

STORIES OF CHANGE

Providing opportunities for young women in Northern Uganda to transition to safe employment and earn decent incomes in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.



30th October 2021 – 30th November 2022



GWED-G
Gulu Women's Economic
Development & Globalization



Table of Content

P.1

Introduction

P.2 In context

P.4 Stories of Change

P.5

Piggery micro-enterprises

P.6 A new passion for pig farming

P.8 Keeping small livestock

P.10 Build agency and decent livelihoods.

P.12 Farming pigs as a family

P.14 Raising pigs an eye-opening and rewarding experience

P.16 Profiting from organic vegetable production and sale

P.18

Bakery micro-enterprises

P.19 An opportunity to work at one of Kampala's top bakeries

P.21 Running a successful baking business

P.23 Getting a living wage by baking

P.25 Earning a living by using baking skills

P.27 Diversifying into small livestock keeping with savings from baking

P.29

Other micro-enterprises

P.30 Taking advantage of rabbit farming opportunities

P.32 Making a profit by raising turkeys

P.34 Creating a profitable basket-weaving business

P.36 Profitable paper bag-making business

P.38 Creating jewelry from paper beads

P.40 Creating new opportunities for young women in male dominated trades

P.43 Developing tailoring skills

P.45 Beneficiary's hairdressing income assists her mother in starting a business

P.47 Saving up for a course in early childhood development

P.49 University completion

P.52

Commentary on initiatives

P.53 Baking

P.55 Livestock keeping

P.56 Vegetable production

P.57 Handicrafts & artisanal products

P.58 Tree planting

P.59 Results in a glance

P.62

Sustainability measures

P.63 Livelihood interventions

P.64 Organic production

P.65 Facilitating access financing

P.66 Access to inputs

P.67 Strengthening family environments

P.68

Recommendations

P.69 Social development

P.70 Economic development



INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic inspired the development of the AJWS-humanitarian-funded project. As a result of the enforced lockdowns, movement restrictions, and school closures, young women and adolescent girls lost access to previously available services.

Northern Uganda also experienced the highest number of unplanned pregnancies among teenage girls. The number of adolescent pregnancies in Gulu alone was estimated to be 4477. Another 5560 cases were registered in Amoro within 18 months. From January to December 2020, there were 79633 recorded pregnancies, of which 16220 (20.4%) were teenage pregnancies. Northern Uganda recorded 18743 pregnancies between January and March of 2021, of which 4111(22%) were adolescent pregnancies. This exponential rise in teenage pregnancies has become a shadow pandemic.

Teenage pregnancy is associated with high poverty rates, lack of parental guidance, and parental care. Based on information from the Ministries of Health, Gender, and UNICEF, an estimated 49% of children in Northern Uganda married during the pandemic. With a poverty rate of 68% in the UBOS report of 2021, Northern Uganda is the poorest region in the country.

In the face of poverty and economic helplessness brought about by the pandemic, young women in petty trades and service industries were more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior as a coping mechanism. Due to social marginalization and a lack of decision-making power, girls are more likely to suffer domestic violence, marry young, become pregnant, and drop out of school. Furthermore, as soon as girls reach puberty, they are considered sources of wealth and income, resulting in early marriages. In some improvised families, daughters are forced into early marriage to escape or discharge the responsibility of caring for and protecting them.

An equally important driver is the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services—denial of adolescent sexuality among parents/caregivers;

the taboo surrounding premarital sex among adolescents. Parents/caregivers often worry that teaching adolescents about sexual and reproductive health will tempt them to early sexual debut. In addition, health service providers' moralistic and judgmental attitudes towards premarital sex, use of contraceptives, and abortion services for adolescents compound the fear, stigma, and shame of seeking preventative sexual health services like STI testing, birth control, and safe sex counseling. Because of these conservative socio-cultural norms, teenage girls are vulnerable and cannot make informed decisions about sex and contraception. Moreover, adolescent girls often lack access to media and public messaging, peer networks, and safe spaces to meet friends to learn about these issues. The result is that adolescent girls are unable to develop the skills necessary for claiming their reproductive health and sexual rights.

However, many of these adolescents and young women are survivors of domestic violence, trapped in homes with their abusers during the pandemic when GBV-related support services were unavailable. Most of these young women and adolescent girls were unemployed and out of school and did not have access to viable, dignified livelihood opportunities, and were more likely to be subjected to sexual exploitation and coercion.

To mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19, the government did establish district emergency task forces and committees. However, the chances of these young women and adolescent girls receiving immediate redress during an ongoing health emergency were slim due to competing priorities and limited resources.

With financial support from AJWS, we intervened, providing humanitarian assistance and skills training. The project targeted young girls and women engaged in informal work, commercial sex workers, food vendors, and transactional sex on the Gulu and South Sudan border. The 300 beneficiaries were carefully selected based on the severity of their circumstances.

For example, we found that adolescent girls from poorer families are more likely to become pregnant as teenagers or engage in commercial sexual work along regional borders, increasing their risk of dropping out of school. The project also targeted pregnant adolescents and lactating mothers who had difficulty accessing reproductive and maternal health services during the pandemic. The project further assisted pregnant, unmarried teenagers who were rejected or shunned by their families as this was likely to affect their long-term well-being and prospects negatively.

Dire economic conditions and inevitable school fee shortages will likely hinder teenage girls' ability to pursue and complete formal education. Moreover, families facing financial hardship may also find it difficult to send their children to school. There's an increased possibility of many adolescent girls dropping out of school to work to supplement their family income. Parents/caregivers are likely to turn to child labor as a means of coping when pandemic-induced poverty intensifies. The immediate survival of the family takes precedence over sending them to school.

This booklet features 21 stories of young women and adolescent girls who have benefited from AJWS humanitarian assistance. These stories reflect the perspectives of teenage girls and young women as primary stakeholders.

Particularly regarding their motivations for choosing specific skills training programs or micro-enterprises. Their accounts provide a glimpse into their lives and highlight some of the challenges, benefits, and tangible and intangible effects of AJWS's humanitarian assistance.

This compilation gives a human face to adolescent development issues in Uganda. The purpose of this booklet is to highlight how a little goes a long way. Despite increased vulnerability, the sociocultural context also presents opportunities for intervention before the challenges these young women and adolescent girls face lead to irreversible outcomes such as school dropouts, early marriages, abuse, and mistreatment.

The stories further demonstrate the potential benefits of skilling and micro-enterprise development to meet the needs of communities crafted around local resources, labor, and creativity. The project has significantly impacted beneficiaries' lives and given them more control and power over their livelihoods. Most beneficiaries now view themselves as masters of their destinies, striving to succeed. Participation has enabled some beneficiaries to develop a positive mindset to articulate their dreams and work towards actualizing them. As a result, beneficiaries feel more empowered and have a renewed sense of purpose.

“Recognizing that many of the adolescent girls would not be able to return to school, we sought to help them improve their skills and empower them to achieve their full potential and become self-sufficient. As a result of the project, teenage girls and young women had an opportunity to enhance their skills based on their inclination, aptitude, and willingness to participate. Beneficiaries acquired marketable skills that have helped them transition to employment or start a business. In addition to training, the project supported young women and adolescent girls who face specific vulnerabilities to start micro-enterprises, which have since become an income source and a form of protection.”



STORIES OF CHANGE

A woman wearing a plaid shirt and a headscarf is seen from behind, leaning over a large blue bowl to feed several pigs in a pen. The pen is enclosed by a wooden fence. The background shows a brick wall. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal color.

STORIES OF CHANGE **PIGGERY** **MICRO-ENTERPRISES**

1. A new passion for Pig farming



**ABER
GIFTY**

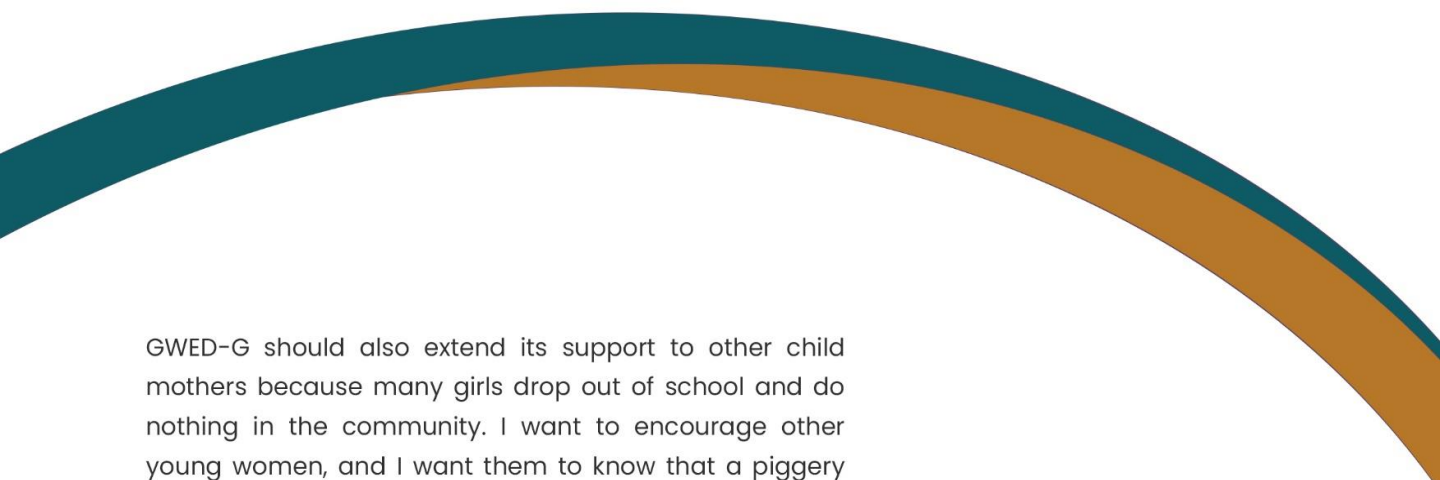
My name is Aber Gifty. I am 20 years old, and my highest level of education is primary six. I'm from Okora village in Amuru District. I have lived here for three years, and I am married with two children.

COVID-19 severely affected my family and me- my children dropped out of school due to a lack of money to send them back. Before the COVID-19 lockdown, I operated a small retail business, "Awaro," buying different items and reselling them in the villages to make a profit to support my family. However, due to COVID-19, I sold everything I had and used all the money to cater to household needs, which left me with no cash flow or savings to invest in the business. So, I was forced to give up on the market business; this affected me badly, and providing for my family was not easy.

I belong to the Koro sports club group where we play football and perform local dances. One day our chairperson informed us during our meeting that GWED-G was looking for child mothers to participate in a livelihoods project.

So I reached out to GWED-G, and they registered me as a beneficiary under the AJWS humanitarian and COVID-19 support grant. As a beneficiary, GWED-G sponsored me to attend training in piggery farming. Afterward, they gave me iron sheets to set up the piggery house.

I also received training on the management of pigs by GWED-G, which included the pigs' vaccination and knowing whether the pigs were sick. Then, after a few weeks, the GWED-G representative called me to the sub-county to pick up the pigs.



GWED-G should also extend its support to other child mothers because many girls drop out of school and do nothing in the community. I want to encourage other young women, and I want them to know that a piggery project is not hectic to take care of; taking care of the pigs doesn't consume much time, and they multiply very fast. Anybody can feed them whenever I am not home, making them easy to keep, and some of their feed is from sources around the home, like potato vines. Besides, there is a ready market for those roast pork.

However, disease control and management in the piggery project are much more complex because some of the vaccines, veterinary drugs, and feeds needed for the enterprise are expensive. Sometimes I need more money for me to treat the pigs. Therefore, the project could consider supporting beneficiaries in disease control and management of the pigs. In addition, some of the high-quality feed, like the rice brand, is expensive.

Project interventions and staff helped me because I gained business planning, management, and record-keeping knowledge to boost my pig-selling business. I plan to invest the profit I make once I sell the piglets to meet my basic needs like clothes and medical services, banking, and paying for school.

Alongside the piggery project, I would have loved to get trained in hair-dressing; the lack of money prevents me from taking up opportunities. I would appreciate it if GWED-G could help me sponsor me in hair-dressing.

I have yet to make any money, but when my pigs give birth, I intend to sell them and get some money monthly. I want to thank AJWS and GWED-G for their support because I couldn't buy the pigs myself.

“ GWED-G should also extend its support to other child mothers because many girls drop out of school and do nothing in the community. ”

2. Keeping small livestock provides more income-earning opportunities



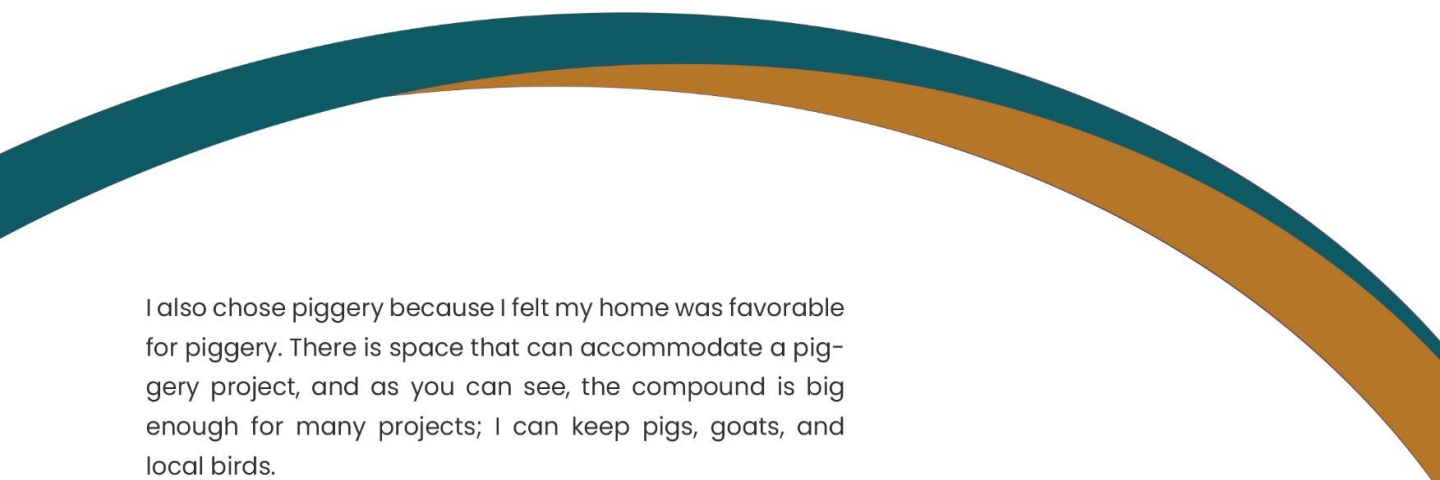
**AKWERO
JANET**

My name is Akwero Janet. I am 22 years old and have lived in Apotokitoo village, Obbo parish Lamogi sub-county in Amuru district for the past 18 years. I studied up to senior four, but when school fees became an issue for my parents, I was forced to drop out. Shortly after, I conceived without even knowing; upon finding out, I immediately moved in with the father of my child, and we started co-habiting, but things did not work out, so I returned home to my parents with my child.

