



## **UGANDA NETWORK OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS**

### **REPORT OF THE 2024 Y+ BEAUTY PAGEANT CAMPAIGN,**

**THEME:** *“BREAKING BARRIERS BRIDGING GAPS”*,

**TIME FRAME;** *SEPTEMBER- NOVEMBER 2024*

### **ABOUT UNYPA**

Uganda Network of Young People living with HIV & AIDS (UNYPA) was established in 2003 to provide leadership and coordinate the greater, more meaningful engagement and participation of young people living with HIV (YPLHIV) in Uganda in the national, regional and global HIV/AIDS response.

**VISION:** Positive and productive lives for all young people living and affected by HIV/AIDS

**MISSION:** Creating an enabling environment for all young people living with HIV/AIDS to meaningfully participate equally in development of programs that improve their life styles.

**VALUES:** Honesty, Integrity, Transparency, Team work and Collective responsibility

## **BACKGROUND TO THE Y+ BEAUTY PAGEANT CAMPAIGN**

The Y+ Beauty pageant is an annual campaign aimed at fighting stigma and discrimination as well as addressing the structural drivers of gender-based violence and other HIV/SRHR related issues against young people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Y+ represents young people living with HIV. The Y+ Beauty Pageant addresses both self-stigma faced by YPLHIV and community stigma driven by the environment towards YPLHIV by uplifting their plight and harnessing the power of empowered YPLHIV in HIV activism.

UNYPA therefore, organises the Y+ beauty pageant for YPLHIV in order to re-echo their voices, co- create to build a strong, energetic, creative, and productive generation able to address the multiple dimensions in which stigma and discrimination affect young peoples through raising awareness and empowering Y+ Ambassadors both male & female as champions to challenge HIV related stigma, discrimination & gender based violence within their communities.

UNYPA works and partners with different Implementing partners like TASO, MJAB BAYLOR, IDI, UGANDA CARES among others that are referral hospitals with whom UNYPA collaborates with to identify Adolescents and Young people living with HIV between ages of 15-24 within the ART clinic who voluntarily aspire to participant and contestant in the Y+ Beauty Campaign. These IPs offer psychosocial support to the A/YPLHIV as they prepare to be a part of the campaign as well as financial support the YPLHIV to the identified district of audition.

The Y+ Beauty Pageant Model has been tested since 2014 from 10 contestants and this number has increased over the 9 years to 1092 ambassadors as of 2022. These have taken up the responsibility of fighting and discrimination in their different communities through different activities like school out reaches, peer to peer support groups, dialogues and representation on both national and international high-level meetings.

It is upon this background that UNYPA organizes the annual event; the campaign this year runs under the theme; **“Breaking Barriers Bridging Gaps”** which sought to transform the way in which YPLHIV are perceived by the communities from which they come and serve; it looked at projecting YPLHIV as agents of change, champions and ambassadors of meaningful youth engagement and participation to ensure that young people and adolescents living with HIV enjoy inclusive youth friendly access to sexual reproductive health rights services, gender equality and women empowerment as a precursor to challenging the structural, socio- economic barriers that drive gender- based violence especially among adolescent girls and young women. The stigma index report calculated overall resilience was at 1.85%, above the zero. Meaning despite, HIV, the PLHIV have coped positively on average.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE Y+ BEAUTY PAGEANT.**

- So far, engaged 1,092 YPLHIV as Y+ ambassadors in the 9-year journey.
- The Y+ Beauty pageant; an annual advocacy campaign has been awarded twice as an *“outstanding community initiative in the HIV response”* during the international conference on AIDs and STIs

in Africa 2017 (ICASA) held in Ivory Coast and during the International AIDS Society (IAS 2018) conference in Amsterdam Netherlands.

- Engaged 5,450 stakeholders in the community events including 540 health workers, 670 teachers, 3,245 young people.
- YPLHIV are more aware of their rights
- The Y+ pageant nationally recognized by UAC as an effective strategy in addressing stigma and discrimination
- Recognition of the importance of working with YPLHIV; programs like YAPS
- Improved meaningful engagement for YPLHIV; many have been incorporated into decision making structures such as the District AIDS Committees, Sub County AIDS Committees, District Youth Councils, UCCM Board committees
- Formation of 14 district based YPLHIV networks

### **Main Objective**

Zero Stigma and Discrimination among Adolescents and Young people living with HIV in Uganda.

