

A Life-Saving Mission: Ending Maternal Morbidity and Mortality due to Unsafe Abortion

Coalition To Stop Maternal Mortality
From Unsafe Abortion (CSMMUA)

Annual Report 2024



CSMMUA

COALITION TO STOP MATERNAL MORTALITY DUE TO UNSAFE ABORTION

An illustration of a hand holding a sign. The hand is brown and is wearing a purple sleeve. The sign is a dark red rectangle with white text. The background is a light yellow color with a decorative floral pattern in the top left corner. The floral pattern consists of several large, stylized flowers in shades of yellow, green, pink, and blue. The sign is held by a wooden pole that extends from the bottom of the frame to the top of the sign.

"Unsafe abortion is one of the easiest preventable causes of maternal mortality. Access to safe abortion is a human right, a medical necessity, and a social imperative."

Dr. Paul Blumenthal



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Acronyms

- AGM** – Annual General Meeting
- AWAC** – Alliance of Women Advocating for Change
- CAC** – Comprehensive Abortion Care
- CSE** – Comprehensive Sexuality Education
- CEHURD** – Center for Health, Human Rights and Development
- CSMMUA** – Coalition to Stop Maternal Mortality Due to Unsafe Abortion
- GCWR** – Gender and Climate Women’s Rights
- GGR** – Global Gag Rule
- HART** – Human Assisted Reproductive Technology
- HIV** – Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- HRAPF** – Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum
- IEC** – Information, Education, and Communication
- LBO** – Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer
- LSN** – Legal Support Network
- MoJCA** – Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs
- MVA** – Manual Vacuum Aspiration
- NHIS** – National Health Insurance Scheme
- PAC** – Post-Abortion Care
- RHU** – Reproductive Health Uganda
- SRHR** – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- STI** – Sexually Transmitted Infection
- SWs** – Sex Workers
- TuWG** – Tukwatirewamu Group
- UHC** – Universal Health Coverage
- ULRC** – Uganda Law Reform Commission
- UNESO** – Uganda Network of Sex Work Organizations
- UWONET** – Uganda Women’s Network
- VCAT** Values’ Clarification and Attitude Transformation
- VSLAs** – Village Savings and Loan Associations
- WPI** – Women’s Protection Initiative
- WWM** – Women With a Mission





Executive Summary

The Coalition to Stop Maternal Mortality due to Unsafe Abortion (CSMMUA) has been at the forefront of advocating for reproductive rights and access to safe abortion in Uganda. Throughout 2024, the Coalition strengthened its impact through strategic advocacy, knowledge sharing, healthcare service delivery, and movement building. However, unsafe abortion remains a significant public health challenge, contributing to approximately 10% of all maternal deaths. Although a number of efforts have been undertaken to improve reproductive health services, the prevalence of unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions continues to pose serious risks to women's health and well-being.

Despite global advancements in reproductive health, Uganda continues to experience high rates of unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions. Several factors continue to contribute to the high incidence of unsafe abortions in Uganda:

- **Restrictive Abortion Laws:** Abortion in Uganda is largely illegal, permitted only to save the life of the mother. This legal ambiguity discourages healthcare providers from offering safe abortion services, leading many women to seek unsafe alternatives.
- **Limited Access to Contraceptives:** While there is increased awareness, many women especially in rural areas still have limited access to modern contraceptive methods and face a high risk of unintended pregnancies.
- **Cultural and Religious Stigma:** There are a number of deep-rooted cultural and religious beliefs that stigmatise abortion in Uganda, compelling women to resort to unsafe methods in secrecy.
- **Economic Constraints:** The cost of safe abortion services in private facilities is prohibitive for many women, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, and the financial burden of unsafe abortions is substantial.
- **Misinformation and Fear:** Many young people have been identified as lacking accurate information on safe reproductive healthcare and requiring safe spaces to empower them utilise the available referral pathways.

Addressing the incidence of unsafe abortions and improving maternal health outcomes requires a multifaceted approach. The Coalition boldly developed and launched its five year strategic plan for the period 2024-2028 for a Uganda where no woman suffers or dies due to unsafe abortion. CSMMUA aims to reduce unsafe abortion in Uganda by advocating for improvement in laws and policies, access to quality and comprehensive services for the prevention and management of unwanted or unplanned pregnancies, and reduction in unsafe abortion stigma and discrimination.



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The efforts of CSMMUA members were focused on reducing the incidence of unsafe abortions and improving the quality of health services so that no woman in Uganda has to risk her life due to preventable causes of maternal mortality. This report synthesises all the work its 52 members implemented in 2024 to advocate for progressive legal and policy changes, expand access to safe abortion services, and empower communities with reproductive health knowledge.

The first of its kind, the 2024 CSMMUA annual report highlights the collective efforts of members in achieving a common mission of a responsive and well-resourced coalition committed to the reduction of morbidity and mortality due to unsafe abortion through evidence generation, advocacy, community engagement, progressive social movement building and capacity enhancement. The report provides critical insights into the evolving landscape of reproductive health in Uganda, including the impact of unsafe abortion, legal and policy developments, and emerging issues. It also evaluates the challenges encountered such as resistance from some stakeholder groups, resource constraints, and gaps in community sensitisation.

The report underscores the urgent need for evidence-based decision-making and multi-stakeholder collaboration to effectively address the impact of unsafe abortion and promote reproductive rights in Uganda. It provides key lessons learned and strategies adopted for the sustenance of the coalition and reproductive rights. The way forward recommends key action points for policymakers, healthcare providers, and civil society organisations. These include strengthening legal and policy frameworks, expanding access to contraceptives, increasing community education, and enhancing post-abortion care services, among other specific priorities of the members which are needed to improve the future of their work in 2025 and beyond.

