Young leaders emerge: knowledgeable, in control of their lives, and transforming society.
“For me, becoming isn’t about arriving somewhere or achieving a certain aim. I see it instead as forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self. The journey doesn’t end.”

~Michelle Obama, Becoming.
The GIRL BRAND...

Starts with self
Is powerful
Is self-examining
Is willing to start over
Is remembering our women and girl folk
Is stepping out of the box
Is improving ourselves
Is empowering
Is healing
Is intentional
Is practical
Is drive
Is worth the fight
To replenish the pool of transformative and accountable leaders, FOWODE has since 2004 mentored young leaders in Alternative and Transformative Leadership. Through her leadership training camps, the young leaders have been challenged to advance women’s rights, foster accountable leadership and effectively participate in all aspects of political, economic and social life. Today, FOWODE boasts of a cadre of 685 young leaders who are engaged in various leadership positions in institutions of higher learning, private sector, political leadership and within their communities.

It is now my pleasure to invite you to peek into what has changed in these young leaders lives. We are so proud to be apart of their preparation to transform the social justice landscape starting with their own personalities—In these pages you will meet young women who are standing in their own space advocating for equal rights and inclusion where it matters most. The young women are taking on leadership positions at every level, starting up successful economic empowerment initiatives across their villages, teaching on sexual reproductive health rights, menstrual management, and walking into boardrooms to market their abilities. Perhaps most touching is how quickly the young women have taken control of their lives and are reaching out to younger girls and helping them redefine their lives.

Thank you to all the partners that made this incredible experience possible.
Priceless preparation

Sharon Nabajju

In-house lawyer, Wilkens Property Services
“Mind boggling”, that’s how Sharon describes the multiple ideas she experienced in her life daily. Sharon had just given birth to her baby. A lawyer by training, Sharon thought a lot about how she could help women achieve their full rights. A friend thought the leadership camp would be the perfect push to help Sharon figure out her ideas. The opportunity was exciting but Sharon was worried about how she would go about the baby. FOWODE surprised her, all arrangements were taken care of and Sharon, her baby and nanny were accepted. According to Sharon, this is a way of making sure that women are not forced to miss out on developmental opportunities because their child care responsibilities are real and should not have to be compromised or minimised.

Sharon thrived at the camp, she met many iconic women leaders and was able to interact with them and get rich knowledge and advice. One of the sessions that stood out for her was on personal branding and marketing. Sharon learnt how to seize every moment to communicate her strengths and share what she has to offer in the shortest time possible. During the training on passing job interviews, Sharon learnt how to posture herself, capture the attention of interviewers and share relevant facts about her experience to win them over.

“After the camp I was invited for an interview by Willeens Property Services. It was as though I had transformed into another person. I was confident, I talked about my character and experience and took care to match my points with the job description. I passed the interview with flying colors and I knew in my heart that if I had done this interview before the camp I would have failed miserably. Today I am the in-house lawyer at Willeens Property Services. I am no longer the Sharon that used to be overwhelmed with several ideas. I work on these ideas and take action immediately. My dream is to offer free legal services to the girls in my home town (Manafwa) and also form a local organization to promote equal opportunities especially for girls. I am so grateful to FOWODE for the knowledge they gave me. It is priceless.”
Passion-Packed
Jane Bisando
Ledger reconciliation officer, Uganda Revenue Authority, Domestic Taxes
“One day I will be a woman councillor, then a Member of Parliament. My focus will be on reducing Violence Against Women which has been a persistent problem in my home area.”

While at university, Jane felt that women and girls were often treated unfairly. Jane had several conversations with her classmates about the startling statistics on teenage pregnancy, maternal health and child abuse.

The discussions ignited a fire within her and Jane determined to find a way to contribute to women and girls rights protection. It was around this time that Jane received an email on the FOWODE leadership camp. She signed up immediately. At the camp, Jane learnt that she had the ability to lead and help other girls succeed. It was time to rethink her own life plan. Jane focused on sexual reproductive health and rights and simple practical money making skills. The hands-on skills to empower girls economically and socially were of particular interest. Jane learnt how to make re-usable sanitary pads, bangles, and paper-bags.

“After the camp, we were encouraged to go to schools in our communities and teach them about “Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights”. I teamed up with a friend from the camp, went back to Nebbi to do just that. I started with a girl in my neighbourhood, she was out of school and told us it was because she didn’t have pads and that meant missing a lot of days every term. It was a special moment because I used the skills from the camp to teach her how to make pads. It was wonderful, more girls came and before we knew it I was in the newspapers. We featured in the New Vision on the 24th August, 2018”.

