GEAR UP
Community action.
Gender Accountability.
Capacity Strengthening

With support from

[Logo: FOWODE - Shaping the future]
[Logo: European Union]
Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) is a national women's rights organisation that grew out of the women's caucus of the 1994-1995 Constituent Assembly that passed the 1995 Constitution, acclaimed to be one of the most gender responsive in Africa. FOWODE was established to pursue the vision of a Ugandan society where women and men equally participate in and benefit from decision-making processes in public and private spaces. Whereas FOWODE primarily focuses on women's issues, she also seeks gender equality and thus involves men in all aspects of her work. With operations at the community, local government and national levels, FOWODE champions women's rights through capacity development, community empowerment, policy engagement and strategic partnerships.

With support from the European Union and in partnership with Mid-Western Regional Anti-Corruption Coalition (MIRAC) and Kyenjojo NGOs and CBOs Forum (KNCF), FOWODE has been implementing a 3-year project (2016 – 2019) titled, Gender Equality and Rights (GEAR) in three districts of Hoima, Kagadi and Kyenjojo, to enhance the capacities of communities, leaders, CSOs and the media to prevent, mitigate, resolve and manage Gender Based Violence (GBV) and land related conflict.

The GEAR project was timely given the escalation in GBV and land related conflict in the Albertine region majorly as a result of the increased pressure on land resources after the discovery of oil and gas reserves.

FOWODE deployed a multi-stakeholder approach that targeted technocrats, political leaders, opinion leaders and community members to enhance awareness among community members of their rights and responsibilities, build agency, improve knowledge on gender responsive planning and budgeting among leaders, and promote social accountability. The deployment of male gender champions on this intervention was a particular highlight as they have been essential in transforming community views on gender equality.

Inside this publication are the stories of how empowered citizens including members of Civil Society and Village Budget Clubs, Community Action Mentors, Model Men, Councilors and Women Leaders are enhancing gender equality and democratic governance in their communities.
The Gender Equality and Rights Project (GEAR) was implemented by FOWODE in partnership with MIRAC and KNCF with funding from the European Union. The 3 year project galvanized community action through grass root groups and opinion leaders to hold their leadership and community members accountable for Gender equality and effective service delivery in 3 districts of Kagadi, Kyenjojo and Hoima.
GOAL:
“Gender equality and accountability for enhanced democratic governance”

KEY OBJECTIVES

1) Strengthen the capacities of CSOs, the media, community members and local government officials to prevent, mitigate and resolve GBV and land related conflicts in 3 districts.

2) Enhance the knowledge and skills of citizens, women leaders and local government officials on their human rights and obligations, and to demand for gender accountability and promotion of their social and economic rights.
> 17,240 citizens equipped to demand for gender accountability and social and economic rights

3 districts covering 14 Sub Counties:
- **Kagadi district:** Mpefu, Rutete, Bwikara, Muhoro, Rugashari, and Kagadi sub counties
- **Kyenjojo district:** Bufunjo, Kyarusozi, Town Council and Nyankwanzi sub counties
- **Hoima district:** Buhimba, Kabwoya, Buseruka, and Kigorobya sub counties

3 years
Movers, Shakers and Change Makers

Village Budget Clubs (VBCs) – Community volunteers trained and supported to monitor service delivery in the education and health sectors, and hold their leaders accountable for gender responsive service delivery.

Community Legal Advisors (CLAs) – Community volunteers trained to provide paralegal support, carry out sensitization & promote access to justice for victims of Gender Based Violence and land related conflict.

Community Budget Advisors (CBAs) – Trainers, mentors of Village Budget Clubs (VBCs) & took lead in advocacy for gender responsive budgets at Sub County level.

Model men – Exemplary & gender sensitive men charged with spreading positive masculinity among fellow men, as well as mediation & support to families affected by GBV.

Community Actions Mentors (CAMS) – Community volunteers trained and supported to lead civic competence building by increasing citizens’ awareness on their basic human rights, freedoms, roles and responsibilities.

District and Local Councilors – Local level legislators trained to enhance gender responsiveness of plans, budgets, programs and policies at local level.
A Woman Councilor Arises

NURTURING women leaders for democratic governance

Hamiidah Kahunde,
Mabira town council, Nyankwazi Subcounty Female District Councilor & District Deputy Speaker
Councilor Hamidah Kahunde had never known that she could do anything about budget allocations. She thought they were predetermined and that the district leaders had to settle and use whatever was provided. The councilor discovered that she had the right and responsibility to advocate for effective social service delivery. “The training by GEAR made me understand that we were responsible for monitoring public programs to keep the government accountable to its promises.”

For example, the councilor sites the problematic health care service delivery in Kyenjojo district.

“We had a number of challenges in this sub county - we had one ward at Nyankwanzi health center III, serving men, children and women suffering from all kinds of illnesses including tuberculosis (TB)!”

When the Councilor learnt about her roles and responsibilities as a leader, she focused on strong budget advocacy. “Together with the Village Budget Club (VBC) members and Community Action Mentors (CAMs), we prioritized the sub county challenges and pushed for improved facilities and service delivery. Today, the construction of the maternity and general wards is in its final stages, with hospital beds already procured and currently in the district store, awaiting completion of the wards to be delivered at Nyankwazi health center III. Similarly, schools like Mabira and Kyarugangama primary schools had no latrines. We developed a document with the community members highlighting the sanitation problems and the problems children and teachers were facing. The two schools have had latrines constructed. Another benefit from the GEAR project is that members of the community are more enthusiastic to participate in village meetings more than ever before.”