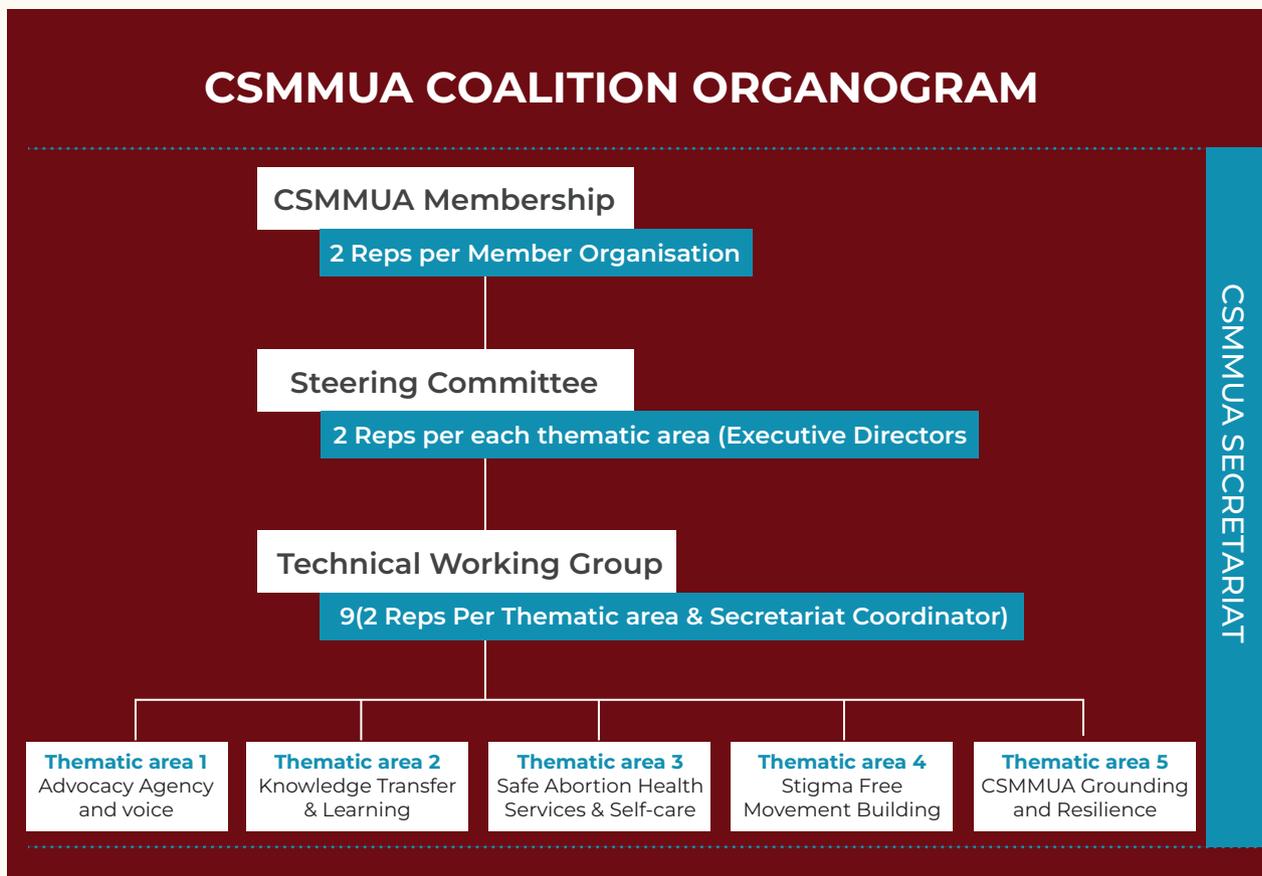


Who We Are

The Coalition to Stop Mortality due to Unsafe abortion (CSMMUA) is a dynamic and passionate alliance, uniting voices from all walks of life—healthcare providers, legal experts, researchers, grassroots activists, bloggers, and development partners—who share a common goal: saving lives and protecting reproductive rights.

Since its founding in 2012, CSMMUA has been a driving force in the fight against maternal mortality caused by unsafe abortion envisioning a Uganda where no woman suffers or dies due to unsafe abortion.

With CEHURD as its secretariat, the coalition operates with a clear mission and shared objectives, guided by strategic plans and advocacy frameworks that turn evidence into action. Through tireless collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and capacity building, CSMMUA empowers communities, influences policies, and champions access to safe abortion services. Anchored in its strategic foundation, CSMMUA is more than a coalition—it is a movement, working every day to ensure that no woman has to risk her life and efforts have to be taken for ensuring the healthcare she deserves.



A Lifesaving Mission: Why CSMMUA Exists

At the heart of the Coalition to Stop Maternal Mortality from Unsafe Abortion (CSMMUA) is a powerful and urgent purpose—to save lives by ensuring that no woman in Uganda has to risk her health or future due to unsafe abortion. We exist to challenge restrictive laws, advocate for progressive policies, and expand access to high-quality, comprehensive reproductive healthcare.

By bringing together a diverse network of passionate professionals, activists, organizations and communities, CSMMUA amplifies voices that might otherwise go unheard. We provide a safe and strategic space for advocacy on sensitive issues, breaking down stigma and discrimination that limit reproductive rights. Through collaboration, resource-sharing, and evidence-based action, we strengthen our collective impact—driving real change, protecting fundamental rights, and ensuring a future where every woman has access to the care she deserves.

CSMMUA Strategic Objectives

1. To advocate for a progressive legal and policy environment for safe abortion healthcare services in Uganda.
2. To improve knowledge generation, management and utilization on abortion healthcare in Uganda.
3. To advocate for improved access to quality sexual reproductive health (SRH) information and services.
4. To promote change in attitudes, behaviour, harmful norms and beliefs among key stakeholders towards abortion healthcare in Uganda.
5. To strengthen the institutional capacity of CSMMUA to efficiently deliver on its mandate.



Achievements Under the Strategic Objectives

Each of these strategic objectives are supported by a key pillar. CSMMUA's engagements are aligned to these pillars as elucidated below.





Pillar 1:

Advocacy, Agency and Voice





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Advocacy, Agency and Voice

Meaningful change begins with strong advocacy, and under Advocacy, Agency & Voice, CSMMUA is committed to creating a legal and policy environment that expands access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for diverse communities. With a steadfast focus on advancing safe abortion healthcare services in Uganda, the coalition champions strategic engagement, policy dialogue, and coalition-building to influence legal frameworks. By fostering collaboration and amplifying voices, CSMMUA works to ensure that reproductive rights are not only recognized but actively protected and accessible to all.

Strides Made Under Pillar 1

No More Whispers: Sparking Open Conversations on Safe Abortion with Youth, adolescents, adolescent women and young girls.