Jane left the camp inspired and told all her friends to apply. She graduated from university and is currently a ledger reconciliation officer at Uganda Revenue Authority. Jane has since obtained funding from MENTRO and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) International to train young girls in her community on how to make paper bags and re-usable pads. The girls use the products themselves and also sale them to earn. Jane believes that economic empowerment is essential if girls are to be independent and achieve their dreams.
Taking Charge
Justine Atai
Customer Relations Executive, DSTV
I am a doer. I no longer keep quiet about my ideas. Nothing we have is too small, even the smallest resource and support could change another person’s life. I learnt that life is not about what others think about me but what I think about myself. I came to the conclusion that my opinion however small or big counts.”

Justine admired women who took charge and changed their lives. At work she was always neutral and although Justine had a rich imagination on how things could be improved, she never spoke up. One of the young ladies she admired urged her to apply for the FOWODE leadership camp. Beth had attended the FOWODE camp, she carried herself with confidence and was never afraid to speak up. Justine hadn’t been short of ideas to help her family and community but she felt inadequate and incapable of achieving her plans. As soon as she could, Justine signed up for the camp longing to discover her friend’s secret of confidence and achieving success.

At the camp Justine was surprised to discover that all along she had what it took to transform both hers and other people’s lives. She learnt that her ideas were both important and attainable. Through the class on envisioning the future, Justine learnt how to define her ideas, plan the activity including finding resources and taking action.

“We took time to imagine ourselves as change makers. I remember this moment every day”.

She returned home a new woman. She wrote down her project ideas starting with the financial literacy activities for the children and youth ministry at her community church. Justine was determined not to simply do what the church suggested, she became proactive. She invited leaders and some of the members and presented her ideas. Today she is successfully teaching financial literacy, she has even taught younger children to save some of their money and not only buy sweets. She also teaches them to look out for those in need and offer help whenever possible. Justine has also started a piggery, she had previously been afraid to try. The piggery will be a source of supplementary income for her home.
Funky Feminist
Sharon AmanyA Bright
Assistant Lecturer, Lira University
Every time Sharon heard the word feminist she thought of radical rude women who went about ridiculing men and setting things on fire. To her surprise, Sharon learnt that feminism meant being the kind of person who cares that women are treated right and given equal opportunities with men in every area of their lives. This truth startled Sharon and that was the beginning of her new passion for women’s rights and opportunities in the world. The lessons on conflict resolution, constitutionalism and entrepreneurship also prepared Sharon for her next project - the Dream Nature Mentorship – online project.

After the training, Sharon got some of her school friends at the university to start an online mentorship project. They began by setting it up on Facebook and the Lira University website. The Dream Nature Mentorship project pairs public health students with high school students focusing on sexual reproductive health rights, career guidance and transformational leadership. This initiative flourished and today Sharon has a legally registered Community Based Organisation ‘Mentoring Girls’ that empowers rural girls to stay in school and acquire income generating skills.

At the camp I was taught how to talk with confidence and sell any idea. This is why I haven’t been afraid of reaching out to bigger networks for funding and support. Our mentorship initiative was discussed at the African Science week in Ethiopia; they were excited about our program and participants were talking about how to adopt this in their home countries.
She Leads

Maria Nnatabi Ledochowska
Secretary Female Affairs, Jinja district
Maria has been a leader all her life; right from her small kindergarten class up to university where she was elected to the Guild Representative Council at one of the largest higher education institutions- Makerere University. During that time however, Maria’s perception of leadership began to change with students putting monetary gain ahead of service. Since 2015, Maria has served as the Secretary Female Affairs of Jinja district. Maria had attended leadership classes but never anything related to gender. One of her former lecturers told her about FOWODE’s camp for young leaders, Maria applied and was successful. At the camp, Maria was introduced to the gender concept including gender sensitivity, gender equity and equality. She learnt that it mattered that leaders consider gender as it applies to representation, rights fulfilment and service provision. Maria was inspired to learn about African feminists who changed the status quo to benefit women. Maria determined to join these great women and charted her life goals including key actions to ensure she didn’t waiver from her plan. She learnt that good leadership begun with effective personal leadership and management. Maria decided to change her own lifestyle, she started an exercise regimen and has become an avid reader to ensure that both her mind and body are fit. Maria is now able to engage in diverse conversations with other leaders including her opponents informed by the knowledge she is acquiring.