These successes energized the councilor to continue her pursuit. The counsellor had noticed that many widows who owned large pieces of land were living in poverty and at risk of land grabbing. “We brought the widows together and explained their rights and opportunities.” The councilor helped the women apply for a development grant and they received Ugx18 million from Hearts and Hands to start their income generating activities. “The widows land is now protected and many have started fish farming, poultry, animal husbandry and medium to large scale food and fruit farming.”
Council or Nesty finds her voice. Reflecting on evidence for social change.

Nesty Bagarukayo, Speaker Buhimba Subcounty, VBC member.
“Before the GEAR project came to our sub county, I personally did not think it was important for me to know the number of girls, boys and teachers and what kind of facilities our schools had. I used to be shy to speak to many people and we used to simply listen to budget reading without saying anything. There were also problems in health service at Buhimba Health Centre III. For example, women would go with their babies for immunization and get sent away because some of the health workers would be absent and their colleagues would say there were no drugs. Mothers in the community thought there were no immunization drugs. The facility closed at 2pm so nobody trusted them.”

The Councilor was aware of these challenges but didn’t feel she could make any significant change.

The GEAR training was a real jumpstart for Councilor Nesty. She learnt that with a few advocacy and communication techniques she could stand up and make a case for her community.

“I am now able to speak and can even chair sub county meetings. I have spoken in churches and community meetings very well with confidence about how together we can improve services at our schools and hospitals. I have also empowered other women, I encouraged Zubedda Birungi to become a parish councillor. We have more women representation on the sub county executive committee. Out of the 17 members now 8 are women. I also advocated for the improvement of Musaija Mukulu East parish office to have their doors fixed, painting done, and ceiling repaired. We also participate in village needs assessments and make presentations at Sub County, so that the priorities of our people are represented within the budget. To deal with the problems at Buhimba Health Centre III, we had to write to the District Health Officer (DHO), the Mayor and Health Management Committee who summoned the health workers and put them in order. We also sensitised health workers and patients to understand their roles and responsibilities. Things are much better now.

With regard to the schools, after the monitoring visits Councilor Nesty and other VBC members focused on strengthening the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) to increase participation and role sharing at Kigaya CoU primary school and Kigaya BCS primary school.

For example, at Kigaya CoU, neighbors were stealing fruit from the school garden and pupils missed out on fruits. In Kigaya BCS primary parents had misused the school tank, they were taking advantage of the water supply. “Through the PTA both issues were handled”

“Personally I feel more confident and I will contest to be a district councillor, and I know I will win!”
Half a dozen books: Facing up to gender inequality

Moses Manyindo, Community Action Mentor
Moses Manyindo is a Community Action Mentor (CAM) from Kyarukomi village in Kyarusozi Sub County, Kyenjojo district and is happy that he was selected through the GEAR project to attend a civic education training by FOWODE. The workshop awoke his mind to the unequal treatment of women and children in his own community. The training empowered Moses and the other CAMs with techniques on how to effectively engage their communities and leaders to recognize and ensure that women and children get an equal chance to participate in development and leadership opportunities. Above all, they learnt about the importance of ensuring all people especially the most vulnerable like women and children enjoy their human rights.

The CAMs mobilized community members and asked them where they saw gaps in service delivery and inequality in the way girls and women were being treated. The members of the community quickly said things were not right at the hospitals and schools.

“In the schools, we found the girls and women were not valued as much. They were not well represented on the leadership and management committees in schools.”

This was indicative of how women and girls’ rights were not being addressed. Moses was particularly stunned that children were missing school because of violence and abuse in their homes.

“Girls struggled more as they had to do more chores before school and yet they were not given the same priority as their brothers. Parents would pay school fees, buy school supplies for boys first. In one of the schools we found that parents would buy a dozen books for boys and half a dozen for girls in the same grade. Similarly, boys would be prioritized in getting uniform over girls.”

When we talked to the fathers they were not shy about it, and said girls would get married and they did not need education as much as the boys. Men also thought that budgeting matters in the home did not concern their wives and this led to further inequality in the home. Mothers couldn’t speak up for their daughter’s needs. Moses thinks that there is some amount of ignorance on human rights that has to continually be addressed.

The CAMs started by addressing representation of women and girls where it matters the most. At the primary schools they successfully advocated for women to be included on the Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees (SMCs).

“There are now 3 out of 8 positions occupied by women on the PTA of Kanyabacope primary school. Although this may look small it’s much better because previously they were none.”

The CAMs also encourage women to take up leadership roles outside of formal institutions, in places where it was previously unheard of.

“Nowadays we encourage women to be masters of ceremonies or at least have a man and woman but not a man alone.”
Equal rights in action: Ensuring Women’s and Girls’ Rights are upheld

Ernest Businge,
Chairman LC III, Kyarusozi Sub county
Chairman Businge admits that projects like GEAR compliment government efforts effectively. Many government programs that would promote inclusion of women in all areas are on paper but they are not implemented, majorly due to limited resources.

“GEAR was a good project for us all, it caused serious changes here in Kyarusozi subcounty.”

