

# IMAGINE UGANDA

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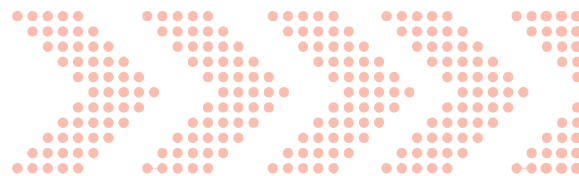
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# Note from CEO



Dear reader,

A warm welcome yet again to *Imagine Uganda magazine*, Issue 11. I am happy to share the positive strides we have taken in the integration of digital technology into the organisation and projects. This has fundamentally changed how we operate, challenged the status quo and enabled us to acquire new skills as well as experiences, thus helping us to be more efficient. For example, under a virtual exchange project dubbed Umunthu, the project staff were given an all-time online experience with platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom and other social media engagements during learning sessions for professional development. Furthermore, we have built capacities of the Marketing Committee members (MCs) from farmer groups under the *Action for Livelihood Enhancement in Northern Uganda (ALENU)* on market intelligence and information. The MCs were trained and equipped with mobile phones to collect data from 40 markets across the project districts and upload information in the Market Information System (MIS) application. The generated reports have continued to inform the decisions made by farmers on market prices, when to sell, where to sell and at how much. Through digital ambassadors, under the *Improving the Economic Resilience of West Nile Youth in the Face of Covid-19* project, the youth have embraced the use of technology and gone on to thrive in the economic markets.

In this Issue, we feature the story of Resty Asingwire, a victim of early child marriage because of the emotional and psychological torture she suffered while at her father's house, now a young mother-to-be and a second wife, and not certain of her life even after giving birth. We also bring to you the story of Simon Peter Oyera, an advocate of good policies and practices against drug and alcohol abuse. Regarding the pandemic era - a period of business resilience, we present to you the stories of Ronald Anican, a young entrepreneur, Sylvia Tushemerirwe, a trader/ business woman and Ojok Ivan Oketa, a lead farmer belonging to Ribeber farmer group – a model apiculture farm in Omoro district. We also share more thoughts and experiences from staff under different projects.

As I conclude, I would like to encourage you to share your views and feedback on our work as well as the stories. Please visit our website on [www.advanceafrika.org](http://www.advanceafrika.org)

All of us at Advance Afrika thank you for your continued support and cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

**Sharon Atukunda**  
Chief Executive Officer

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**He promised to pay my school fees and take care of me**



# Resty Asingwire

**M**y name is Resty Asingwire. I am 16 years old, and the sixth child out of nine children. My mother is a Munyarwanda and my father is a Mukiga. I lived with both my parents until my father got another wife and started beating and mocking my mother for having only one boy out of nine children and chased her away from home. At that time, I had completed my P.7 at Ibanda Central Primary School and joined Kibubura. During holiday time, we would go to the tea farms and help our parents harvest the tea or with planting and weeding.

I met this man who used to bring me accompaniments for tea at the farm. He bought me shoes and other small gifts, and we became friends. I would escape from my parents and siblings to spend more time with my new friend. He took me to his home one time and it was peaceful compared to my home where we were always quarrelling and arguing with our step-siblings. He promised to take good care of me and also to pay my school fees for the remaining school terms until I finished.

All this time, he never told me he was a married man. Before I knew it, I had conceived by him. When my father realised that I was expecting, he chased me away from home. When I reached my husband's house, I lived there for a few days and later found out that he had recently sent his wife and the children to the village so that I could live with him.

That was when I found out I was a second wife. He had three other children. One was twelve years old, the second was three and the third two. The people of this village told me I had stolen someone's husband. I ignored all that because I was already pregnant and my father had chased me away from his home. I had nowhere else to go. I wake up in the morning, do my house chores, go to the tea plantation and work with my husband.

I was approached by a social worker from Advance Afrika who gave me guidance and counselling. She encouraged me to be strong and willing to go back to school after I give birth. I told her all my other elder siblings had completed school and were even working. I have missed out on opportunities because I have not even completed S.4. An organisation came here one day and wanted to enrol me for tailoring but they were taking only girls who had completed S.4.

