

DAR-GIRLS





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A movement building story,
4 girl leaders on a mission

Jennifer John Mbemba, Wadada Wa Leo
Francisca Pashcal, Social Empowerment
Mariam Jumah Husein, Jitambue
Zawadi Salehe Mtande, Juhudi Girls

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Surviving Childhood

“ Before that I was a happy child, I would sing, dance, tell stories, but the death of my father and these painful changes took a toll...

Jennifer John Mbemba is the leader of Wadada Wa Leo which translates to ‘Sisters of today.’ It is in Bunju, Kinondoni in Tanzania.

When Jennifer walks into a room, her inner fortitude is palpable – her confidence admirable. Her power is not off putting; it draws people in to listen to her, to engage with her.

Jennifer was wise before her years. When she was only 5 years old Jennifer had come home to find her beloved father dead. That dark day would escalate into more terrifying days for the family. Jennifer’s fathers’ family would proceed to take every thing they owned. Why? Because Jennifer’s mother wouldn’t agree to the cultural practice of “widow inheritance” where a widow is required to be married to a male relative of her late husband, often his brother.

“They took everything, even his National Social Security Fund. My mother had been a stay-at-home woman, she farmed, took care of us. My father was the one who worked as an engineer. We had a good life until he died.”



This experience scarred Jennifer, leaving her to detest the uncertainty of marriage especially. Jennifer’s mother moved the family to a single room. It was in the village where her mother’s side of the family lived.

“It was very sad for me – it made me ‘mute’. Before that I was a happy child, I would sing, dance, tell stories, but the death of my father and these painful changes took a toll and I stopped speaking. I stopped being a child. There was no room to be a child, no reason to smile. My teachers or anybody who knew me before would have been shocked.

When I finished primary 7 and took the national exams, I didn’t bother checking on the results. A girl like me had no hope for continuing education- but I knew I was old enough to be a house girl-in the capital city.”



“ It was hard for me to make friends because parents in the society didn't want their children to be friends with someone raised by only one parent, a woman.

Francisca Pashcal is the leader of Social Empowerment located in Kigamboni, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

For Francisca, life pains began when her father left her mother, herself and her little brother. In a culture where single motherhood was shunned, their household was treated like a stain on their tight knit community.

Since I didn't grow up with my father, it was hard for me to make friends because parents in the society didn't want their children to be friends with someone raised by only one parent, a woman. They thought I had bad manners and that my family was selling their bodies [commercial sex work] to get money.

Francisca's mother was a businesswoman. She rose early every morning to make snacks for sale and went to the seacoast to buy and sell fish. As far as Francisca can remember, she took care of her little brother and sold the snacks her mother left behind. Sometimes things got very hard with the abuse, and her mother would get depressed. As a result, Francisca became a mother figure early on. It hurt her to see the suffering, and made her feel let down by men.

Mariam Jumah Husein, is the leader of Jitambue in Temeke, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania.

“Uyu ni fashionista!” Mariam's friends call her a fashionista. She dresses well, chooses fabric skillfully and showcases the latest designs brilliantly.

“Mariam can be gentle; she is not a big lady but don't mistake her, she is strong and a big defender of girls. This year Mariam did something very kind. When I got engaged, she travelled over 4 hours to be with me. I was so happy; you can rely on her.” Jennifer

When Mariam starts voicing with passion the power that girls can build together it is hard not to jump to your feet and follow her lead. Things weren't always this way. She was a shy timid little girl who had lost her mother early on and started her life with her father and grandparents in the village. Mariam was a smart student with a lot of potential to excel in her education, but the culture she was born into didn't value a girl's education. She was a big sister tasked with taking care of everyone, finding a way to earn money, and starting a family of her own when she got married.

As was the norm for other girls in her circumstances, as soon as she finished primary school she was sent to work as a house maid to contribute to her family. When the final exam results were released Mariam had passed and returned to her village with the hope that she would continue with secondary education but this hope was crushed by her father. According to him would most probably get pregnant and drop out. Mariam wasn't willing to go back into house help work. Mariam's dad was willing to consider another option – tailoring and fashion design skilling. His sister lived in town and shared some ideas about opportunities for vocational skilling. This was the beginning of Mariam's power building journey.