### **Specific objectives;**

- To create a safe space for YPLHIV to safely express themselves freely, share stories of change and build coalitions to fight stigma within their own communities.
- To Promote linkages, Referrals and Retention/Follow-ups for new infections and young people as well as for YPLHIV falling out of care hence, leading to a reduction in further HIV infections as well as mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS.
- To promote inclusiveness of young people living with HIV including key Vulnerable and Marginalized groups in the design; implementation and monitoring of such HIV related programs.
- To enhance awareness and sensitization on gender issues such as gender-based violence, gender inequalities and inequities among YPLHIV especially young women and Adolescent.
- To Improve care and support within the health sector and home-based caregiving. This will be achieved through engagement of Y+ ambassadors who will continuously sensitize their host communities.

## **ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED DURING THE Y+ BEAUTY CAMPAIGN**

### **1. THE LAUNCH!!**

The launch event is mainly a "press briefing" with media groups made to present and inform them about the campaign; the media are given an opportunity to ask questions, seek clarity about the pageant, its objectives and impact including how the campaign shall be conducted across the country and the essence of the Y+ Beauty Pageant in the HIV/AIDS response in Uganda. The launch was held on September 27<sup>th</sup> 2024 at the Africana Hotel with attendance of only 78 participants including media, like minded partners, CSOs, YPLHIV, policy makers, ADPs, government representatives and Y+ ambassadors

The launch was a media café that was organized with journalists, donors, partners, the ambassadors, the partners and young people to create a safe space for a conversation on why it is important for innovations like the Y+ beauty pageant which challenge the stigma and discrimination that many YPLHIV face. Besides unveiling the campaign, audience was honored to listen to the experiences of Y+ ambassadors and how the campaign has positively transformed their lives into advocates, activists who are change makers in their communities hence lobbying public support for challenging HIV related stigma and discrimination.

### **2. REGIONAL AUDITIONS**

The Regional Auditions are a series of activities that paved the way to the Grand Finale of the Y+ Beauty Pageant; the auditions pulled 156 contestants in total; These were in districts of Kampala, Mayuge, Fortportal and Lira on the dates October 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup> 2024.

These audition pre- Activities included;

1) community dialogues with key stakeholders such as district leaders, school administrators, health workers, VHTs, client experts, parents, caretakers and young people on their role in addressing HIV related stigma and discrimination, challenging gender inequalities, gender based violence, addressing the structural barriers that affect provision of youth friendly SRHR- HIV services in public health facilities and strategic advocacy for implementation of policies which guarantee improved well-being of young people living with HIV.

2) During these events, Y+ ambassadors conducted door to door visits while delivering SRHR- HIV information, distributing and educating community members on condom use. Produced IEC materials such as posters, t-shirts, bags, fliers, banners, wrist bands to ease the dissemination of HIV/SRH messages.

The purpose of the auditions was to identify the ambassadors from the different regions in the country hence hosted in the central, western, eastern and northern parts; The eligibility for contesting as an ambassador was based on their willingness to open up about their HIV status, their knowledge on issues affecting YPLHIV, and their ability and willingness to represent YPLHIV, 2024 had a total of 156 contestants bringing the total to 1,248 ambassadors to date.

## **BASIC STATISTICS**

<b>REGION</b>	<b>NUMBER OF PEOPLE REACHED</b>				<b>TOTAL</b>
	<b>CENTRAL</b>	<b>EASTERN</b>	<b>NORTHERN</b>	<b>WESTERN</b>	
COMMUNITY DIALOGUE	25	30	30	30	<b>115</b>
AUDITIONS	24 contestants 35 spectators	48 contestants 40 spectators	34 contestants 45 spectators	56 contestants 45 spectators	<b>156 contestants</b> <b>1651 spectators</b>
CONDOMS DISTRIBUTED	102,000	110,000	101,000	95,000	<b>408,000 pieces</b>

From the auditions; the following were the regional winners who became the 18 national contestants vying for the national position;

<b>CENTRAL</b>	<b>EASTERN</b>	<b>NORTHERN</b>	<b>WESTERN</b>
Nakayemba Shadia Kisaakye Mary Grace Jimbo Shanurah Jokpee Emmanuel Ochuko Nicholas Mugabi Moses	Werema Ibrahim Wamusha Muhamma Achor Anna Rose Nassozi Miria	Omiat Simon Peter Akello Sandra Eliru David Akao Daisy Apio Martha Asha	Kambale Robert Kobusinge Grace Kiiza Justus Salha Adamz