After three weeks, Advance Afrika organised community dialogues on the rights of children and women through plays and songs. I have learnt a lot. Surely, we go through these things as children and as wives at home. The husband comes home late after drinking with friends and disturbs the peace in the home but we have to pray for them to change.

After giving birth, I pray I get a scholarship and go back to school and finish S.4. I want to become a nurse one day or to become a tailor. I advise all young girls out there to study and be successful people if they have someone to pay school fees for them.



When my father realised that I was expecting, he chased me away from home.

# My parents did not give up on me while I was losing myself to alcohol and drugs

Simon Peter Oyera



**Simon Oyera, now an advocate of good practices and policies against alcohol and drug abuse**

**M**y name is Simon Peter Oyera. I am 28 years old. I live in Layibi, Gulu city with my parents and siblings. It has been one year out of prison by the grace of God. As a young person I have always wanted to make my parents proud but I ended up disappointing them. I would find myself involved in different cliques doing drugs. After, I would go back home intoxicated and grab anything available, and sell it to get more money for drugs. I would fight with my siblings or anyone who got in my way. As a result, my parents sent me to jail ten times. The eleventh time I was imprisoned for 10 months, I had stolen something from the neighbours and they beat me up. I almost died. My mother came to my rescue and asked them to stop beating me; she promised that she was going to take me to prison. She took me to Amuru Prison where I was convicted.

This was the turning point in my life. I decided to go into prayer and started reflecting on my life. I would sit in prison and remember how much my mother loved me and tried to take care of me but I always disappointed

her. I talked to the welfare and social worker. She gave me counselling and guidance. She encouraged me to apologise to my mother. I wrote a letter to her and promised not to be involved in actions that soil her name again. I also participated in the life skills and entrepreneurship training from Advance Afrika where I got skills in how to take good care of a business, saving, confidence and building self-esteem. I apologized to my siblings also, and now we are in good terms.

I take care of my father's farm currently at Koro as the farm manager and here I work very hard to make my parents proud of me. We grow cassava, soya and beans, and we are doing well. My mother is happy with the progress I have made at the farm and in general. I am in good health. I have learnt to work hard to earn money to make a living instead of indulging in alcohol and drug abuse or picking other people's things that can get you killed. It is a process, but

I know I will make it with determination and persistence.

## **What the mother had to say**

Simon was not behaving well. He joined a bad group. They would take a lot of drugs and then his health would totally deteriorate. You would find him looking sick and malnourished. When he wanted, he would return home but then he would pick things from my room without permission and sell them. I have taken him to prison because it is the only place I know that could transform him. He kept disappointing me by involving himself in the same crime shortly after release each time but I did not give up. Now he is a very good boy. He left the bad groups and he works with his father on the farm. He is more responsible. He encourages his young siblings to stay on the right path and always keep busy to avoid doing drugs and drinking alcohol. The Welfare Officer also calls me once in a while to check on him and I thank God my son has totally improved.



**Simon and his mother during this interview with AA project coordinator**

# The Pandemic Era

a period of business resilience

Ronald Anican



I am 25 years of age. I reside in Padea trading centre, Jangokoro sub-county. I am a young entrepreneur and a person living with disability. Regardless of my condition, I managed to set up a business in Padea trading centre that has enabled me to sustain myself and my family. I trade in roasted bananas (*gonja*) and tea. Through my engagement with Advance Afrika and Faraja Africa Foundation, I have gained knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship and life skills. I also got support through business booster kits.

