

Health Workers: Champions of Advancing Reproductive & Maternal Health

THE EMPOWER PROGRAMME | UGANDA



The EMPOWER Programme

Funded by the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the EMPOWER Programme (February 2025–December 2026) supports the Government of Uganda to reduce preventable maternal and child deaths by **strengthening public health systems, building health worker capacity to deliver quality reproductive and maternal health services, and addressing misinformation and harmful gender norms.** Pathfinder International leads implementation in partnership with Baylor College of Medicine Children's Foundation Uganda, the Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Uganda, Communication for Development Foundation Uganda, and Uganda Youth and Adolescent Health Forum.

A mother and child reached by the EMPOWER programme at Iganga Regional Referral Hospital.



Note from the EMPOWER Team Leader

Health systems strengthening, localisation, and sustainable change—these are the values that drive our work at Pathfinder International Uganda. These values are exemplified in the EMPOWER programme, which united communities, local leaders, and district governments in the mission to improve reproductive and maternal health outcomes. Through initiatives like Young Mothers' Forums, household visits, and Obstetric Fistula Surgical Camps, which you will read about in this photobook, EMPOWER brought life-changing counselling and services to women and girls across 50 districts of Uganda.

These achievements were delivered by the EMPOWER programme's most valuable partners: health workers. Every mother and child saved, every woman and girl provided with postpartum family planning, every household counselled against harmful norms and misinformation—were reached by a health worker, either at the facility level or through a Village Health Team volunteer. After EMPOWER's closure in December 2026, the programme-supported improvements to health facilities' operations, equipment, and service provision will be carried forward by health workers. Within Uganda's health system and among communities in programme-supported districts, health workers represent the heart, voice, and legacy of EMPOWER.

This photobook shares personal experiences from some of the health workers who partnered with EMPOWER to strengthen health system capacity to deliver quality family planning and maternal health services—and stories about their impact in the lives of clients. I hope their voices inspire you like they do for us at Pathfinder Uganda.

We are grateful to FCDO for their support to the EMPOWER programme; to Baylor College of Medicine Children's Foundation Uganda, the Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Uganda, Communication for Development Foundation Uganda, and Uganda Youth and Adolescent Health Forum for partnering with us; and to the health workers of Uganda for breathing life into EMPOWER.

Warmly,



DR. RITAH WADDIMBA NAKIGUDDE
Country Director, Pathfinder Uganda
Team Leader, UK EMPOWER Programme

The Heart, Voice, and Legacy of EMPOWER

The close partnership of health workers was integral to EMPOWER's work. Health workers received training and mentorship in a range of topics, including basic and comprehensive emergency obstetric and newborn care, administration of long-acting reversible contraceptives, commodity management and reporting systems, and integration of family planning into other services (e.g. maternal, newborn, and child health; immunisation; HIV).

With strengthened capacity to provide quality family planning and maternal health services, health workers reached clients at the community-level through outreaches and home visits. Through a mentorship system, EMPOWER-trained health workers cascaded their knowledge and practical skills to health workers at lower-level facilities, creating a cycle of continuous quality improvement.

RITAH, NABINGOLA HEALTH CENTRE III

Family Planning Integration for Better Maternal Health Outcomes

Naziwa Ritah Mirembe, 35, has served as a midwife for over 14 years, providing essential Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) services to women and their families. At her facility, she is among the frontline health workers driving a significant shift in service delivery, where family planning is no longer offered as a standalone service but integrated into every client interaction.

By 7:30 each morning, Ritah arrives at Nabingola Health Centre III and spends her day attending to more than 50 women seeking a range of health services. Through the EMPOWER Programme, every service point has become an opportunity to counsel women on their reproductive choices and provide voluntary family planning services.

Midwife Ritah reviews the family planning register at Nabingola Health Centre III.

"Family planning is now part of everything we do," Ritah explains. "Instead of waiting for women to come specifically for family planning, we provide counselling and services during antenatal care, maternity, postnatal, child health, and outpatient visits. This has helped us reach more women than before."

