VOICES INSPIRING CHANGE

UGANDA 2020
Voices Inspiring Change, an initiative of the African Collaborative for Health Financing Solutions (ACS) project, amplifies the voices, needs and perspectives of diverse and underrepresented members of society in sub-Saharan Africa through contextualized storytelling. It aims to fill a persistent gap by engaging and highlighting voices outside the typical stakeholder groups like policy makers, donors, partners, and technical advisers. It seeks to amplify the stories and knowledge of the full range of stakeholders who have a stake in how the universal health coverage (UHC) agenda is shaped and carried forward in their country.

Voices Inspiring Change calls attention to the responsibility of decision-makers to listen to and include critical voices in policy discussions that support their country’s movement towards UHC. Policies are more equitable, responsive, and effective when they are inclusive of the voices they are intended to benefit.
Kaviri ('Ali') is the Team Leader at Kampala's Youth Equity Center, working to amplify young adults' voices when it comes to issues related to gender equality and social justice. We talked about universal health coverage (UHC) and what it means for young people in Uganda.

Q. Why social justice and gender equality, how did you become interested in these issues?

Ali: I was raised by my maternal grandmother in deep, Eastern Uganda. Since I was born out of wedlock, the community did not afford me importance or opportunities, which had a great impact on me. As an adult, my viewpoint changed when I saw an ad from a Women's Rights Organization and applied for their transformative leadership training.
"It is my hope that the UHC roadmap will ensure that the key stakeholders will embrace the plan and achieve sustainable action, and eventually make UHC a reality."

- Kaviri Ali Harrison
Ali continued: Their 6 week intensive training opened my eyes to see the world through a different picture. I saw that we need to change social injustices around domestic violence and other issues that put women on unequal footing. It empowered me to turn my adversity into advocacy.

Q. What does UHC mean to you, and to youth in Uganda?
Ali: UHC is so important for a healthy, productive population, and youth constitute the largest percentage of our population. Young adults need to be at the forefront of UHC in terms of our ideas and educating others. Right now, the biggest challenge to youth in Uganda is unemployment and the lack of youth participation in programs. If we're excluded from decision-making opportunities, it creates a barrier. Plus we have many health challenges, so it is crucial to include our voices, and to implement UHC policies. We need the President, Parliament and Ministry to support us and our involvement.

Q. Where would you like to see Uganda by Vision 2040?
Ali: Medicine in hospitals and health facilities that are able to respond to key issues that populations are facing. I'm envisioning my country being able to respond to emergencies, and an improvement in maternal complications. I want Ugandans to be able to afford healthcare and not rely on fundraising drives. We need to equip and train health care providers to ensure they can do their jobs. In general, I want to see empowerment and self confidence. Governance has a critical role to play, it calls for leadership, transparency and accountability. I'm working to ensure young people play an active role in our country's future.
Q. Tell us about yourself and how you became Executive Director of Uganda's National Consumers Organization.

Robinah: I was working in social work when I met a doctor who was passionate about patients' rights. I lost my brother who unnecessarily died in a hospital, so when that doctor started this organization, I was sucked in. We do what we call the three P's: patient, provider and policy makers. We need everyone to understand each other and see each other's point of view. Our approach is based on constructive engagement.

Q. How are you working to support UHC in Uganda?

Robinah: We currently have a bill in Parliament that we think is going to be very important if we're going to have National Health Insurance. We need a framework for accountability, and a mechanism for holding service providers accountable. We need to have a public private partnership for this to work. In addition to the financing aspect, the government needs to work closely with the private sector to look at prevention, immunization and maternal and newborn health. The biggest challenge for both sectors will be to ensure quality services, responsiveness and getting information to everyone, including the indigent, as well as making sure the information is easy to understand.

We're looking to empower patients to take responsibility for their lives and to hold service providers accountable. Part of my work involves building a bridge to policy makers to ensure that we (civil society and patients) have a seat at the table.
**Grace Kiwanuka, Uganda Healthcare Federation:**

*UHC will never be perfect, and our population is constantly shifting so UHC should constantly be shifting. But with UHC, I'd like to see the end of children dying, the end of under the table payments, access to medication and an affordable health financing mechanism.*

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**Dr. Daniel Okello, Kampala Capital City Authority:**

*My challenge has been to break silos and barriers to create an integrated way of looking at health as the "health everything approach" because in some way, everything leads back to health.*

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**Joseph Ngobi Mwoga, World Health Organization:**

*It is critically important to amplify the voices of the people we serve, which is one of the key areas for the WHO as far as strengthening the movement to achieve UHC.*