business is slowly growing and is getting better and bigger each month. I give my praise and thanks to the chairperson of HALEA, Ms Aisha Nansubuga for the encouragement and counselling as well as Ms Viola Namyalo for guiding us through finances and investing having been our Treasurer in the Savings Club.

KYOMUHENDO MERCY,

I have been part of HALEA since my school days at Kampala Students Centre. Due to some challenges, I did not go through university education. However the directors at HALEA encouraged me to start an income generating activity and I started on the making of fries (chips and chicken) on the road side. My capital was very small but HALEA staff encouraged me to join the Savings Club. I started saving money with the club's treasurer and by December 2021, I was paid UGX 331,700. I was happy with myself and I immediately invested the money in my business. Through HALEA focus group discussions and counselling, I now know better how to carry on with my life and how to survive within my earnings. The life lessons I keep learning from HALEA are very important, I am always thankful.

KATUSHABE CHRISTINE

I am happy to be part of HALEA programs. I have benefited greatly through their several services. The critical thinking discussions coupled with SRHR services have kept me aware of the need to think critically through my actions. I now take my life as very important and I avoid any reckless behavior that can put me in trouble.

When I joined HALEA's Women Savings Club, I was empowered to learn more about financial literacy and more especially how to avoid reckless expenditure and save money for future investments. I was taught that no amount is too small to save as well as invest. I learnt that learning a practical skill can be as important as having a university degree. I am happy that at the end of the year, I had saved UGX 356,200 and I have now invested this money in a small business of groceries. I never had any thought that I can start up something on my own but now I am all motivated to thing bigger and better. I am happy that the time I have spent with HALEA has been very productive. I also thank HALEA for giving us a Christmas package as vulnerable and struggling girls in slum areas, it helped us a lot going through the long holidays and it demonstrated further how team HALEA cares for the community.

MIREMBE JOY,

I am a single mother struggling with children without a stable income. When I shared my challenges with friends, they took me to HALEA.

I was encouraged to enroll my children and other dependants into the several programs offered by HALEA. I was personally encouraged to join the Women's Savings Club. During club meetings, I learnt so many things I did not know especially on money and the importance of savings. At the end of the year, despite my very little income and limited savings, I was happy to be paid UGX 164,000. I did not expect this money because often I was without cash so I was not saving regularly. HALEA helped us to show us the value in saving little and having your money make some profits. I am always grateful for all the services offered by HALEA especially in supporting our children and us the elderly.

AUMA GRACE,

I am a proud beneficiary of the several services offered by HALEA. As a young woman growing up in a slum area, there are many challenges I have gone through and I have often had to consult HALEA for advice and support. As young women, we go through so many challenges where our guardians cannot be of much help. In such circumstances, HALEA has stepped in and helped me and my friends a great deal.

Through the Women's Savings Club, I have benefited a lot of knowledge and I have encouraged several friends to join HALEA's Discussion Groups through which we have been able to learn many things we did not know much about. HALEA's Critical thinking Lessons and discussions have been helpful to me through mind set change.