The integration of family planning across departments has been reinforced through continuous quality improvement initiatives, mentorship, and supportive supervision. Before EMPOWER, immediate postpartum family planning was rarely offered, despite health workers knowing it was possible. Women were routinely advised to return six weeks after delivery, resulting in missed opportunities to initiate contraception.

Today, health workers at Nabingola Health Centre III have the knowledge, confidence, and practical skills to provide postpartum family planning before mothers are discharged. As a result, the facility recorded a remarkable increase in immediate postpartum family planning uptake, from zero clients in October 2025 to 30 women by February 2026.

For Ritah, these changes mean fewer missed opportunities for women to make informed reproductive health choices. Through integrating family planning into routine care, the facility is ensuring that every client encounter contributes to improved access, increased uptake, and better maternal and newborn health outcomes.

VIOLET, IGANGA GENERAL HOSPITAL

Strengthening Provider Competency Increases IUD Uptake at Iganga General Hospital and Lower Health Facilities

Over the years, Iganga General Hospital has registered low uptake of long-acting reversible contraceptives. This has been attributed to gaps in family planning counseling, limited provider confidence in offering and inserting long-acting methods, and commodity stockouts. As a result, some clients have not been able to access their methods of choice, leading to missed opportunities for voluntary family planning uptake.

To bridge this divide, the EMPOWER Programme implemented a training and on-the-job mentorship model, using a low-dose, high-frequency approach. National trainers built the capacity of regional trainers, who then cascaded mentorship to facility-level providers. [The approach focused on continuous learning in real service delivery settings](#), strengthening family planning provision, documentation, infection prevention, and commodity management without disrupting routine service delivery. Kyakuwaire Violet, a midwife at Iganga General Hospital, was among the providers who benefited from this mentorship approach.

“We were trained in the new techniques of inserting IUDs, both hormonal and Copper T, including side effect management for other family planning methods. We used to think that hormonal imbalance was the only cause of bleeding, but I got to know other causes and how to manage them,” she said.

Following this mentorship, Violet cascaded the skills to six lower health facilities, including Nakalama, Bunyiro, Nawandala, Bugono, Busonozi, and Nambale, expanding the number of providers competent in delivering long-acting reversible contraceptive methods and improving access at community level.

The EMPOWER model also strengthened commodity management and reporting systems through mentorship embedded in routine work.

“We were also mentored in commodity management. Before, we used to have stock-outs, but now we routinely monitor our stock status and do bi-monthly orders, which has helped us to keep our facilities well stocked. EMPOWER has enabled us to report timely through the monthly reports, and this has strengthened our documentation and forecasts,” she explained.

Before EMPOWER, Iganga General Hospital provided an average of 10 IUD insertions per month. This has now increased to about 25 insertions on average.

Through this mentorship approach, EMPOWER continues to strengthen provider competencies, improve service delivery systems, and expand access to quality long-acting contraceptive services across facilities.

Midwife Violet reports improvement in stock management at Iganga General Hospital.



HEALTH WORKER VOICES FROM LUUKA DISTRICT, BUGOSA REGION

Better Counselling for Better Reproductive and Maternal Health Outcomes

At Bukoova Health Centre III, Midwife Nabirye Joy remembers a time not too long ago when family planning services were scarce and often deprioritized.

“We used to have a very low uptake of family planning services, especially postpartum family planning,” she recalls. “Sometimes, we would turn women away and ask them to return another day. It was heartbreaking to see some of them come back pregnant, reminding us that we had turned them away.”

This began to change when the EMPOWER programme came on board. EMPOWER provided targeted mentorship to improve counselling skills and support with commodity redistribution and documentation, which resulted in a notable rise in long-term family planning uptake. The facility launched a continuous quality improvement project to boost postpartum family planning services, and early results show a positive upward trend.

Joy believes the increase is due to strengthened health education: “If we continue strengthening these efforts, more women will take up family planning, and we shall have empowered women to decide when and how many children to have.”