I suddenly found myself a school dropout and a mother. It seemed like no hope for the future, which broke me. Despite this, my mother never gave up on me; she's supported my baby and me to this day. However, I faced a lot of stigma and rejection from friends, family, and relatives, who made me feel isolated. This disorganized my prospects in the community.

I learned about the AJWS project and the assessment that the GWED-G was doing from a friend. My friend advised me to stay home and wait for the team since the GWED-G team was moving door-to-door, looking for young mothers and adolescent girls who had dropped out of school to join the AJWS project. I was focused and determined during the assessment because I was sure GWED-G would support me. That's why I got the piggery project.

Afterward, GWED-G sensitized us to the benefits of keeping pigs, and that is when I chose to go for piggery because it's easy to take care of compared to other projects. In addition, it quickly generates income because, in terms of production, one pig produces many piglets, and there's a market— the demand is high.



I also chose piggery because I felt my home was favorable for piggery. There is space that can accommodate a piggery project, and as you can see, the compound is big enough for many projects; I can keep pigs, goats, and local birds.

My life has changed compared to other child mothers and girls who have had to drop out of school. The piggery project has empowered me economically and made me independent. Right now, I look at these pigs as my asset. The piggery project restored my hope for the future because it is the source of my income. It is essential because the project will generate revenue for my hands. It has also limited my unnecessary movement because all the time, I have to keep watching my pigs.

This project also opened my eyes, and I have also started keeping local poultry (chickens) for income generation. I earn sh100,000 monthly from the farm work I do alongside the piggery. In addition, it has allowed me to support my siblings in terms of school fees.

I plan to open up a small business-like shoe selling. I also plan to upgrade the level of my piggery project to large production and supply. I want to join the tailoring training school. However, I still need more money and support to cover the cost of the tailoring course.

I appreciate the work of GWED-G to the community for the support they offer. The GWED-G project officer was in close contact with me to amplify my voice and our needs. They closely monitor, advise, and follow up on my progress. I request GWED-G not to leave us but rather continue empowering us. There is a need to increase support for many girls who are in the community. In addition, we need to increase economic empowerment, especially for child mothers.

“ **This project also opened my eyes, and I have also started keeping local poultry (chickens) for income generation.** ”

3. Enhancing the status of adolescent girls in their families through opportunities to build agency and decent livelihoods.

My name is Amarorwot Mercy; I am 19 years of age and was born here in Pakiri Village in Omoro District. I have lived here all my life.

I am the fourth born out of six children. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, I was in primary seven. My father lost his business due to the extended COVID-19 lockdown; with many family responsibilities— with all my siblings in school— paying for school fees became difficult for my parents. My father could only afford to continue paying school fees for one of my eldest brothers since he was at a higher level than all of us; the rest of us stayed home. That's why I dropped out of school.

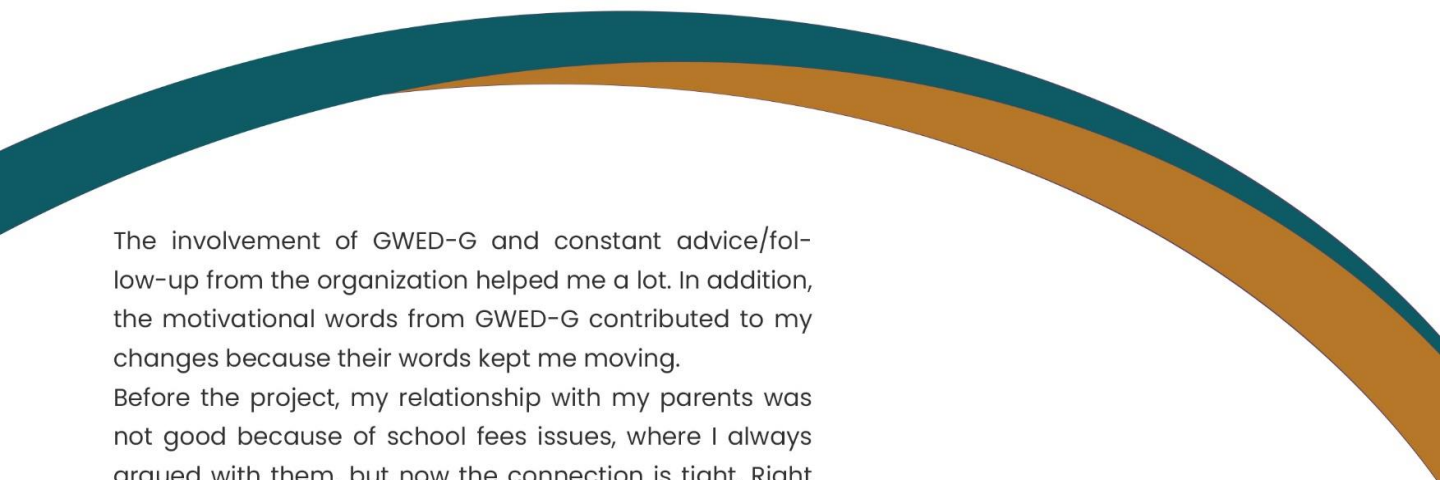
During the lockdown, a neighbor employed me to operate a mobile money business for a small payment at the end of the month, but when COVID-19 became so severe, I had to give up the job and stayed home with no source of income. I became hopeless and isolated.

I only got something to call my own once GWED-G supported me in participating in the piggery project. I was at the farm near my home when the GWED-G team was moving door to door doing their assessment to select beneficiaries under the AJWS project; they asked many questions and wrote down the answers I gave in their forms. Later I received a call from a staff member to go to the GWED-G office for training on piggery; I was so excited to be part of the project.

The training on pig management offered by GWED-G helped me because I knew nothing about keeping pigs, but I gained knowledge and skills with training. I now have a source of income. I am ever home taking good care of the pigs in terms of good feeding and disease control, and management. Easy access to pig feeds makes it easier for me to continue with the project.



**AMARORWOT
MERCY**



The involvement of GWED-G and constant advice/follow-up from the organization helped me a lot. In addition, the motivational words from GWED-G contributed to my changes because their words kept me moving.

Before the project, my relationship with my parents was not good because of school fees issues, where I always argued with them, but now the connection is tight. Right now, we are doing farming as a family. My parents are supporting me now with everything that concerns piggery. When I am not at the farm, my parents help me feed and treat the pigs; they are so supportive.

The piggery project offered by GWED-G has eased my social life in the community. The project also made me known to the rest of the community, and they asked me to connect with them for support. As a result, I have gained respect from the community; now they know I am somebody.

The project's benefits have yet to be seen because the pig is still pregnant; that's why I have not yet started earning money. But pigs multiply quickly, and I am sure to make a profit after my pigs deliver piglets I can sell.

GWED-G should continue with the goodwill and extend support to other young women who dropped out of school since they are still many in the community.

Anybody in the community can handle the piggery project. However, feeding, vaccines, and veterinary drugs for treating pigs are very costly; sometimes, my parents fail to get money for the treatment. In addition, I am terrified of swine fever, which attacks pigs seasonally.

I want to continue with this project, but later, after saving some money, I would like to join a vocational training school for a tailoring course. I would also like to support my young ones with the issue of school fees.

I am so grateful for the support GWED-G offered me, and I am glad that the project has returned the smile on my face again. The happiness I have now also made me share my story with others. Because of the support I received, I am happy.

“ I am so grateful for the support GWED-G offered me, and I am glad that the project has returned the smile on my face again. ”

4. Farming pigs as a family

I am Nancy Lajara. I am 26 years old and was born here in Pakiri Village in Amuru District. I grew up here and got married here.

I attended primary school but stopped in Primary 6 due to lack of money. Around that time, my father passed on, and my mum single-handedly paid my fees till she couldn't anymore.

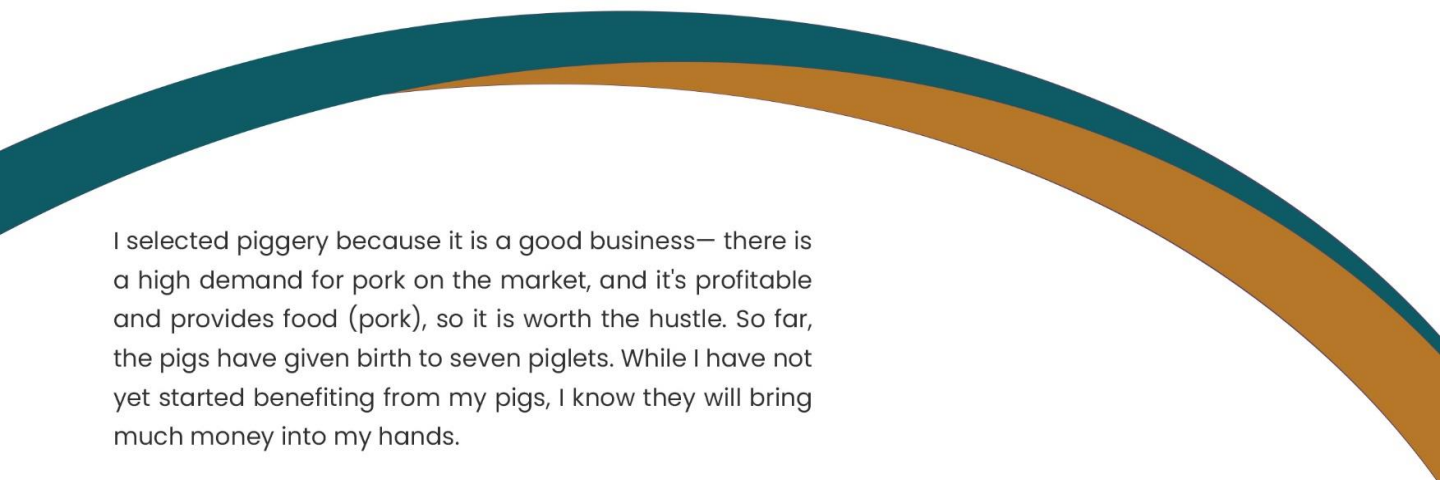
In 2012, I left my parent's home and moved in with my husband though we were not yet formally married. God blessed me with two children, now six and two years old. I am a subsistence farmer growing maize, beans, cassava, groundnuts, and millet.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, all my groundnuts, cassava, and beans got destroyed, and we had a poor harvest. There was hunger in the home and a lack of money since most of my crops got damaged, and I couldn't even sell a little to raise money for basic needs like soap. Sometimes we were forced to borrow money.

Luckily, one day I was in the market and came across the GWED-G project advertisement; I immediately registered to participate in a piggery project. It was my plan, and my husband was very supportive. I enjoyed the training on the piggery project. It was the first ever training I ever attended. I received training to make a pigsty, monitor the health of the pigs, and feed them. The skills I gained in piggery included; pigsty construction, monitoring, medication administration, feeding, and extra care (dos and don'ts during pregnancy)



**NANCY
LAJARA**



I selected piggery because it is a good business— there is a high demand for pork on the market, and it's profitable and provides food (pork), so it is worth the hustle. So far, the pigs have given birth to seven piglets. While I have not yet started benefiting from my pigs, I know they will bring much money into my hands.

I am now a busy lady, I used to roam around the village without a specific time to come back home, but these days, most times, I move with purpose and have to be home before 5:00 pm to look after my pigs which we are doing together with my husband. So I no longer loiter a lot— farming is seasonal, but the piggery now fills the gap. Piggery is a full-time job that keeps one busy and discourages youths from roaming.

The hardship I faced was the transportation of the pigs from the Lamogi sub-county to Keyo in my home. Feeding the pigs is also a challenge. However, my husband has been supportive and asked and researched how best to keep pigs.

I want to expand our piggery project. With my husband, I would like to get my land for farming and buy a plot to construct our hut since we are still staying at my husband's maternal home.

GWED-G should not forget me in case of any new project because I will not forget them. GWED-G should recruit more girls/ladies of my same social class to benefit from such kind of project. GWED-G staff should continue encouraging and mentoring us.

“ I selected piggery because it is a good business— there is a high demand for pork on the market, and it's profitable and provides food (pork), so it is worth the hustle. ”

5. Raising pigs an eye-opening and rewarding experience

My name is Acayo Concy. I am 22 years old and from Okora Village in Amuru District. I have lived here for fifteen years.

I attended some primary education but dropped out of school when I was about to sit for my final exam after discovering I was pregnant. By then, I had no information about safe sex— I knew nothing about protecting myself from getting pregnant. By then, no school sexual reproductive health and rights club could give us information like these days.