One of our first steps in advocating for access to safe abortion was creating open spaces for dialogue with adolescent girls and young women in Iganga. In partnership with UNYPA, the CSMMUA coalition organized a dedicated Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) camp, offering a safe and supportive environment for meaningful discussions. These conversations equipped participants with critical knowledge about their reproductive rights, legal protections, and access to SRHR services—empowering them to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

Building on this momentum, we extended the dialogue to Lira University students, where we broke down the legal and policy framework surrounding abortion. This initiative not only educated young people on their rights but also shed light on the existing legal landscape, advocacy opportunities, and available legal support. By engaging students in these discussions, we are challenging stigma, promoting awareness, and empowering young people to become advocates for reproductive justice.

Recognizing the power of peer-to-peer education, through Reach a Hand Uganda, we also trained 10 peer educators in higher institutions of learning, equipping them with essential SRHR knowledge. These peer educators have become champions of change, leading peer-led dialogues, raising awareness about the dangers of unsafe abortion, and promoting family planning as a vital tool for preventing unintended pregnancies.

Through open conversations, legal education, and peer-led initiatives, we continue to amplify young voices, break down barriers, and ensure that all young people have the knowledge and support they need to make empowered reproductive health choices.

Training Healthcare Workers: Bridging Law and Compassion in Abortion Care

Healthcare workers are often the first point of contact for women and girls seeking safe abortion and post-abortion care services. Yet, many operate in a landscape clouded by legal uncertainty, unsure of the policies that govern their practice. Recognizing this gap, we set out to equip them with the knowledge they need to provide both legally sound and compassionate care.

Through a series of three intensive training workshops, CSMMUA brought together healthcare professionals to deepen their understanding of abortion laws, patient rights, and ethical guidelines. These sessions not only clarified the legal framework but also empowered providers to navigate complex cases with confidence and empathy.

Now, armed with the right knowledge, these healthcare workers stand as stronger allies—ensuring that women and girls receive the care they need without fear, stigma, or legal repercussions. By bridging the gap between policy and practice, we are helping to create a healthcare system where rights are protected, choices are respected, and care is delivered with dignity.

Empowering Midwives: Advocating for Legal Awareness in Reproductive Healthcare

Recognizing the crucial role of midwives in delivering reproductive health services, HRAPF supported the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Private Midwives Association. During the event, a presentation

was made on the law surrounding abortion, ensuring that midwives were well-informed about their legal responsibilities and rights. This engagement aimed to equip them with the necessary knowledge to provide safe and legally compliant reproductive healthcare.

From Punishers to Protectors: Strengthening Law Enforcement's Role in Protecting Reproductive Rights

In Uganda, law enforcement officers are often the gatekeepers of justice, tasked with interpreting and enforcing laws that shape the lives of countless individuals. When it comes to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), their role becomes even more critical—determining whether the law is a tool of protection or a weapon of punishment.

Recognizing this responsibility, HRAPF led two intensive training workshops with police officers, equipping them with a deeper understanding of legal provisions, human rights principles, and the need to prevent the criminalization of reproductive healthcare. These sessions challenged harmful misconceptions, encouraged nuanced discussions, and fostered a greater appreciation for the importance of upholding human dignity in law enforcement.

Now, with strengthened knowledge and a rights-based perspective, these officers are better prepared to handle SRHR-related cases with fairness and sensitivity. By transforming the way law enforcement interacts with reproductive health issues, we move one step closer to a system where justice serves—not silences—those in need.

Advocacy with Private Midwives

Recognizing the key role of midwives in providing reproductive health services, HRAPF supported the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Private Midwives Association, where we made a presentation on the law on abortion. This engagement



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Strengthening Community Dialogue and Awareness

As part of our commitment to raising awareness about reproductive rights and legal protections, HRAPF brought the conversation directly to Nawanyingi Village in Iganga District through a dynamic community baraza discussion. This gathering created a safe and open space where community members, local leaders, and health professionals could engage in meaningful dialogue, addressing concerns, challenging misconceptions, and deepening understanding of reproductive health rights. Beyond sharing information, the discussion empowered individuals to advocate for their rights and demand access to the healthcare they deserve.

Expanding on these efforts, the Rella Foundation has been instrumental in amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, particularly LBO (Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer) individuals, in reproductive health advocacy. Through engaging online discussions, the foundation has brought together key stakeholders to address the unique reproductive health needs of LBO individuals, ensuring their concerns are reflected in inclusive dialogues and policy conversations. By bridging gaps in knowledge and representation, these efforts continue to foster more inclusive, rights-based approaches to reproductive healthcare.

The Local Sustainable Communities Organisation (LOSCO) conducted a radio Talk show and other community dialogues to arouse the public to the fact that SRHR are critical to the development of the Kigezi region. In these conversations they were able to hold the different stakeholders accountable for information, access and service provision at all levels. These interventions were also aimed at addressing social-cultural/religious barriers in advancement of SRHR in Kigezi sub-region.

Shifting the Narrative: Harnessing Media to Advance Reproductive Rights

Recognizing the power of storytelling in advocacy, CSMMUA actively engaged journalists in community sensitization efforts, providing them with a firsthand look at the challenges women face in accessing safe abortion care. Through direct exposure to real-life experiences, journalists were able to document compelling, fact-based narratives that shed light



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on critical reproductive health issues. This collaboration led to the publication of eight impactful stories, reaching wider audiences and sparking vital conversations on reproductive rights.

To further strengthen media engagement, we commemorated International Safe Abortion Day with a dynamic media café, bringing together 25 local journalists for in-depth discussions on reproductive rights and safe abortion advocacy. This interactive space encouraged meaningful dialogue, accurate reporting, and a deeper commitment to shifting the public narrative on SRHR.

In addition, we launched a narrative change initiative in collaboration with 13 media houses, aiming to reshape public discourse on safe abortion. Through this initiative, journalists and media professionals were equipped with the tools to report on SRHR with accuracy, empathy, and a rights-based approach. By working closely with the media, we are breaking down stigma, countering misinformation, and ensuring that conversations around reproductive health are rooted in evidence and dignity.

Storytelling to Challenge Stigma

In addition to online discussions, CSMMUA members shared storytelling blogs featuring powerful personal narratives. These stories challenge the stigma surrounding reproductive health and raise awareness, ensuring that a diverse range of voices is heard and represented in the fight for reproductive justice. Through these efforts, the foundation continues to create a more inclusive and understanding space for reproductive health issues.