Zawadi Salehe Mtande is the leader of Juhudi Girls, in Illala, Kiwalani, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Zawadi's parents had always been her biggest supporters. Unlike many other girls in her village, they encouraged her to complete her secondary education. Once word spread that she had completed school, potential suitors and their parents — began knocking, asking for her hand in marriage. The elders told her parents that if they were not careful, she would age and not be marketable any more for marriage.

She had dreamed of being a nurse or teacher working with children, so she knew she needed more training and staying at home would not be the answer. She kept looking for opportunities, telling people about her dreams, growing more certain she wanted a different life — one that would be meaningful to her and her community.



Breakthrough

Breakthroughs aren't always earth-shattering. Sometimes, they're a simple radio jingle, a conversation with a neighbour, a movement that meets people where they are — at home in their community, or even a knock on the door.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The knock didn't come soon enough. Kiota Women's Health and Development (KIWOHEDE), a non-governmental organisation and a community partner of Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund (CRVPF) at the time was looking to provide opportunities for young girls to build their vocational skills to enable them better position themselves for income generation and social economic wellness.

WHEN WE CHOOSE COMMUNITY, WE WIN

Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund (CRVPF) is a child rights and social justice regional intermediary organisation that was founded in April 2015. We are a grant making entity which supports and strengthens the capacity of community organisations in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, to prevent violence and sexual violence against children and young people. We support our partners to create enabling environments free from violence, which strengthens the agency and resilience of children and young people, enables them to build power to make informed choices and decisions, and facilitates access to dignified and fulfilling employment opportunities.

We choose community-based partners-because they reach the last mile in the grassroots, because they know the context, they are close to the people, they are for the most part a permanent fixture in their neighbourhoods. In this instance, CRVPF's partner was well situated to provide relevant life skills and income generation support for young girls who were looking to ignite their potential to achieve the futures they dreamed of.

MONEY MATTERS

After primary school, Jennifer went to work in her neighbourhood and she remembers how happy she was to receive her first salary. Jennifer wanted only one thing- to put a smile on her mother's face. She had watched her suffer without money, face ridicule, and have no say in how their life was progressing.

"I knew very early on the power of work and the power of having your own money, I knew that you couldn't rely on marriage to save

you — look at what happened to my mother. So, when I got my first pay, I bought her salt, some oil, soap and a kanga (a colourful cloth or garment). It made her smile. I was young but I knew that we needed more money. My mother helped me find a family in the city who needed help — I went there and worked as a house maid."

Before she left, Jennifer swore her uncle to secrecy — he was a well-known builder in their village. Jennifer vowed to send money home to buy land and have him construct a simple home for her mother. It would be their secret. For two years she toiled until finally she could afford the land and start the foundation.

"I didn't buy a thing, not one thing for myself, my uncle would call to give me positive updates on our project and this made me stronger. In the second year he called and said it was time to roof the house."

Jennifer decided to request for her first time-off to buy the iron sheets and finish constructiong, however, she was devastated to find that the house was non-existent. Jennifer went back to Dar-es-Salaam devastated and requested a lady she had made friends with to let her stay with her as a nanny for her new born in exchange for living and being with her family.

"I just wanted a place to rest and be treated as a member of the family. Besides, the lady had reminded me of my mother and they looked alike. Anytime I got a gift or money I sent it to my mother but I never looked back to that village."

Through this lady Jennifer was connected to Kiota Women's Health and Development (KIWOHEDE), a neighbour reached out to them because she knew that there was a young girl living there that might be interested in going to a vocational school.

"I never really wanted to sew, rather I loved to build things to see people wear something I imagined and made."

At KIWOHEDE, Jennifer thrived; learning various techniques in fashion, design, soap-making and life skills. She made new friends, girl leaders: Zawadi, Mariam, and Francisca, with whom, she has remained close. Jennifer, together some classmates started a farming group and, with the support of a teacher, created a business plan that was supported. Additionally, the group received free land from the school to implement their plan. It was a challenging but eye-opening experience. Jennifer had done this because they were nearing the end of their training and she wanted to find ways to work together and earn money.