After the camp, Maria returned to her district fired up to engage the other women leaders to do more for girls and women. Together they planned out their action points starting with helping girls stay in school. As the secretary for women affairs, Maria started a mentoring program for girls where they share their own journey to leadership, provide tips on keeping healthy and motivated to complete school. The girls also learn how to make reusable pads and effectively manage their menstruation in order not to miss school days during their period.

“It hasn’t been easy to work with the women leaders at the lower levels. Majority have not received any training on leadership and do not even necessarily believe that women and girls rights can be at the top of the agenda. This made me appreciate FOWODE even more for training women councillors. My future plan now is to become a Member of Parliament which will be a strategic position through which I can prepare and encourage young women leaders to succeed in leadership.”
Empowerment Package

Martha Karen Nandera

Volunteer, Centre of Outreach, School of Psychology, Makerere University
“Inside, I felt like I could be a good leader but was not sure where to start. Besides, I had no confidence and speaking in public was especially scary”

Martha wanted to do more for the girls in her district. She did not know that her closest friends were aware that she had the potential to become a successful leader. One of them told her about the FOWODE leadership camp, Martha applied immediately and was accepted.

The first thing she took advantage of was learning how to speak in public. Martha was ready to confront every obstacle. She was especially intrigued about the history of African women and their role in shaping women’s rights. Martha was inspired by the testimonies of all the women leaders that shared their triumphs in advocating for their rights and standing for truth in their respective fields. In her words, “the programme was one dynamic package of empowerment”.

Martha was startled by how ignorant she had been about feminism, sexuality and women’s empowerment. She had thought women had equal opportunities to do whatever they wanted but this was not true. Right from the lowest level there was a lot to be done to ‘level the playing field’. During the training Martha talked with other young women and soon realised that girls and women were facing similar difficulties across the country. At the end of the training the young women were urged to take what they had learnt and inspire young girls to reach for their dreams and to maximise the resources around them for success. Maria teamed up with Eunice, a friend from her district and obtained permission from the District Education Officer to teach girls in two primary and secondary schools about sexual reproductive health rights. Maria and Eunice created a safe environment for discussion and in no time they had engaged the girls in deep conversations about their rights and experiences at school. When they returned to Kampala, the young ladies began an initiative called Girl Child Ambassadors; a platform on Facebook where they engage girls in conversation on their rights and creating economic opportunities to improve their lives. Girl Child Ambassadors is planning a holiday workshop for young girls focusing on making liquid soap to help them earn pocket money for school supplies and also make re-usable sanitary pads.

“My biggest lesson is that it is not only money which changes things, with the right mentorship you can lead by example, create and work on ideas that change lives and attract the resources you need.”
One point five

Jamila Namugenyi

Undergraduate Student, Makerere Business School.
If you have heard Jamila’s story once, you have heard it a thousand times. In Kigowa where Jamila grew up many young girls are sexually abused, or at great risk of Gender Based Violence. When Jamila reached her final year of high school, her parents were no longer able to afford her school fees. The only relative who had resources was Jamila’s uncle who threatened to withhold support if she did not succumb to his sexual advances. Jamila was devastated, her parents struggled to pay for her final year of high school. Jamila’s parents, however told her that she needed to get a scholarship for university as their funds were depleted. Jamila worked very hard as this was her only way to escape the life she hated so much. The hard work paid off, Jamila surprised everyone and passed with flying colours, but didn’t qualify for the standard government scholarship. However, with the additional 1.5 (one point five credits) given to girls as part of affirmative action in Uganda’s education system, she made it to university on Government sponsorship. Jamila was grateful for all the feminists that had fought to keep affirmative action when parliament was advocating for its removal. ‘One point five’ was for girls like Jamila who were fighting against all odds to get a university education, the ultimate purchase of their freedom.

“Most of my life I have felt alone with no one believing I could make it. Achieving success one day as a leader has been a major motivation- to be able to help young girls who struggled like I did have hope”.

Before the training, Jamila did not know how to motivate and engage other people around change processes. While interning at FOWODE, a volunteer told Jamila that she could learn this at the leadership camp. Jamila immediately registered and enjoyed every moment of the camp. Jamila was especially moved by the testimonies of women leaders on their leadership journeys, surviving GBV and overcoming a history of sexual violence. “It was as though they were talking about Kigowa my home area. I knew sexual abuse happened to young girls and I wanted it to stop”.