Chairman Businge says, “domestic violence for example was rampant in the sub county because men used to think that they are the bosses and never looked at women as partners”. The GEAR project has helped men understand that women and children are equal family members and as such need to be involved in the decisions of their home. Of course things cannot change in one day however, we see more women empowered as a result of the GEAR project and they now understand their rights including land rights, inheritance and will making processes. So many domestic violence cases including disputes on property have been resolved.

As a father of teenage girls, the chairman is very proud that his sub county which once had no secondary schools now has a community secondary school.

Most of the girls would have to walk as far as 20km which put them at high risk of abuse. Also the boda-boda riders (motorcycle taxis) who have some little money have been notorious for giving young girls rides and money in exchange for sex. These men were manipulating the girls, many got pregnant and had to leave school. One of the key activities we agreed on as part of our responsibility under the GEAR project was to address this evil.

“We mobilized the community around Barihiija parish and agreed to start our own community secondary school so they didn’t have to walk far anymore.”

The community built the school together. Barihiija secondary school was started in 2019 with 42 students. It remains a community-owned school, currently charging Ugx 50,000/= per term for each student. While the school requires more resources, the local leaders are committed to lobbying for more support from government and other institutions.

“In the meantime, we have resolved at the sub county level that each adult contributes Ugx 2,000/= per year towards this school. We estimate that the sub county has an estimate of 5,000 adults, so even that can help a lot.”
The Women’s Secretary

Addressing the right to education for all children

Gladys Basemera, Women and Environment Secretary
As part of her work, Gladys was charged to support other women in the face of domestic violence. Some were struggling with alcoholic partners, others were depressed and not able to pay adequate attention to their children’s needs. The counselor unfortunately saw their struggles in her own life. She decided to turn her attention to her home. Gladys has a son who had trouble learning in the mainstream education system but was good with art and building things. Rather than trying to find the right school for him, she had kept him home and didn’t consider his right to an education. The training helped her to realize this and she has since enrolled her son in a vocational program where he is thriving.

It is no surprise then that when Gladys was called to help a couple with multiple challenges including access to education for a step child, she was ready.

“In this family the man had a child outside their marriage and then brought the child to live in the home. His wife was very upset about this and decided to keep the child out of school.”

Gladys empathized with the wife and was also able to bring attention to the fact that the child was innocent and had the right to education in order to be successful in the future. They also considered what it might mean for them as a family if he missed out on education and grew to become an uneducated adult who resented them. The family agreed to return him to school.

“Our goal was to help all the families we were called to help live more peacefully.”

Gladys remained unsettled however because she knew that there were problems in her own home. “In my own life, I had frequent episodes of domestic violence in our marriage. But the project gave me skills to deal with this problem in my home and in the community. My husband was violent especially when drunk.

I tactfully talked to him about how we could develop our family together better if we addressed these problems. He has since reduced on his drinking and there are no fights and abuse in our home anymore. Now we live in peace and he has significantly reduced on drinking alcohol.”
Teacher Susan is on the VBC

Effective representation for a shift in education

Susan Kabahumuza, -
Educator, Kyenjojo district
Susan Kabahumuza is a teacher at Barahija Primary School. She joined the local Village Budget Club, to be a part of a movement through the GEAR project that was changing service delivery especially in her field of practice-education. For two years, she has chaired meetings at the school addressing the unmet rights of the girl-child, empowering parents with decision making skills, and counselling families so as to reduce conflict.

Through the VBC advocacy in the schools, we have seen things change. School dropouts have drastically reduced especially at Barahija and Nsinde Primary Schools. Latrine facilities for teachers that were not there before have been constructed at Barahija primary school. We also advocated for furniture, and to date 14 desks have been provided by the sub county to Barahija primary school. Parent participation is at its highest for instance, construction of school latrines, paying for PTA fees, and providing lunch for their children have greatly improved. Early pregnancies have also reduced due to increased counseling and guidance in schools, in the community and with parents.”
Daniel Rujwagu is a family man and has seven children, the first is a teenager. Being involved in the GEAR project gave him a chance to use some of his experience to help other families to resolve conflict.

“I joined the GEAR project as a VBC member, 2 years ago. I have been able to help families with misunderstandings. I remember a couple where a wife did not want her husband (Sebastian) to pay fees for his son from another relationship using their money. The wife was okay with her husband contributing to his son’s school fees, but she didn’t want any of their joint money to be used. It was the wife who came to me for help. I spoke with both of them about sharing resources for the good of the family. They resolved by agreeing to have all Sebastian’s children attend school regardless of where the finances come from.”

Daniel helped the couple resolve this issue because it was not a new experience to him. Previously, Daniel says he too had fights with his wife.

“My wife used to constantly pester me to buy her dresses and other things even when she knew the load of school fees that I had. My explanations did not make sense to her until we started the GEAR project through which we learnt to save money together, budget and spend as per our plan. This approach resolved everything, I am now stress free because we both understand where the money comes from, when it will be earned, and where it goes.”
The Three Big Ones: Addressing the drivers of community problems in Kyongera

Lucy Banura, CLA, Kyongera village, Kyarusozi Sub County
I focused mostly on women & children’s rights and domestic violence because almost all the other challenges grow out of these three.”

