

Kampala and Wakiso Youth Thrive under AWYAD's Youth Ignite Approach Bridging the Unemployment Gap through Empowerment

Uganda has one of the youngest populations globally, with over 75% of its citizens under the age of 30. While this youthful demographic offers immense potential for economic growth and innovation, it also presents a pressing challenge: youth unemployment. In urban areas like Kampala and Wakiso, many young people grapple with limited job opportunities, underemployment, and a lack of marketable skills. To address this gap, the African Women and Youth Action for Development (AWYAD) launched the Youth Ignite approach. This approach was implemented through the Youth Empowerment, Entrepreneurship and Decent Employment (YEEDE) program which was implemented in partnership with VSO with funding from Standard Futuremakers by Standard Chartered Bank. The YEEDE program supported 500 vulnerable youth in Uganda 60% of which were female and 5% were people with disabilities, aiming

to: improve employability skills for 500 young men and women, including people with disabilities; enhance entrepreneurship skills for 300 young people, including people with disabilities (5%); create inclusive youth platforms and networks for 500 young people to enhance skills sharing and facilitate access to business development services; and create a conducive and supportive institutional policy and advocacy environment for entrepreneurship and employment in productive sectors. The Youth Ignite approach is designed to equip young people with market-ready vocational skills, mentorship, and access to financial resources, enabling them to secure employment or launch their own businesses. Through targeted interventions in digital skills, fashion, bakery, hairdressing, mechanics, and entrepreneurship, Youth Ignite is reshaping the future of Uganda's youth.



Youth Graduands with officials from AWYAD, VSO, Ministry of Education, KCCA and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development take group photo at the end of the Graduation ceremony held at AWYAD offices in Ntinda Kampala.

Engineering Opportunity: Joseph Katongole, the Motor Vehicle Mechanic

Joseph Katongole, 26, from Kyengera Town Council in Wakiso district, was passionate about automobiles but lacked formal training. After joining the Youth Ignite Motor Vehicle Mechanics Training Program, he received hands-on mechanical skills, diagnostics training, and business management education. Upon graduation, Joseph was supported to acquire startup tools and secured a space at a local garage, where he launched Katongole AutoFix Services. Within six months, Joseph built a reputation for reliable service and began mentoring three young apprentices. "Youth Ignite put tools in my hands and dreams in my heart," he explains. At the local garage Joseph now handles 10 – 15 vehicles monthly and generates monthly revenue of UGX 1.8 million (USD 500).



Above: Joseph Katongole ready to start work after receiving a toolbox from AWYAD and VSO team.

Below: Joseph and his team working on a clients vehicle at the local garage in Kyengera Town Council



Changing Lives by the Numbers

Since its inception, Youth Ignite has recorded impressive outcomes: 600 youth trained in vocational and entrepreneurship skills across Kampala and Wakiso; 75% employment rate among graduates, either through job placements or self-employment; 50% female participation rate, enhancing gender inclusion in economic development; 100 startups launched, ranging from digital marketing agencies to agro-businesses; 30% of startups incorporate green or digital innovation, promoting sustainable development; and 12 youth-led businesses now mentoring other young entrepreneurs in their communities.

Transforming the Future: The Broader Vision

Youth Ignite is more than a program; it is a movement of transformation. It redefines youth not as beneficiaries but as agents of economic growth and innovation.

AWYAD's model integrates skill-building, mentorship, financial access, and social inclusion, resulting in a holistic empowerment framework.

With Uganda's youth population projected to grow, Youth Ignite offers a scalable and replicable solution. Plans are underway to expand the approach to other districts and to integrate agribusiness, renewable energy, and digital finance training.

The stories of Brian, Sarah, Joseph, Sandra, James, and Maria are not anomalies; they represent the potential lying dormant in millions of Ugandan youths. With the right support, they rise—not just as survivors of a harsh economic climate, but as creators, innovators, and leaders. AWYAD's Executive Director Mr. Steven Bwayo notes that as Uganda grapples with youth unemployment, the Youth Ignite model offers a pathway forward—a future where young people are equipped, empowered, and energized to lead their communities. It is a future where unemployment is not a lifelong sentence but a challenge that can be overcome with vision, skill, and opportunity.

Indeed, when youth are ignited with purpose, there is no limit to how far they can go. AWYAD has lit that flame. Now, it's time to fuel it.



Nankya Prossy one of the Youth Graduands receiving her DIT Certificate during the graduation ceremony

Beauty with a Purpose: Sarah Nabwire's Hairdressing and Beauty Architecture Journey

Sarah Nabwire, 22, from Nansana Town Wakiso District, always had an eye for style and beauty. Yet, she lacked formal training and resources to open her own beauty salon. Through the Youth Ignite Hairdressing and Beauty Architecture Program, Sarah received intensive training in hairstyling, bridal makeup, skincare, and salon management.

With startup equipment provided by AWYAD, she opened Nabwire Glam Studio in the heart of Nansana town. Her client base grew rapidly thanks to social media promotion and referrals. Today, Sarah employs two apprentices and offers beauty services to more than 40 clients weekly.

"This program gave me the skills, the confidence, and the tools to be my own boss," Sarah says. Her salon now generates UGX 1.5 million monthly, and she dreams of starting a beauty academy to train others.