Before my participation in the training in entrepreneurship, life skills and alternative sources of livelihood, I used to roast my *gonja* using the traditional method of setting a wire mesh on three stones. It was tedious, time-consuming and unhygienic, and I made minimal

profit. However, after the training, I received a booster kit in the form of a raised charcoal stove, a wire mesh, a table, an umbrella, an apron and a dozen plates and cups. This was indeed a big boost to my business. I realised an increase in profit from the business. Before I received the boost, I would get a profit of 5,000 shillings after a day's sale. Afterwards, my profit doubled as I now record a profit of 10,000 shillings per day. The charcoal stove has enabled me to roast more bananas and have them readily available for my customers compared to before when they had to wait longer. Also, because I work at a table under an umbrella, I am organised and dust doesn't affect my *gonja*. I save a total of 3,000 shillings per day and plan to save for a year before I set up another investment.

Sylvia Tushemerirwe



With the training I received from Advance Afrika, I learnt to reduce the amount of goods I give out on credit.



VSLA training for women and women groups in Bihanga, Buhweju district

## Thanks to VSLA training and saving, I was able to purchase more stock for my business before it collapsed

My name is Sylvia Tushemerirwe. I am 37 years old. I have three children and have been married for 12 years. I have been in business since 2016 selling shoes, slippers and a few household items. I had planned to expand this shop in two years' time. My profit was between 30,000 shillings and 50,000 shillings each month. Everything was moving on fairly well before lockdown because, my shop is in the trading centre so a lot of customers would come to buy shoes and slippers.

Transport was expensive, the shops I bought my items from were also expensive. When I travelled the first time, I brought some items and I increased the price of the items as well but slowly the number of customers started reducing. Since then, stock has not been moving well in my shop here. People take goods on credit and they pay back very slowly. Up to now, some of them have not yet paid the debt fully.

My shop was about to close because I had no stock to put in it but I did not give up. I continued to put my savings in the business because I knew the situation would return to normal and I would make profits as before. I am a member of a kigombe. We usually save money and share it amongst ourselves at the end of the year. However, since last year we have been struggling. I had saved some money but it was not enough to get me a loan to boost my business.

Our business mentor, **Ms. Elizabeth Bigambwamukama**, introduced our kigombe to training on VSLA conducted by a team from Advance Afrika here in Bihanga. She encouraged us to attend and participate in this training to improve on our saving habits and strengthen our group so that some people are able to access loan services to grow their businesses. Through the training, we were taught financial literacy, entrepreneurship and life skills as well.

With the knowledge acquired and the experience that I have in business, I have learnt how to treat customers when they come to my shop. I will give them attention and help them choose the shoes that fit them well and look good on them. I also plan to apply for a loan in six months' time to boost my business.

My biggest challenge now is that customers are seasonal here and also some customers take things on credit and delay in paying. With the training I received from Advance Afrika, I learnt to reduce the amount of goods I give out on credit. I make sure the customer has to pay at least 70 per cent of price of the item before I give it to them to reduce the debt.

With help from Advance Afrika, we have registered our VSLA group and we look forward to expanding our group and getting more opportunities in government, like the Parish Development Model funds that have a low interest rate.





Ojok Ivan Akena,

model farmer in Apiculture, Omoro district



Under the ALENU intervention, we are promoting apiary

Ojok Ivan Akena, leader of Rubangatwero farmer group and Denis, a member of the group, pose behind one of the KTV modern beehives received under the ALENU action

My name is Ojok Ivan Akena. I am a member and the agro-ecology champion of Rubangatwero farmer group in Labujen village, Lujorongole parish in Lakwana sub-county, Omoro district. Since 2016, I have been practising diversified farming with crops like soya beans and beans, rearing goats and bee-keeping. Because of the unpredictable seasons and weather patterns, crop farming became very challenging, so I chose to concentrate on bee-keeping. I started with five local beehives and slowly increased the numbers to about 56 hives (16 beehives here in the Labujen site and 40 beehives in Laminadera sites, Labor sub-county). The local hives

for honey production fetch little honey so that when I sell the honey I get little profit because the hives take long to make the honey. However, I have benefitted more from bee-keeping compared to other types of farming because of the several products I get from honey like honey, beeswax, candles, soap and propolis.