Lucy Banura is a single mother of 5 children, her 3 sons have graduated from college and 2 daughters are still in school. Lucy is a head teacher at Webikere primary school, Kyongera village in Kyarusozi sub county, a school she has headed for 9 years.

“I learnt of the GEAR project at Nsinde primary school where I had been invited by my co-head teacher for a PTA meeting. We then were invited for a training in human rights specifically women and children rights. Previously in Kyongera village, there was a high school dropout rate of children most especially girls. The boys were favored over girls, there was significant child labor in the tea farms and many girls stayed home to take care of their siblings. Most of the schools had no latrine facilities, no hand-washing facilities, and no changing rooms for girls. There was significant absenteeism especially for girls due to menstruation related challenges. I learnt how to sensitize the community on gender equality and rights issues, prevention of domestic violence, resolving & prevention of land wrangles. We also learnt about making wills. I have so far had 7 cases of domestic violence brought to me; I have been able to solve 4, referred 2 for legal support and 1 is still pending. There was a man who used not to buy his children clothes and at the same time he refused his wife to work because he thought she would become too powerful. When I spoke to them, we discussed how a double income would be good and put less pressure on him as a bread winner. He appreciated this and started a retail shop for his wife to manage, which has solved a number of money problems.”
Talking things over
A community member reaches out to save their family

Doris Kabahumuza, Kyarusozi
sub county, Kyenjojo district
"I met Lucy, the CLA at a PTA meeting at Kyongera primary school while she was talking to parents and teachers about domestic violence and women’s rights. After the talk, I approached Lucy for advice about issues in my own marriage. My husband used to come home drunk, and was very late every night. He had stopped paying school fees and providing uniform and school supplies for our children. I went to my parents and told them about this. My father gave me a goat which I sold, got money to start a retail shop. My husband however, did not want me to have the shop because he thought I was going to meet many men doing this business and that they would probably give me more money than he ever did. I invited Lucy to our home to discuss these things. Lucy helped us so much. She pointed out that the shop is for our benefit as a family and should be treated as such. She further advised my husband to reduce on his heavy alcohol drinking and the late night habits. Lucy endeavored to make my husband realize the dangers of drinking and the benefits of saving for the children’s education. He listened and we started making changes. Our home is more peaceful now, we plan, budget and spend together as a family."
The GEAR project helped us identify key challenges. Lack of finances was one of the biggest challenges so we started a savings group and we are successful. The group doesn’t only focus on money, members are also promoters of rights in their communities.

30 members

Ugx 1.9 million savings of date
A Mans World

Edward Mugenyi, Male
Representative Kikumiiro Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO) Executive, Kyarusozi sub county.

“In our culture we believed that land belonged to men only and girl-children were ignored.” Edward an Executive member of the Kikumiiro SACCO says genuinely. Edward also admits that there were challenges that everybody had witnessed including children missing school, parents’ lack of interest in school and poor hygiene in the community. “The GEAR project helped us to look carefully at all of this for example even if my own home was clean but my neighbor’s home is dirty, when a disease outbreak like cholera occurs, we will all suffer. We chose to work together to change our community and this SACCO is part of it”.

Regarding the women

Margaret Kajumba, Vice Chairperson, Kikumiiro SACCO.

A few women here had an idea about women’s rights and they used to push their rights everywhere but they never addressed their responsibilities. The GEAR team enabled us to understand our rights, roles and responsibilities.

Ekikoba, No more bad periods

Immaculate Kahunde, Women Representative, Kikumiiro SACCO.

“After the training with the GEAR project on women’s and human rights at Makara, I started working with schools, specifically teaching and empowering girls on cleanliness and menstruation management. Previously, girls from very poor families were using ‘ekikoba’ sanitary pads made with local materials. Ekikoba is a traditional pad that is generally uncomfortable for most girls. The school girls were always afraid that it would fall out and they would be embarrassed, so they stayed away from school during their periods.

We worked with parents to teach them how to make reusable pads, and those who can afford buy pads so that girls are comfortable, confident and do not miss school. We also empowered girls to understand that mensuration is a normal process of growing up and does not in any way mean that they should start having sex.”

School fees for the rich and other myths

General Secretary, Kikumiiro SACCO.

“Parents used not to take children to school with the pretext that they themselves never went to school. Some parents were stuck with the belief that it’s only the rich who could pay fees for their children. Another thing that was troublesome here was that people never wrote wills because they feared it would bring death to them. Relatives used to end up fighting and sometimes even killing each other. Today, people are more confident to write wills and no longer live in that fear of death.”
Previously, community members used to flock the health center after noticing a truck delivering medicines. However, to their disappointment sometimes they could not find the medicines like anti-malarials and anti-biotics. Community members used to assume that every time a medicine-truck comes to the health center, it delivers everything. Its until we started inviting them to observe the medicines delivered that they started appreciating that not all medicines were being delivered every time the truck came. Sometimes the medicine-truck used to deliver mama kits, condoms, and other sundries without the most sought medicines.” Mary Nakyanzi, member Nyankwazi VBC.
“Girls nowadays open up and are more confident to approach teachers. Facilities have been considerably improved, for example at Mabira primary school, a 5-stance latrine was completed using the district budget.”