For the first time Jamila realised she could speak up and advocate for prevention of sexual violence against girls. After the camp, Jamila decided that she would pursue a Master’s degree and centre her research on Gender Based Violence (GBV) so as to prepare for a career in advocacy. Jamila had already started reaching out to her community. She mobilised girls and their parents in her town to discuss Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), GBV, entrepreneurship and financial literacy, “I taught them how to make liquid soap and re-usable pads. I also invited the Vice chairperson of the area in Kigowa and discussed how to scale up this initiative.”

Currently, Jamila works as a mentor, teaching young girls about Sexual Reproductive Health Rights at BRAC.

Throughout this entire process, I have learnt to appreciate who I am and what I can do to impact others. I now know that I am capable of leading and that good leaders have the ability to mobilise, inspire and influence others for change.

Jamila is also working on starting up a savings group for young women, to enable them learn about financial management and some of the savings made will be used for re-usable pad making both for member use and sale.
New Mentor

Juliet Agwang

National Organization of Peer Educators (NOPE) Uganda - Field Officer/Youth Mentor
“In every aspect of our lives, we have to be leaders. As a mother, I am a leader for my young son. A leader draws followers. Now I know this can only be built through trust, integrity and keeping up with our responsibilities and promises.”

Juliet found the leadership programme online and the expert line up of speakers was irresistible, she applied right away. The sessions on effective communication and networking stood out for Juliet because she works with children in primary schools. Juliet was intent on learning new skills to motivate and inspire her students.

After the camp, Juliet was energized. She couldn’t wait to get back to her students. Juliet changed her year plan and decided to tackle Sexual Reproductive Health Rights. She reached out for the support of other mentors and the school administrators to ensure her classes were successful. Juliet started by educating the girls about their bodies, their right to protect themselves, how to manage their menstruation and keep in school. Juliet’s sessions are quite popular, they inspired one of the pupils to compose a song on managing menstruation and presented it during the music and dance festival. This gave Juliet great joy.

So far Juliet’s biggest lesson has been on the importance of leveraging each other’s resources.

In my kind of work, I have learnt that we need one another. If someone has the money and another has the skills, they should be able to help each other.

Juliet plans to start up an organization that supports child survivors of sexual violence recover and live well. I believe every child deserves a happy childhood. She will also be pursuing a Master’s degree.
Safina Nabisere, District woman councillor, Mityana District Local Government since 2002
"I am an outstanding, confident woman because of the FOWODE Leadership programme. I never used to speak in public or think of myself as a valuable girl. Every time I spoke up they laughed at me, this made me think that my opinions were wrong about the different motions being discussed in council. I have been a district woman councillor in Mityana for more than 17 years. Yet I always kept silent and listened to other councillors speak."

When a FOWODE Field Officer, Kato shared the leadership programme with Safina she knew it was time to take control of her life. Safina wanted the humiliation to end.

I wanted to stand out; I wanted the issues of my constituents listened to and my voice to be heard.

Safina took in every bit of information at the camp. She shared her challenges and learnt how to organise her ideas, speak audibly and communicate effectively. Safina would never be intimidated again. After the camp, she lobbied the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship programme to fund her women economic empowerment programme. The organisation was supposed to fund a program in another district-Kalangala. Safina mobilized her fellow councillors, documented the desperate need in the community, made a convincing case and won the grant.

The new confident Safina did not stop here. She had always wanted to join the civil service, but had been afraid she would fail the test. A job application for hospital administrator was advertised, she applied and out of 63, Safina emerged the best candidate. During the interviews Safina used the presentation and interview success skills she had learnt.

I am now a hospital administrator. I never forgot the discussion on how culture can hold women back from pursuing their dreams. In the past I wouldn’t have believed that I could do better than men. In the final civil service interview, I was the only lady among men, I did not fear them or hesitate and I won.

Safina is determined to achieve the highest goals possible for herself and those she serves. She learnt that leadership is a process with many lessons from which she is adapting her practice every day to ultimately become a transformative force. Safina is preparing to become a Member of Parliament where she will be in an even better position to help more girls and women achieve their dreams.