Advancing Legal Frameworks for Safe Abortion Services

CSMMUA remained at the forefront of efforts to strengthen reproductive rights and improve legal frameworks for safe abortion services in Uganda. A key milestone in this journey was the ongoing litigation of Petition 10/2017, a case with the potential to shape the future of abortion rights in the country. With the judgment still pending, CSMMUA continued to push for legal reforms that uphold the dignity and autonomy of individuals seeking reproductive healthcare.



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During the dialogue, CEHURD worked with 6 social media influencers to amplify the conversation and document key commitments from stakeholders. According to Tweet Binder our hashtag #SafeAndLegalCare scored a reach of at least **1,593,000**, **47 retweets** and **26 contributors**

Contributed to building a positive narrative in support of legal reform for safe abortion amidst the challenging environment of 2024

CEHURD in partnership with CSMMUA members IPAS Africa Alliance and Marie stopes Uganda convened a **Televised Dialogue** which was live streamed on NTV and YouTube. The dialogue brought together fifty-three participants who included Members of Parliament, officials from the Ministry of Health, the Media development partner's members of the SRHR movement and the media who generated discourse on the critical issues that need to be addressed: unsafe abortion. One of the Policymakers who was a panelist at the dialogue said; *"There is a significant information gap regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), particularly concerning comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). Women and girls must be empowered to make informed choices about their reproductive health. As policymakers, we must collaborate with other stakeholders to develop responsive policies that meet the community's needs. Our shared goal is to cultivate a healthy community for everyone".* Hon. Rita Atukwasa, Member of Parliament for Mbarara City

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To stay informed and actively engaged in legislative progress, CSMMUA held strategic meetings with the Uganda Law Reform Commission (ULRC) and the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs (MOJCA). These discussions provided critical updates on the Penal Code Amendment Bill, a proposed reform aimed at addressing restrictive abortion laws. By fostering dialogue with policymakers and advocating for rights-based legal changes, CSMMUA reinforced its commitment to ensuring safe and legal abortion services for all.





Building Capacity for Legal Support: Training and Advocacy

CSMMUA strengthened legal support for reproductive health rights by organizing bi-annual retreats and capacity-building sessions for the Legal Support Network (LSN). These sessions brought together lawyers, advocates, and healthcare providers for in-depth training on harm reduction and life exception models, equipping them with the knowledge and strategies to defend reproductive rights effectively.

Beyond training, CSMMUA provided rapid legal support in five urgent cases across Kampala, Arua, Mbale, and Abim, ensuring timely intervention for health service providers facing legal challenges. The coalition also played a pivotal role in policy advocacy, presenting key recommendations to Parliament on the HART Bill and the Sexual Offenses Bill. Through these efforts, CSMMUA actively pushed for critical legal reforms, reinforcing its commitment to protecting reproductive health rights and ensuring access to safe abortion services.

Fostering Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange

CSMMUA actively fostered collaboration and knowledge exchange by facilitating South-to-South learning exchanges and supporting the Legal Support Network's (LSN) participation in the *Break Her Silence* symposium on Assisted Reproduction. These initiatives enriched the discourse on reproductive healthcare in Uganda, reinforcing CSMMUA's commitment to legal reform and improved access to reproductive health services.

Championing Legislative Action for Reproductive Rights

In its ongoing advocacy efforts, CSMMUA partnered with Akina Mama wa Afrika, Women Probono Initiative, and UWONET to convene two high-level meetings with over 40 Members of Parliament. These discussions placed women's rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) at the center of legislative conversations, particularly about the Marriage Bill.

Campaigning for Improved Healthcare Access

CSMMUA also launched a strategic campaign advocating for the re-tabling of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) Bill, a crucial step toward expanding access to comprehensive healthcare services. In addition, the coalition hosted a thought-provoking webinar on decolonizing abortion within African health systems, sparking critical discussions on the need for inclusive and context-specific healthcare models.

Advancing SRHR on the Continental Stage

Taking its advocacy beyond national borders, CSMMUA developed and disseminated a powerful statement for the Africa Regional Consultation on Beijing +30. This statement presented key recommendations to advance SRHR across the continent, reflecting CSMMUA's dedication to shaping progressive policies and fostering impactful dialogue at both national and regional levels. Through these efforts, the coalition remained steadfast in its mission to champion reproductive health rights and drive meaningful change.



Pillar 2:

Knowledge Transfer and Learning





PILLAR 2: Knowledge Transfer and Learning

Why Knowledge Transfer and Learning?

Abortion remains one of the most hotly contested issues in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), with knowledge generation in this field being both deeply political and highly contentious. Historically, research and evidence on abortion and SRHR have been largely shaped and funded by the Global North, fueling resistance from anti-gender and anti-rights movements. These groups argue that abortion rights are incompatible with Africa's moral and cultural fabric, particularly in Uganda, using this narrative to push back against progress.

In response, CSMMUA and its allies are strategically using evidence to challenge misinformation, shift public discourse, and influence both formal and informal policies. Through rigorous research and documentation, the coalition is not only informing policy decisions and guiding programming but also strengthening movements and mobilizing resources to advance abortion rights. Despite the persistent political and cultural opposition, CSMMUA remains steadfast in ensuring that evidence-based advocacy leads the way in securing reproductive justice.

Strides Made Under Pillar 2

Leading with Knowledge: Expanding the Safe Abortion Repository

This past year marked significant progress in expanding and enhancing the Repository on Safe Abortion, ensuring broader access to critical information. A Physical Resource Centre was established, serving as a hub for key materials on abortion rights, service provision, and policy advocacy. The center was continually restocked with new resources, including academic publications, legal documents, and advocacy materials. Additionally, CSMMUA subscribed to leading academic and research listservs to stay informed on global developments and best practices in reproductive healthcare.

To complement these efforts, a digital online repository was launched, providing an easily accessible platform for coalition members and stakeholders to access essential materials. Further strengthening the coalition's evidence base, CSMMUA began collecting internal data on safe abortion services, starting with information from service providers within the coalition. These initiatives contribute to a well-informed, resource-rich environment that supports reproductive rights advocacy and improved healthcare access.



At CSMMUA, advocacy goes beyond policy debates—it is rooted in evidence and real-world experiences. Recognizing the urgent need for data-driven solutions, we conducted critical research on menstrual hygiene in the Karamoja and Teso regions.