“It’s an embarrassment today to have domestic violence in any of the homes of the VBC members. The VBC members have made several improvements in their homes including ensuring that they are food secure. Our councillor is also very active. She mobilizes us and takes our views and returns to update us on what is happening at the district. This good flow of information has improved accountability and feedback on government programs in Nyankwazi sub county” Julius Balokoooha, Member Nyankwazi VBC.
Timothy Ngonza 35 is a businessman dealing in cassava, sweet and Irish potatoes. He is married with 4 children. Timothy was trained as a model man on the GEAR project. Timothy has worked with many families dealing with conflict. “I have worked with at least 5 families since I got the training. I counselled men on various issues including being faithful to their wives. Some married men were chasing after other women in the trading center, leaving their wives at home. I also personally had some challenges. I used not to fulfil my responsibilities at home, but after getting the training I started improving, working and budgeting together with my wife.”

“I was a drunkard, I used to start in the morning and drink all day long until late in the night. I used to fight with my wife all the time and our children were not attending school because I was not providing for them. Timothy Ngonza talked to me several times, but all his advice did not make any sense to me until I became sick because of the drinking and could neither help myself nor my family. I significantly reduced drinking as I started praying for another chance to live. Timothy continued counselling me and I was able to cut down on drinking. I also started working with my wife, and slowly we took our children back to school. We have changed a lot as a family, we have even built a permanent house, and made improvements in farming. I have also completed a form to become an out grower of sugarcane for Bushenyi Sugar Works”.

The most significant change according to Rogers is that he feels better, his children are well dressed, have nutritious food and go to school.

“I would love to help others as I was helped.”
Six times more than men Leveraging on the power or male peers

Sezi Kandole, Model man.
Katooke town council,
Katooke sub county

Sezi Kandole is a farmer of coffee, bananas and other food stuffs. He is married with four children and lives in Katara cell.

When Sezi Kandole attended the GEAR project training he was shocked to discover that women are mistreated six times more than men. He realized that all along women were losing out on everything for example, we grow food together but at harvest time, only us men decide what happens and handle the money. I used to leave a lot of work for my wife taking care of children, washing clothes, cooking, fetching water. I changed and we share responsibilities at home and I tell other men to do the same. One of the men I helped is Deo Tirwakunda.
Deo Tirwakunda is 60 years, married with 8 children. The Tirwakunda family live in Katooke town council where they farm and grow coffee, bananas, cocoa and have 3 acres of sugar cane. Deo says there was a lot of fighting in their home over finances and because they never talked through problems, there was always pent up anger.

“Sezi, the model man invited me for a visit after learning about our problems at home. Sezi counselled me and gave me tips on how I can prevent many of the avoidable fights with my wife. He also encouraged me to let her be involved in the affairs of the home. Sezi helped me see that it was good for my wife to work; it wasn’t a bad thing. I started some projects specifically for my wife including fruits and tomato growing for sell and a retail shop. Previously, I used to take my wife as my property, after paying a hefty dowry of 3 cows, 1 bull, 5 goats and some money in 1984. I did not know that this was causing me to treat my wife like property. We now live more peacefully. Sezi has empowered and supported us in different ways. He has connected us to suppliers of coffee seedlings, banana suckers and now we are registered as sugar cane out growers for Bushenyi Sugar Works. Sezi’s message changed my life. What I benefited most, is that I matured in my mind. You can be old in terms of years but when the mind has not grown.”
Moses Balwana Atenyi is a teacher at Katembe primary school in Katooke town council. He was trained under the GEAR project as a Community Legal Advisor (CLA).

After Moses completed the training to become a Community Legal Advisor he started raising awareness on the importance of making a will in churches, women’s clubs, and at functions where he was invited to be a master of ceremony. Moses had received a will making template which he gives to those interested.

“I explain the form and encourage people as they start on the process. I am always available to help individuals draft their wills. I have had up to 3 wills read in the same format I have been giving out, this means that people are actually using the form. For cases that require additional legal support we refer them to the authorities at the district. Previously, the few people who made wills used to do it on their death beds and some used to be forced at the last hour when they are even unconscious. This situation has changed now. Many people in this sub county now make wills with a clear mind”.

Will Making

Community Legal advice reaches the most vulnerable

Moses Balwana Atenyi
Calling on Peace

Trusted credible leaders inspire change

Enoch Mpigiza, Muhooro Sub County
Enoch is a CLA and a member of a Village Budget Club. He is happily married with 11 children. At 70 years, Enoch has witnessed many things in his life. “I have always wanted people to have peace in their homes but there were many problems, poverty, alcohol, mistreatment of girls and women that I disagreed with.”

The GEAR project was an answered prayer, because we are reaching families everywhere to help them live peacefully and value women and children’s God given rights.

Enoch’s most satisfying victory has been the change he has seen at the village primary school in Nyambeho.

“On one of the VBC monitoring visits to Nyambeho primary school we discovered that the School Management Committee never had minutes of their meetings; they had no record at all! The head teacher was found to be extremely irresponsible. He had no idea about several issues that were taking place in his own school. In the same school we found teachers who were not smartly-dressed; we asked them to tuck in their shirts and challenged them to be good examples to their students. Today, things have changed. teachers and children have their shirts tucked and they look neat.”

Neatness was the first step. Together with community members, we made a documented dismissal recommendation to the Inspector of Schools and copies were shared with the Chief Accounting Officer, Resident District Commissioner and Chairman Local Council (V). The VBCs discovered that many people in the community had been displeased with the head teacher but did not have an appropriate platform to address the issue.