Now more than ever, I know I can and will become a Member of Parliament sooner than anyone expects.
Women Possibilities
Irene Nagudi
Programs Manager,
FIKA AFRIKA ADVOCACY FOUNDATION
“At work we are two women and the rest are men. I wasn’t too sure we would make it to the top; it was always the men. I was a follower, did whatever the others suggested. Inside I knew I could lead but needed someone to show me how.”

When Irene got a link about the camp on her phone, she applied right away. She had heard about it from several friends who came back different, bold and ready to take on the world. Irene describes her experience as “unforgettable”. She agreed with the observations on gender inequality that cut across various areas where women are mistreated or put down by family, friends and the community, and as a result, held back. All the young ladies she made friends with at the camp were facing similar problems despite the fact that they were from different parts of the country. But it was the testimonies of ordinary women who had taken courageous steps to skill themselves and fight for their rights that stayed with Irene. It meant that she had a chance at the extraordinary.

Irene decided she too was going to use her gifts and resources to make a difference in her community especially for women and girls. Irene decided to focus on her area of passion and expertise, environmental science.

I believe that the environment must be preserved in order not to compromise the present and future generation.

Irene already knew that women suffered the brunt of environment related problems including droughts and floods that resulted into food shortage. At the same time women were well positioned to adapt positive behaviour and influence their communities to improve disaster preparedness and resilience. Irene started the FIKA AFRIKA Advocacy Foundation whose sole purpose is to conserve the environment. The foundation partnered with Youth GOGREEN and are together promoting affordable and efficient energy options. Irene also started a vegetable gardening project to teach women how to grow kitchen gardens in their backyard. She plans to expand this programme so that more women can use the vegetables both to prepare nutritious meals and for sale to increase their earnings.

Finally Irene has also deepened and expanded her reading. Before the camp, Irene had taken a 3 months reading course. The camp further concretised the importance of learning how to read in order to lead. Irene is an avid reader and her work is informed by all the new things she learns.
Boss Lady
Patience Mukulu
Artist, Social entrepreneur
A professional dancer, hair stylist and tailor, Patience thought becoming a leader meant becoming a boss and as a result getting respect from those below.

“When I joined the FOWODE camp, I learnt that leaders should be exemplary, determined and selfless because it is all about the people”.

Patience’s favourite class was on feminism, reproductive health and in particular the importance of menstrual hygiene management caught her attention. It reminded her of growing up with 5 siblings in a cash strapped home with a mother who worked as a house keeper and an absentee father who was a teacher but didn’t support the home. Patience recalls her monthly period with trepidation. She went to a poorly resourced school where girls were not provided with menstrual hygiene products or given any alternatives for menstrual health management. Patience’s friends advised her to use paper. It was painful. Patience had promised herself to do everything she could to succeed so that her sisters and daughters would never have to go through the same experience.

Once Patience learnt that she could make reusable pads there was no stopping her. Patience started training girls in her town in Gayaza how to manage their period hygienically, using reusable pads they made themselves. She talked to them about the importance of staying in school. At every meeting she encourages the girls to fight hard against all obstacles to completing their education.

The camp prepared Patience to talk about the female anatomy with pride rather than the shame that had resulted from strange and embarrassing names assigned by culture. She was no longer ashamed.

“My friends and I also started the Nurturer’s Initiative for Transformative Leadership. Currently, Patience is mobilising and conducting charity drives for community non-profits. We have since worked with two children’s homes. I want to spend my life inspiring other girls to reach for their dreams. I am setting up a savings group to expand the re-usable pad making project and plan on expanding my tailoring business so that I have more funds both to improve my life as well as reach out to others.”
In-Doors

Namusoke Hanna Elizabeth

Law Student
Very shy is how Hanna was described by everyone. Hanna spent most of her days indoors. Even those closest to her worried about how their lawyer-to-be would ever survive in court.

A friend thought this camp would be good for me, I trust her so I attended. My life has not been the same. I went in quiet and scared I came out bold, mature and capable. I learnt how to package myself, these days am so confident when I meet people. A month after the camp I teamed up with another young lady and we mobilised young girls in our neighbourhood who we sensitized on Sexually Transmitted Illnesses. Most of the girls had no idea there were other diseases besides HIV and AIDS to worry about and prevent. These health talks are ongoing. My entire world outlook changed. I know that leadership goes beyond aspiration and position, it really is about service. I continue to focus on raising awareness of Sexually Transmitted illnesses among school girls.