At Nawampiti Health Centre II, Nalulondo Olivia, the maternity in-charge, has noticed a change among young mothers. The introduction of Young Mothers’ Forums—safe spaces where pregnant teenagers and young mothers receive counselling on family planning, gender-based violence, and antenatal care has created a supportive environment that did not exist before.

“We never used to counsel clients properly,” says Olivia. “Even now, some young people say, ‘Eh, these days you guys are teaching us?’ It is exciting to see them take charge of their reproductive health.”

With EMPOWER’s support, the facility now provides long-acting reversible contraceptives, something it previously lacked the capacity for. In just three months, 78 young women under 24 have taken up a method. One of them, Barbara, is proud of her decision:

“I’m happy I received Jadelle. Now I can focus on my farming and take care of my one-year-old daughter without worrying about another pregnancy.”

Young Mothers’ Forums

EMPOWER’s Young Mothers’ Forums were a structured social and behaviour change approach that combined peer support, provider engagement, and integrated RMNCH and family planning counselling within routine health facility services. They were designed to improve knowledge, strengthen health-seeking behaviours, and increase utilization of RMNCH and postpartum family planning services among pregnant girls and young mothers aged 15–24 years. The forums created safe spaces for discussion, peer learning, and practical problem-solving while strengthening trust between young mothers and health providers. Sessions were integrated into routine antenatal care and immunisation services, enabling repeated engagement during pregnancy and the postpartum period.



Young Mothers’ Forum at Iganga General Hospital.



A Village Health Team visits a home in Iganga district.

EMPOWER Household Model

EMPOWER's Household Model delivered integrated sexual and reproductive health information and services to families' doorsteps. EMPOWER trained Village Health Teams in family planning counselling and service provision to conduct targeted home visits. During these visits, Village Health Team volunteers provided short-acting contraceptives; counselling; antenatal, delivery, and postnatal care; immunisations; and referrals to nearby health facilities for long-acting reversible contraceptives and other maternal health services.

Village Health Teams also identified and engaged households where teenage pregnancy, early child marriage, or gender-based violence were a concern. Through consistent, intimate conversations, they addressed barriers to care stemming from deep-seated social and gender norms, followed up with pregnant adolescents for postpartum family planning services, and ensured all eligible household members were counselled and linked to appropriate services.

Community-level Health Worker Impact

A well-trained, confident, and supported health workforce inspires trust in health systems and provides tools for addressing harmful norms and misinformation—both within and beyond health facility walls. In hard-to-reach areas of Uganda, EMPOWER supported Village Health Teams, composed of volunteer health workers, to bring family planning and maternal health counselling and services directly to households' doorsteps. And when women and girls at the community level know that they can turn to their health facilities when they need support, care-seeking behaviour increases.

VILLAGE HEALTH TEAMS DELIVER CHANGE

Reaching Young Couples with Maternal Health and Family Planning Information at Home

Akello Mercy, 18, from Telela Village in Apala Town Council, Alebtong District, had married early. After dropping out of school in Primary Two, her parents encouraged her to wed quickly so the family could receive dowry. With little knowledge of family planning, Mercy married her husband, Richard. She became pregnant with their first child soon after.

The sudden transition to parenthood strained their relationship. Caring for one baby was daunting enough—what if Mercy became pregnant again before they were ready?

The couple reached a turning point when a Village Health Team volunteer, Opio, approached them with an invitation to enroll in the EMPOWER Household Model. Mercy and Richard agreed, and Opio conducted regular home visits, where he provided counselling on family planning, gender-based violence prevention, antenatal care, malaria prevention, and immunisation. He engaged both Mercy and Richard, helping them understand how to care for their family's health.

The couple also attended a community dialogue organized by EMPOWER, which brought together women, men, and girls to address harmful practices, debunk myths about family planning, and encourage open conversation about shared decision making. Listening to other families' experiences helped Mercy and Richard reflect on their own choices. For the first time, Mercy felt informed and supported to make her own decisions.