## **THE BOOT CAMP**

The boot camp is a week-long residential capacity building and strengthening training for the 18 regional winners of the Y+ Beauty pageant enhancing their presentation, advocacy and leadership skills in preparations for the grand finale and the yearlong leadership in advocating for and addressing issues that affect young people living with HIV/AIDS in their respective communities. The boot camp was run from 15th- 18th November 2024 at Matterwood Hotel Kira and brought together 18 Y+ ambassadors (4 from the North, 4 from the East, 4 from the West and 6 from the Central region of the country)

The boot camp is meant to empower YPLHIV as youth champions and advocates to speak out for their rights, to create a safe space for YPLHIV to express themselves freely, share stories of change and build coalitions to fight stigma within their own communities and to enhance a gender-transformative focus on empowering women, men, boys and girls; and strengthen their capacity to participate in and benefit from programs to reduce HIV related stigma and discrimination. Prior to the boot camp, different consultations were made on what the different ambassadors presented as capacity gaps and topics that needed to be covered in the boot camp besides the other life skills building drills and sessions prepared by the partners; informed the program

of the boot camp. Other topics covered included; understanding the HIV/ADH trends in Uganda, youth led advocacy, innovations and SRHR, condom advocacy, effective communication and visibility, leadership and how leaders inspire action, Self-esteem, Body image dreaming and setting goals, Emerging trends on VAW in Cyber abuse and intimate partner violence, GBV, mental health and youth movement building.

### ***GRAND FINALE, NOVEMBER 19<sup>th</sup> 2024.***

The Grand Finale is the almost final step of the Y+ beauty pageant campaign; this is where the 18 crowned regional winners come to the national level to compete for the position of the national Mr. and Miss Y+ who shall lead the years' cohort of the Y+ ambassadors,

The 2024 Grand Finale was a glamorous scientific event held both physically and virtually on November 19<sup>th</sup> 2024 at Hotel Africana with participation of only 380 guests ranging from representatives from the HIV Parliamentary Committee, representatives from Ministry of Health, Education, Gender, the US Embassy, DUTCH Embassy, Embassy of Ireland, PEPFAR, UNFPA, UN Women, UNAIDS, Uganda AIDS Commission, Global network of people living with HIV, RUTGERS, Dutch Embassy, SRHR Alliance Uganda, Reproductive Health Uganda, Baylor, Mildmay, Reach Out Mbuya, Alive Medical Services Right Here, Right Now.

As we celebrate 10 years of, the **Y+ Beauty Pageant**, our team leader, **MaryRio Babirye**, reflects on this incredible journey: *"I am very grateful for what is happening today as the pageant marks 10 years. Words may fail to express how deep our gratitude is, but I thank you all for continuing to walk this journey with us as we create a safe environment for young people living with HIV (YPLHIV) in Uganda. In 2014, we started with just 10 contestants. Ten years down the road, we now have 1,248 ambassadors across the country. This milestone shows that we are truly breaking the chains of HIV stigma and discrimination in Uganda."* This is not just a celebration of a decade but a powerful testament to the resilience and courage of young people living with HIV. Together, we are fostering inclusion, empowerment, and hope for a brighter future. Thank you to everyone who has been part of this movement. Let's keep the momentum going as we advocate for a stigma-free Uganda!

### ***KEY NOTE ADDRESS; H.E. Frederieke Quispel,, Dutch Ambassador***

The key note address was delivered by **H.E. Frederieke Quispel**, he mentioned that he was excited about the work of young people especially in using innovations to address the SRHR- HIV challenges that they struggle with, it is important to have adolescent girls and young women at the centre of these initiatives because they are most disproportionately affected and bare even thrice the burden. *The Y+ pageant plays a key role in strengthening the district YPLHIV movement hence increasing the mass of young people protecting and promoting the rights of adolescents and young girls in their communities; this event is a strong advocacy agenda that we all need to push forward.* She encouraged young people to continuously

harness their energy, courage and power appropriately to change their lives and those of the people around them

***SPEECH FROM GUEST OF HONOR; His Excellence; William.W. Popp, Ambassador of the USA to Uganda***

The Grand finale was graced with the presence of special guests including the Guest of Honor; His Excellence; William.W.Popp, Ambassador of the USA to Uganda, he mentioned that, *'I am excited to be here, I can't think of a better way to appreciate UNYPA for implementing innovations that are committed to changing lives of young people, the lives of their peers and to changing how society views those living with HIV; the theme 'Bridging Gaps, Breaking Barriers is so very appropriate! When I asked my colleagues about this event, they lit up when describing what an amazing celebration this is and its relevance in showcasing the talent, creativity, and commitment of Uganda's youth and the critical role this majority of the population plays in not just shaping the future but what happens today!'*", H.E William.W.Popp, US Ambassador to Uganda.