“People will tell you that you don’t belong here because you are a woman or it’s not your time yet...”
Not-Knowing
Tracy Ivy Nakayenga
Volunteer, Femme Forte Uganda
Tracy was at cross roads right when she saw the camp announcement online. It was the end of her university degree and yet she still felt unsure of who she was, and what she had to offer the world. Tracy had always loved it when women were winning and followed them across media but did not think she could be one of them. She was thrilled when she was invited for the FOWODE leadership camp.

While at the camp, she met some of the winning ladies she had admired over the years. Every day Tracy learnt that she was powerful and had the ability to make a difference. It was a very inclusive training and the facilitators were approachable. For the first time Tracy begun to understand sexuality and feminism. She became proud of being a woman and begun to embrace her total being. Until then, she hadn’t known they were African feminists who have impacted our continent. She learnt that budgets should be considerate of gender. By the end of the camp, Tracy was fired up and as soon as she returned home, Tracy invited her inner circle of friends to dispel all the myths they had on feminism. They had all thought the same thing that feminists were angry women who hated men. Tracy explained to her friends that a feminist is a woman who believes in equality and fairness and that women should have the same opportunities as men. They discussed sexuality and reproductive health. It was a learning moment for the young women. Tracy had more courage after this and started applying for more opportunities where to implement what she learnt.

Tracy landed a position at ‘Femme Forte’ which means ‘Strong Woman’. At Femme Forte she was able to express her passion for helping women and practiced everything she learnt on communication, emotional intelligence and adult learning at the camp. When Femme Forte organised a 5 day leadership training workshop, Tracy was invited to present a session on health care and wellbeing. Tracy organised and delivered her presentation, and received many compliments on it.

“I no longer speak just because I am asked to – no. I speak from a point of information and research my facts before sharing anything.”

Tracy recently started a blog on understanding feminism from a young woman’s perspective and another on self-discovery. She is a strong believer in understanding oneself before you start advising others what to do. Tracy chose to maximise every leadership opportunity and became intentional about seeking the advice of successful leaders. She attended the Uganda Feminist Forum and enjoyed conversations with many powerful women. It was invigorating.
Craft Merchant
Irene Bwengye
Fellow, Building Tomorrow
Today, many young women have dreams, but are often overwhelmed with uncertainty and fear of failure. Irene was no different. Irene is a fellow at the Building Tommorow program in Mbarara which mentors school girls to succeed in school. At the FOWODE camp, Irene through the emotional intelligence sessions examined her personality, talents and decided to face her fears head on.

“Sometimes friends help define us but it is best to know ourselves and understand why we are here.”

Irene always wanted to make jewellery but was afraid that no one would buy it. By the end of the camp she had improved her idea, Irene decided to make jewellery and teach other girls how to do the same. She started a shop with a friend to market, and sell their products. Irene and her friend train school girls on jewellery making and work with them to sell it and manage the revenues from it. The necklaces and bangles are popular. Irene is determined to expand the business into a larger craft shop in Mbarara district and the entire western region.

“You have the right to be at the table that is making decisions that affect your daily life.”
Change Maker
Lailah Nassaka
Student, Bachelor of Science and Midwifery at Lira University.
Lailah laughs as she shares her favourite dance ‘waka waka’ by Shakira.

“It was one of the funnest things to do at the camp, as we danced we connected with our bodies, became proud of our beauty, no more shame. We determined to keep healthy and always posture ourselves with value, respect and confidence.”

Lailah had never thought that women could do great things to change the world. She felt that most girls grew up feeling shame about their body parts. In particular, Lailah remembers a primary school teacher who discouraged her from competing for the class monitor position. He would only let a boy take the position. When Lailah made it to university she looked out for young girls especially from her hometown and encouraged them to study hard. Lailah did not realise she was becoming a mentor. She learnt how to mentor with confidence and intentionality. Lailah was invited to the FOWODE leadership camp by her professor. The camp was a perfect fit for her.

Lailah and her university friends started a mentorship club promoting self-leadership, time management, goal setting, sexual reproductive health and financial empowerment. Together the university students decided to go beyond their campus and attached a mentor to each of the high schools they targeted. The friends had observed that whenever there was a meeting at the university alot of money was spent on sodas purchased outside campus. She and one of the other mentors learnt how to make fruit juice and offered it as a more affordable healthy alternative. Next they learnt how to bake cakes which they sell at the university.