Under the ALENU intervention, we are promoting apiary. The project distributed to each group member five KTB modern beehives, harvesting equipment like smokers and bee suits and provided training in apiary management and value addition. Before my group was



Members of Rubangtvero farmer group during one of their weekly meetings in Lakwana sub-county, Omoro district

supported by the project, most of us here were using local hives only, using grass to smoke the hives during harvesting and sometimes the ash would go into the honey, tampering with the quality. Harvesting could only be done late in the night, but now we harvest any time, including evening and early in the morning. In addition, from the capacity-building provided by the project, the knowledge and expertise I acquired made me a resourceful person in the community. My services are hired to harvest honey for people in the area because of our modern equipment and knowledge, and we also train the members of our community in bee-keeping. This is supporting the group with generating income because of the small fee I charge on the services to non-group members.

With support from Bee House, my group is piloting honey production with modern beehives. Bee House will support the group to establish a demonstration site for apiary consisting of 100 modern hives. The farmers will receive intense training in modern beekeeping technologies. Bee House products will provide different beehive technologies to be displayed in the apiary demonstration area. The farmers will help to collect honey and other bee products from apiary farmers in the district. In addition, they will promote Bee House Products Ltd in the region and support farmers to access inputs from the private actor. So far, with the money the group makes and part of its savings, the group intends to fence the proposed demonstration site to protect it from animals that keep passing by, rubbing themselves on the trees and ending up making the bees wild. The bees then sting the people around. We will also make it a resource centre for other people to learn about bee-keeping. We expect to expand with 10 more beehives next month. We got a local carpenter and farmer to make for us the modern beehive at 35,000/=, not at 70,000/= as it is sold in other places. We shall plough this piece of land in the rainy season and plant

flowers around. The bees pollinate the flowers and pick the nectar, increasing the honey production.

Forming a group strengthened us because, individually, we all used to sell the honey from here but we realised that we were being cheated. So, as a group, we collect our honey, weigh it and sell it at about 8,500/= to 9,000/= unprocessed to the buyers. Now we can even sell our honey to Bee House. In one harvest season, the KTB hive produces 15 kilograms, the other hives give us 8 kilograms in a season and we have about three seasons in a year.

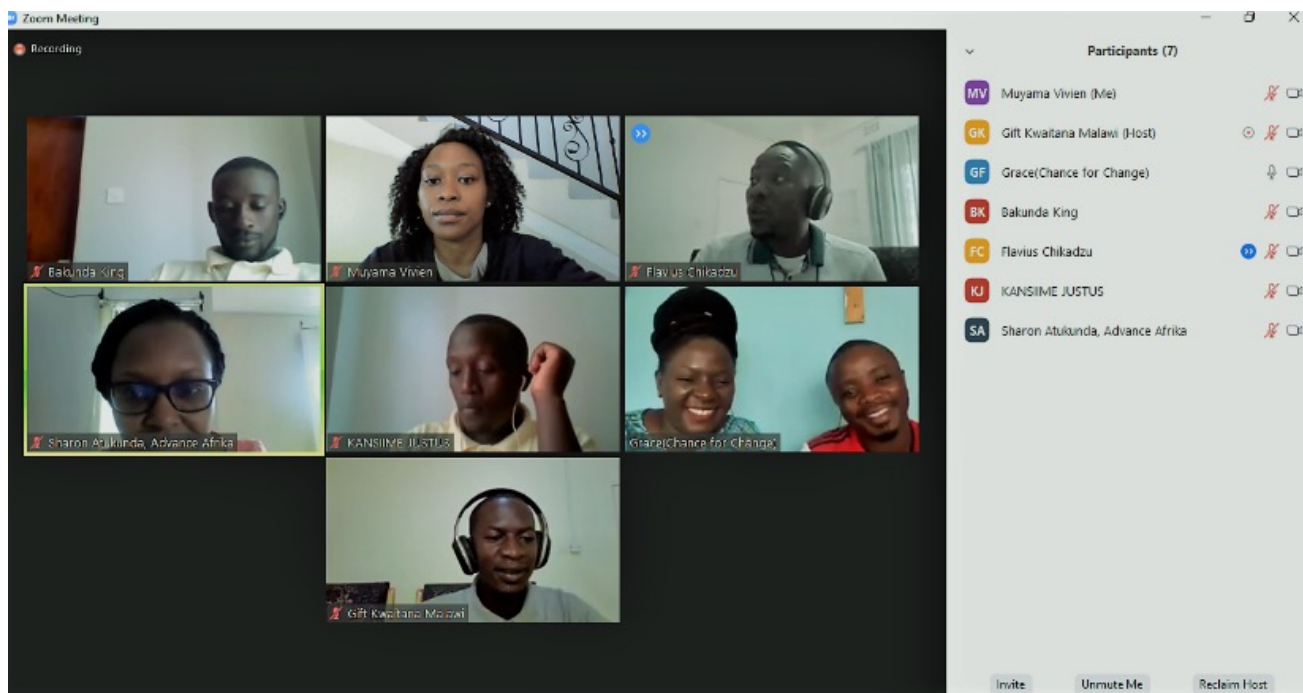
Advance Afrika visited our group, trained group leaders in VSLA, apiary and vet practices as peer trainers. The only challenge we have is the person who was trained for VSLA left the group. I wish they could train another person for us. Previously our beehives were not colonised but now we now know how to bait bees and thus our production has increased.