Using Research and Lived Realities to Drive Safe Abortion Advocacy

In Uganda, discussions around abortion are often clouded by myths and misconceptions, with voices from academia and the health sector frequently overshadowed by religious and cultural rhetoric. To shift the narrative toward data-driven realities, CSMMUA took a proactive step in developing policy briefs on Post-Abortion Care.

Drawing insights from a study conducted by the Makerere School of Public Health, alongside a retrospective analysis of teenage pregnancies in Mayuge, Kamuli, and Wakiso districts, these policy briefs provided a well-researched foundation for advocacy. The findings were presented at the Safe Motherhood Conference, where they underscored the urgent need to strengthen post-abortion care services across Uganda.

By bringing evidence to the forefront, CSMMUA continues to champion informed conversations, ensuring that policy and healthcare decisions are guided by research, not rhetoric.

Driving Change Through Research: Advancing Menstrual Health Advocacy

At CSMMUA, advocacy goes beyond policy debates—it is rooted in evidence and real-world experiences. Recognizing the urgent need for data-driven solutions, we conducted critical research on menstrual hygiene in the Karamoja and Teso regions.

The findings painted a compelling picture of the challenges faced by communities, revealing deep connections between menstrual health, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and broader reproductive rights. To amplify these insights, we compiled them into policy briefs and presented them at a national policy dialogue, ensuring that menstrual health remains a priority in the broader conversation on reproductive justice.

By bridging research with advocacy, CSMMUA continues to push for policies that reflect lived realities and create meaningful change.



Reframing narratives around safe abortion access: Strengthening Abortion Communication and Awareness

At CSMMUA, we believe that informed conversations drive meaningful change. To enhance abortion communication and awareness, we conducted in-depth research to understand how abortion is discussed and perceived. Our findings uncovered key insights that are shaping the way SRHR and abortion rights movements engage with communities, policymakers, and the public.

By sharing this research with advocates and stakeholders, we are helping to refine advocacy strategies, challenge misinformation, and foster a more open and fact-based dialogue around safe abortion. Through evidence-driven communication, we continue to push for a future where reproductive rights are understood, respected, and protected.

Strengthening Access and Awareness: Mapping Referral Pathways & Transforming SRHR Media Coverage

A major milestone in our efforts to enhance abortion care access was the successful completion of referral pathway mapping. This critical initiative ensures that service providers have clear, well-structured guidance on directing individuals toward safe, legal, and supportive healthcare options. By streamlining these pathways, we are bridging gaps in access and empowering both providers and those seeking care with the information they need.

Beyond improving service delivery, shaping public perception is equally essential. Akina Mama wa Afrika conducted an insightful study on media coverage of SRHR, uncovering how reproductive health issues are framed in the media. These findings lay the foundation for shifting public discourse—ensuring that reproductive rights are reported on accurately, sensitively, and with the urgency they deserve.

Through these initiatives, we are not only improving access to care but also transforming the way reproductive health is understood and discussed—one step closer to a more informed and supportive society.



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Shedding Light on Injustice: Documenting and Addressing Human Rights Violations

In a groundbreaking effort to expose the injustices faced by sex workers, UNESO launched a Human Rights Violations Report, unveiling the harsh realities of discrimination, violence, and systemic neglect. The report documented 237 cases, with 214 confirmed as human rights violations, including torture, discrimination, property rights infringements, and threats to life.

Beyond the numbers, the report painted a stark picture of deep-rooted stigma and discrimination within health facilities, which continue to limit access to essential Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services for sex workers. These barriers not only deny individuals their fundamental rights but also endanger their health and well-being.

By bringing these violations to light, the report stands as a powerful advocacy tool, driving awareness, demanding justice, and pushing for urgent policy reforms. It is a call to action for decision-makers, healthcare providers, and society at large—a reminder that sex workers deserve dignity, protection, and access to the healthcare and human rights they are entitled to.

From Stagnant Policy into Progress: Assessing SRHR Implementation

Ensuring that reproductive health policies translate into real impact requires more than just legislation—it demands continuous evaluation and advocacy. With this in mind, CSMMUA undertook a comprehensive

review of SRHR policy implementation, assessing national progress and identifying gaps that need urgent attention. The validation process has been completed, and the final report is on the horizon, set to guide critical policy decisions and strengthen reproductive health frameworks.

Beyond this, in collaboration with CEHURD and WPI, CSMMUA took a deep dive into the Human Assisted Reproductive Bill. Through a thorough review and strategic recommendations submitted to Parliament, we worked to shape policies that are inclusive, rights-based, and aligned with global best practices.

These efforts are more than just assessments—they are steps toward a future where reproductive health policies don't just exist on paper but actively improve lives.

Mapping Referral Pathways for Abortion Care

A major milestone was the completion of referral pathway mapping for abortion care, ensuring that service providers have clear guidance on directing individuals to safe, legal, and supportive healthcare options.

Improving Media Coverage on SRHR

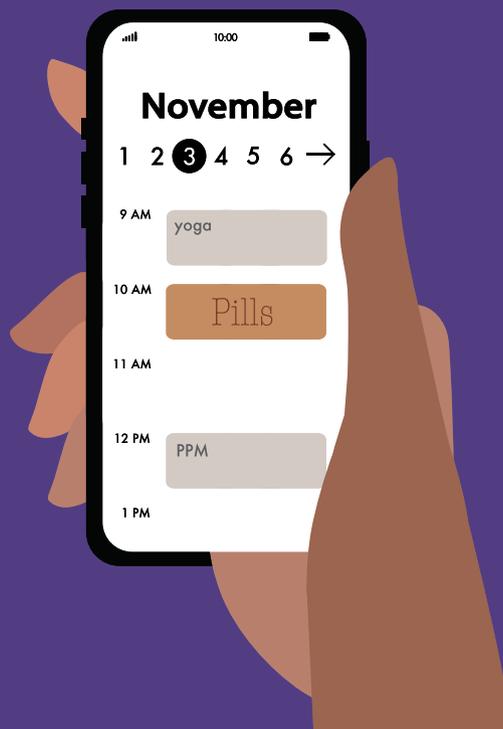
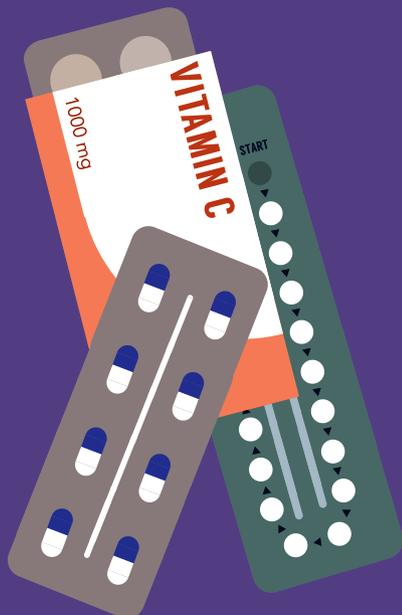
AMWA conducted a study on media coverage of SRHR, offering valuable insights into how sexual and reproductive health issues are framed in the media. This research serves as a foundation for shaping public discourse and developing strategies to promote accurate and supportive reporting on reproductive rights.





