

## AWYAD's Financial Literacy and Economic Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Naguru Go-Down Women

In the heart of Nakawa Division, where poverty and hardship have long shaped the lives of many women, a transformation is unfolding. For decades, the women of Naguru Go-Down, a community known for its struggles with economic insecurity, have battled to survive on meager incomes, relying on informal labour and small-scale vending to feed their families. Yet, their dreams of financial stability and self-reliance often seemed out of reach. That was until AWYAD (African Women and Youth Action for Development) stepped in with a powerful intervention: financial literacy, financial inclusion, and economic empowerment tailored to uplift vulnerable women.

AWYAD recognized that financial resilience begins with knowledge. The first step in the initiative was equipping 100 women with financial literacy skills—helping them understand budgeting, saving, debt management, and investment planning. Many of these women had never operated a formal bank account or kept track of their earnings and expenses. Through practical training, they learned how to manage money effectively, set financial goals, and make informed economic decisions.



Aisha Nakato

she learned how to keep financial records, set aside emergency savings, and reinvested in her business. Within a year, Aisha had expanded her business, started supplying clothes to local boutiques, and even enrolled her eldest child in a better school. ***"For the first time in my life, I feel I am in control of my money,"*** she says with pride.

One of the most remarkable success stories is that of Aisha Nakato, a single mother of three who had spent years doing small tailoring jobs in a makeshift stall along a busy road. Her income was unstable, and any emergency—be it a child's illness or rent increase—would send her into a financial crisis. When she joined AWYAD's financial literacy training,

Yet, financial literacy alone was not enough. AWYAD understood that without financial inclusion, these women would remain trapped in cycles of economic vulnerability. Many of them lacked access to formal banking, credit services, or business capital. AWYAD partnered with local financial institutions to open opportunities for women to access loans, mobile banking services, and savings groups. Supporting existing community-based savings and credit groups became a game-changer. Women supported to establish Village Savings and Lending Associations (VSLAs). In the VSLAs women pooled their savings, and used VSLAs to provide small loans to each other, and built financial safety nets that had never existed before.

One such group, the Ebenezer Women's Group, started with just 15 members. At first, they saved small amounts—5000 Ugandan shillings per week—but within months, they had accumulated enough to provide business loans among themselves. As time went on the group also grew from 15 members to 30 members. By end of December 2024, all the members had taken a small loan to start small business or to inject into an already existing business. Many women who started from scratch, today have countless stories of change in their lives and communities. One of the women with a tremendous inspiring story of empowerment is Kyampaire Enid, one of the founding members, used her first loan of UGX 200,000 to diversify her business from selling second-hand

clothes to also stocking children's shoes. Today, she not only has a thriving business but has also become a mentor for other women in the community, teaching them how to leverage small capital for maximum returns.

Beyond financial access, AWYAD introduced economic empowerment initiatives that allowed women to create sustainable sources of income. Through hands-on vocational training, women were equipped with skills in soap-making, tailoring, handicrafts, and food processing. Many of them, previously reliant on unstable casual labor, found new ways to generate income and achieve financial independence.



Kyampaire Enid

Take, for instance, Nangobi Sophia, a former domestic worker who barely made enough to sustain her family. With AWYAD's support, she trained in liquid soap-making, an affordable and high-demand product in urban areas. She began making small batches from home, selling to neighbours and local businesses.



Sophia Nangobi

Over time, Sophia established her own small manufacturing unit, employing two other women from her group. Today, she produces over 100 litres of liquid soap per week, supplying schools and hospitals. Her income has tripled, and she has moved into a better home. ***"AWYAD's women empowerment and financial literacy program did not just give me skills; it gave me a business, a future,"*** Sophia shares.

Financial empowerment is not just about generating income—it is fundamentally about building resilience. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit and businesses across Uganda were forced to shut down, countless families faced economic ruin. In Naguru Go-Down, a low-income settlement, many women were pushed to the edge of collapse. Yet, those who had participated in AWYAD's financial empowerment programs demonstrated remarkable strength and adaptability. These women had acquired critical financial literacy skills, learned how to save and invest wisely, and diversified their sources of income. Some had established multiple small businesses, which provided alternative revenue streams when one enterprise was affected. Others were part of vibrant women-led savings groups, where pooled resources became a lifeline during the most difficult moments of the crisis. Rather than sliding back into extreme poverty, these women drew upon the knowledge, skills, and social capital they had built through AWYAD's economic empowerment interventions. They found innovative ways to adapt—shifting to mobile trading, home-based businesses, and new markets.

This experience underscored a powerful truth: true financial empowerment goes beyond cash— it builds a foundation of confidence, solidarity, and readiness to withstand future shocks. These women did not just survive—they began to rebuild, stronger and more determined than ever. Phiona Kyabakazi, a member of the Ebenezer Women's Group, had faced a difficult period in her life when she left her marriage due to persistent abuse. Her husband criticized her for not supporting the family financially, which left her emotionally and financially strained. After staying with her parents for three months, Phiona was selected to participate in AWYAD's Start-Up Initiative, where she received UGX 100,000 along with nine other women. She used this support to purchase a machine for frying samosas and other snacks. Today, Phiona's business is thriving. She is not only able to support her family but has also reconciled with her husband. This was what Phiona had to say during the interview with her. "AWYAD didn't just help me start a business; it restored hope in my life and my marriage.

"My children now have school fees because I earn from my business," Phiona says, expressing her gratitude. She hopes that AWYAD can extend similar support to other vulnerable women, helping them rebuild their lives and regain their independence. My children now have school fees because I earn from my business," Phiona says, expressing her gratitude. She hopes that AWYAD can extend similar support to other vulnerable women, helping them rebuild their lives and regain their independence.



Phiona Kyabakazi

Another crucial aspect of AWYAD's intervention was challenging traditional gender norms around financial management. In many households, men controlled financial decisions, often leaving women financially dependent. By empowering women to take charge of their earnings, engage in business, and make independent financial choices, the program contributed to shifting social perceptions about women's roles in economic decision-making. Husbands who once doubted their wives' ability to handle money now witnessed them thrive as entrepreneurs and community leaders. Today, the impact of AWYAD's intervention is visible across Naguru Go-Down. Women who once lived on the margins of survival are now financially literate, banked, and running successful businesses. They are mentoring others, investing in their children's education, and contributing to household incomes in ways they never thought possible. The story of Naguru Go-Down's transformation is a demonstration of the power of financial knowledge, access, and opportunity. AWYAD's financial literacy, financial inclusion, and economic empowerment programs have not only helped vulnerable women break free from poverty but have also built a community of financially resilient and self-reliant women. Looking ahead, AWYAD aims to scale up these interventions, reaching more vulnerable women across Uganda. Their mission is clear: no woman should be left behind and no woman should be financially powerless. Through continued partnerships and support, AWYAD envisions a future where every woman, no matter her background, has the knowledge, tools, and resources to shape her financial destiny. For the women of Naguru Go-Down, this is more than just financial empowerment—it is the restoration of dignity, confidence, and the ability to dream beyond survival.