"We did well with the fruits and vegetables but hadn't planned on marketing and selling our produce. That business 'went with the wind'. We saved some little from what we earned, ate a lot of fruits and vegetables but it was critical in teaching us about working in groups."

Towards the end of her bursary, Jennifer received an extension and she was thrilled. Jennifer and the other students got to learn about soap making, batik (a technique of wax-resist dyeing applied to fabric) and she was also chosen to learn weaving. Being on the powerful weaving machine, choosing colour and using thread to create beautiful cloth was energising. It was different from sewing; she used all her senses and creative energy. She felt powerful.





TURN ON THE RADIO

Mariam had been saddened by her work as a housemaid. It didn't matter that she wouldn't be following through with education; at this point she couldn't do it any longer. She had an eye for fashion even as a little girl in a difficult village, but she did not know that there would be an opportunity for someone else to believe in her, for a place where she could get out of her loneliness and be with other girls and together change the trajectory of their lives.

While listening to the radio she heard about the opportunity for girls to attend vocational skilling at no charge at KIWOHEDE, she was excited and her father agreed to take her to his sister's house near the school to explore this opportunity. Mariam was accepted into the program. She was overjoyed, Mariam flourished in fashion and design, and almost immediately her sense of power began to shift.

By the time Mariam completed the vocational program she had mastered various skills particularly excelling at pattern making, tailoring, fashion and design – her dresses and bags were admired. After her training, Mariam returned to her Auntie uncertain about the path ahead, no longer the timid girl, Mariam had skills that no one could take away and had awakened her potential. Mariam's Auntie helped her find a job at a clothes factory and right away, Mariam started to attract the interest of others as she brought them together to ask them what they knew to do, what they were good at so she could learn and teach them what she had learned. Very soon, after work and on weekends, her Auntie's porch had become a mini workshop where Mariam and her new group were making beautiful pieces, talking about life, helping each other solve problems and imagining new futures together.

CHANGE MAKER

When Francisca's mother was approached to let her daughter enroll in vocational training at KIWOHEDE she didn't need to think twice. The family had endured despicable insults, and Francisca's mother, not having the skills to earn money and provide for her children, wanted a better future for her. Francisca was ready and determined to change her story.

"I was excited to go to school and there I couldn't believe they would train me for free. I learned about smart thinking, how to set my own goals and achieve them. I learned how to make batik fabric and how to make soap. I made many friends, like Jennifer, Zawadi, Mariam and others which made me feel so happy because I usually felt lonely at home."

Francisca was unstoppable. When she completed the program, determined to change the lives of other girls.

"I felt ready to return to my community and build a life for myself and help others."

BEFORE MARRIAGE

Zawadi's story is a little different from many girls in her community. When she was growing up she had wanted to be a teacher or a nurse, and while she didn't end up in either one of these fields, Zawadi has ended up in a role as a girl leader and mentor that has surpassed the things she had hoped to do with her life.

Her family was different from others in the community; they were everything pro-girls and they did their best to educate her as far as they could manage. Unlike other girls in her neighbourhood who were barely allowed to attend primary school, Zawadi's parents took her all the way to high school and she completed and received her ordinary level certificate.

Then the elders started visiting with suitors and cautioning her parents that if they waited any longer, she would get old and there would be no one to marry her.

Even though her parents comforted her and were always ready to support her decision, Zawadi could feel the pressure yet her dream for herself was different. The day that a guest came by carrying the good news of a free vocational training opportunity, Zawadi was the happiest.

"At the time I didn't have interest in tailoring, sewing and art. However, it was a way out to get out of a marriage which I wasn't ready for."

Zawadi enrolled and successfully trained in life skills, fashion and design including batik, similar to her new friends the girl leaders Mariam, Jennifer, and Francisca. Upon completion, Zawadi had built confidence in these skills and later with training from CRVPF strengthened her inner courage and sharpened her public speaking and teaching ability.