I have two (2) children and two other dependents. I lost my sister to COVID-19 and am caring for her two children. After COVID-19, due to unemployment caused by the pandemic, I could no longer afford to send the children to school. Moreover, we lacked food; what we had stored was consumed during COVID-19 and started from zero again.

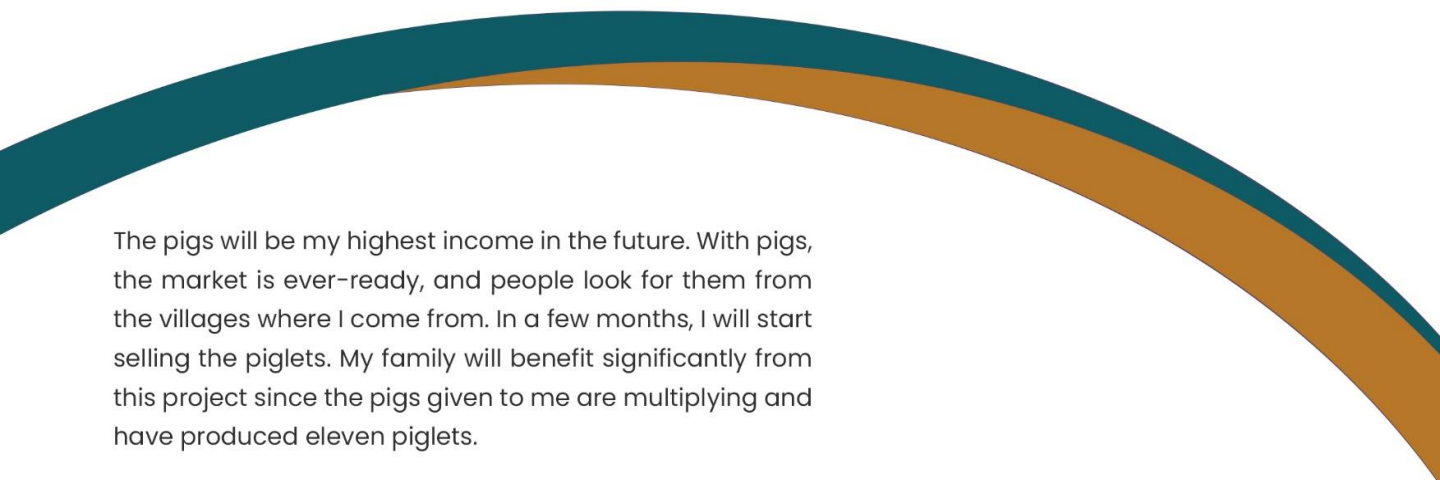
Right now, I still need to earn more to take them to school; the little I am making now, I spend on feeding my family.

I participated in the piggery project. As a result, I received training in piggery project management and a pair of pigs and five iron sheets that helped me construct the house for my pigs. In addition, GWED-G gave me cassava cuttings and bean seeds for planting.

The most significant change for me is that the project has changed how I perceive things. I have significantly benefited from the guidance and advice from the team from GWED-G. I have learned that there is always a turning point in life, and through GWED-G, God has made it happen.



**ACAYO
CONCY**



The pigs will be my highest income in the future. With pigs, the market is ever-ready, and people look for them from the villages where I come from. In a few months, I will start selling the piglets. My family will benefit significantly from this project since the pigs given to me are multiplying and have produced eleven piglets.

I want to share my story with the rest of the young women to encourage and advise them to save and start doing income-generating activities to support their families and meet their needs.

GWED-G contributed a lot because I would not have all these things at my place without them. The support from GWED-G made my piggery project more manageable. The training and advice made me take good care of my pigs, especially at the delivery stage. However, I still face some challenges with treatment and feeding, primarily since the piglets' birth—this stage has been challenging for me. I wish GWED-G could support us with routine vaccination of the pigs, which we cannot afford right now.

I planted my cassava and beans. Although the beans were still affected by the sun, still, I know I have my cassava in the garden. Unfortunately, I have yet to start making money from this project since my pigs have just delivered piglets, and my cassava still needs to be prepared for harvest.

I am interested in activities like hairdressing, bakery, and poultry keeping, but now I need more capital to support me. I also thank the GWED-G for supporting me and opening my eyes which have been closed for a long; I urge that they continue to extend their support to disadvantaged girls and single mothers within the community.

“ My family will benefit significantly from this project since the pigs given to me are multiplying and have produced eleven piglets. ”

6. Profiting from organic vegetable production and sale



**ROSELINE
OROMA**

I'm Roseline Oroma I am 24 years old and from Labongo Village in Amuru District.

Our mother single-handedly raised my siblings and me as she had separated from my father. Even back then, my mother did not make enough money to invest in family needs such as schooling, so I could not continue my education beyond primary six.

At 16, I started cohabiting with my boyfriend, and God blessed us with two (2) children, 7 and 2 years. But, sadly, things didn't work out with my boyfriend because he was a womanizer, drunkard, and irresponsible. As a result of his carelessness, he infected me with HIV/AIDs, which forced me to return home to forge ways to take my child to school and start getting medication.

My mother and I are predominantly peasant farmers. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it was tough to access money to buy agricultural inputs- finding the money to purchase seeds was a struggle. We also lacked basic needs and enough food and survived on one meal daily.

Before being selected to participate in the GWED-G AJWS project, I had never benefited from any project at the sub-county or sold anything to get money.

I was chosen to participate in the piggery project where I was trained to make the pigsty, monitor the female (sow) during the gestation period to birth, feed, and tell when the pig is sick. I was also supported with vegetable seeds and taught how to make them grow well and have good yields. After the training, I received two pigs (sow and boar) and vegetable seeds, including; hibiscus 'malakwang,' otigo, and Lala, which yield quickly— 1 to 2 months.



Through vegetable gardening, I started earning money faster than I ever imagined. After one to two months, the vegetables I planted on half an acre earned me my first income, 80,000/=. After that, I invested the profits from selling vegetables in my petty retail business— "Awaro." I buy foodstuffs, including; silverfish, eggplants, bitter tomatoes, and tomatoes from the market and resell them in the village for a small profit margin. This was how I started earning a profit of about 40,000/= a month, basically from selling the very marketable vegetables here in my village. I intend to stick to the business because I profit daily, and it is quick, enabling me to take care of my children.

My pig delivered eight piglets one night when we were all asleep and accidentally slept on the piglets (6) died, and only (2) survived. My biggest challenge is getting their feed during the dry season. I learned to separate the piglets from their mother once they deliver; I will only take them to their mother when to breastfeed. So much as only two piglets out of 6 survived, this piggery project has acted as therapy — it has been helpful mentally, keeps me busy with less time to think about my sickness, and helps me remain focused.

I believe in God's favor upon my life. I was referred to the GWED-G team by the Local Council (LCI) in Labongo Village. I qualified to participate and receive project support because of my chronic health condition, the economic hardships I was facing at the time, and the lack of support from the father of my children. Today, I mobilize other young women in similar situations and refer them to the GWED-G project.

The counseling and psychosocial support I receive as a project beneficiary has given me more reasons to participate. The GWED-G team (Madam Susan) has continually checked on me and given me psychosocial support not to give up on life. Madam Susan encouraged me to care for myself, follow my prescriptions and live for my children. My mother has also helped look after my children while I am at the market. The project has generally kept me hopeful and allowed me the opportunity to deal with the economic hardships I faced. I now have a small business I started from the money I got from selling vegetables.

I was determined to make a better life for my children. The fact that my children's lives depend on me gave me the courage to live even when I wanted to give up.

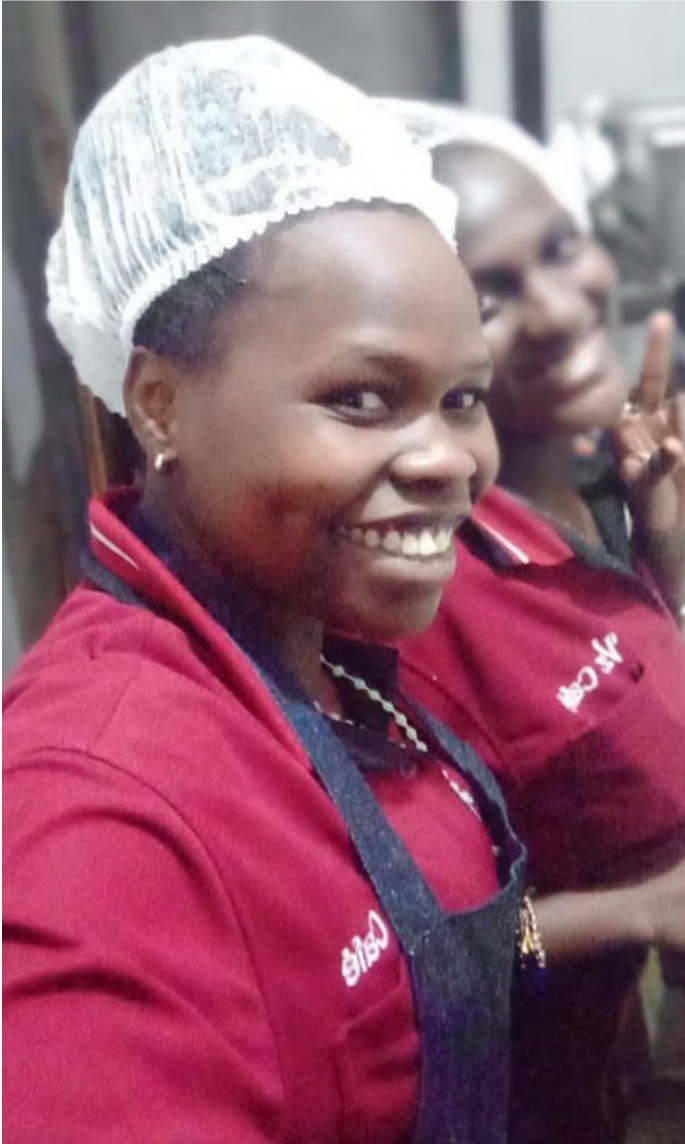
In the future, I am ready to expand my piggery project. I want to buy a cow and two goats and continue with the petty business to sustain my family's welfare. I have already purchased a hen and a cock to multiply and expand my income.

I will never forget GWED-G for this support and for restoring my hope even when I was almost giving up. I pray to God to continue blessing GWED-G with money so the project can continue for many years. Furthermore, I request GWED-G to bring seeds early to avoid affecting the yields if they get any support in the future.



STORIES OF CHANGE **BAKERY** **MICRO-ENTERPRISES**

1. An opportunity to work at one of Kampala's top bakeries



ABEDI SHARON

My name is Abedi Sharon. I am 23 years old, and I was born in Lamogi, Amilobo village, and I have lived in the Keyo-Lamogi sub-county in Amuru District all my life.

I sat senior four in 2019, but in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown, I got pregnant, which led to rejection and stigma from my family members, friends, and the community.

Although my parents promised to send me back to school when the baby was born and that they would pay my school fees, this proved difficult. After the lockdown, my parents had no money for further education because they did not have adequately paying jobs; therefore, I stayed home supporting them with house chores.



I became so helpless and hopeless. The major challenge was that I had to have a cesarean section (c-section) operation to deliver the baby, and my body needed time to heal afterward. As a result, I could not do much to earn an income. Later I started hustling, selling cassava chips by the roadside to support my baby and me.

I wanted something big like hairdressing but did not know much about it, and although I wanted to get trained in it, my father and elder brother turned me down. All these problems continued until that day when GWED-G held a meeting at Keyo to inform the community about the AJWS project, which I attended and registered as one of the beneficiaries.

The GWED-G team then assessed me to find out what I wanted to do as a training skill. I finally settled for a bakery, and GWED-G facilitated my participation in bakery training. Today, my success is due to the bakery training and the certificate I obtained; what would I be doing now without any skills and knowledge?

I put the skills I received into practice; I did not just sit back with the knowledge that's why I am doing good now. With the certificate I obtained, I secured an offer of a job at Alokolum Major Seminary, which was a stepping stone for me; they were paying me one hundred thousand shillings per month. The payment enables me to start saving immediately and frequently send money to my mother for the upkeep of my child. So my mother is helping me take care of my baby.

I later secured another job in Kampala at Pauz café at Uganda House. With this job, I get enough allowances; weekly, I get sh30,000, and monthly I also get sh300,000 as my salary, which allows me to save enough and send money to my family weekly.

I am also seriously saving for the future, and I know I will never return to where I came from. I can send my baby to school next year with what I have saved. I am now an independent woman. The support given to me by my mother now; is taking good care of my baby while I do my work freely. I am a big dream person and have high confidence; this keeps me going forward.

The skills and knowledge the organization provided me with in terms of training were vital to my change. GWED-G also provided my bakery group and me with startup capital, setting us up for a good start. The encouraging and motivational word regularly offered during the training was also important. GWED-G and the staff have a heart of gold; they do not segregate anybody, making it possible for anybody to change. They kept on calling and physically following me up.

I plan to open my own bakery business and a cosmetic shop where I will be running to save money to educate my child. I want to focus on my child. I do not want to ever go back to where GWED-G brought me from, and I thanked God for this significant change that the organization brought upon my family and me; I will live to testify to the great work they have done for me.

I don't want the project to end; the organization should continue to support vulnerable girls out there so that other girls can also benefit. I want to make GWED-G proud. Right now, anybody can ask me what is behind the changes in my life; I am glad to share my story. It's important to me to share my story because I now have the confidence I used not to have; I can now provide for my own needs and those of my baby.

2. Running a successful baking business with the help of a supportive family



BRENDA
ATIMANGO

“ The knowledge and skill I gained from the bakery training have empowered me economically, and at least now, I can provide for my basic needs without any problem, and my baby lacks nothing. I am living an independent life and making my own decision. ”

I'm Brenda Atimango. I am 19 years of age, and I am from Layamo Village in Amuru District.

I dropped out of school in primary six. At the time, sometimes, instead of going to school, my parent could send me to the farm, and with that, I got used to farming work instead of school, and little by little, I lost interest in school.