Pillar 3:

Safe Abortion Health Care Services and Self-Care





Pillar 3:

Safe Abortion Health Care Services and Self-Care

Expanding Access, Transforming Care: Strengthening Reproductive Health in Marginalized Communities

One of our most impactful achievements has been enhancing healthcare access and service delivery in four fishing communities, where reproductive health services are often limited. Through dedicated efforts, we provided comprehensive CAC training and ongoing technical support to partner medical centers, ensuring that healthcare workers were equipped to deliver quality, compassionate care. In total, we trained eight clinical officers, 12 nurses, and midwives, empowering them with the skills and knowledge to provide effective reproductive healthcare. Additionally, we successfully negotiated lower service costs across all partner facilities, removing financial barriers and ensuring affordability for those in need. Further, CSMMUA reached Under our Careplus we reached 699 individuals with CAC/Post-Abortion Care services, providing critical care and support as part of the Careplus project.

Our outreach efforts extended further through five musawo (health provider) sessions and four community outreaches, delivering accurate sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information to an estimated 1,662 individuals in Nakiwogo, Kasenyi, Gerenge,

and Kigungu. In addition to supporting fishing communities, we expanded our SRHR services to marginalized populations in three refugee slums, where access to healthcare is particularly challenging. Targeted programs focused on adolescent girls and young women, increasing both awareness and service uptake. By addressing barriers to care and reaching those most in need, we continue to transform access to reproductive health services, ensuring that every individual—regardless of their circumstances—has the knowledge, resources, and support to make informed choices about their health.

Recognizing the critical role of skilled healthcare providers in Post-Abortion Care (PAC), we trained 17 service providers from Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU) and public health facilities in Bushenyi, Gulu, and Lira on the administration of Manual Vacuum Aspiration (MVA) and the use of Misoprostol for PAC. This initiative has equipped health workers with the necessary skills to provide safe and effective care to women in need, further strengthening our commitment to comprehensive reproductive health services.



Harnessing Digital Innovation to Strengthen Healthcare Capacity

In a bold step toward improving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services, **over 125 health** workers received specialized training in digital and mobile health applications from IWAY. This initiative went beyond enhancing technical skills—it played a crucial role in reducing provider bias, and ensuring that individuals seeking reproductive healthcare receive unbiased, compassionate, and informed care. By integrating digital tools into service delivery, healthcare workers are now better equipped to provide accurate, timely, and patient-centred SRHR services.

Combating Abortion Stigma through Values' Clarification and Attitude Transformation (VCAT) Sessions

We recognize that stigma remains one of the biggest barriers to accessing safe abortion services. To challenge these harmful narratives, we have conducted Values Clarification and Attitude Transformation (VCAT) sessions, aimed at shifting perceptions and fostering an understanding of abortion as a fundamental reproductive right. These sessions have helped both community members and service providers recognize the importance of supporting individuals seeking abortion care without discrimination.



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Strengthening Referral Pathways for Safe Abortion Care

For sex workers in need of safe abortion services, GCWR has established referral networks to connect them with trusted providers. These confidential and dignified referral systems ensure that SWs can access safe, quality care without fear of judgment or legal repercussions.

Creating Healing Circles for Emotional Well-being

Recognizing the emotional toll of abortion experiences, GCWR has established Healing Circles—safe spaces where sex workers can share their stories, heal from trauma, and build resilience. These support groups foster self-preservation, emotional strength, and solidarity, reinforcing the belief that every individual deserves dignity, respect, and compassionate care.

Distributing Essential Health Commodities

In our continued efforts to promote safer sexual practices and reduce HIV and STI transmission, we distributed essential health commodities such as condoms and lubricants to sex workers. This initiative empowered them to take control of their health, reinforcing the importance of harm reduction strategies and fostering a sense of agency within the community.

Building on these efforts, we partnered with AWAC and Dynamic Doctors to host a two-day health camp in Isingiro District, delivering critical SRHR services to underserved communities. The camp provided not only medical support but also legal education, highlighting the importance of an integrated approach that combined healthcare access

with rights-based advocacy. By ensuring that individuals received both essential medical care and legal awareness, we strengthened efforts to create a more inclusive and holistic framework for reproductive health services. Through these initiatives, we made significant strides in bridging healthcare gaps and empowering marginalized groups to make informed decisions about their well-being.

Enhancing Financial Empowerment through Village Savings and Loan Associations

Economic empowerment is a crucial aspect of SRHR accessibility. To support financial independence, GCWR has facilitated the formation of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) among sex workers. These savings groups enable SWs to financially support each other, ensuring that in cases where a member needs a safe abortion or emergency care, they can access the necessary funds without financial strain.

In 2023, UNESO made significant strides in advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) advocacy and education. A key milestone was the successful training of 57 sex worker leaders in SRHR policy analysis through an intensive two-day residential program. This training provided participants with a comprehensive understanding of reproductive health policies and laws, equipping them with the skills to advocate for change at both the community and national levels.

By strengthening their knowledge and leadership, the program empowered sex worker leaders to champion reproductive rights, challenge stigma, and drive meaningful policy change. These efforts contributed to expanding access to SRHR services for sex workers across Uganda, ensuring that their voices were heard and their rights recognized.