"I didn't miss being a nurse or teacher because as a mentor to the girls in the safe spaces, I care for many who are hurting, and I am always teaching whether it's a skill whether it's self-awareness or reproductive health campaigns in schools and on the street. In fact, I have been selected as a health educator and member of the health committee at two hospitals which I am very proud of because I speak up for girls in my community."



Training Ground

After Jennifer, Mariam, Zawadi and Francisca, successfully completed training at KIWOHEDE, they were introduced to a new world, new friends, new mentors and possibilities.

THE MOVEMENT

When Mariam, Zawadi, Jennifer and Francisca met, they didn't know they were already girl movement builders. However, even while at school, it was clear that they were unique, already bringing other girls together to work on projects such as: vegetable growing, sewing and crafting.

On return to their communities Mariam, Zawadi and Francisca had all helped either build a new group or expand one they had already started before they graduated. The goal was to 'pay forward' what they had received for free; starting with bringing the girls in their communities together – connecting regularly in a safe space and supporting each other. They would do this first on their own and later with the support of CRVPF's Adolescent Girls Power Program (AGPP) which would enable them recognise the power they had within them to make positive decisions and actions to prevent violence and sexual violence as well as build power.

All four girls were pleasantly surprised that the work they were doing in their communities was noticed. They never expected CRVPF to fund their work and build their leadership skills to support other girls. Soon after graduation, CRVPF started supporting the girls through the AGPP – a program which utilises various strategies including: safe spaces, peer leadership, and education life skills detailed in the **'This Little Light Of Mine'** manual. It includes modules on: self-confidence, smart thinking, Sexual and Reproductive Health, gender violence and safety, as well as setting and achieving goals.





“ A safe space is a place where girls can come together away from stress and worries to be themselves to talk about the things that hurt to share ideas and learn together. It’s a place where girls can make good friends to support them.

- MARIAM

SAFE SPACES

Safe spaces are one of CRVPF-AGPP’s strategies to prevent violence and sexual violence against adolescent girls. Beginning as an avenue for adolescent girls to share their aspirations and challenges, the initiative has rapidly evolved into a secure environment in which girls are equipped with life skills to enhance their power and agency through guided sessions led by peer mentors. During these sessions, participants are taken through planned activities from carefully crafted manuals to help them make better choices and decisions and live safe and dignified lives, free of violence and sexual violence.

Jitambue

Location: Temeke

Mariam named her group Jitambue [recognize] as a way to awaken girls to recognize their value and power. While she named the group Mariam never guessed that the group would give her a name. Mariam is proud to be a leader of Jitambue safe space which now has three smaller safe spaces under it in the community to expand their outreach to girls in harder to reach areas.

“I am not just Mariam, but a Mariam who does what? who is known who has responsibility who has wisdom and experience- and most important who is a champion for girls in her community. As the leader I also carry a big responsibility. My name is the first one you see on any communication so when people are looking for any information, they call me. For example, when government leaders are organising an event about girls, I receive a call from the municipal because they trust the work we are doing.”

Wadada Wa Leo

Location: Bunju, Kinondoni

Jennifer leads the group Wadada Wa Leo – ‘Sisters of today.’

“We wanted to be unique so that people could ask why *Wadada Wa Leo*? Sisters of today when we thought about our pasts we realise that in the past maybe women did not know the issues of girls or how to support each other but we are saying as women of today we are different we are here to reach one another and help each other we believe that we have power and that we can make a difference.

Social Empowerment

Location: Kigamboni

“It was five of us when we started. Fresh out of vocational school, Francisca led the Social Empowerment group to reach out to other girls in her community. I had found my voice and my power and I didn’t want any other girl like me – stigmatised, whose only hope would be to depend on a man or people and carry shame like I had just because my mom had been single.”

Francisca never forgot that she had been skilled by CRVPFs partner for free and her life was never the same. She planned to do the same for many for other girls.

“When I remember that the skills, I learned back such as soap making, batik, tailoring and fashion for free, I was determined that we would give that to other girls. We could use life skills and the vocational skills together to inspire girls about the opportunity to change their lives and support them to seize it. I especially wanted girls to make their own money so they can be safe from situations of violence like in their homes with violent partners or bosses at work. I wanted to deal with the dependence syndrome because girls have power when they can take care of themselves.”