In late 2020, during the first COVID-19 lockdown, I got pregnant. I was 18 when I became pregnant and had my baby at 19. So, I stayed home until I gave birth to my baby. Around the same time, my father lost his job— he operated a plastic utensil wholesale dealer business, which required him to move from one district to another. However, due to the coronavirus movement restrictions, he could not move to conduct his business; my mother is a farmer, so we struggled to make ends meet. The situation I was undergoing as a single-child mother is why GWED-G selected me as one of the beneficiaries under the AJWS project.

The GWED-G team chose me to receive training to build baking skills. With the training GWED-G gave me, I am doing my own business. Choosing the bakery project was one of the best decisions— I imagined that I would not go wrong with baking because there are schools and health centers as my target to make sales.

I am a member of the Ribbe Ber Bakery group in Amuru, and we were given an oven for baking. The oven is stationed at Labongo-Ogali Center, where we always commute every morning. Each member takes turns using the oven, but each person uses their ingredients.

Right now, I mainly bake half cakes and mandazi for daily survival. I sell mandazi and half cakes at Labongo-Ogali health center, Labongo-Ogali primary school, Amuru trading center, and Labongo trading center.

My monthly income is sh80,000. I also make party cakes, but there is little demand from people in the villages, so I only make them when customers request them as a special order. I have also joined a voluntary saving group where I can save sh3000 weekly. Out of the daily profit we each earn, we contribute to a small group saving scheme for the future.

Also, as a group, we are extending our skills to other people through training other girls who are also vulnerable.

My parent's support is one of the things that has helped me participate in the project activities. My parents helped me by giving me money to buy the items needed for baking, and they kept guiding and advising me.

The knowledge and skill I gained from the bakery training have empowered me economically, and at least now, I can provide for my basic needs without any problem, and my baby lacks nothing. I am living an independent life and making my own decision.

The GWED-G team's support also contributed to my success through regular follow-up because I would have given up on this.

I now want to do a technical training course in tailoring, but I still need more money for the training in tailoring and some capital to start up a business. Therefore, I would be pleased if I could be supported and sponsored for the training course.

3. Getting a living wage by baking

ANENA SANDRA

My name is Anena Sandra; I am 21 years old. I am from Ngeri Village in Gulu District.

When COVID-19 came, I was already out of school; I had studied until senior four but could not continue my formal education because my mother had no money for me to go back to school. My mother was the breadwinner, but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, she lost her job as a matron at Negri primary school and could not afford to pay for my schooling. Even acquiring basic needs was challenging at the time.



I learned about the GWED-G AJWS project from the Local Council (LCII) of a bus park in Gulu city— who is also the founder of Street Samaritan. Street Samaritan is a community-based organization that works with sex workers to take them off the street. During their meetings, the LCII asked them what they would like to do to leave the street, and with that, they are linked to the GWED-G office for different project opportunities. I joined the Street Samaritan when I got pregnant and delivered my baby during the COVID-19 lockdown.

When the GWED-G opportunity came to me, I was chosen to participate in the bakery skilling project and received training. I trained for six weeks in baking, and now I can bake cakes, samosa, doughnuts, and salads. I chose baking because I looked at how people buy bread daily, and the demand for cakes, bread, and other bites is high.

The knowledge and skills I gained are the most important thing that happened to me; it was one thing I had desired for so long. Finally, I am using the skills I received from the training. Every day I make doughnuts, cakes, and samosas and sell them in the Gulu city main market, to NGO offices like GWED-G, World Vision, Gulu university, and schools like Gulu Town Primary School, and through hawking on the road and bus parks. I usually make cakes on order and charge between sh30,000 and sh60,000.

I am a member of the Gulu City Bakery Group. As a group, GWED-G supported us with a baking oven and other materials like margarine, sugar, spices, icing sugar, baking flour, baking powder, and in-cense. We started out baking as a group, but we started selling individually along the way. The materials and the baking oven helped me start earning early.

After the bakery skilling, I also got a job here in Evator foods doing baking and food supply.

I have worked here for eight months now. I earn sh700,000 per month and manage to save sh500,000. The bakery makes me earn money, and being a sure deal business; has helped me continue with the business.

I am proud that I am now exposed and very happy because it has given me hope for the future. GWED-G's support raised me from a nobody into somebody that people in my community now recognize as a successful businesswoman. A big thank you to GWED-G for the change seen in my life that made me noticeable. The training and skills offered by GWED-G contributed to my achievement because I would not be doing this without this training. Furthermore, the advice and counseling GWED-G staff encouraged me to continue building my business.

My social life has changed; economically, the training has empowered me; I earn money to support myself and my family. I am now independent; I can provide for my needs and that of my baby. I can now also provide for my siblings. I have three siblings, and I usually provide for them by giving part payment for their school fees and giving money for their feeding through my mother.

The project I am interested in is starting my bakery center, and I need more training to learn more skills that I still lack. Therefore, we need to open a bakery training center to support people in the community. When I start my baking center, I will be able to train other young women to also get money out of it and supply the community they come from. In addition, I will also be able to become the supplier of cakes, bread, and other bites in Gulu city, and with this, my earnings will expand.

The project needs to continue supporting the rest of the community that has not benefited from the project.

4. Earning a living by using baking skills

ASUNTA
NYANGOMA

“ I love baking because of the profits I make from it compared to doing other businesses. ”



I am Asunta Nyangoma. I am 21 years, Ngeri Village in Gulu District.

I stopped in primary seven in 2019 when I was 19 years. When COVID-19 broke out in Uganda is when I sat for PLE. My parents wished to take me back to school or vocational training after the lockdown, but everything did not work out because whatever savings they had, we consumed during the lockdown. Had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic, I would have gone back to school, and my parent would not have used all the money they had.

COVID-19 disrupted my education, and later, I realized that I was pregnant, which stopped me from continuing my studies. I got pregnant during the lockdown, and the father of my baby denied my pregnancy at an early stage— he is married to another wife now. GWED-G identified me through one of the Local councilors (LCs) for the Bar-Dege Layibi Division. I was so desperate at the time that I considered joining the street as a sex worker to get money because some of my friends were already in that business. That's when this Local Councilor approached my mother and took me to GWED-G to get help.

When GWED-G offered me support in bakery skilling, I never thought I would have my own business, but now I have a baking business through the training I receive from GWED-G. I get sh120,000 per month.

I love baking because of the profits I make from it compared to doing other businesses. In addition, I like that I acquired knowledge of baking which I did not have.

At first, I wanted to do driving but then driving was outside the options of skills supported by the AJWS project. Therefore, I chose baking since there is a ready market, and I could earn

good money. Also, with my baking skills, I could look for a job or run my own business. I have worked here— Jubilee foods and baking center in Gulu City—for eight months since I received the bakery training. The teamwork at the workplace keeps me going and doing better. My knowledge now exposes me to other people because with baking, people place orders, and you get to be known and respected daily.

The most important part of the training was that it caused me to stand on my own feet compared to how I used to be before I began baking. When I started baking, putting into action the knowledge I was given, I could live an independent life. Instead of begging for economic support from my family, I now earn my own money and give some to my parents to use. I can send my money to my mother for the upkeep of my son. My son is now two years. Before GWED-G, I depended on my parents for everything; sometimes, they used to get tired of me begging for everything. My parents are now delighted that I am doing something good for my life. My mother's support also helps me excel since she is taking care of my baby, allowing me to move freely to my workplace.

The GWED-G team always does follow-ups to find out how I am doing, and the best thing they are doing is connecting my business to other people, which has helped sell my business.

I want to get trained in catering in the future. However, I still need money to support me in the course.

It is important to share my story since some friends who drop out of school need the same opportunity to improve their lives. Sadly, the community still has many people who need the same support. I want to thank GWED-G for supporting me and requesting that they continue to help others.

5. Diversifying into small livestock keeping with savings from baking



**KEVIN
ATIMANGO**

I'm Kevin Atimango. I am 23 years old and live in La-bongo ogali village in Amuru District. I have lived in this village all my life.

I attained some primary education but dropped out when I got pregnant at 19 due to being in bad groups at school, whose influence on me made me not regularly attend school. Back then, my friends and I would escape from school to visit our friends at the center, doing nothing. After giving birth to my baby, I felt shamed and isolated— I had too much fear of being near people.

I have twelve (12) siblings — eight siblings from the same mother, and the four other siblings are from my stepmother, but we live in the same compound. Some of my siblings dropped out of school because my father lost his job when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and could not raise the school fees. He is farming now, but farming is seasonal, and he cannot raise enough school fees for the twelve of us.

But on a positive note, it was also during the COVID-19 pandemic that GWED-G selected me to receive skill training in the bakery. We received training and got organized in groups. I joined the Ribbe Ber Bakery Group and am chairperson in the Amuru sub-county. I became a chairperson for the group after the members were interested in me leading them in Amuru.

The AJWS project has given me the knowledge and skills that will live with me for the rest of my life, making it very important. Furthermore, the training and the certificate I obtained from GWED-G made me alive again because I can get a job in any bakery center with this certificate.

GWED-G also gave us a baking machine and items to start baking bread and cakes and selling them locally as a group.

This project has made me independent, and now I have money. I can meet my own needs. Before this project, I could not stand on my two feet like today. I now bake and sell my bread and cakes and earn at least sh200,000 per month. This daily income allows me to save and invest in my child's education and for my future needs.

With the little savings from baking, I bought one (1) sow (female pig), which makes me very happy.

What I like about this project is that the community supports me in the business by making orders for the cakes. You can operate a bakery business from anywhere; it can be done from home using local materials with very little capital. The baking skills I have now it has made me known to many people and has built my confidence in handling different kinds of people. However, the customers in the village are still very few making me earn a moderate amount of money.

The emotional support through the advice and motivational words offered to me during the training made me complete the training without any challenges. The staff of GWED-G also supported me a lot through regular follow-up and giving me motivational talks, which encouraged me in the business.

Apart from baking, I would like to receive training in tailoring, which I can do alongside my baking business. I would also like to do domestic animals like goats and pigs. Though I have started with one, I know it will produce and multiply.

However, juggling family responsibilities and business demands is a challenge for me because men think that when a woman is empowered, it may result in disrespect for them. Secondly, limited capital for buying materials can also prevent me from venturing into more activities. I would appreciate it if GWED-G could provide farm inputs like hoes and seeds to back up the baking business.



STORIES OF CHANGE
OTHER
MICRO-ENTERPRISES

1. Taking advantage of rabbit farming opportunities



JACKY
AOL

“ I decided to take on the rabbit-rearing project. Raising rabbits will earn me a lot in the future, and I am glad I am doing it now. ”

My name is Jacky Aol, and I am 20 years old. I am from Lapeta village, Pece Laroo Division, Gulu City. I am a single mother of a one-year-old.

After my father died, I left school since he was the family's breadwinner. By the time he died, I was in primary six, and my mother had already passed away. My uncles, who promised to pay me in school, turned me down, and that's how I left school because I had no one to support me in paying my school fees. It was my stepmother who took care of us.

After my father's death, I started doing casual work like weeding and farming people's gardens to get money to pay my fees, but I still needed to raise more money. I had started planting vegetables like Greens around our home and selling them at the market to save for vocational school, but then I spent the money on my baby's basic needs.

When the GWED-G team visited us at home to assess young mothers who had already dropped out of school to join the AJWS project, I felt confident they would assist me. The GWED-G team carried out my assessment and informed me that I was one of the rabbit farming beneficiaries after answering several questions. Because rabbits are in high demand locally and nationally, I decided to take on the rabbit-rearing project. Raising rabbits will earn me a lot in the future, and I am glad I am doing it now.

Upon receiving my rabbits, I found that the female rabbit was already pregnant, and she has since given birth to 10 kittens that I sell locally for shs40,000 each and outside Gulu for shs60,000 each. As a result, I can now save between 100,000 and 150,000 shillings monthly. Due to this, I have joined a volunteer savings and loan association and a revolving fund that gives me shs200,000 weekly after I save shs2,000 every day.

In addition to keeping rabbits, I have also expanded to keeping local chickens, and I have ten (10) roosters and five (5) hens ready to be sold in December for Christmas. I will sell them for between Sh30,000 and Sh40,000 each.

I plan to start a poultry farm where the community can buy chicken from me, and I will use the chicken dropping as fertilizer for my garden. Moreover, I would like to buy some goats.

I have realized I have many good things to look forward to, thanks to participating in the AJWS project. GWED-G needs to continue supporting more people still facing many community challenges.

2. Making a profit by raising turkeys



**SUSAN
KIPWOLA**

I'm Susan Kipwola; I am 34 years old. I have lived in Kati Kati Cell in Gulu District for 18 years. I am a single parent of five children.

Before joining the GWED-G project, raising money for school fees and food was difficult. But during the coronavirus pandemic, life got more challenging. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my children's education came to a standstill, and I had paid the school fees, but when schools closed, we lost that money.

I used to hire/lease a small piece of land for cultivation, but it is far from where I live. But farming also became a problem during the pandemic because of the long distance to the farmland. Due to the lockdown, there was no public transport and restriction on movement. People were not allowed to move even with boda-bodas, and I found it hard to walk the long distance to go and dig and walk back home.

But on the other hand, COVID-19 positively impacted my family and me- I stayed home with my children and grew to understand their characters; I taught them to do additional work like digging.

GWED-G also selected me to participate in the turkey-rearing project. I received training in proper turkey-rearing techniques, feed and water needs, disease management and control, record keeping, and management of the turkey business.

I later received project support to start a turkey project as an income generation activity. As a beneficiary of the AJWS grant, GWED-G supplied me with three (3) pieces of mature turkeys— (2) female and (1) male.

The most significant change for me was understanding the benefits of keeping poultry for eggs, meat, and sale. Before the project, I had never raised any poultry, not even chicken, but raising poultry at home was a real opportunity.