Pillar 4:

Stigma Free- Movement Building



Pillar 4:

Stigma Free- Movement Building

A Tribute to Lives Lost: Remembering and Honoring the Impact of Unsafe Abortion

In a deeply moving observance of International Safe Abortion Day, UNESO organized a candle-lighting vigil to honour those who had lost their lives due to unsafe abortion practices. Sex worker leaders gathered in solidarity, holding space to remember the 32 individuals who had tragically passed away over the past year. As their names were read aloud, a moment of silence filled the room—a poignant reminder of the devastating consequences of restricted access to safe reproductive healthcare.

This emotional tribute reinforced the urgency of continued advocacy. It was not just an act of remembrance, but a call to action—underscoring the need to fight for safer, more dignified reproductive health services for all. Through education, policy engagement, and unwavering commitment, UNESO and its partners remain dedicated to ensuring that no life is lost due to lack of access to care.

New Partnerships to Advance Reproductive Health Advocacy

CSMMUA is thrilled to secure a partnership with Amplify Change through the Strengthening Grant: “Reimagining Abortion Care, Sex, and Pleasure for Sex Workers in Fishing Communities of Uganda.” This collaboration marked a significant step in improving access to reproductive health services while fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for vulnerable communities. Through this



Beyond expanding access to care, we took to the community to amplify voices and spark critical conversations. In commemoration of International Safe Abortion Day, we actively participated in a community vigil, a radio talk show, and a powerful drama performance hosted by TuWG.



partnership, we worked to challenge stigma, empower sex workers with essential health information, and advocate for their reproductive rights in a way that was affirming, safe, and centred on dignity.

Beyond expanding access to care, we took to the community to amplify voices and spark critical conversations. In commemoration of International Safe Abortion Day, we actively participated in a community vigil, a radio talk show, and a powerful drama performance hosted by TuWG. These events provided platforms for open discussions, storytelling, and advocacy—ensuring that the message of safe abortion care and reproductive health rights reached far and wide.

Through partnerships, grassroots engagement, and unwavering advocacy, we strengthened our efforts to ensure that everyone—regardless of circumstance—had the right to make informed, safe, and empowered choices about their reproductive health.

Creating Inclusive Safe Spaces

Tusitukirewamu organized dedicated pleasure sessions for sex workers, lesbians, and bisexual women, creating inclusive and supportive environments for open discussions on sexual health, well-being, and empowerment. These sessions provided a safe space for participants to share experiences, access accurate information, and build a sense of community, reinforcing the importance of holistic sexual and reproductive health.

Building Capacity for Outreach

To expand the reach of reproductive health education, Tusitukirewamu successfully trained 10 service providers, 40 community volunteers, and 20 drama group members. This training equipped them with the knowledge and skills to effectively disseminate information and support safe abortion services. By strengthening community-based outreach, we ensured that vital SRHR information reached those who needed it most, fostering a more informed and empowered society.



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Pillar 5:

CSMMUA Grounding and Resilience





Pillar 5:

CSMMUA Grounding and Resilience

Strengthened the CSMMUA governance structures & streamlined membership

This was done through convening meetings with the steering committee which is a leading body for the Coalition to Stop Maternal Mortality due to Unsafe Abortion.

These meetings provided a platform to strategize on key issues with likely impact on the coalition such as the implication of the Anti-Homosexuality Act and how it affects partners, the implication of Trump Administration

With this support of the Steering Committee, the secretariat was able to align the membership of the coalition given the fragile times that we were in. Both the old and new members had to reapply for vetting and approval in accordance with the CSMMUA Membership Charter that was operationalized in May 2024. Over this period the secretariat received over 50 applications which the steering committee reviewed and vetted for approval 50. A total of 45 members were approved and onboarded in the end of year CSMMUA meeting.

Strengthened member's capacity in advocacy and campaign through an exchange learning with advocates from Latin America.

The CSMMUA secretariat brought together coalition members in a side event at the Regional Litigation Baraza justice under the theme role of Global South Collaborations in Advancing SRHR. The meeting gave us the opportunity to learn from advocates/activists from Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Brazil who have been instrumental in steering campaigns that saw abortion legalized in their countries. The advocates from Latin America empowered over 40 coalition members as they shared their experiences, strategies, and challenges in advocating for reproductive justice with special focus on safe and legal abortion.

During this exchange learning meeting, panelists shared their experiences in developing strategies to advance reproductive justice, including litigation, public mobilization, and engaging with religious and conservative groups. Some of the strategies shared included effective framing of the narrative, engaging religious leaders, community-based approaches, legal and policy advocacy, media and communication, intersectional approaches, collaborations and knowledge sharing. This informed our collective advocacy in the following month of September as we commemorated the Global Day of Access to safe and legal abortion.

Strengthened the grassroots movement through Sub-Granting CSMMUA Members working at community level;

In 2024 the secretariat continued to strengthen the SRHR ecosystem through the small grant's initiative/program piloted in 2022. Like the previous two years, the small grant in 2024 supported initiatives of community engagements among the members of CSMMUA and Community Health Advocates (CHA) with an aim of strengthening their advocacy capacity and building a movement at grassroots level. The small grant initiative in 2024 attracted 23 applications from partners within the Coalition and Community Health Advocates as well as other partners working on SRHR and abortion rights at community level. The three members selected for small grants included Dynamic Doctors Uganda, Uganda Youth and Adolescent Health Forum (UYAHF), Mentorship Haven for young women and adolescent girls. These partners have empowered communities through trainings, radio talk shows, held policy makers accountable in community dialogues, created awareness of SRHR challenges within their communities and agreed on key issues to be addressed by leaders in their target communities.

As a result of these small grants, the organisational capacities of the subgrantees have been strengthened two of the beneficiaries said;

"Before the project came, I was everywhere. I was the organization but now I feel my team being independent. This came with the provision of resources. It has been key in improving our internal controls and independence. It was the first local grant that we got from partners which energized us that we should not only look at the foreign donors." **Oscar Muhoozi, Executive Director, Dynamic Doctors Uganda**

"The idea of small grants is something that needs to continue because it supports the diversity of the work that partners are working on. The constant feedback on compliance leaves us as a better organization. Infact 6 months feel like more because of how much we have been able to learn.

Norah Nakyagera – Program Manager Uganda Youth and Adolescent Health Forum





Wins to Celebrate

CSMMUA has made remarkable strides in advancing abortion rights through strategic litigation, joining forces with dedicated partners like CEHURD, WPI, WWM, and HRAPF to challenge restrictive laws and policies. The coalition has also embraced global learning, fostering south-to-south exchanges with Latin American countries, where innovative advocacy strategies and best practices are shared.