Juhudi Girls

Location: Bom Bom Road, Kiwalani

In Kiwalani, on scenic Bom Bom road near the market and in plain view is Juhudi Girls group safe space.

“Our safe space is a place where girls meet, where we meet girls and together learn new skills, talk about the things that concern us and create ways to make our lives better.”

Zawadi’s a mentor at Juhudi Girls group. Like Francisca, Jennifer, and Mariam, Zawadi and the other leaders of Juhudi started this group after completing their vocational training. Juhudi Girls is a fixture in the community, representing safe and progressive girlhood.”



Building A Movement

“Our safe space is a place where girls meet, where we meet girls and together learn new skills, talk about the things that concern us and create ways to make our lives better.”

MY STORY IS UNEXPECTED

In Kiwalani, on scenic Bom Bom road near the market and in plain view is - Juhudi Girls' safe space. Zawadi Salehe Mtande, is a mentor at Juhudi Girls group - a group currently supported by CRVPF that she helped start, after completing her vocational training.

When Zawadi was growing up she had wanted to be a teacher or a nurse, and while she didn't end up as either, she has surpassed expectations by becoming a girl leader and mentor. Zawadi's family have always been supportive of her pursuits, and delighted in her opportunity to receive further education in hopes of a better future. Zawadi enrolled and successfully trained in vocational skills, fashion and design including Batik similar to her friends - fellow girl leaders: Mariam, Jennifer and Francisca. Upon completion and confident in her skills, Zawadi received training from CRVPF which boosted her courage and sharpened her public speaking and mentoring ability.

“Girls are going through a lot — not only from men like their bosses at work, but even from their parents. In some of the cultures here, once you are grown you have to take care of your parents and some don't care whether or not you can. Some don't care if you're still young.”

One of Zawadi's early experiences at Juhudi Girls was a young lady was frustrated by her parent's and the community's requests for financial support.

“There was a young lady like me who had furthered her education amidst the ridicule of the community. When she returned, her own family put pressure on her to take care of their needs, since she had chosen to get all this education. They wanted her to prove it was worth it by providing for them. The girl was very frustrated and someone advised her to come and talk to me.”

By this time Zawadi had completed the CRVPF's Adolescent Girls Power Program (AGPP) on life skills — **'This Little Light of Mine'**, which included: confidence building, smart thinking, financial literacy, goal setting and achievement. Even though the girl was accomplished in her education, Zawadi understood what it meant to feel confused, rejected, different from others and so she welcomed her to the group and helped her think through her challenges as well as identify opportunities to improve her life. The young lady had the humility to learn and receive support through the safe space and today is working and thriving.

In due course, Zawadi met a man she liked and got engaged. When she brought her fiancé (now husband) home, she didn't need to explain her boundaries to him — her parents did it for her.

“They were polite but told him that since I was a child they had raised and supported my vision to be active in the community to help others and that if this was something, he couldn't abide by they wouldn't give their blessing.”

Zawadi was married with her parents' blessing. Her husband also works in community development, is impressed by her work and passion, and is committed to supporting her dreams. He is a great father — caring for their baby when the girls went to Kenya for a CRVPF arranged convening. He even hired an uber, had a gift ready, and his arms wide open at the airport as soon as they returned.

Zawadi is firm in her resolve to work with the other leaders to expand Juhudi Girls throughout their community. They currently have girls participating weekly in life skills, vocational skilling, peer education, Gender Based Violence awareness and use this information together to reach and support other girls.

Future Notes

“If I met Zawadi at 10 years old, I would tell her, first of all, to study — not just to study, but to have a goal and a dream. She must fight for her dreams, and while she's fighting for them, she must also fight for her opportunities. Where there are chances to join school clubs, for example, I would advise 10-year-old Zawadi to join so she can learn more, gain knowledge, fight for herself, and fight for what she believes in.