During the lockdown and movement restriction, it was a good option for women like me who were tied to the house and with few resources and opportunities. I could also earn money while staying home; I could keep the turkeys in my backyard, making it easy to take care of my children.

I am now raising broilers for sale. It takes 22 weeks for turkeys to grow into the appropriate market weight—from hatchling to sale. I look at this project as my future investment for my family. I now see turkey farming as my children's future and am happy that my children also like taking care of the turkeys. In addition, Turkey farming will help me sort out school fees.

I can't estimate the monthly income because my turkey still has baby turkeys. But I know that there are few farmers in the turkey business. I realize that I can sell turkeys at a higher price than chicken. I could earn three to four times more income from the rearing of turkeys than from chicken which is the best part about the turkey project.

Some of my wealthy neighbors have already booked to buy my turkeys in advance, which is a good thing about raising turkeys. It implies that even the poor can take care of turkeys. I liked this project because it has restored my lost hope, and I believe in the future. I will meet my basic needs in the future.

3. Creating a profitable basket-weaving business



ANENA HARRIET

My name is Anena Harriet Uhuru; I am 26 years old and live in Koro in Omoro District. I have been in this place since I was born.

In 2017, I dropped out of school in my senior four and was 21. Sadly, my father fell ill and could not continue paying my school fees, and my education ended that way. He was a businessman, but due to his illness, he could not run his business because it involved moving from one place to another.

When COVID-19 hit, the stress from the pandemic affected my family. My mother was a market vendor, but the lockdowns and movement restrictions meant we could not do anything, so no money was coming in, which worsened our lives.

At the time, I requested a lady— a local baker to employ me to hawk her bread through the village. I offered to do it for free, and in exchange, I asked her to provide me with food and where to sleep since I had left home to escape the situation at home. But again, due to the coronavirus movement restrictions, I could not continue the bread hawking— for fear I might catch the virus.

“ I can pay my rent, meet my daily needs, and go to the hospital when I am sick. In addition, I support my family ”

I then decided to move door-to-door, offering people in the village my services of washing clothes for a small fee. I usually earned sh30,000 weekly from cleaning people's clothes— enough to feed myself and rent a room. Slowly, I began to put aside some savings until I had sufficient capital to start vending in the market— selling onions, silverfish, and tomatoes. However, coronavirus movement restrictions still made it difficult to move to buy more stock to sell.

But while the COVID-19 pandemic brought all these difficulties and changes, it also led me to connect with GWED-G. A friend who saw me suffering and doing many things to make life easy eventually referred me to GWED-G.

My friend who referred me to GWED-G helped me a lot. As a result, I was selected as one of the AJWS project beneficiaries, and GWED-G supported me with a financial grant of sh400,000 to invest in my basket-weaving business. I already had the skills to make the baskets, but I needed financial support to buy the materials for making the baskets.

Today, I sell my baskets between sh8,000 and sh12,000. On average, I sell baskets worth sh100,000 per month. I have built good relationships with my customers, who reach out to me to place orders. With this income, I can pay my rent, meet my daily needs, and go to the hospital when I am sick. In addition, I support my family; I send them money for food and help them on the farm.

The project encouraged me to join a revolving fund where I save sh2,000 every day and, in a month, I put aside sh60,000. With the additional savings, I have been able to buy two (2) goats and four (4) chickens which I sure will help once they multiply.

I want to share my story because I never thought I would look like this, but I have learned that you can reach any level you wish to through connections and doing good things. And also, difficult situations and challenging times are not the end of life — look at me now; the negative effect of COVID-19 helped me turn my life around, and many people still do not believe the positive things that came out of an impossible situation.

I am interested in helping others, so I want to train other girls to weave baskets and become independent. I hope to teach other girls, including my sister, who is also interested in basket weaving.

The start-up capital I received from GWED-G also helped me get up from where I was because, without this money, I would still be moving from place to place, washing people's clothes for cash. The encouraging and motivational words given to me by GWED-G pushed me forward, and I never gave up on my business. The continuous follow-up on what I was doing encouraged me.

The project made way for me through the start-up capital I received, which made me quickly buy materials, and later, basket production became high. However, I still need more money to purchase materials in bulk, and it becomes a challenge to order frequently and need to be always there.

I now want to save more money to buy land. I would also like to grow my tailoring skills, acquire a sewing machine, and run a tailoring business alongside my basket-making business.

GWED-G should continue supporting the vulnerable people in the community and help build capacity for youth who are not in school.

4. Profitable paper bag-making business meets market demand for packaging



**MERCY
OLANYA**

“ The paper bags business has changed my life. I earn money daily, which makes me independent, and I can save money weekly for the future ”

I am Mercy Olanya. I am 26 years of age, and I have lived in an airfield village, Gulu District, for five years. I studied up to senior four.

Before I got involved in the GWED-G AJWS project, I owned and managed a restaurant providing people living and working in this area with food, but the business needed to do better. Sometimes I earned enough, and sometimes not very much. But when the coronavirus hit, I lost the business because of the lockdown and movement restrictions. The government closed all restaurants, and I lost my customers. The restaurant business supported me in my education; without it, I could not continue, so I dropped out in senior four.

I participated in the paper bag-making project after receiving financial grant support from GWED-G. I got involved with GWED-G when I already had some experience making paper bags. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I ran a paper bag-making business making money, but it was affected to a great extent when the pandemic broke out. One of the biggest challenges was that the pandemic forced me to use cash for my personal needs, like food and rent, as capital to run the business. But one time when the landlord threw my things out of the house. That is when I gave him all the money I had.

Luckily GWED-G chose me to participate in the AJWS project. In the beginning, I asked GWED-G to give me money to buy a timber smoothing machine that people could hire from me, and I would profit from leasing the machine. However, the GWED-G team advised me instead to build on the paper-making business I was already doing.

First, GWED-G trained me in good business management and showed me how to ensure my business remained profitable.

The project helped me develop business skills: managing a business, keeping accounts, and calculating costs and income. I also learned how to market myself and handle customers to ensure my products sell. GWED-G then supported me with sh400,000, which I used to buy materials for making the paper bags.

The paper bags business has changed my life. I earn money daily, which makes me independent, and I can save money weekly for the future because, in a week, I can get sh300,000. Although I am working from home, I get orders for bags from different hotels and joints. Right now, I can have my own money, making it easier to buy anything I want at any time. I am saving money to get a bigger space to expand the business.

The business is enabling me to afford most of my needs. For example, I can afford to pay my rent, which was a challenge during the lockdown. In addition, I am happy because I can now buy food and baby clothes for my child and support my mother with money. The business has also saved me money for my child's education; I am sure my child will start school.

As a result of this business, my relationship with my husband has improved; he supports me in doing everything. For example, my husband now helps me make these paper bags which has helped to increase production.

In addition, the business makes me move from one place to another, making me known to many people in the city.

I want to share my story so that others know that anyone can start small but will earn big in the future and that they should not ignore starting any business.

5. Creating jewelry from paper beads to pay for university



LUCKY LYDIA LAMARO

I am Lucky Lydia Lamaro. I am 26 years old and come from Lacenotinga Village in Omoro District. I am pursuing a degree at Gulu University.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit; it severely affected my family and me. I attended Gulu University before the pandemic hit, but after, I had a challenge paying tuition at the University.

In addition, my mother caught COVID-19 at the market, where she had gone to sell cassava one day, and she was sick for a long time. Thank God she got well again, but it was hard for her as a single mother to take care of seven children in her condition.

My mother faced the hardship of paying tuition, and getting the basic needs for the family was hard, too; because of this, I had to drop out and start making paper beads and doing a bit of knitting; however, there was also the challenge of buying materials.

I got the idea of making paper beads from my mother. She inspired me and taught me how to make the bead. I was so close to my mother, which is how I learned. My mother had picked up the skill from one of the organizations in Gulu – she lost her job at this organization, and they built her capacity on paper bead-making as an income-generating activity.

And so, as an AJWS project beneficiary, I participated in paper beads making and knitting of swimming costumes. I received financial support of sh500,000 from GWED-G to buy the paper-cutting machine and the material because I needed help to make my paper beads.

I sell my products locally— move from place to place looking for markets. For example, I target parties/events for the paper beads and market to hotels with swimming pools for the swimming costumes.

On the marketing side, the GWED-G project has created opportunities for me to sell my products to different customers. Through the project, GWED-G supports me by connecting me to buyers and linking me to many potential customers. For example, whenever GWED-G hosts an event or workshop anywhere, they inform me in advance so that I can display my products, find buyers and learn about the market.

Gulu university, where I am a student, has also helped me market my products- they actively promote them to other businesses and organizations, making selling easier. My family and friends support me by encouraging me and giving me hope for the future; they promote my products to other people. These connections from different directions for my products boost my business.

My paper beads are selling very well. Depending on daily sales and orders placed, I now get between sh200,000 to sh500,000.

Getting the capital of sh500,000 to invest in my business made it possible to raise money for my tuition. What I make from selling the paper beads is what I use to pay the university tuition.

I can now also support my family through the money I earn from selling paper beads. For example, I am paying school fees for my siblings who had dropped out due to the financial challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other community members have seen the changes in me due to the paper beads-making business and want to join my way of life. So far, the project has enabled me to train three (3) other young women to acquire knowledge and skill in paper bead making and knitting. These three trainees usually help me when demand is high, and I have many orders from clients to fulfill.

I have developed a heart for helping others, so I am also training other young people in paper beads and knitting. When selling my products, I always encourage my fellow youth to do anything to keep them busy and earn them some money, start small, and aim high.

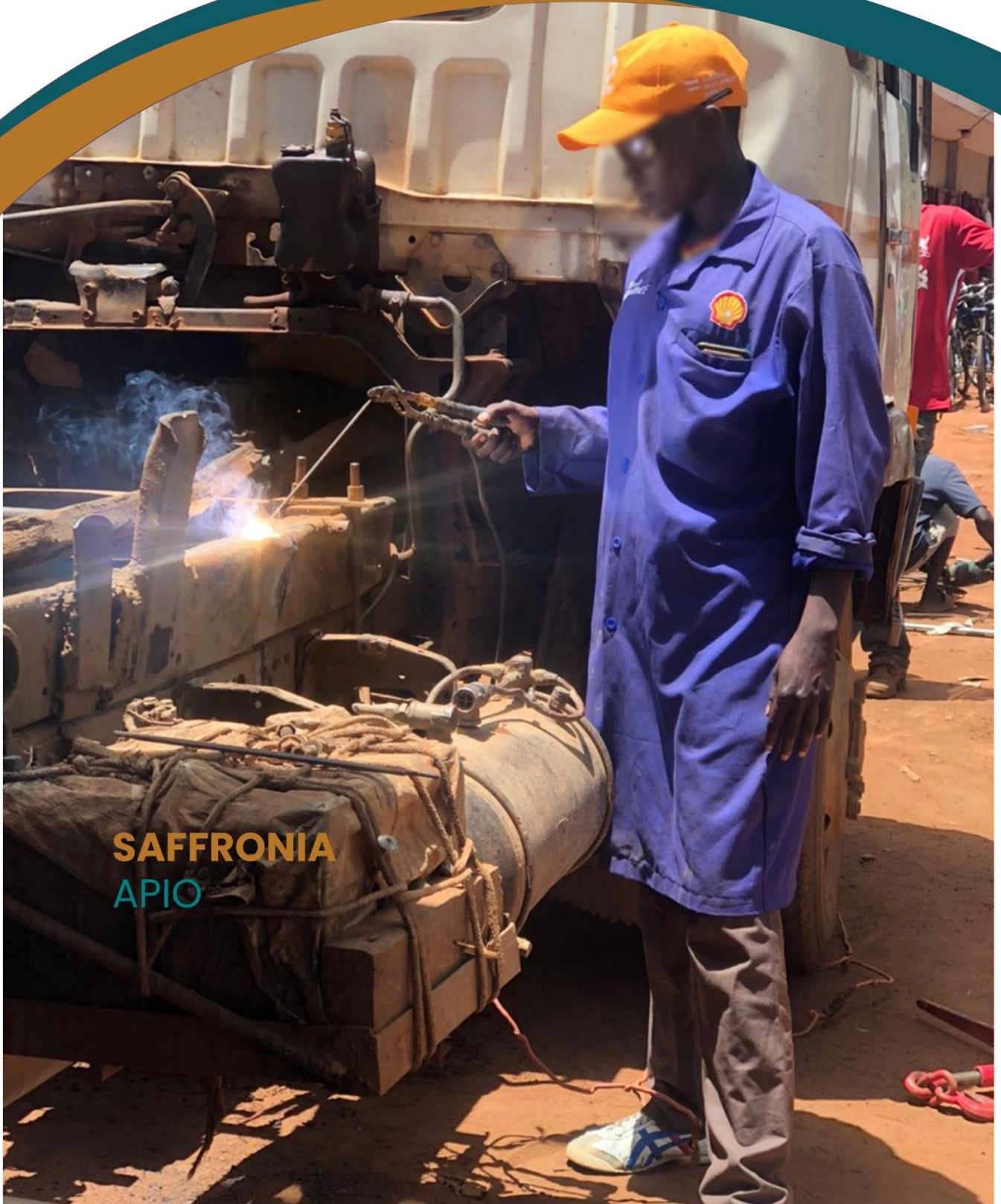
With this paper bead-making, I learned about caring about the environment by collecting and recycling papers like the calendar; it reduces paper dumping.

I want to promote my knitting business of making swimming costumes besides paper beads. I would also like to expand to the tailoring business, whereby I would be knitting sweaters, head socks, and babies' shoes made out of threads. However, the lack of capital to buy the machine for making sweaters is the only thing preventing me from expanding my activities.

The GWED-G team frequently monitors and follows my business and advises me. GWED-G needs to extend its support to child mothers who are still many in the community through the use of the community who knows these people well.

I am so glad that GWED-G supports my business, and I pray they continue extending their support to many people in the community.

