



Future Health Systems
Innovations for equity



Photovoice: Youth and maternal health in rural Uganda



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FHS is a research consortium working to improve access, affordability, and quality of health services for the poor

Where we work



What we work on

Each of the country studies feeds into one of three cross-cutting themes:

- Unlocking Community Capabilities (UCC)
- Stimulating Innovations
- Intervening in complex adaptive systems (CAS)

In Uganda, FHS has implemented a number of research projects to understand how best to mobilise community resources for better maternal health. One of these research projects uses ‘photovoice’ to involve local youth in identifying maternal and new born health issues in the community and in identifying opportunities to engage in their improvement. The study was carried out in Bulwanyi parish, Ssisa sub-county, Wakiso district – a rural area in Central Uganda.

About photovoice

Photovoice is a visual research methodology through which people can represent, and enhance their community by photographing their daily lives and the lives of those around them. It is a qualitative and participatory research method that aims to capture what occurs when researchers are not necessarily present.

Following a range of trainings – on how to use digital cameras, how to approach a picture subject, and getting people's consent – study participants used the cameras provided to them to capture aspects and situations in their community where youth can contribute to improving maternal health for a period of five months. Monthly meetings were held between the youth and research team to discuss the photos and to identify collectively emerging themes and areas for action.

Access to health services



Government health facilities exist in neighbouring communities. And despite stories of limited numbers of qualified health workers and the poor attitudes these workers can take towards pregnant women, they manage to serve many women and children. Pictured here is a pregnant woman who is smiling after having received adequate care at a health facility.

Photographer: Eria Mdidde

To reach health facilities and trained health workers, women must travel over 7km. It takes both time and money to travel there, which limits the number of antenatal and post-natal visits expectant and new mothers make. A common way to get to the health facilities is on a hired motorcycle, known as a *boda boda*. In this picture a mother takes her young child to a health centre for an immunisation.

Photographer: Denis Mpiima Mukooza





Making it to the health facility does not ensure that they will be seen by a skilled health worker. Often pregnant women must wait several hours for a consultation. Here, two pregnant women lay on the grass outside the health centre waiting for the health workers to arrive.

Photographer: John Ssewadda

Education,
knowledge and
access to
information

Teenage pregnancy is associated with higher morbidity and mortality for both the mother and child. But in Uganda, the median age for a mother at first birth is 18.6 years. Pictured here is a pregnant teenager who is also carrying her first child in her arms.

Photographer: Anthony Mpanga





Although several methods for contraception are available in Uganda, the unmet need among married women for family planning is thought to be around 34%. In this picture are two siblings who can be mistaken for twins - an indication of lack of use of family planning methods for spacing children. As the older is only learning how to crawl, the young one is already starting to sit.

Photographer: Roger Mubiru

But there are also areas where education has been effective. Malaria is the leading killer in the area, but insecticide-treated bednets have been found to be effective in preventing the spread of this disease. In this picture an expectant woman sits on her bed, which is protected by a mosquito net.

Photographer: Juliet Anyango





Top row (left to right): Cate Namuganga, Henry Bugembe, Roger Mubiru, Juliet Anyango, John Sserwadda, Cotride Nakazibwe

Bottom row (left to right): David Musoke, Denis Mpiima Mukooza, Cate Nandawula, Anthony Mpanga, Rawlance Ndejjo, Annet Nakayima

Outcomes and participants

The study shows that local youth have a significant role to play in improving maternal health. This included health education on issues such as family planning, antenatal care, women engaging in income generating activities, and avoiding unhealthy practices during pregnancy.

It also established that youth can do advocacy among concerned authorities on challenges women face in accessing maternal health services. Youth also highlighted their potential for involvement in community work like helping those in need, improving roads, and clearing bushes and unblocking drainage of water sources to prevent malaria.

The research had several benefits for the participants. They became more knowledgeable about maternal health issue, carrying out advocacy work, and participation in voluntary community activities.

Future Health Systems is a research consortium working to improve access, affordability and quality of health services for the poor. We are a partnership of leading research institutes from across the globe working in a variety of contexts: in low-income countries (Bangladesh, Uganda), middle-income countries (China, India) and fragile states (Afghanistan) to build resilient health systems for the future.

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