### **Nyapoli Lucy, a member of the group, says it is better to work in a group than individually.**

We even receive seedlings, plant crops and sell them to earn a living. Also, when you are organised in a group, and it is easy to access incentives from the government. The challenge we fear now is the likelihood of a fire outbreak during the dry season, animals moving around that end up rubbing on the trees and disturbing the hives, price fluctuation, the high cost of beehives, and some small insects that enter the beehives so that they cannot be colonised. Furthermore, we still do not have some harvesting equipment.

As a group, though, we have decided we shall use grass to cover the iron sheets on the beehives to protect them from direct sunlight and we hope to acquire tight covers that leave only a small space for the bees to escape.

## Umunthu – The experience of a virtual exchange programme



NOREC participants from AA and C4C during a learning session.

It all started with an online training session on successful digital cooperation and capacity-building across borders for resource persons working under the Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (NOREC)-supported projects. We were taught to appreciate communication across different cultures and organisations. We embraced the use of digital platforms together with our partner, Chance for Change in Malawi, for communication. We formed a WhatsApp group, made constant phone calls and exchanged emails, and used Zoom or Microsoft Teams for learning sessions.

The experience taught us to improve on our presentation skills, critical thinking, networking, responsible use of gadgets such as phones and laptops, writing emails and communication skills during virtual interactions with facilitators and stakeholders. The COVID-19 restrictions negatively affected the implementation of some programme activities, for example our work with Uganda Prisons Service, and also created stigma and fear within the communities.

In the course of the action, we complemented the online sessions with a few experiential learning sessions. For example, we held an experiential learning session with



Prison social workers, AA-NOREC participants and other AA staff after training on Cognitive Behaviour and Rebuilding identity.

prison social workers, the NOREC participants and a few staff of Advance Afrika on cognitive behaviour and rebuilding identity at the Gulu office. Cognitive behaviour, rebuilding one's identity and how to run a reformatory centre, are key areas where Advance Afrika has considered for further collaboration with Chance for Change in a new application with the support of NOREC in 2022 that will contribute to our long-term objective of setting up a reformatory centre (halfway home).

## Growth and investment opportunities for farmer groups



Members of Winyeber farmer group pose for a group photo with Beatrice from Centenary Bank, Gulu after opening up a VSLA account

The Action for Livelihood Enhancement in Northern Uganda (ALENU) project seeks to foster linkages between smallholder farmers, agro-processors and market operators. Under the action, farm clinics and agribusinesses focusing on the needs of the farmer groups, such as access to finance and credit, financial literacy, growth and investment opportunities were prioritised. This was intended to create a direct link between the farmer groups and formal banks to be able to gain access to the necessary financial services, strengthen their capacity, and engage with and benefit from the different products and services offered to smallholder farmers in the financial institutions.

