Greetings from Straight Talk Foundation (STF). We are delighted to share our recent newsletter with you. In this issue, we give you insights into STF planned Silver Jubilee scheduled to be commemorated in October 2018. The newsletter further provides highlights from important Sexual and Reproductive Health programs implemented in various districts; these include the NIYETU project supported by Plan International Uganda and the Get Up Speak Out project implemented in Eastern Uganda. In this issue we also provide highlights from the Advocacy for Better Health programme supported by PATH and funded by USAID. We trust you will find this newsletter informative.

Celebrating 25 years of Innovative Quality Service delivery for Young People

2018 will be a special year, when we commemorate our Silver Jubilee.

In the 25 years of its existence, the organization has made outstanding contributions to improving the health and wellbeing of young people in Uganda.

In its journey of growth, the organization has continuously adapted to the changing context of young people’s lives especially in health, poverty and associated social problems in Uganda.

The country is considered a young nation with 58% of its population under the age of 17 years. In Uganda, young people face socio-economic challenges characteristic of developing countries. These include unemployment, poverty, HIV/AIDS, Sexual and reproductive health (SRH).

In its programming, STF has integrated livelihoods and environmental initiatives as crucial in empowering young people in Uganda to improve their lives and wellbeing.

Further to this, such initiatives develop young people’s capacity to establish livelihoods that can in turn help them afford & sustain healthy and health seeking lifestyles.

Looking ahead, we are confident that the organization’s work is still very relevant. In commemorating our 25th birthday, we would like to reaffirm STF’s commitment in supporting young people in Uganda to improve their sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing. Congratulations!
Early 2018, STF concluded the implementation of Advocacy for better Health (ABH) a 4 year Project funded by USAID with technical support from PATH. Initiatives were implemented in the three districts of Bugiri, Busia and Namutumba.

The key focus of Advocacy for Better Health was the provision of Ugandans with skills, tools and systems to effectively advocate for accessible and high quality health services. Specifically working with various actors drawn from 32 subcounties, the project enhanced capacity, mobilised and empowered citizens and civil society organizations to become effective advocates for health and social change and to catalyse policy action and accountability. Overall, STF undertook the following:

Support to district based civil society organizations: STF facilitated and supported thirty two (32) CBOs/PLHWA groups to hold advocacy forums. These were used to present issues to duty bearers, obtain feedback and solicit commitment. Advocacy champions and group representatives were further supported to undertake follow up meetings with duty bearers in various sub counties to reflect on progress of commitments made by various actors.

The 32 CBOs continue to undertake tracking/monitoring visits to public health facilities to identify health service delivery gaps related to commodity stock outs and Human Resources for Health.

Strengthening Human Resources for Health: Overall the project has realised reduced health worker absenteeism as a result of the vigilance of citizens, and regular support supervision by the health monitoring teams constituted by District Health Officers across the 3 districts. An example is Nankoma HCIV. Following a media campaign by ABH on Human Resources for Health that documented stories on existing gaps prompted a visit by officials from Ministry of Health resulting in the construction of housing for staff who often absented themselves from duty because they lived far away from Nankoma HCIV. “We are happy because we have key staff housed at the health facility and we no longer wait for extended hours to access services at the health facility” KimakaSiraji – Chairperson Action for Youth Development Association

Further to this, community advocacy efforts from the project have resulted in upgrading of Health Center IIs to IIs in order to provide comprehensive HIV/AIDS & Family Planning services. For instance, district leadership have increased the number of health workers, especially midwives & laboratory technicians at several health facilities. As a result, patient waiting time especially during the ART clinics has tremendously reduced.

The ABH project demonstrates the strength of engaging communities through capacity building in advocacy to improve service delivery. For example Magada HC III located in Magada Sub County, Namutumba district that has been routinely monitored by Magada PHA has in the recent past designated a counselling room for HIV/AIDS clients following a renovation of the facility. These efforts have resulted in increased numbers of people visiting the health facility for HIV Counseling and Testing from 10 to 18 per week.

Ni -Yetu: Community engagement in promotion of SRH and GBV prevention

Plan International Uganda in partnership with STF, Uganda Youth Network (UYONET) and Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP), together with the district based CSOs and district local governments have concluded a three-year participatory youth-led social empowerment program, ‘Ni-Yetu’ in the districts of Tororo, Kamuli, Alebtong, Lira and Kampala. The program aimed at increasing SRH knowledge, prevention of GBV and promotion of good governance among young people.

Key achievements from the project to date have been:

- Capacity building for Health Workers: In collaboration with Ministry of Health (MoH), 100 Health workers from 54 health facilities were trained in adolescent health service delivery. One health center per district was equipped with assorted items for their youth friendly corner.