The recommendation attracted overwhelming community support and the infamous head teacher of Nyambeho primary school was dismissed. “Today the school has another head teacher, more responsible and now very accountable.”
Madam Chairperson.

Inspired women to take on leadership positions

Jane never thought for a minute that she would be the Local Council chairperson (LC1) of Kyema village in Bwikara sub county, Kagadi district.”

Women in Jane’s village felt inferior and were treated poorly for a long time, the new LC1 chairperson explains. Boys were prioritized in every area especially education. According to Jane, mistreatment of women especially by men was the usual thing and there was constant fighting and violations in homes. The training greatly empowered us (CLAs/CAMs/VBCs) and we quickly started encouraging other women to know and exercise their rights and responsibilities. Community dialogues were one of the ways we addressed such issues including sensitizing communities on gender equality and rights issues. The dialogues really worked, I have seen a big change already among women, they now participate in village meetings much more than it used to be. “I am a good example, I contested among three men for the position of LC1 chairperson and I won”. Jane attributes the victory to the empowerment and education she received from the GEAR project.

Jane Mushemere, VBC/CLA/CAM, Bwikara sub county
Express Cases

Getting rid of corruption requires community leadership

Rose Baguma, Community Action Mentor (CAM)

Rose Baguma, is a 55-year-old farmer and small business owner living in Nyakabale village, Nyamasa parish, Bwikara sub county. She is the chairperson of the women council at the sub county. Rose is married with 6 children. Rose is also grateful for the GEAR project because previously people used to run to the police for every misunderstanding they got in their household or village. Land wrangles were terrible and caused generational hatred between individuals and families here in Nyakabale village. It was also a known fact in our community that for cases to be handled immediately (express) they got reported to the LC1 council, one had to pay Ugx25,000/=; ordinary consideration (normal pace, maybe within 3 days) cost Ugx10,000/= In addition, there were backdoor dealings that could make the entire process messy because of corruption. The CLAs, VBCs and CAMs do not charge anything and yet we help deliver justice. We need to uphold this!"

“When I was identified for the training, I did not know how it came about but later I learnt that my name was forwarded by community and opinion leaders for me to get training in gender equality and rights. Before we started working on the GEAR project, there were several challenges of domestic violence as well as land and inheritance wrangles due to lack of wills in families. There was also ignorance and misuse of rights in our community. There was a case I intervened in where a widow got a misunderstanding and had refused to share land with her sister in-law. Her late husband had died at a young age but he had inherited land from their deceased parents. The widow had vowed not to share with her sister in-law because she is a woman who, according to the practice of the land, does not inherit property. The widow was reminded that she was equally a woman who according to the culture didn’t have a right to land either. After a lengthy discussion, the widow understood her rights and responsibilities and how to exercise her rights properly. Together with the LC1 and community members, we peacefully distributed the land between all parties, and the misunderstanding was successfully resolved.
Men listen to model men because they are admirable and wise.

David Nsenga is the perfect model man, he is 39 years, married with 5 children a farmer and a well-liked person in his neighborhood. David trained through the GEAR project and became a Community Legal Advisor, Village Budget Club member and then Model Man.

There was a man with 4 wives in our village. He told his second wife that he wanted to transfer their children to another school. However, this was not the truth, he was planning to take those children to provide labor in his third wife's house. The third wife wanted older children to work in their garden and do chores. The first wife caught wind of it and ran to us the VBCs for help. “When we intervened, we cross-examined him to ascertain why he wanted to transfer the children and to which school he wanted to take them. The man had no answer. We also asked the man to go with his second wife to the new proposed school, he declined and said he would go alone. After the discussion we strongly recommended that children should remain in their old school and if the need to transfer them arises again, both parents have equal rights to know where they are going. The man specifically agreed to these terms and they have had no other incident since.”
According to Nathan, everything was for the men. “Even in their language they disregarded women for example men would refer to their property as ebintu byange (my things) or to their children as abaana bangye without any consideration for their wives. Women were taken to be inferior and they did not know their rights especially pertaining to property ownership. Sharing of property was only done among boys and priority for school fees and scholastic materials used to be given to the boy child over the girl child. On top of all this Nathan says the schools and health centers were in shambles, so we addressed these first”.

We conducted monitoring visits to some of the schools like Kasojo primary school, Rwabaranga primary school, Mass primary school and Mpeefu Seed secondary school. The VBC members asked questions about enrolment per gender, attendance lists for both pupils and teachers, sources of income and accountability. In some schools, and particularly in Kasojo primary school, the VBCs found out that the registers were not tallying with the physical count of pupils.

“There were so many more children in the school physically as compared to the registers. The head teacher was attending 2 days in a week, had stayed at the school for 13 years and his transfer was long overdue. Based on these findings, we made a report to the District Education Officer (DEO), Resident District Commissioner (RDC) and Inspector of Schools with the head teacher in copy.

We also engaged parents through PTA meetings to get interested in what goes on at the schools of their children. To date, Kasojo primary school has new head teacher, updated registers and the whole place has improved”.
STOPPING THE FIGHTS

Pastor Bernard Turyahikayo, Community
Legal Advisor

“A child could murder his father
over failure to give him land”. Pastor Bernard, a Community Legal
Advisor says, “there were a lot of
misunderstandings in homes and the
community at large. We organized and
held sensitization sessions in parishes
of Rukatojo and Rwesenene. People
appreciated the sensitization sessions
so much and everywhere we went,
they wanted us to return there.”