6. Creating new opportunities for young women in male-dominated trades



I'm Saffronia Apio. I am 22 years of age and a resident of Otong village, Gaya parish, Pabbo sub-county in Amuru district.

I lived in Pabbo for only four years and later moved to Otong village with my mother, where I lived for about nine years and continued with school from Primary 2 to Primary 6.

While in Otong, my life was threatened by my step-siblings, who didn't like me. As a result, I was taken to live in Atiak Sub County with my grandmother for two years, where I repeated Primary 6. After about two years, I moved back to Pabbo.

My father was a polygamous man with two wives and a total of 7 children. Problems came in with the lack of school fees. He could not afford to pay for all my siblings and me to attend school, so we were encouraged to get married as girls.

Most of my sisters started cohabiting with men, but my case was different. I wanted to attend school, and my father instructed me to farm and pay my fees.

At 13, I started learning motorbike repair, where I got some little money, bought requirements, and sat Primary Leaving Exams (PLE), where I attained 4th grade. My father was not pleased with these scores and told me to retake the PLE, but I still got 4th grade.

I needed to score higher to qualify to join a secondary school, so I borrowed a motorcycle from a friend and started a boda-boda business to raise money for my technical school.

In 2016, I joined the St Janani Loum Vocational Training Center, where I was awarded a certificate.

Raising the tuition of sh700,000 would allow me to join the St Janani Loum Vocational Training Center through all petty business and farming. Luckily, I kept goats and pigs, so I asked my mother to sell eight goats I used to raise tuition for the first year (Junior 1). Later, during the holiday, I worked at a particular garage doing simple mechanical repairs and earned sh400,000. In 2017, I came to Gulu, where I stayed with an aunt and engaged in petty businesses, making sh100,000 per month for three months.

However, my father disapproved of my work; he despised me and looked down on me, so he took every penny I got to punish me, and consequently, I could not complete my technical education.

In 2019, through petty works at "Jilary" (West Acholi Cooperative Union), I met an Indian gentleman. He took notice of my hard work and sponsored me to attend a technical school in Dokolo, where I was able to complete Junior 2.

I was determined to enroll for Junior 3 but needed to raise the tuition myself; I planted sesame and got three bags. Unfortunately, the Government declared a COVID-19 lockdown in early 2020, and my dream was shuttered.

Since I could not return to school, I planted six (6) acres of sesame and got 6 million out of it, which I invested into the charcoal business in Akaa. At least I was getting enough money to take care of my other siblings and mother; all eyes were on me.

The charcoal business was doing well till I started facing challenges. My charcoal burner was physically assaulted and attained a blot clot in the brain leading to a mental problem, and the thieves stole 100 out of 300 bags. I had to pay many charges at checkpoints, and sometimes I had to leave my motorbike with authority to get money to pay. The charcoal business became risky, and I was not making money, so I quit.

Prayer was my pillar; around the same time the AJWS project started, I told my pastor my sad story, and he referred me to the GWED-G. As a result, the GWED-G team selected me to participate and benefit from project support, allowing me to continue with the mechanics course. In addition, the project also facilitated me to attend two months of training at Prestige driving school. As a result, I can now drive a vehicle.

Currently, I work as a mechanic at Gonge Pa Acholi. Here I repair and weld motorbikes and cars and am paid after doing some casual work. The payment depends on the job— sometimes, it ranges from 3,000 to 10,000 shillings per day on motorbike repair, but when it comes to welding, I earn a lot more, ranging from 10,000 to 50,000 shillings. So in a month, I often save between sh100,000 to sh180,000.

The training has increased my knowledge and skills in mechanics work, especially where I had gaps. The only hardship in this activity was that my father was against mechanics work, yet it was my dream. Mechanics' work is dirty, coupled with harsh work conditions such as working under the sun and carrying heavy spare parts.

Men are never welcoming because women do not traditionally do mechanics, and I have endured lots of negativity and insults from men. Several times people advised me to marry instead of taking away men's work. Nevertheless, I remained focused and accomplished. Men can be tolerated if you are focused; you learn to turn a deaf ear to negative criticism.

Women, too, can do the work that men do even better. And work, no matter how menial, should not be despised. If I had looked down on mechanics beneath me or taken it as strictly a men's job, I would not be where I am today. Patience and bravery are needed. Mechanics work is not easy; becoming a complete expert in it and driving is for the brave.

The psychosocial support and advice from the Executive Director and the GWED-G staff encouraged me to finish the mechanics training amidst the challenges. In addition, since the mechanic's school is within the city, the staff always checked on me to see how I was doing; it gave me hope to finish.

I want to be recruited as a driver in GWED-G or any other company, save up and start up my garage in the Kitgum district. This may be a gradual process, and I want the organization to help me make the necessary connections to others who can support me make my plans a reality.

The organization should continue encouraging and empowering girls not to fear or despise work. I appreciate GWED-G for seeing the capability in me and bringing it out through the skills they supported me with. I want to work with GWED-G as a driver and hope this dream can come true.

7. Developing tailoring skills
and building social capital



MARY
GUMPEROM

I'm Mary Gumperom. I am 23 years old and live in Koch Amar in Amuru District; I have lived here since childhood.

I completed my primary seven education but could not attend secondary school after my PLE examination due to a lack of school fees.

In 2020, during this coronavirus pandemic lockdown, I became pregnant, and the person responsible denied the pregnancy, so I became a single parent and lived at my parents' home.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected my family; businesses were closed, and places like markets where my mother ran a market stall to pay for family needs such as schooling and food were also not doing well. My parents decided to focus on farm work but income from farming seasonal. The family only gets money when we sell off the harvest. We might have much money immediately after the crop is harvested and then almost nothing some months after.

During the pandemic, I used to work for people as a housemaid to meet my basic needs. GWED-G found me through one of the women I worked for; she knew my problems and thought of connecting me to the organization.

I was among the lucky people they assessed and later sponsored to a tailoring school in Gulu. The GWED-G AJWS project paid the cost of my fees and the tailoring materials for all three terms.

In the beginning, my first choice was tailoring: I was interested in tailoring. When GWED-G registered me, I chose to tailor because, with tailoring, you can start the business immediately after finishing and getting the skills. It is an in-demand business because in the villages the community likes sown dresses /clothes like kitenge.

Still, along the way, I did consider taking a hairdressing course instead, but I managed to choose wisely with the guidance and advice of the GWED-G staff. So right now, although I am still at school and left with term one to complete the study, my participation in the project has changed my life in many ways.

Although I am still at the tailoring school, I can earn a little money now. During the practice sessions, we are allowed to create pieces that we later sell; this is how I currently earn money— from the sale of items that I make. I can cut and sew clothes neatly, and my pieces sell out quickly. Customers always buy the clothes that I tailor. I sell the products I sew during my tailoring lessons and earn around sh40,000.

The money I get from the sales is helping for the feeding of the baby back in the village. Although I am not yet supporting my family as well as I would wish since my income is still low, I know it will be fine. My parents are taking good care of my baby, enabling me to concentrate on what I am doing.

8. Beneficiary's hairdressing income assists her mother in starting a business



My name is Judith Apiyo; I'm 19 and from Limo Village in Gulu. I attended Pakwelo primary school.

Things were fine in the days before COVID-19, but the money ran out after the lockdown, with everyone staying home. The businesses of both my father and mother collapsed during the COVID-19 pandemic, so I dropped out of school. My father is a peasant farmer, while my mother is a petty market trader. Even after COVID-19, I stayed home, hoping things would change with time, but it wasn't to be.

Although my parents tried to improve things through farming, the harvest was poor – too much sunshine destroyed much of the crop. At this point, I lost hope of getting an education. Instead, I could see myself becoming a typical village girl living with other girls from the same village until I fell into the trap of boys from the town and became pregnant.

The world changed for me in 2021 after I delivered my baby. As a new mother, I didn't know how to care for my baby and isolated myself from people and friends. Only my mother supported my baby and me; she was there every step of the way and encouraged me to keep going. But unfortunately, I was unable to return to school because my father could pay the school fees, and my baby's father abandoned me when I was still pregnant.

One day, the GWED-G team visited my home while conducting assessments and selections for the AJWS project, and they began asking me questions. When GWED-G selected me as a beneficiary of the AJWS humanitarian support, I was overjoyed to receive a grant to pay for my hairdressing course. GWED-G paid my course fees for three months, and I completed the course successfully.

I now work at a saloon in Gulu city and am paid shs200,000 per month. In addition to my salary, I get daily tips ranging from shs10,000 to shs50,000. Due to this work, I have become independent and supportive of my mother and family. The money I earn from saloon work has helped my mother return to her petty business, and she is doing great. Moreover, this work keeps me busy, so I've forgotten all my troubles.

In the future, I plan to open my saloon in town to train other people interested in saloon work to obtain knowledge like me.

I thank GWED-G for the huge support offered to me at the right time of need and request that they continue to open their hands to others so that those who have lost hope in life also gain back their lost hope.

9. Saving up for a course in early childhood development



ALOYO
IRENE

My name is Aloyo Irene, and I am 30 years old and from Layibi Division in Gulu City. When COVID-19 struck, I was studying for a certificate in early childhood development at Kitgum Technical Institute.

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted my course, yet I only had one exam to complete. So after that, I had nothing to do but come back home and stay without doing anything, and life was tough. Since raising tuition was a challenge, I was stuck with no hope of returning to the course after the lockdown. In the end, I managed to pay only my examination fees following the first lockdown.

I later learned that GWED-G provides financial assistance to young women who want to start their own businesses. When I heard this good news, I rushed to the GWED-G office, where I met the Director and the program team, who briefed me about the AJWS humanitarian project.

GWED-G later paid for my three-month hairdressing course. I learned many skills in the process, including hairdressing and styling, retouching and treatment, financial management, plaiting, and general saloon management.

I have completed the training and am operating my saloon, earning between Sh20,000 and Sh50,000 per day. I save shs200,000 monthly. However, because I am working from home, I am experiencing a space challenge. I plan to move to a bigger place where I can train others to provide services like fashion and design, especially for weddings and parties.

My goal is to save money to complete my early childhood development course, which I am yet to finish.

My sincere thanks go to the GWED-G for the great support and love they have shown me, and I request that GWED-G render the same to other people in need.

“ I have completed the training and am operating my saloon, earning between Sh20,000 and Sh50,000 per day. I save shs200,000 monthly ”

10. Saving up for a course in early childhood development



ATIM
BETTY

I'm Atim Betty; I am 39 years old. I am from Obiya Village in Gulu district. I have lived here for five years now.

The AJWS project is why I was able to pursue my education degree in special needs at Kyambogo University, which I have just completed, and I am waiting for my graduation in December 2022.

In 2020, I lost my father; at the time, I was in my second year at Kyambogo university, and he was helping me pay my tuition. Unfortunately, we lost him during the COVID-19 lockdown, which was very stressful. Life became difficult, and I struggled to cope without my father's support. Because of the lockdowns and coronavirus movement restrictions, there was nothing I could do to raise money, forcing me to drop out of university.

Later, an uncle assisted me with some money, and I started a business selling bales of second-hand clothing. However, I still needed to raise more funds to pay my tuition. Even then, lockdowns and coronavirus movement restrictions affected my business—customers had no money to buy clothes, and I could not go to the flea market or auctions. At flea markets/auctions, people come from different districts to sell or buy second-hand items. However, during COVID-19, I could not travel since the Government restricted movement to stop the virus from spreading, so I lost much of my business.

During the lockdown, my family and I struggled to feed ourselves—we could not afford even two meals a day. My business was not taking off because I lacked the money to invest.

I used the small profits I would make to provide food for the entire family and myself. So, I found saving money and investing in growing my business difficult.

I learned about GWED-G through a friend supported by the organization. Because of this, I came to the GWED-G office to meet the director, and after hearing my story, she sent me to the project office to assess me thoroughly for support.

After this, the GWED-G officers selected me as a beneficiary under the AJWS project and offered me working capital to restart my business so I could return to university. Much of the money I invested in growing my second-hand clothing business came from a business grant from GWED-G. As a beneficiary of the GWED-G AJWS project, I received the financial boost I needed, which helped me double the volume of my business. Through my involvement in GWED-G, I also learned how to budget and plan for my business.

The business is a success. My monthly income is sh100,000; this is basically from the clothes sales. I recovered my initial investment and saved enough to pay tuition to complete my degree and cover the transport cost to and from the university. The profit I made from selling clothes also helped me buy and rear two free-range goats that are now multiplying.

When I am in school, my family members help out, improving my family's welfare.

I am what I am now because of the help given to me by GWED-G. I am now stress-free and living happily, hoping to become someone. However, the most important thing was the warm welcome and acceptance of my request by GWED-G; their help rescued me from my problems. Also, the follow-up, the business visits, and the guidance and advice from the staff of GWED-G kept me going and motivated me to concentrate on making my business a success.

I want to support other girls through economic empowerment, like opening a tailoring training shop/center and a cosmetic shop where they would learn and get skills. However, I seek help with income and equipment like tailoring machines to enable me to start a tailoring center.

I am also interested in projects like poultry keeping and farm work which I have already implemented on a small scale through my goat-rearing project. However, the need for more capital and land to start these projects is challenging.

I want to share my story so that the support I got would continue to others because I know that many people are suffering and others are going through worse situations than I did. GWED-G should consider disadvantaged children like child-headed families, orphans, and street kids with any support possible. I want to thank GWED-G and the people funding this project for their support given to me and request that GWED-G continue with the spirit of helping people.

“ I want to support other girls through economic empowerment, like opening a tailoring training shop/center and a cosmetic shop where they would learn and get skills ”

A woman wearing a white headscarf and a white apron is cooking. She is standing next to a blue stove with a large metal pot on it. She is using a long-handled spoon to stir the contents of the pot. In the foreground, there is another metal pot on the floor containing a large quantity of yellow, elongated food items, possibly fried dough or dumplings. A white plastic chair is visible behind her. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

COMMENTARY ON INITIATIVES

BAKING

GWED-G established a baking academy, acquired baking machines, and trained 60 young women in baking. These skills will enable them to become self-employed or secure employment due to gaining these marketable skills.