Sarah Nabwire at Nabwire Glam Studio in Nansana Town working on a client

Baking a Dream: Sandra Achen's Sweet Success

Sandra Achen, 23, always had a knack for baking but lacked the capital and business knowledge to turn her passion into a profession. Residing in Acholi Quarters – Band Left: Sandra Achen the Baker demonstrating to her team how to make the best chapati. Right: Sandra second from left show casing one of the cakes and other products at a workshop. Parish, Nakaw division; Sandra enrolled in AWYAD's Youth Ignite Bakery Training



Left: Sandra Achen the Baker demonstrating to her team how to make the best chapati.



Right: Sandra second from left show casing one of the cakes and other products at a workshop.

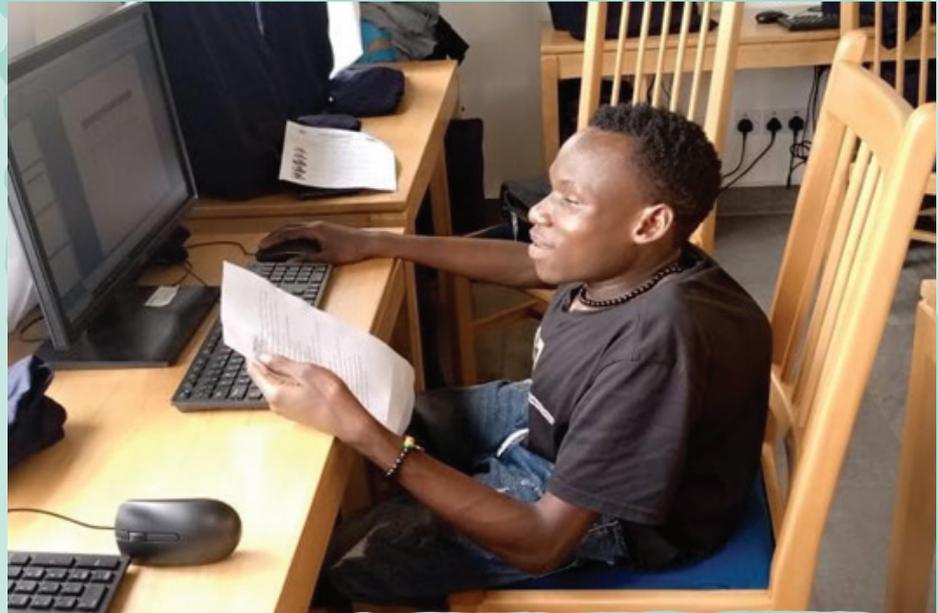
Program. She learned baking techniques,

food hygiene, customer service, inventory management, and financial planning. With a startup grant from AWYAD, she launched Kato's Treats, offering cakes, cookies, and pastries. Sandra's quality products quickly gained popularity, and within six months, she began supplying baked goods to nearby supermarkets and cafes. Sandra has since hired three other youths to support her growing enterprise. Her business not only generates a monthly income of UGX 1.8 million (USD 500) but also serves as an inspiration for young women looking to turn talents into thriving ventures.

Breaking Barriers:

James Mwesigwa's Story of Inclusion and Innovation

James Mwesigwa, 27, from Wakiso, has a physical disability that limits his mobility. For years, James faced discrimination in the job market despite his passion for business. Through AWYAD's Youth Ignite Digital Marketing training, James found an avenue to overcome these barriers.



James Mwesigwa from Wakiso Town Council at a Computer doing digital marketing for one of his clients

James mastered skills in content creation, digital branding, and targeted advertising. From the comfort of his home, he started a social media management agency, offering services to local businesses. Today, James works at internet cafe in Wakiso town council and also manages 12 business accounts, creating engaging content and running advertising campaigns that have increased his clients' online visibility.

"Youth Ignite showed me that disability is not inability. I'm proof that digital work can level the playing field," James shares. He earns a stable monthly income of UGX 1.2 million (USD 325) and is advocating for digital inclusion among other youths with disabilities.

Threads of Empowerment: Christina Nakyobe and Clementina Nglobi Fashion Journey

Christina Nakyobe, (24 years) and Clementina Nglobi (23 years) commonly referred to as Tina and Tina, had long dreamt of starting a fashion brand that celebrated African culture with a modern twist. However, lacking capital and professional training, their ideas remained sketches in a notebook. Youth Ignite's Fashion Design Program brought those sketches to life.

"AWYAD helped us turn dream into reality. We are not just designing clothes, we are creating identity," says Christine. Tina-Tina AfroTrend Wear records monthly sales of UGX 2 million (USD 550) and is expanding to offer online orders nationwide.



Christina Nakyobe at Tina-Tina AfroTrend Wear Production House in Rubaga Division



Clementina Nglobi show casing at African Wear Expo in Kampala

Tina and Tina trained in garment construction, fabric selection, and fashion branding. With startup support from AWYAD; they founded Tina-Tina AfroTrend Wear, a youth-focused fashion line combining traditional African prints with contemporary designs. Her creations went viral on Instagram, and she soon attracted a steady clientele from Kampala and beyond.

Tina and Tina trained now employs three young tailors and plans to attend Regional Fashion Expos to grow her brand.