Pastor Bernard Turyahikayo lives in
Kasana LC I Rwabara parish in
Mpeefu Sub County.

Cases resolved include domestic violence issues, land wrangles, inheritance disputes, and child abuse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Cases</th>
<th>Cases Brought in by Women</th>
<th>Cases Brought in by Men</th>
<th>Cases by Boys Below 18 Years</th>
<th>Cases by Girls Below 18 Years</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>242</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than 60% resolved and few still pending
Councilor Kellen has helped resolve some of the most puzzling household cases in her neighborhood. She says the GEAR project equipped her to handle them. In Mpeefu central she was identified to work with the GEAR project in her capacity as a Councilor.

**Separate beds**

“I have been called on several occasions to resolve misunderstandings in families. I have helped 4 families now to have their peace restored. One of the families had even separated beds but now it’s no more and they are okay. There was also a man who married a second wife, put her in a separate house in the neighborhood, and offered his new bride the well-maintained garden of the first wife even when he owned uncultivated land elsewhere. He had also instructed his new wife to pick coffee from the coffee plantation of the first wife, dry it from her courtyard, they were really stealing it. The first wife reported to me and we intervened. At the end of our intervention, the second wife was allocated a free piece of land to start cultivating her own garden.”

**Violent house**

The third case was of a woman, who came to report her husband for torture. Kellen and the other VBCs had been trained to listen to all parties before taking sides.

“When we investigated, we found out that it was actually the woman who was initiating the violence in their home. She had on several occasions cut her husband with a big knife while drunk. The woman was consequently separated from the husband & children and given conditions for their relationship going forward. Today, there is relative peace in the home because both husband and wife faced the truth and are taking steps to become better.”
"The VBCs did a great thing for me. I had lived with my husband for many years. We gave birth to three children and I was pregnant for the 4th child. One day, I fell sick while pregnant, and all of a sudden, my husband dropped me at my parents’ home, with no money or any support. He had never paid the dowry or formalized our marriage in any way. When I asked him why he had become so different and behaved that way, he said his family did not love me anymore and they had told him to take me back to where he got me. It was a very difficult time, I lost my small business I had started. I missed my children and wanted to see them but I was also very pregnant and I could not fight to go there. I contacted the GEAR project team who connected me to the police in Kagadi in the department of family affairs. The police then invited my husband and we started attending meetings to resolve the issues. After a long time, I was called to return to my husband and I did. We now live together again we are okay."
"I came to GEAR project team when my husband was continuously selling land to the extent we were left with quarter of an acre of land. Whenever I told my husband that we have children, he would say that even the 2 kids I have with him are useless. He had no sense of value for us as a family. He had gotten another woman. One day he said he is even going to sell the remaining land and we should find where to stay. That’s when I got very scared I knew I had to do something. I was advised by a friend to contact the GEAR project team. When I got to them they intervened. My husband had even picked some deposit from the potential buyer. We were invited to a meeting and one thing I remember was the fact that they told us we have a right to a home as wife and children. We hadn’t known all those things of rights, but the GEAR team explained to my husband and he was asked to stop the process of selling the remaining piece of land. I thank the GEAR team because that land and our home were saved. We also know what to do if anything similar happens to us as a family."

Patience Nakato, 
Beneficiary, Mpeefu sub county
Overhaul

Communities in charge of their right to effective service delivery

Benard Mugisa, Village Budget Club Member, Kabwoya Sub County
“As the VBC members, our work was to monitor and make recommendations to the sub county and district on government services in our community. We had already noticed that the security at Kabwoya health center was very poor. Some items including computers were stolen, and health workers were afraid to be on duty overnight. During one of our first monitoring visits at the health center, we recorded the services offered, challenges faced, roles and responsibilities of each health worker, and their thoughts about the community. The biggest challenges were insecurity and the lack of a good relationship with the political leaders of the sub county. We made a report and shared with the sub county leaders. We then scheduled another meeting involving the community, sub county leaders and the health workers. In that meeting, after a discussion on the importance of government services in the community, a volunteer from the community offered to work at the health center as a security officer. He is still serving to date.

At another location- Kaseta Health Centre III we found that the health center had not been painted since 1992, 27 years ago! The health center was severely under staffed. Additionally, it had no “placenta pit” yet Kaseta has a fairly busy labor ward. We made recommendations and continued talking with key community people, and a lot has changed. To date, the placenta pit has been constructed, a new bathroom for the maternity ward has also been constructed and the number of health workers has been increased. The health center now has 2 Enrolled Nurses, 2 Enrolled Midwives, 1 Health Assistant, 1 Laboratory Technician, 1 Laboratory Assistant, 1 Records Assistant and 1 security person.”

Bernard is one of the Village Budget Club Members who were concerned about the insecurity at the health center in their community.
Janet Omutoro and the other VBCs in Kabwoya lower found the GEAR training enlightening.