After safely delivering her baby in November 2025, Mercy chose an immediate postpartum family planning method—three-year Implanon—so she could focus on recovering, caring for her baby, and acquiring skills before considering another pregnancy. Richard committed to supporting Mercy in enrolling in vocational training to become a tailor, which would provide her with the opportunity to generate income and gain independence.

"I didn't understand before, but now I see the importance of supporting my wife," Richard says.

"Opio's visits and the community dialogues helped us plan our family and build a stronger relationship."

AGABA LODIOUS FINDS FREEDOM FROM FISTULA**Restoring Dignity through Obstetric Fistula Surgical Camps**

Agaba Lodious, 37, developed obstetric fistula five years ago following a caesarean delivery. She began experiencing uncontrollable urine leakage and sought care at Mubende Hospital, but did not receive effective treatment. The condition persisted despite medication, causing Lodi to withdraw from public life.

Struggling with loss of confidence due to constant use of pads and discomfort, she stayed home during social events and church services. "I hated myself and tried to hide it from others," she says.

Lodious found hope through a radio announcement about a fistula repair camp, hosted through the EMPOWER programme. She attended and received specialized care for three weeks, after which she was successfully treated.

"I am now healed and back to my normal life. I no longer use pads, and I even attended the full Christmas service," she shares.

Now, Lodious is focused on growing her business and farm to support her family. And she encourages pregnant women to deliver in health facilities to prevent complications.

Obstetric Fistula Surgical Camps

In collaboration with the Urogynaecology department at Mbarara Regional Referral Hospital, the EMPOWER programme hosted two six-day fistula and birth injury repair camps at Hoima and Mubende Regional Referral Hospitals. Each fistula repair team included an obstetrician/gynaecologist, a midwife, and an anaesthetist from Lira and Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospitals for competency-based fistula/birth injury repair training. Through these camps, 48 women received successful surgical repair.

**LEARN MORE****Preventing Obstetric Fistula Through Health Systems Strengthening in Uganda**

Explore EMPOWER's proven framework for preventing obstetric fistula through integrated, health system-driven solutions. By strengthening local capacity, improving quality of care, and addressing the underlying factors that contribute to birth injuries, Pathfinder is helping transform maternal health outcomes across Uganda.



Agaba Lodious received treatment for her fistula at a surgical camp held at Mubende Hospital.

Gratitude and Acknowledgements

EMPOWER extends its gratitude to the UK Government through the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office for its generous support, and to the Ministry of Health, Pathfinder International, Baylor College of Medicine Children's Foundation Uganda, Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Uganda, Communication for Development Foundation Uganda, Uganda Youth and Adolescent Health Forum, district local governments, and health facility teams working together across EMPOWER-supported sites.



Health workers attend to a patient at a fistula camp at Mubende Hospital.



PATHFINDER

The **Empowering Women for Better Reproductive Health Outcomes (EMPOWER)** programme is an initiative funded by the UK Government to reduce preventable maternal deaths and empower women and girls in Uganda. Implemented on behalf of the Ministry of Health, EMPOWER is led by Pathfinder International in partnership with Baylor Uganda, Communication for Development Foundation Uganda, Uganda Youth and Adolescent Health Forum, and the Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Uganda.

This photobook is made possible by the generous support of the UK Government. The contents are the responsibility of Pathfinder and do not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Government.

For nearly 70 years, Pathfinder International has been a catalyst for systems transformation, inclusive growth, and resilient communities in over 120 countries across the world. With a global footprint spanning Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East, we invest in women, girls, and communities by expanding access to essential health products and services while advancing health systems, unlocking leadership pathways, and strengthening economic and climate resilience. Through strategic partnerships with civil society, governments, and the private sector, we scale innovations and data-driven models that deliver measurable impact. We advance this work alongside men and communities, co-creating and building environments and systems to ensure every woman has the agency to shape her future and lead a healthy, fulfilling life.

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