One of the most exciting milestones this year was the approval of National Self-Care Guidelines for health and wellbeing at the Safe Motherhood Conference, a significant breakthrough that promises to enhance reproductive healthcare accessibility and empower women with greater autonomy in Uganda. This marks an exciting chapter in CSMMUA's ongoing journey to ensure that every woman has the right to make informed choices about her health and future.

Abortion solidarity; In commemoration of the international safe abortion day in September 2024, the secretariat commissioned a video, documenting the many interventions members of the coalition undertook to highlight abortion advocacy, public dialogues service provision and community engagements. This is a key milestone as its the first time the commemoration of international safe abortion for members of the coalition has been memorialized.



Hurdles and Obstacles

While **CSMMUA** has made remarkable progress, several persistent challenges continue to shape the landscape of reproductive rights and safe abortion services in Uganda.

Restrictive Legal Environment

The legal landscape remains challenging, with laws that limit access to safe abortion and comprehensive reproductive healthcare. These restrictive laws continue to hinder progress toward reproductive rights in Uganda.

Growing Political Challenges

The political climate has become increasingly difficult, with civil society organizations facing growing scrutiny and pressure. This political environment presents a significant hurdle to advancing reproductive rights.

Cultural and Religious Stigma

Abortion stigma, deeply rooted in cultural and religious beliefs, continues to pose a major barrier, complicating advocacy efforts and slowing the momentum toward change.

Opposition from Anti-Rights Groups

The rise of opposition from anti-gender and anti-rights groups presents a serious threat to the progress made in reproductive rights, further challenging efforts to expand access to safe and legal abortion services.

Lack of Comprehensive Data

The absence of accurate and comprehensive data on abortion continues to be a significant challenge, making it difficult to fully grasp the scope of the issue and advocate effectively for policy reform.

Shifting Donor Priorities

One key hurdle has been the shifting priorities of donors, leading to a more rigid funding environment, particularly in the area of abortion advocacy. These changes have made securing consistent and flexible financial support for reproductive rights programs more difficult.

The Impact of Political Instability on Reproductive Rights Advocacy

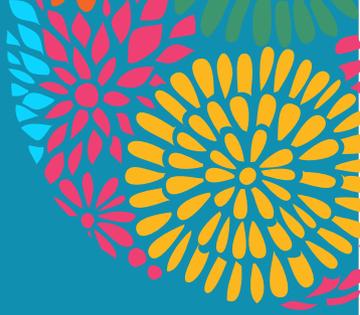
As the upcoming election period in Uganda approaches, there are growing concerns about the potential for political instability. This could result in a more restrictive environment for civil society organizations, particularly those advocating for reproductive rights. Such an atmosphere presents challenges to maintaining the momentum of progress and securing the freedoms needed for continued advocacy and action. It underscores the importance of vigilance and adaptive strategies as we work to protect and advance the rights of women and marginalized groups during uncertain times.

The Need for Collective Action

These barriers highlight the critical need for ongoing, collective efforts to overcome legal, political, social, and data-related challenges, ensuring reproductive rights for women in Uganda.



Looking Ahead: Priorities For 2025



Looking Ahead: Priorities For 2025

As we move into 2025, the CSMMUA members remain committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), with a renewed focus on reducing unsafe abortions, expanding access to reproductive healthcare, and strengthening policy advocacy. Building on the lessons learned in 2024, our approach will prioritize evidence-based programming, strategic partnerships, and community-driven solutions to address persistent challenges and emerging trends in Uganda's reproductive health landscape.

Strengthening Legal and Policy Advocacy

One of our key priorities for 2025 will be to intensify efforts toward legal and policy reforms that promote reproductive health rights. Despite ongoing advocacy, restrictive abortion laws continue to limit access to safe services, pushing many women into unsafe alternatives. We will engage with policymakers, legal experts, and civil society organizations to advocate for clearer legal frameworks that align with global human rights standards and prioritize women's health and autonomy. Additionally, we will focus on monitoring the implementation of existing SRHR policies, ensuring that commitments made by the government translate into meaningful action.

Expanding Access to Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

Access to contraception, safe abortion care (where legally permissible), and post-abortion care services remains a critical gap in Uganda's healthcare system. In 2025, we will work towards enhancing healthcare delivery models, ensuring that marginalized and underserved communities, particularly adolescents, rural women, and low-income populations, can access high-quality, non-judgmental reproductive healthcare. This will involve strengthening referral networks, equipping healthcare providers with updated training, and integrating digital health solutions to improve service accessibility.

Addressing Stigma and Cultural Barriers Through Community Engagement

Stigma and misinformation around abortion and contraception continue to be major obstacles to improving reproductive health outcomes. In 2025, we will expand our public awareness campaigns and behavioral change initiatives to challenge harmful cultural norms and myths. This includes engaging religious and cultural leaders, who hold significant influence, to promote open, informed conversations about reproductive rights. Additionally, we will enhance our work with youth-focused platforms, peer education programs, and grassroots organizations to foster a more supportive environment for young people to access SRHR information and services.

Investing in Data-Driven Decision-Making and Research

To drive evidence-based advocacy and programming, we will strengthen research and data collection efforts on unsafe abortions and SRHR indicators in Uganda. This includes tracking abortion-related morbidity and mortality rates, analyzing contraceptive use trends, and evaluating policy impacts. We will also invest in new research on the socio-economic costs of unsafe abortions, providing stakeholders with compelling data to inform policy reforms and funding priorities.

Enhancing Partnerships and Sustainable Resource Mobilization

A multi-sectoral approach is essential for sustainable impact. In 2025, we aim to deepen collaborations with government agencies, healthcare providers, international donors, and civil society actors to align efforts and leverage resources. Additionally, we will work towards diversifying our funding base through grant opportunities, social enterprise models, and local fundraising initiatives to ensure financial sustainability for our programs.

Harmonize messaging on abortion and document stories of lived experiences

Harmonizing messaging on abortion is essential to ensure clarity, reduce stigma, and foster a shared understanding across diverse communities. Documenting stories of lived experiences brings a human perspective to the issue, highlighting the real-life impacts of abortion access or restrictions. Together, these approaches help build empathy, inform policy, and support evidence-based advocacy.

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