



How empowered women are reducing GBV in Nakawuka

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence serve as a powerful platform to raise awareness, advocate for policy changes and foster solidarity among individuals and communities

BY TREVOR LUTALO

Nakawuka sits on the edge of Kajjansi Town Council like a place caught between two worlds. From a distance, the township looks like one of Wakiso district's many fast-growing fringes; new rentals, fresh trading centres, more boda stages, and the occasional half-finished structure waiting for the next payday. But step away from the main road, and the town returns to its true rhythm: the slow pulse of a rural community still anchored in subsistence farming, informal work, and deep poverty.

In these villages, Dyango, Mpumudde, Butega and others, families rely on what they can grow, stitch, weave, or burn into briquettes to survive.

Here, the cost of living is not just about money; it is measured in the weight of domestic tensions, unpaid school fees, broken expectations, and a way of life long shaped by patriarchal norms.

For years, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has been commonplace. Some women have grown into adulthood believing that silence was the only inheritance they were allowed.

But something is shifting. A new form of empowerment, quiet, practical and deeply local, is taking root across Nakawuka. At its heart are women who once felt powerless, and men who once believed authority came from force.

Supported by SOS Children's Villages and its implementing partner Generation Health Initiative (GHI), these communities are discovering that safety begins with livelihoods, and freedom begins with knowledge. And slowly, the cycle is breaking.

Activists working to end gender-based violence say more than 200 caregivers are direct beneficiaries, but the programme's impact stretches to over 2,000 community members. PHOTO/TREVOR LUTALO

INSIDE THE PROGRAMME

To understand the engine behind these changes, one must look at the approach used by SOS Children's Villages and Generation Health Initiative. Moses Tony Lukyamuzi, the Livelihood Officer under the partnership, says everything begins with inclusiveness. "When dealing with GBV, we train everybody in the community irrespective of their gender," he explains. "We deal with women, men, girls, boys, PWDs, and the elderly. We do not discriminate according to gender."

The programme covers parishes in Katabi, Nsaagu, and Nakawuka, reaching villages such as Dyango, Mpumudde, Nalubude, and Butega. But Nakawuka and Nsaagu were chosen specifically after a gap analysis revealed a disturbing trend. "We found that GBV was a major concern around these areas," Lukyamuzi says. "So we had to centre all our activities around GBV and inclusiveness." The results have been remarkable. More than 200 caregivers are direct beneficiaries, but the programme's impact stretches to over 2,000 community members.

"Many people were reluctant and didn't know what to do," he says. "But once we trained them and made them aware of gender norms and empowerment activities, they became eager to learn. A lot of livelihoods have changed." He cites basket-making as one of the most transformative activities. "To our surprise, many people were so interested because they wanted to improve their income," he says. "Now they see the changes we instilled in them, and they want to be part of it."

A Couple's Rebirth

If there is a story that captures the transformation of Nakawuka, it begins in Dyango village, at the home of Brenda Nambusi and Joseph Semaganda. For years, this couple of sixteen years lived like many others, surviving day to day, raising six children on an inconsistent income, and fighting their way through life's pressure points.

Back then, Semaganda drank heavily. Arguments came easily. Peace was fleeting. Violence hovered over the household like a bad spirit.

Today, it is hard to imagine that history. Semaganda stands in his compound, smiling as his children run around him, the air clear of tension. After joining the parenting and GBV intervention training under SOS, he says something changed in him.

"We now make decisions as a unit, and getting out of the pits of poverty is our goal," he says. "I am proud to be a role model man. I am not abusive anymore since I stopped the alcohol. My children are well taken care of and my wife is happier."

Beside him, Nambusi nods in agreement. She is a member of a women's village savings and lending group, where she keeps a portion of the family's earnings to cover school fees, food, and emergencies.

"When we get any income, we sit and plan as a family," she says. "We decide what to buy and when. We also ask the children what they would like to eat. We are a unit."

Their home is a portrait of what empowerment looks like when it enters a family, not loud, not flashy, but marked by harmony. The tension lines have softened. The children smile more. Decisions are shared. And with their new approach to money, the family feels the future is no longer something to fear.

Under the Mango Tree

A few metres away, in another corner of Dyango, transformation takes a more tangible form. Under an old mango tree, so old it no longer bears fruit but still shades the ground with its wide canopy, women sit weaving baskets from recycled plastic and making briquettes. The colours of the baskets are vibrant: yellows, greens, blues, and combinations that look like the patterns of hope itself.

This is where 28-year-old Mwajuma Nakanda spends most of her days. She is a mother of four, married to Ismail Mubiru, and for years, her marriage carried a heavy shadow.

Her husband took a second wife. Finances collapsed. She was pushed to the edge.

"He couldn't provide our children's school fees anymore," she recalls. "I had to do odd jobs to maintain the family."

The situation could easily have broken her, but the women's groups of-

fered her something she had never experienced, economic independence and a community of women who understood her struggles.

"Ever since SOS came into our lives, things have changed," she says. "I am in a women's group where we save, make baskets for sale, and also make briquettes. The money helps me support our children and home. My husband is not burdened and he has changed the way he treats the family."

As she speaks, her hands continue weaving with the rhythm of someone who has done it for years. The mango tree, once simply a resting place, is now a workshop, a classroom, a safe space. Women come here bruised by life but leave with skills, income, and dignity.

The Power of Women's Groups

In neighbouring Butega village, Prossy Nassolo chairs a group of 35 women. Their gatherings are equal parts financial forum and emotional refuge. With savings, lending, and open discussions about what happens in their homes, the group has become a lifeline.

"We have been able to save and also lend each other money, which has changed our businesses," Nassolo says.

"But it is also where we share our problems. You realise you are not alone."

The groups have allowed women to grow small businesses, selling vegetables, rearing poultry, weaving baskets, or making charcoal briquettes. Some now pay school fees without relying on their husbands. Some have opened shops. Some have left violent homes. Others have stayed, stronger, better equipped, and more respected. Local leaders say the change is visible.

The Numbers Tell Their Own Story

Damalie Namala, a local leader in Nakawuka, says cases of GBV have gradually dropped. Women now understand where to report, how to seek help, and how to protect themselves.

"Those that come through have been well handled," she says. "Women are more confident now because of the empowerment."

Cotrida Namirembe, vice chairperson LC1 of Mpumudde, has seen similar progress.

"The place of women in the community has changed," she says. "The girl child has been elevated. People here now understand that violence is not a way of solving problems."

The ripple effects are visible even among teenagers, who now see women in leadership positions within the savings groups. In a community that once believed daughters were "marriage material" before they were anything else, such visibility represents a profound cultural shift.