I would also advise her that if there is a safe space nearby, she should join it to learn valuable life skills through peer education, sewing, making soaps, saving and creating items to sell. It would be good to learn early so that by the time she grows up, she can earn money from the things she makes. While in the safe space, she will learn life skills and peer education. Peer education will help her understand and value herself; it will give her clarity about what she wants and plans for the future. If she faces challenges at home, peer education will encourage her to stay committed to her education and her life goals. It will help her focus on these things instead of considering early marriage.

I would also tell young Zawadi that if she ever feels like giving up on her studies or if her parents don't support her education, the safe spaces will help her seek assistance from BARAZA or other offices that advocate for children's rights. The safe space leaders will help her reach out to the government so she can return to school with their support.

If a child goes to school, I believe she will learn important life skills and how to handle peer pressure, which will help her become a strong woman in the future. These are the two pieces of advice I would give to my younger self. I would also share this advice with anyone going through a challenging and difficult situation, someone considering giving up on their education and dreams, or thinking about getting married at a young age.”



MY STORY IS UPLIFTING

When CRVPF contacted Mariam and the other girl leaders to support their activities, she was more than ready.

“Girls have a lot of ideas, but feel limited in their minds, they lack money and community support which makes them feel powerless. My eyes were open, I wanted them to see beyond their situations and show them that they can learn something, they can change their lives, they can have their own office or workshop one day. I wanted girls to know they don’t have to do things alone, some things that are hard they can do with others. My dream was to show and help other girls know that it is possible.”

Mariam’s Auntie has seen her evolve from the little girl to a young movement builder. She was so impressed with Mariam’s journey that she became a self-appointed promoter of all things girl power and Jitambue.

“My Auntie understands what we are doing to reach girls and support them through peer education, life skills and income generation. She visits the safe space on the days we have a talk with the girls, and also organises parents’ groups encouraging them to let their daughters go to the safe spaces. As a parent and mature person her peers are able to trust her advice. She organises women and tells people about Jitambue she is a good messenger.”

Future Notes

Mariam has a 3-year-old son, when she dreams about the future, she thinks of him and is raising him to be a man of faith, a man who will understand what his mother dedicated her life to and acknowledge the change it made in their life and the lives of girls.

“I want my son to be a different kind of man, not the kind who abandons women when they have children with them. I want him to have a different eye, one that looks kindly and supports women in their dreams.”

Apple Dreams is the name of the organisation that Mariam intends to build in the future; giving more girls safe spaces where they can achieve their dreams. Mariam thinks girls’ groups are a game changer because organisations come and go, but the girl groups stay active within the community. While safe spaces recognise international and national days that highlight girls matters, at Jitambue, there is a special emphasis on using campaigns to reach girls in the furthest communities. Girl leaders and mentors are active in street outreach, and Mariam emphasizes the need for tact when conducting these activities.

“You have to be friendly and understand the culture. In some places, girls are freer but in others, they are not and we need more time to approach. One day there was a girl who wanted to ask us for help but she feared that people in the community might talk, she waited for the end and approached us in private. She was struggling and wanted to learn a skill and do better with her life. We gave her all the information and the next day she came with a friend. Actually they had some basic skills – they worked hard and got better at tailoring, they learned to save and today they have their own business and are employing two more girls – this makes me very happy.”



MY STORY IS A GAME CHANGER

“One day we got good news that CRVPF was interested in funding us directly as a girls’ group. When it was our turn to present our ideas, I think I spoke more than anybody else because I knew this partnership would be a good opportunity for the group to do what they wanted to do in the community. The meeting was successful.”

Wadada Wa Leo took off despite initial resistance from community leadership. Jennifer and the other safe space leaders had to work diligently to prove that they were trustworthy. Working to bring girls together within community safe spaces where they could freely discuss their challenges, recognize their purpose, gain skills to help them achieve their dreams and contribute positively to society.

There are six lessons Jennifer has learned as a girl leader in this movement:

1. Coming Together

“When I was alone as a girl, things happened to me that hurt me, but when girls have a place like a safe space to relieve their stress to talk about their challenges it brings hope, they can share ideas and they can learn how to solve problems others have dealt with. You are not alone with the safe space.”

2. Navigating Power

A critical concept for Jennifer has been understanding and teaching the girls about power and decision making.