“We teach all those who attend our club how to start a business and maintain it. The club also facilitates health education on topics like personal hygiene and preventing HIV and AIDS. Many teenagers are still ignorant about this disease”.

As a student of science and midwifery at Lira University, she had been troubled by the number of teenagers with unwanted pregnancies that showed up for antenatal care. Majority said they never knew about contraception. This is why she uses every opportunity to talk about Sexual Reproductive Health Rights so that teenage girls can make informed choices.
Rethinking girlhood
Gladys Bahimbisomwe
Fellow at Building Tomorrow and Programs Manager USIKATE TAMAA Social Entreprise
Gladys has always been an ambitious go getter. Competition and leadership were her favourite ‘cup of tea’. For a while, she felt that everyone was fussing about the girl child and not the boys. In step with her character she chose to do the opposite. Gladys decided to take on mentoring young boys.

When Gladys joined the leadership programme, she stopped in her tracks. It was uncomfortable to unveil patriarchy, its results and face her own biases. She took courage and along with the other participants begun a new journey understanding ‘girlhood’.

At the camp, Gladys decided to start with herself, she was determined to take advantage of every opportunity to lead and put women first. Whenever she recognised that there was a leadership position for women anywhere, she applied. It did not matter how small. Right after the camp, her sister was getting married. Gladys realised that the entire RSVP list on her invitation cards were men. Gladys felt it was not representative and got herself on the list immediately. She is currently a fellow at Building Tomorrow in Kiboga district. Her work includes; helping young girls and boys who have dropped out to get back in school, strengthening literacy, monitoring and promoting teacher accountability, supporting and facilitating Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programmes.

Gladys and her colleagues are invited to seat on various committees throughout the school system. Because of the camp, Gladys now ensures that every management committee has a female representative. Today, more women than ever before, are sitting on committees in the school district.

Furthermore, Gladys and her colleagues started a football tournament. When they had just started out, she encouraged a very shy girl to become team captain because she is a great player and old enough to take on the responsibility. The girl had always turned down any responsibility. Throughout, Gladys encouraged every member of the team to do their best, cheered them on and taught them about leadership. In no time the new captain was a budding well respected leader in addition to having one of the fastest speeds on the field. Her new confidence did not stay on the field it showed up in class before long, the captain’s grades were soaring.

Economic empowerment resonated with Gladys and was very much part of the Building tomorrow agenda. Gladys decided to train the girls in making reusable pads both for themselves and for sale. She has since trained 50 girls in making re-usable pads. She also plans to start an organization called, “Voice of the Child Uganda” to empower more children to speak out. Gladys wants to reach out to more children especially from the villages, who are often timid and unable to speak up.

On a personal level, Gladys is facing fears in other surprising places. She recently rode a motorcycle for the first time to one of the rural communities in the region where she works. Previously, she was too scared to ride a bike to work and depended on a male motorcyclist, they were no women cyclists in this particular area. One day, when he was unavailable she decided to face her fear and successfully conquered kilometres of distance.

Gladys is currently working on her master’s degree with keen interest in global affairs and women in development.
No Shaking
Immaculate Kanyunyuzi
Fellow at Building Tomorrow and Co-founder/Project Coordinator Life Skills Uganda
“I am a fellow at Building Tomorrow yet every time I was called to make a presentation, I would shake. I hated how I felt”.

As far as leadership and innovation were concerned, Immaculate had counted herself out, after all she didn’t have any donors to fund her start up ideas. Immaculate had seen her sister go to a FOWODE leadership camp and return a different woman, energised and in control. When Immaculate became age eligible for the camp she applied and was happy to get accepted. At the leadership camp Immaculate was most impressed by the public speaking, conflict resolution and effective communication sessions. By the end of this module she was unrecognizable, holding her head up high, speaking up and delivering incredible presentations.

Next she focused on Life skills including financial empowerment. Before the camp, Immaculate didn’t think she could start a financial improvement project for girls without much money. After the training there was no stopping her, Immaculate started a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called Life Skills Uganda. The NGO equips girls with financial literacy, practical income generating skills, encourages and supports primary school girls to take up leadership positions.

Immaculate through her organisation also started girls’ clubs within the local primary schools to build leadership skills, and immediately realised that more girls were dropping out of school every term. The clubs did not have stable membership. The team looked into the problem and discovered that the lack of sanitary pads ranked high on the list of causes identified by the students and teachers. The focus became teaching girls how to manage their menses and make re-usable pads. Drop out levels for girls have since reduced. Life Skills Uganda is the only NGO in Kiruhura focusing on girls. In order to expand its work they have partnered with a Community Based Organisation called Endibo to train girls how to make Vaseline among other initiatives.