“The training was very good because I came to understand many things I did not know about. By the time we started our work, I felt very confident and was looking forward to helping other people in our community but I was especially concerned about Kaseta Primary School in my neighborhood. I knew that there were many problems at Kaseta. On our first monitoring visit we found that Kaseta primary school had a very large enrollment of more than 1,400 pupils but they had very few classrooms (2 classroom blocks) and many pupils were studying under trees. The school had only one 2-stance latrine. In addition, the school had no water source. The school did not have enough teachers, it was not fenced, and pupils would escape at any time during the day. It was sad.”

The VBC appealed to the district for support.

“We shared all the challenges and needs. We did not give up asking for the district to allocate resources. As a result, the school received 55 desks, two classroom blocks have been built, and an additional 6-stances latrine with a stance for the disabled have been completed with the support from the district budget.”
“Before the GEAR project, the epilepsy disease was common in this sub county and children were simply kept in the villages because people never knew that there was treatment at the Buseruka Health Centre. Medicines for epilepsy were among those that used to expire in the health center. Some people even had a misconception that epilepsy is a cultural issue. During a monitoring visit at the health center, we discovered that epilepsy could be treated and medicines were simply getting expired unused! I took it upon myself to identify the victims in the villages. I have so far brought 7 children with epilepsy to the health center to access treatment. The 7 children show significant improvement. Their parents have also been advised on how to manage their condition and tell others in the villages about the availability of treatment at the health center.
“People here in Buseruka did not know that government programs belong to them.” Joseph India a Community Action Mentor recognizes this as one of the biggest contributors to the poor services in his community. According to Joseph, the community has looked on for years as services were misused and funds misappropriated because they did not realize they had both the power and right to shape their services.

“When the GEAR project started, communities were empowered to understand that government facilities belong to them. Political Leaders in our sub county were not necessarily prioritizing community needs until the Community Budget Advisors tasked them to budget for priority areas. Tonya health center for example was not being prioritized until the CBAs, CAMs and VBCs together with the community raised the need. Today, Tonya health center construction is ongoing. Secondly, Kabaale primary school had very poor enrolment and classrooms were almost collapsing. With the GEAR project, the school has been prioritized, and 3 new classroom blocks have been approved and construction is going to start. In addition, Joseph points out that the male dominance and the gender imbalance in the sub county has to an extent been addressed.

“More women are participating in community meetings and taking up positions of political leadership now.”
The beauty about partners

Building stronger families translates into healthier communities

Onesimus Oyirwoth, Buseruka Sub County

Onesimus Oyirwoth is a model man in Buseruka Sub County. He is very proud of the progress he has seen in the community. Once he learnt about how couples can work together and build a good life for their families, he decided to practice this and encourage other men to see their wives as partners. Onesimus helped John and Sam resolve their family challenges.

John Baptist Bedijo

“I have learnt a lot and improved my life by following advice from my model man Onesmus. I am married with 3 children and 2 other dependents, but never wanted my wife to do business - without any good reason – but because it is the practice in our community. After listening to Onesmus, I started slowly by interesting my wife to plan together with me. I asked her to help me in my petty business transactions. We have now started working and budgeting together on all things about our family. From these changes, I see my wife more supportive, she is more confident and happier than I have ever seen her.”

Sam Kyaligonza

“From the time we started getting help from Onesimus (Model Man), a lot has improved in our lives. I used to think that women are not supposed to do business; their work was to stay home, cook, and wash clothes. I came to learn that when both husband and wife work together in business, you earn more, which is very helpful in supporting the family. However, above all, misunderstandings reduced in our home because when I don’t have money both of us know and when we get it, we decide on the priorities together.”
‘Kibaraza’ Conversations in the shade

Maximizing community platforms for social accountability

Directly translated, Kibaraza is a porch or balcony, a place where neighbors or families have great conversations. Kibaraza has been formalized as a community dialogue event in parts of Uganda that brings together several stakeholders.

According to Stephen Monday, Kigorobya like the other sub counties in the district were plagued with poor service delivery in the health centers and schools. The Kibaraza’s were a good way to bring the community together. Kibaraza’s are very popular already so we would bring together schools with problems in one meeting then another it would be the health centers. For example, we had to address gender imbalance at Kibiro primary school where they had only male teachers. At Ndaragi primary school, teachers and pupils were sharing the same toilet facility while at Kyeramya primary school the number of students was large with very few teachers.

As a result of the Kibaraza discussions, the school agreed to make changes. Ndaragi primary school has had a 4-stance latrine built with the support from parents and the Sub County. Fencing and recruitment of more teachers at Kyeramya primary school was also as a result of action points agreed upon in the dialogue at the “Kibaraza” forum.
“When I got pregnant, my boyfriend disappeared from me. He did not leave anything to support me, and his mobile contact became unreliable, sometimes on, other times off! I waited in hope that he would return, but he never did. I returned home and started living with my mum. When I went to the hospital to give birth, he knew but never came. When the baby was one month old, I went to his parents to seek for help for the baby but they did not help. I also tried the uncle of the boy but got nothing. I contacted Herbert Ahija the Community Legal Advisor who connected me to the Community Development Officer. The Community Development Officer followed up and set up a meeting with my father-in-law. We started having meetings and these helped because my father-in-law regularly started sending milk, sugar, soap and other requirements for the baby. This to me came at a time when I was giving up.

Scovia is thankful to Herbert Ahija, she is hopeful about the future and is a budding advocate herself as she knows how and where to link others in the same situation for help.