Pictorial

OF OUR ACTIVITIES

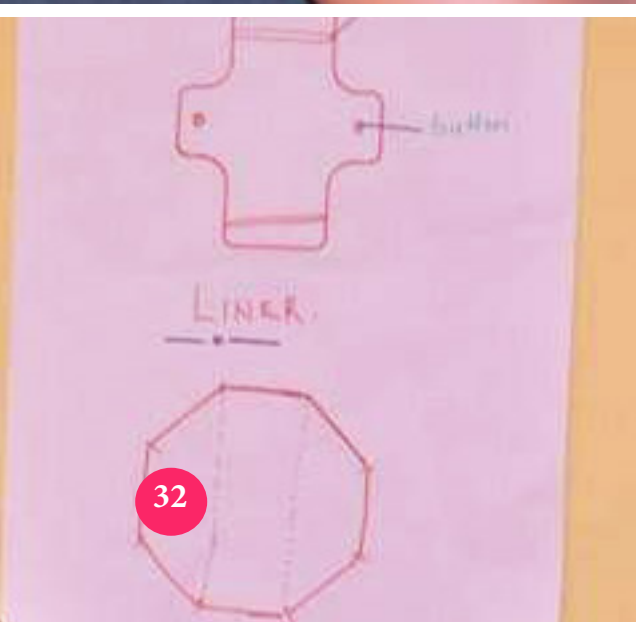


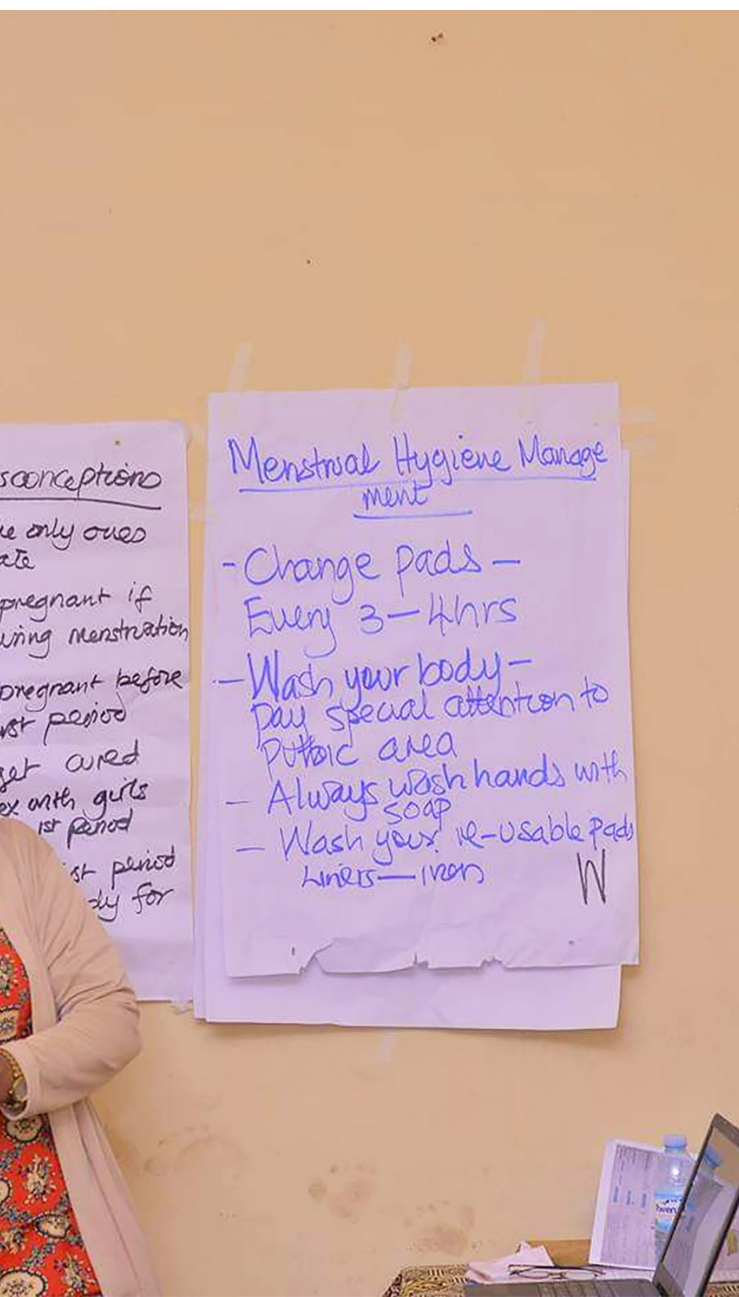
-Menstrual Hygiene Session in progress





Taking Menstrual Hygiene Sessions in Schools







Skilling girls in tailoring







Girls showcasing some of their finished products



Distributing condoms in slums

CALL FOR SUPPORT

Support us, donate to HALEA today:

HALEA is a charity organization started in 2007 and got fully registered in February 2008.

All our activities are done through membership contributions and donations.

All our staff are dedicated volunteers and it's your contributions that keep us going.

We have several activities centered around youth empowerment and we rely on your continued support.

To enable us continue doing this work, please consider donating to us through the following bank account:

NAME: HALEA LTD, P.O. Box 8664 ,Plot 41, Makerere Hill Road, Kampala.

BANK: STANBIC BANK LTD, Crested Towers, Plot 17, Hannington Road,
Kampala Uganda

ACCOUNT NUMBER (IBAN): 90 3000 564 2565

BANK IDENTIFIER CODE: SBICUGKXXXX

Thank you

For your continued support





CONTACTS US:

Find out more by Visiting HALEA Offices at Plot 41,
Makerere Hill Road, Enterprise House, Room L3 Or Send us an
Email: haleauganda@gmail.com