Networks like these are helping the Life Skills team to learn and grow starting with the resources they have. Next Year, Life SKills will register a social enterprise in order to attract a more diverse range of partners and scale up programmes to reach more girls.
Wise Academy
Ednah Kukundakwe
Founder and CEO for Women in Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship Academies (WISE)
"I dream of a gender equal world".

Edna is a social entrepreneur, founder and CEO of WISE Academies (Women in Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship). WISE academies are slum and village based learning sites that target out of school girls aged 12-24 years to equip them with IT skills, knowledge on Gender Based Violence (GBV) and economic empowerment.

“I have always been about women and girls rights. I conducted many community dialogues with girls but I used to fear to talk about women issues among men."

While at the camp, Ednah begun to gain clarity and understand feminism better. She was impressed by the idea of African feminism, and that women can take control of their lives, be proud of their bodies and communicate with power. When Ednah returned to her organisation she streamlined all their programs to influence the community towards gender equality. Ednah became radical about making a difference. She made a lot of noise on social media speaking up about women’s rights and challenging men’s perception about women. People started calling her KUKU for crazy.

“I work in these very villages so my messages on gender equality are on point. I knew I had struck the right code”.

Edna and her team at WISE started a menstrual hygiene programme in four schools. She taught both boys and girls how to make re-usable pads. Groups made up of 4 boys and 4 girls were created; this was meant to enable boys learn about menstrual hygiene and how to support their fellow students when they go through period related challenges. They have been able to work with various stakeholders in the education system like District leaders, civil society partners like Akina MaMa and Educate who have provided support in terms of materials and advocacy.
Breaking Free
Dorah Nanteza
Advocacy Coordinator, Slum Child Uganda
Breaking barriers was Dorah’s biggest learning and resolve at the FOWODE leadership camp. Dorah is the Advocacy Coordinator at Slum Child Uganda, a Community Based Organisation focusing on poor urban settlements. She had always taken the back seat and shied away from leadership and speaking up about her convictions on gender equality.

At the camp Dorah gained confidence, and realised that there were several opportunities to improve her leadership and advocacy skills. Dorah had previously thought this was not possible. By the end of the camp, she had built a network of professional resource persons who helped her apply for a popular leadership program, the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). She could hardly believe it when she was accepted.

“I have learnt that we have the potential to achieve change; society should not determine who we want to be. We should chase our dreams and go for what we want; start small and grow to create change at national and global level”.

Dorah returned to work at Slum Child Uganda inspired to encourage the team to go beyond Banda slum where they were operating. Slum Child Uganda started on the process to become a Non-Governmental Organisation. Previously, they were a Community Based Organization, but this limited their opportunities for impact. In addition, Dorah and her colleagues started a resource mobilisation campaign to fund community public health, and socio-economic improvement projects for girls.

She plans to keep on sharpening her skills and plans to attend another leadership camp through the Mandela Washington Fellowship.
Nolonger a Tea Girl
Nancy Okwong
Volunteer, UNESCO
Nancy like many young women in the workplace take on care roles typically assigned to women in most of Uganda’s culture and perhaps many parts of the world. For a while Nancy had accepted this as status quo. It didn’t help that her early experiences at work shattered her confidence. Nancy is a journalist and during her first internship she had worked in a male dominated newsroom where her ideas were always shut down. Negative comments about women were common place. At the leadership camp, Nancy was keen on discussions on gender and sexuality in the workplace. By the end of the camp Nancy had become bold and now stands her ground while discussing issues with the opposite sex.

“I am not afraid of standing up to men”.

“There is a lot of sexual harassment against women and girls. It happens all around us everyday. I remember while seated in a taxi, a teenage girl did not have transport fare to reach her home. The taxi conductor told her that if she didn’t have the money, she should consider ‘giving him some’- a derogatory term for sex’. An older woman in the taxi was outraged, scolded the conductor and paid the fare.”

The leadership camp was based on the reality that young girls are unable to speak up even when they are in a crisis. After the camp, Nancy started an initiative to help the most vulnerable girls find their voice and learn to speak up under the threat of abuse and mistreatment.

After volunteering at the camp she plans to start running awareness talks in her community.