- Training of district based Trainers: STF spearheaded the training of 19 district based trainers. The trainings equipped district based Trainers with knowledge on the promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Health, GBV prevention, Child Protection handling and Advocacy.
Better Life for Girls is a program funded by KOICA with technical support from UNFPA implemented by STF in 17 districts, namely, Lamwo, Gulu, Abim, Amudat, Amuria, Bududa, Butaleja, Iganga, Kaabong, Kapchorwa, Katakwi, Kotido, Mayuge, Moroto, Nakapiripirit and Napak.

The thrust of Better Life for Girls is girls’ education and health. To date, the program has undertaken training of 757 teachers on SRH information and service provision. 745 schools were supported to establish functional safe spaces benefiting a total of 36,504 girls. The project trained 547 health workers in the provision of SRH adolescent and youth friendly services. STF has continued to conduct ongoing AYSRH service quality evaluation and mentorship among target 152 health facilities.

STF recently conducted an operational research on menstrual hygiene to establish if provision of menstrual supplies reduced related absenteeism from school in the Better Life for Girls project sites. This followed the distribution of reusable sanitary towels to 52,920 girls of menstruating age from 756 beneficiary schools (670 primary, 86 secondary) in 14 districts namely; Abim, Amudat, Amuria, Bududa, Butaleja, Iganga, Kaabong, Kapchorwa, Katakwi, Kotido, Mayuge, Moroto, Nakapiripirit and Napak. The program anticipated by end of 2017 95% of girls using the pads would report no menstrual related absenteeism.

Findings indicated 85% of respondents reported they had not been absent from school for lack of menstrual supplies. The program increased beneficiary access to sustainable menstrual supplies resulting in fewer girls absenting themselves from school due to menstrual supply related challenges. Overall this research concluded that ensuring access to sustainable menstrual supplies was a cost effective way of reducing girls’ absenteeism from schools.

Support to peer educators: A total of 504 in school peer educators from 126 schools were equipped with health information and skills in social protection among in-school young people including the most marginalized. The results of this will be sustained through ongoing school activities such as the clubs.

The use of multimedia communication: 152 live radio programs and 150 spot messages were used to reach out of school youth with messages on SRH and prevention of GBV. The topics addressed were Menstrual hygiene management, effective Decision Making, Gender Based Violence.
The Whole School Approach- Enhancing SRH for adolescents:

The Get up Speak out (GUSO) program is an initiative of the SRH Alliance in Uganda. It targets young people aged 10-24 years in Iganga, Bugiri, Mayuge and Jinja districts.

The programme initiatives contribute to five key outcome areas: A strengthened and Sustainable Alliance, Empowered Young people to Voice their rights, Access to quality SRH information and education through diverse channels, Increased use of youth friendly SRH Services and improved social-cultural, political and legal environment for gender sensitive youth friendly SRH. In this program STF collaborates with 60 schools (20 primary & 10 secondary) in Bugiri & Iganga districts respectively. Key activities seek to ensure that all young people especially girls and young women are empowered to realize their Sexual and Reproductive Health.

In its implementation, the whole School Approach (WSA) has been instrumental in the realisation of this. It focuses on overcoming implementation barriers by drawing on the participation of all stakeholders in the lives of young people.

Key achievements made by the initiative to date include:

- **Enhanced collaboration with structures** such as local government (District Coordination Committees), learning institutions (through the sustainable teams) and identification and training of teachers to provide SRH information and education.
- **Meaningful involvement of young people** through peer to peer approaches, placing young people at the center of the SRH initiatives that concern them.
- **Harnessing technology for SRH:** There is enhanced use of various media platforms such as electronic and Social Media to reach young people with SRH information. Further to this STF has strengthened its infrastructure at the Bugiri Field office by establishing a computer lab from which young people with their teachers can receive technical support. As of 30th April 2018 STF reached out to a total of 3,236,199 young people and community members through tweet ups = 38,536, face book = 8,504, Radio program & toll free SMS =3,233,608.
- **Engagement with significant adults:** This has been critical in strengthening parent child communication regarding SRH issues. As a result, significant improvement in the general performance of learners has been noted as articulated by the head teacher of Bugubo Butambale Primary School; “There is improvement in academic performance as a result GUSO program in their school”.

The Whole School Approach has been highly effective in reaching more students with quality sexuality education and building support from school staff and parents. The approach has proven to be successful in creating a safe and respectful school environment, leading to better academic performance by the students. Schools report that the lessons become a reason for students to attend school.

STF Board of Directors participated in a field visit of the organization sites in Gulu district. During their visit, the Board undertook:

- Visits to 2 Health facilities supported by the Closing the Gap project. The team interfaced with beneficiaries at the facilities.
- A visit to Sir Samel Baker School to interact with members of their Straight Talk Club. Members provided motivational talks to students
- Learning sessions on governance for 8 Board representatives from 4 grassroots organizations supported by STF. The team shared experiences of serving on a Board.