Following training and mentorship on baking, selected teenage mothers were pictured with Ms. Pamela Angwech, GWED-G Executive Director, and Auma Christine, the baking instructor.



Following training and mentorship on baking, selected teenage mothers were pictured with Ms. Pamela Angwech, GWED-G Executive Director, and Auma Christine, the baking instructor.



3. Mr. Geoffrey Osborn Oceng, Resident District Commissioner (RDC) for Amuru district, presents the Baking Academy students with their certificates of completion.

BAKING



4. The Gulu City Speaker Joyce Rene Alima addresses the Baking Academy trainees as they receive donations of baking equipment.



5. Ms. Betty Ocan, Honorable Member of Parliament for Gulu City, inspects the baking products made by beneficiaries of the AJWS humanitarian project.



6. On the occasion of receiving certificates and donations of baking equipment, Mr. Geoffrey Osborn Oceng, Resident District Commissioner (RDC) for Amuru district, addresses the Baking Academy trainees.

LIVESTOCK KEEPING

“ we supported some beneficiaries to acquire productive assets and launch micro-enterprises rearing and multiplying small animals, such as pigs, poultry, turkeys, and rabbits.”

In times of crisis, productive assets like livestock—goats, pigs, poultry, turkeys, and rabbits can serve as coping mechanisms through the consumption of livestock products or the sale of livestock products to obtain money to meet household expenses. Therefore, we supported some beneficiaries to acquire productive assets and launch micro-enterprises rearing and multiplying small animals, such as pigs, poultry, turkeys, and rabbits. Compared with other commodities, livestock prices rarely fluctuate, they are profitable, and the return on investment per arc of land is much higher.

From a nutrition perspective, several pregnant teenagers and lactating mothers could not afford to purchase protein sources, such as chicken or meat, due to the high cost of living due to the pandemic. As a result, they consumed much less iron-rich foods than they needed to meet their nutritional requirements. We also know that meat consumption is associated with a reduction in stunting, especially during the complementary feeding period. Therefore, livestock micro-enterprises could also enable them to meet their children's nutritional needs.



HANDICRAFTS & ARTISANAL PRODUCTS

There is a great deal of value to be gained from artisanal skills and knowledge. Artisanal skills and expertise have allowed some project beneficiaries to develop sustainable and fulfilling livelihoods that will enrich their lives and those around them. For example, some AJWS project beneficiaries already demonstrate scalable recycling solutions through their paper beads and bag-making micro-enterprise.

Artisanal handicrafts made from locally available materials have enormous commercial potential. Paper-bead and paper-bag-making micro-enterprises are nontraditional meaningful social and economic activities that can motivate young women, increase their incomes and enable them to become self-sufficient. These micro-enterprises have opened doors for some beneficiaries to pursue their dreams of completing University. Their micro-enterprises also allow them to meet their children's educational, nutritional, and health needs.

HAIRDRESSING AND TAILORING

GWED-G supported some young women and adolescent girls to attend training courses to fulfill their aspirations to acquire hairdressing and tailoring skills.

FABRICATION AND WELDING, AND MECHANICAL WORKS

GWED-G also facilitated a few beneficiaries to learn skills as metal fabricators and welders.

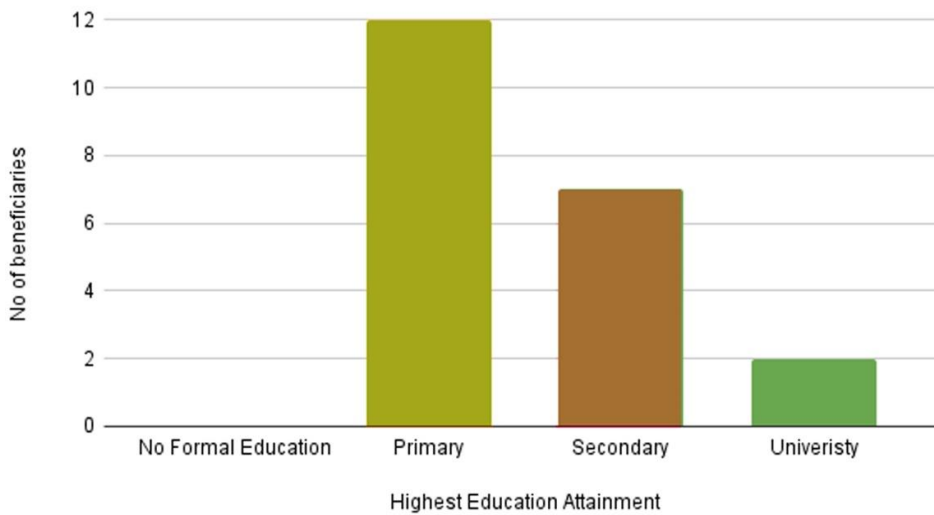


TREE PLANTING

As part of our environmental protection and climate justice initiatives, we encourage beneficiaries to plant trees. It is essential that production practices are sustainable and do not negatively impact the environment, which would undermine the ability of future production to take place. But also, through tree planting, impoverished adolescents and young women can build sustainable livelihoods, mitigate environmental degradation, and reduce climate shocks. Benefits of tree planting include the sale of tree products, reducing environmental degradation, and improving local environments.

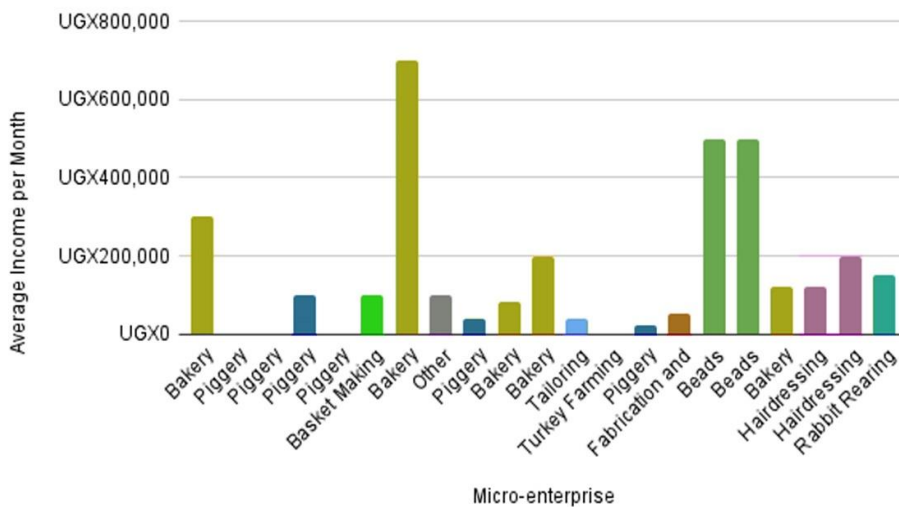
Results at a glance

No of beneficiaries vs. Highest Education Attainment



an income for young women, particularly those with high levels of education (university and secondary), shows a high return on investment. In addition, the determination of these young women to complete their university education is commendable.

Average Income per Month vs. Micro-enterprise



Positive material impact:

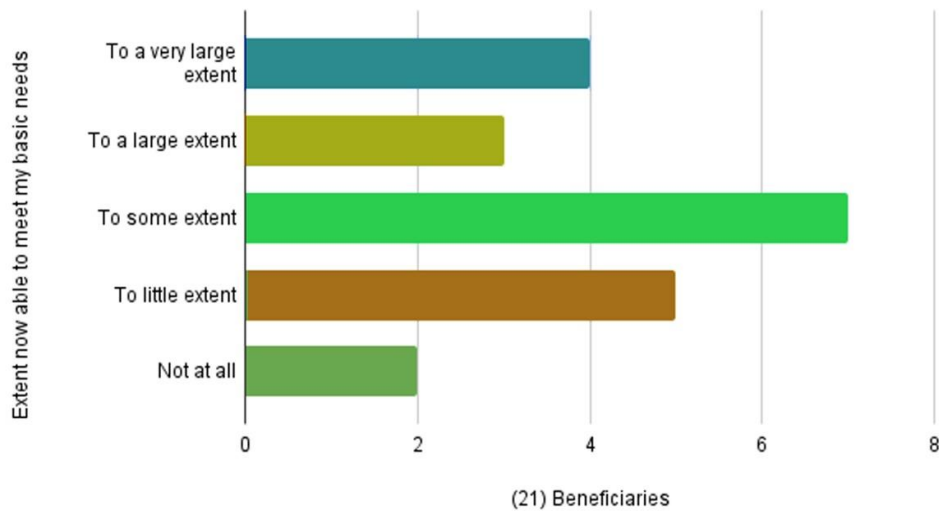
- Improved productivity
- Improved food consumption (quantitative and quality)
- Increased cash income
- Increased assets
- Increased knowledge / more extensive skillset

Positive impact on social capital:

- Widened social network

Some themes emerge in interviews with the beneficiaries: the importance of establishing a personal relationship between the project facilitators and beneficiaries and having a supportive family network. GWED-G project beneficiaries appreciated frequent, regular contact with the project team and the team's responsiveness that motivated or inspired them. Further, **interviews emphasize the importance of social capital as both an alternative marketing method and an element of marketing**, mainly when there are one-off transactions and limited opportunities for building trust through repeated successful impersonal transactions.

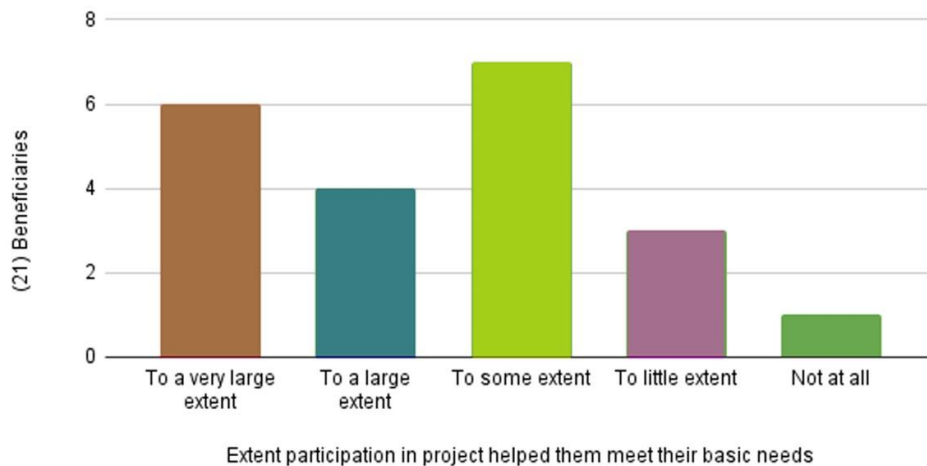
(21) Beneficiaries vs. Extent now able to meet my basic needs



Basic Needs (Food, shelter, education, and health)

There was a sense of empowerment and economic independence among the beneficiaries interviewed. Now that most of their micro businesses are profitable, they can take care of themselves and pay their children's school fees.

(21) Beneficiaries vs. Extent participation in project helped them meet their basic needs

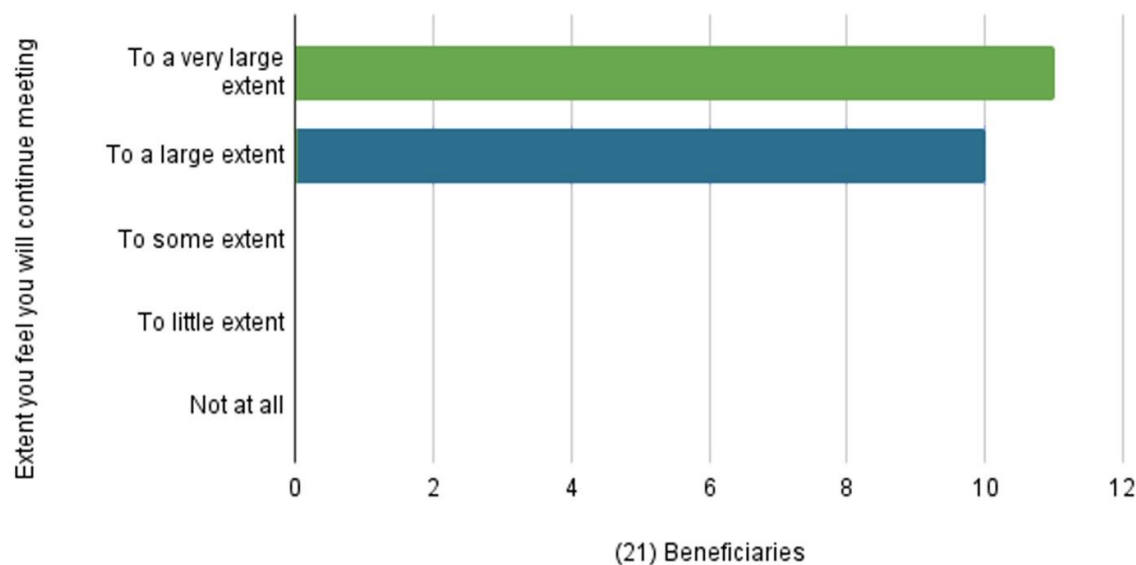


Resources (Employment, Financial resources, assistance, and Debt)

The beneficiaries were generally very optimistic about their micro-enterprises. Admittedly, only some young women are earning, but the majority were able to report positive outcomes. In addition, all participants expressed great appreciation for the knowledge they gained through participation in the project, including, but not limited to, the benefits of formal training. In addition, many participants noted the benefits of having a more extensive social network and increased social capital due to their participation. Overall, the sentiment towards the project interventions was overwhelmingly positive.

However, most beneficiaries stressed the need for business incubation, more training, extension services, and credit access to stabilize and diversify their activities beyond the start-up phase.