Subsequently, 10 farmer groups were each able to open up a VSLA account with Centenary Bank while individual members also opened individual accounts for easy access to banking services.

*“Since our group was registered under ALENU programme, we were saving and lending out money to members while keeping the remaining money with the treasurer, which was risky in case of fire and theft,” Mr Jacob Anywar from Winyeber farmer group recounted.*

Advance Afrika, in collaboration with Centenary Bank, Market branch, Gulu and Equity Bank, Gulu organised a financial clinic for the farmer groups. The two financial institutions shared with the farmers products and services they offer and the procedures for access-



Centenary bank staff guiding one of the members of the group through the process of opening an account.

ing these services. The loans officer encouraged the groups to acquire loans as long as they are engaged in a productive activity and are able to pay back the loan.

Beatrice, from Centenary Bank, re-emphasized that the VSLA account has no monthly charges and the group can deposit money with any nearby bank agent. During the sensitisation she said that any two of the signatories can sign and withdraw money from the account on behalf of the group.

During the clinic, both banks emphasised the need for farmers to be organised in groups in order to benefit from their services, and that the groups intending to engage with the bank should be registered with the district and must be recommended by the district to the bank.

# TEAM-BUILDING IN GULU

Under the AGIAMONDO cooperation, Ms Carla Lisa Heimann, a CPS member of staff with Advance Afrika, organised a treat for the team in Gulu at the Recreation Project in Gulu city. The team-building activities were meant to improve team unity. Key tasks such as a tactical course were performed where the team had to work

together to complete tasks. Discussion and reflection sessions were also held. From these sessions, the team was able to get to know one another's strengths and how to use them to improve work relationships. Also, some timid members of the team showed improvement in their confidence.



**Top:** The team posing for a group photo and  
**Bottom:** Listening carefully ahead of the tasks.



# Staff experiences on the project implemented



▶  
**Mukhwana  
Eveline**

***Accounts and Administrative Assistant supporting ALENU/DINU Project; Action for Livelihood Enhancement in Northern Uganda/Development Initiative for Northern Uganda.***

This project has provided an opportunity for me to increase my expertise in financial management and leadership, created a better atmosphere for networking and strengthening relationships, and elevated my desire for involvement in agriculture. I have witnessed an increase in the production of diversified foods to improve maternal and child nutrition, and easy accessibility to farmer markets through linkages and information technology devices to digitally collect and exchange market information.



▶  
**Charles  
Mutungi**

***Accounts and Admin Assistant under Improving the Economic Resilience of West Nile Youth in the Face of COVID-19.***

I have learnt a lot about public health and occupational health from the consultants facilitated by Advance Afrika, which has enhanced my understanding of the various diseases affecting and enabled me to acquire mechanisms to prevent transmission of these diseases in the communities. There has been an improvement in hygiene in the areas where the young entrepreneurs operate from. Washing facilities have been observed in their business premises and there is general cleanliness among their neighbours both at work and where they reside.



▶  
**Sharon Alobo**

***Project Officer under the Bridging Opportunities for Effective and Productive Livelihood of youth prison inmates and ex-inmates in Northern Uganda.***

I have been able to professionally coordinate with the project stakeholders, which has in turn not only built on my interpersonal skills but also enlarged my network. This project has created an attitude change in most of the stakeholders with regard to empowerment and reintegration of youth ex-inmates. As of now, community members and leaders are taking responsibility and engaging themselves in talks on the reintegration of youth ex-inmates to ensure peaceful co-existence between offenders and their victims.



▶  
**Ayika Juliana  
Rose**

***Project Officer working under the Improving the Economic Resilience of West Nile Youth in the Face of COVID-19 project.***

This experience has instilled in me values such as courageous leadership, good communication and excellent professional presentation, through active participation in training programmes, task-force meetings, community outreach, within the community. Through sensitisation on infectious and communicable diseases with VHTs and local leaders, people have become more aware of the procedures and guidelines to follow to prevent the spread of diseases.

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