The pageant was won by;

1. 1 st Runner Up KAMBAME ROBERT
2. 2 nd Runner UP OCHOKO NICHOLAS
3. National Mr. Y+ MUGABI MOSES
4. 1 st Runner Up APIO MARTHA ASHA
5. 2 nd Runner Up KISAKYE MARY GRACE
6. National Miss. Y+ JIMBO SHANURA

Key recommendations included;

1. There is need to continue empowering young people as advocates, activists and change makers for policy advocacy.
2. Partnerships and collaborations are important as they ensure a strengthened referral network for the YPLHIV to maximize service utilization
3. Work with men allies and partners in promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment as a mechanism of reducing AGYWs vulnerability to HIV infections and violence.
4. Strengthen Investment in addressing social cultural and gender injustices, inequalities that affect AGYWs empowerment and protection of their SRHR needs.
5. Strengthen mobilization of grassroot communities in the HIV/AIDS Response Advocacy

6. Invest in innovations that bring services closer to the people such as the UNYPA mobile application where young people can access SRHR-HIV information and services without the usual bureaucracies in public health facilities
7. Strengthen engagement of Parents and care takers in promoting the healthy welfare of Young people living with HIV.
8. Prioritize approaches that guarantee young people to access HIV prevention and treatment services. (Young people to know their HIV status and those found HIV positive to be initiated on treatment immediately).
9. There is need to support YPLHIV district movement building initiatives started by Y+ ambassadors as they create a basis for peer to peer support for AYPLHIV in the communities
10. Invest in innovations such as the Y+ beauty pageant, which work with and for young people to build a movement of advocates challenging HIV stigma and discrimination
11. Social structural Barriers (Gender inequalities, Violence on Girls and Women, Stigma and Discrimination continue to predispose many to HIV infections.).

## CONCLUSION

The Y+ Beauty Pageant campaign is the first of its kind in Africa and Uganda; the 3 months campaign this year is aimed at opening opportunities for YPLHIV, celebrating the works of Y+ ambassadors as change agents and the impact they have made in their communities, continue advocacy for creation of a safe and supportive environment for YPLHIV. The campaign shall attack and challenge the negative gender and cultural norms which drive HIV related stigma and its adverse effects, while also strengthening capacity of YPLHIV to frontline the fight towards ending AIDS by 2030.

*For more information on the 2024 Y+ beauty pageant campaign please follow the links; with videos,*

Different stakeholders and prominent media gurus took to social and mainstream media, held fruitful discussions regarding the pageant using the hashtags #BBG and #YPlusPageant24.

Please follow this link to access the digital; social, print, audio, visual reports for the Y+ beauty pageant;

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UHBOLzAW4rONCBUDgXEQe1H7aJ0MVZDX/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UHBOLzAW4rONCBUDgXEQe1H7aJ0MVZDX/view?usp=drive_link)

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1K7zjY24Y4ud\\_pG8FojzOpoL7xf8m\\_I-p/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1K7zjY24Y4ud_pG8FojzOpoL7xf8m_I-p/view?usp=drive_link)

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<https://youtu.be/aqY0ZayauOA?si=qt9VlmSgudozrR43>



<https://youtu.be/aqY0ZayauOA?si=qt9VImSgudozrR43>

<https://youtu.be/y4Ux4bOnDak?si=Um7oFMW1BIshHm4t>

<https://www.radiocomnetu.org/mamafm/2024/09/27/empowering-youth-living-with-hiv-9-years-of-the-y-beauty-pageant/>

<https://bit.ly/3BjWaxd>

<https://youtu.be/rAgoZiK7Qc0?si=A0Cy4Kgpo9S3zEij>

## PICTORIALS

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bTpIYQwbx4ZyrKtpCUQZ5L2IFuSoMCx1?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bTpIYQwbx4ZyrKtpCUQZ5L2IFuSoMCx1?usp=drive_link)