(21) Beneficiaries vs. Extent you feel you will continue meeting your basic needs in the future



Sustainability (*Savings, social capital, safety, and health status*)

Micro-enterprises are still in their infancy, so it is too early to determine their sustainability. However, humanitarian assistance has profoundly impacted beneficiaries' lives in some cases, while the improvements were more incremental with other beneficiaries.

It is worth noting that beneficiaries who reported incremental outcomes have yet to receive a cash income from their micro-enterprises. But regardless, they are optimistic that their efforts will pay off in the medium and longer term. Furthermore, they still believe they have gained more from what they have done and are more willing to carry on building their micro-businesses without the assistance of the project.

Participating in these micro-enterprises has allowed beneficiaries to develop problem-solving and decision-making abilities. Furthermore, their participation has helped them build self-esteem. They reported feeling more confident and comfortable expressing themselves, interacting with others, and resisting negative peer pressure. These skills are essential for young people, especially girls, who generally have less experience in public settings.

Most beneficiaries aspire to enhance their communities by becoming trainers and developing others' skills within and beyond their micro businesses. Those trained are, in turn, passing on their knowledge and skills to other young people in their communities. It will have a multiplier effect.



SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES

The following are some sustainability measures we have incorporated into the project. These primarily aim at individuals who have received livelihood interventions focusing on crop farming or livestock as micro businesses.

Combining long-term and short-term livelihood interventions

The majority of the micro-projects supported were short-term and could provide quick results. However, we determined that project beneficiaries would benefit more from a multi-pronged approach. So, we incorporated activities that can sustain beneficiaries over time or develop marketable skills to diversify their earnings.

Skills training and micro-enterprise development

For example, beneficiaries who attended baking training were encouraged to plant eucalyptus, pines, and fruit trees to yield long-term benefits.

Marketable skills to secure employment.

Furthermore, GWED-G assists young women with marketable skills in finding employment. In one example, we connected young women who completed baking training with larger private catering businesses for jobs. In addition to receiving stable wages, these young women are guaranteed employment for at least one year. Most job placements are in hotels, restaurants, food processors, and the hospitality industry.

Upskilling

Through the project, some beneficiaries were also able to upgrade their skills and expand their capabilities. For example, for the young women who chose mechanics and those who pursued skilling in fabrication and welding, we provided them with the opportunity to learn how to drive and repair vehicles and motorcycles.

Crop farming alongside rearing of small livestock

GWED-G facilitated some beneficiaries to take up crop farming and combine this with the rearing of small livestock. Due to this project, several young women who would otherwise have ignored agriculture have acquired agronomy skills. Beneficiaries can thus use these agronomic skills to increase their farm productivity or to provide extension services to other farmers for a small fee.

In addition, GWED-G promoted crop farming alongside small livestock rearing to reduce the seasonality of income. For more long-term micro-projects in livestock keeping like piggery, we provide beneficiaries with vegetable seeds and methods to increase the yield of their vegetable gardens. Therefore, in the short term, beneficiaries can start selling the vegetable and earning an income before their piglets reach maturity. By selling the vegetables they produce, they can still make money and meet the nutritional needs of their families.

Organic production

Moreover, we encourage integrated activities related to organic production to reduce production costs since natural alternatives are cheaper than artificial fertilizers and pesticides. For example, suppose a young woman rears turkeys, poultry, rabbits, or pigs alongside backyard gardening. In that case, we recommend that they use the droppings from their livestock as mature to increase the output from their backyard gardening, which allows both micro-enterprises to thrive. Such integrated activities have become one of the most critical aspects of pest and soil management.

Organic farming can be profitable for farming households. Besides attracting premiums and higher crop returns, certified products allow producers to charge consumers a higher price, thus increasing their income. However, artificial fertilizers and pesticides can be costly, and there are organic alternatives that are more cost-effective. In addition, organic agriculture can generate new business opportunities through pest control and soil management.

Linking and connecting beneficiaries to markets and buyers

We have also linked these young women to the market to ensure the sustainability of their micro-enterprises. GWED-G began by mapping out the existing value chains of the different micro-enterprises. From the get-go, we wanted young women to be market-driven and consumer-oriented in production, so we facilitated them to understand the market, the quality and volume required, and when and where to deliver profitably. We have further helped broker arrangements such as guaranteed prices or guaranteed markets that can incentivize beneficiaries to take their initiatives to a meaningful scale. As a result, some beneficiaries have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with potential buyers.

We have also linked these young women to the market to ensure the sustainability of their micro-enterprises. GWED-G began by mapping out the existing value chains of the different micro-enterprises. From the get-go, we wanted young women to be market-driven and consumer-oriented in production, so we facilitated them to understand the market, the quality and volume required, and when and where to deliver profitably. We have further helped broker arrangements such as guaranteed prices or guaranteed markets that can incentivize beneficiaries to take their initiatives to a meaningful scale. As a result, some beneficiaries have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with potential buyers.

Facilitating access financing via a financial institution (Stanbic Bank)

AJWS project provided beneficiaries with a modest amount of cash to launch their micro-enterprises. However, we know they will need additional capital to develop their initiatives to their full potential.

Therefore, beneficiaries need help accessing financial and credit resources and managing and growing their businesses effectively. As their micro-enterprises develop, these young women seek larger loans to make more significant investments. However, high-interest rates and difficulties obtaining the right financing are significant investment obstacles for micro-enterprises. And some of these micro-enterprises may be at risk of failure due to a lack of working capital. Realizing this, GWED-G brokered and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Stanbic Bank to help beneficiaries access appropriate financing. As a result, Stanbic Bank now offers two financial products and services tailored to micro-enterprises, which AJWS project beneficiaries can access. The first is the Stanbic Bank Women's Loan Program, which provides loans at a subsidized interest rate of 12.5% per year— the lowest rate on the Ugandan market. An annual interest rate of 12.5% means that a borrower must pay back 1% per month in interest, which is affordable for these young women.

Furthermore, currently, Uganda's inflation rate ranges from 9 to 10%, so securing financing at a rate of 12.5% per year is remarkable. Stanbic Bank's initiative will run for five years and target not only the beneficiaries of the AJWS project but also other women-solidarity groups supported by GWED-G. As a result, we now refer and connect these young women with Stanbic Bank.

Stanbic Bank also offers individual business loans at a rate of 15.5% per year, specifically targeted at micro-projects like piggeries and rabbit farming. Similarly, AJWS project beneficiaries can apply for loans under this scheme to invest in their micro-projects. In addition, GWED-G assists these young women in preparing a presentation about their micro-enterprises as part of the loan application process.

In the foreseeable future, the beneficiaries of the AJWS-funded project have a great potential to register their micro-enterprises and grow their businesses to become commercially viable when they can make tax contributions and attract more substantial investments.

Enabling beneficiaries' access to inputs (indigenous seeds)

Also, as part of our food security initiative, we connected project beneficiaries with our seed bank initiative. This seed bank is part of a food security initiative that involves multiplying indigenous seeds and distributing them to beneficiaries. We started the indigenous seed-saving initiative in response to the seed crisis. The current situation is that households must buy new seeds each season since the planted seed varieties cannot reproduce. One cannot help but recall when our parents and grandparents picked and saved the finest grains from their gardens for growing the following year. In addition, promoting indigenous seeds that families can use for many years indirectly addresses environmental justice issues and climate change, both related to the use of Genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Thus, the indigenous seeds we distribute to project beneficiaries can be reproduced and cultivated over several planting seasons.

We refer these young women to the seed bank so they can obtain organic seeds as well as organic fertilizers. Consequently, the beneficiaries will be able to multiply these seeds and reuse them in the future. For example, the seed bank is now distributing some varieties of cassava that grow and last for three years before rotting. These are indigenous cassava species that we had previously, which are now accessible to communities via the seed bank and can provide food security for families again. In return, we expect beneficiaries to contribute to strengthening the seed bank. The seed bank even offers seeds to those who cannot afford to buy them. However, recipients are responsible for producing, multiplying, and caring for the seeds. Therefore, if someone receives seeds as a gift, we expect them to return the favor by donating some seeds. For example, if someone receives 1 kilogram of seeds, they give back 2 kilograms to the seed bank.

Food sovereignty

Indigenous seed security is part of a global conversation about food sovereignty. For example, COVID-19 exposed how heavily rural farmers depend on large corporations for seeds, pesticides, and fertilizer. Food sovereignty means food production ensures food security for the local population and that the local community controls the processes that feed the community (seeds, conservation agriculture, organic farming). Sovereignty in food production and consumption is a political act to empower farmers to control their lives and food systems. Therefore, farmers must take responsibility for their lives and food systems by owning their seeds, producing their fertilizers and pesticides, and encouraging the local production and maintenance of agricultural tools – or, in other words, taking complete control of the means of the production process. With the creation of an indigenous seed bank, we are taking the conversation about seed security and food sovereignty forward.

Strengthening family environments to foster the resilience of adolescent girls and young women

To address the economic vulnerability that fuels teenage pregnancy and child marriage, we worked with adolescent girls and their parents and caregivers to develop coping strategies. In addition, we prioritized interventions to secure the livelihoods of teenage girls and their families, help them prevent income losses, and recover from pandemic-related challenges.

Finally, we mediated family meetings, particularly for teenage mothers who may be pressured into marriage by their parents/caregivers.

Family meetings also ensure that beneficiaries retain control and benefit from their income since some still live at home.

In our work with families, we ask them to assist the girls in overcoming the stigma associated with having a baby out of wedlock or becoming a teenage mother, single parenthood, and the consequent dropping out of school. In addition, it is beneficial for them to receive mentoring and coaching from older women and family members since some girls are ages 12, 13, and 15 and need to gain experience with motherhood. As a result, they are better able to deal with the responsibilities associated with motherhood.

Developing beneficiaries' social assets

Through participation in the project, beneficiaries have built social networks. Besides providing valuable connections, information, and opportunities to receive support, social capital also promotes young people's sense of belonging.

As these young women and adolescent girls develop further in their entrepreneurial ventures, these intangible assets will be crucial to their success.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE THE PROTECTIVE CAPACITY OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN POST-PANDEMIC

Social Development

Develop solutions that address the drivers of teenage pregnancy and child marriage in the broader context focusing on social norms:

To prevent teenage pregnancy, we must work with local communities to address the root causes and risk factors that affect adolescent girls. As part of this effort, we must ally fears and transform cultural mindsets about teenage sexuality and access to sexual and reproductive health services.

Reframe Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health Rights in Behavioural Change Communication:

The public's deep assumptions and implicit understandings of sexual and reproductive health predispose people to view adolescents needing ASRHS services as degenerate or immoral based on current discourse and cultural mindsets. Therefore, Behavioural Change Communication should aim to reframe ASRHR to diffuse harmful othering and help to build support for changes necessary to build public understanding and create demand for policies and programs that more effectively support adolescents.

A campaign for Radical Personal Responsibility among adolescent girls and young women should be the first step in preventing teenage pregnancy and sexual and gender-based violence:

Adolescents and young women should be supported to develop a wide range of skills and competencies valuable inside and outside the classroom.

To use an analogy, I would prepare if I were going into the jungle. I would bring tools, bug spray, a knife, and weapons to be ready for anything I might encounter. I certainly would expect the jungle to stay the same for me. By being prepared, I can meet with and be with the jungle because it isn't something I have to be afraid of. I'm prepared. Bad things may still happen, but I can't control everything. We need to empower adolescent girls to assess risk factors and protective factors.

Tell stories of teenage motherhood as part of the solution and enlist pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers as messengers:

Did MTV Lower the U.S. Teen Birth Rate?

Economic Development

Promote micro-enterprise/ business incubation

Apart from initial capital for micro-enterprises, livelihoods programming should also provide business incubation, market-based opportunities, and credit access so that beneficiaries can expand, stabilize, and diversify their activities beyond the start-up phase.

Enhance young women's participation in agriculture and agri-food systems across the value chain of production, processing, and trading

There is considerable scope for linking beneficiaries to existing agribusiness value chains. Supporting entrepreneurship along these lines will enable access to new markets and provide opportunities for value creation.

Food Production — Facilitate access to farming innovations and SMART technologies.

Livelihood programs should provide young women and youth with access to affordable SMART technologies and farming innovations. Farming innovation and affordable SMART technologies contribute to household productivity by reducing drudgery and improving resource efficiency. Moreover, they offer opportunities for employment and skill development and for rural entrepreneurs to engage in entrepreneurial activities and develop business models.

With the impact of climate change, the rains are sporadic and unpredictable, making farming risky. Therefore, climate-smart solutions such as

drought-resistant varieties, water-efficient irrigation systems, and conservation agriculture, among others, are vital to promoting year-round crop production

Food Trading— Informal food market businesses "Awaro."

There is no doubt that informal food market businesses are viable micro-enterprises. Food market businesses have become an essential source of income for low-income families. Most food consumed by low-income households comes from informal food markets. Most low-income families purchase some or all nutrient-rich non-staple foods via informal market businesses. However, only a limited amount of micro-enterprise is being carried out compared to their potential. Cash investments are necessary for these Informal food market businesses, "Awaro," to become more vibrant. There is scope for supporting livelihood strategies that address food processing and trade and farm-based initiatives to increase crop productivity and production levels.

Linking and connecting to government extension services

It is critical to work closely with the relevant government ministries to ensure beneficiaries have access to technical skills and extension services. Providing information necessary for the development of linkages empowers beneficiaries without directly providing them with material benefits.

Planting companion plants offers a way to boost backyard gardening. Using Guilds, Companion Plants, and Polycultures to conserve water and soil, adapt to climate change, and prevent pests from taking hold, farmers can boost crop yields and improve crop resilience. Communities can increase their farm productivity by using nitrogen-fixing tree species through agroforestry. Several land-independent agricultural production practices are available to landless women, including vertical farming, drip irrigation, vermin composting or climbing species.