“Many people make decisions about things, but few take action. Sometimes, it’s because the power differences are overwhelming, but we teach girls that they have power within. For example, if they see something that has gone wrong that they can handle well and good, but there are times the person who is doing wrong has more power than them. There was a girl in our community who had come to the big city to reunite with her mother who had left her in the village without any education. Unfortunately, she found that the mother got married and there was no place for her. She got a job at a restaurant, but the owner knowing her circumstances made her work for two years without pay. Some of the members heard about it and told me.

I didn’t want us leaders to intervene immediately because it was an opportunity for the girls to put into practice what they had learned. The girl had no power to influence her boss, she had tried to request pay with no success that was within her power. Since it wasn’t enough, she had to look at power with others that is the Wadada Wa Leo girls but even then, they realized the business owner had more power they decided to go to a community leader who would have power over him. It worked. The community leader demanded that the girl be paid immediately and released. This happened and the girl joined us and learned various skills which she is using to survive. If the girls hadn’t made the decision to change things, we don’t know what would have happened.”

3. Smart Strategies Around Harmful Social Norms

"In this area there are many girls who just want to make a life of their own. There is a strong culture that dominates girls and prevents them from pursuing further education with the only option being marriage and often its early. Unfortunately, Jennifer points out that even girls as young as 14 who have not passed to go to secondary are expected to find a way of looking after their parents yet they too are still children.

When these young girls go to markets to sell food and snacks, they are at risk of men with money like boda boda riders who use them and abandon them. There other harmful practices celebrating a girl's womanhood like Kigoma (drum) ceremony where parents indicate to the community that their daughter has received her first period. But the period comes much earlier these days, so these are still children who are being showcased as women and being put into dangerous situations – as some predators' claim that they are already mature enough for sexual relations and marriage."

Jennifer and the Wadada Wa Leo leaders with the support of CRVPF devised a strategy to approach both parents and girls as part of their mobilization for the safe spaces.

"We have at least two meetings with parents. First, we introduce ourselves and make sure they know what Wadada Wa Leo does in the community. We also want the parents to have peace of mind when their daughters tell them, *'I'm going to Wadada Wa Leo'*.

Secondly, we want to raise awareness that a girl is still a child and girls are capable of doing the same things as boys. We inform them if their child will participate in different activities, such as going to the government during our advocacy campaigns. We always assure them that their child is safe, and if we need to book a bus to ensure they get home safely. We keep them informed."



4. Leader Buy In Is Key

"There were leaders who looked at Wadada Wa Leo as an opportunity to earn money. Yet the girls needed various certificates to mobilise girls in the communities and schools.

It took us a lot of time back and forth to discuss with leaders to make them understand that we are a girls' group we are not a company with a lot of money but most importantly we demonstrated how their girls in their own communities who are their responsibility to help would benefit from the safe space and in fact contribute to the wellbeing of their families and their communities' economies.

At first, the leaders would send us mature women disguised as youth because they thought we gave out allowances, but soon the truth came out that we are here to stay and we are building the lives of girls to manage their futures. Today, the municipal knows Wadada Wa Leo because they see their impact, as parents' schools and girls testify to the changes that occur in a girl's life when she participates in their group."

5. Never To Early To Start

"Wadada Wa Leo has members between 9 and 24 years old mostly. The girl leaders feel it's not too early to involve them because already strangers are offering them sweets and trying to lure them into dangerous activities.

We let the little girls enjoy themselves, learn how to work with fabric, and also start including life skills to help them understand how to keep themselves safe."

As part of the training, Jennifer and other leaders encourage each other and the girls to market their products to earn money for personal savings and contribute to the safe space sustainability.

6. Hope For The Best

When Jennifer graduated from vocational training, she knew her path ahead was unknown but she had fallen in love with weaving and hoped for the best- she had a dream to start a factory – fate conspired to help her.

Jennifer asked a friend if she could weave in his factory space, he let her, and she went ahead and started posting her creations online. The weaving room was always the happiest place for Jennifer she took it in full speed and learned everything about making cloth, thread, colour and making beautiful pieces. She decided to connect with other weavers online but she couldn't find any groups in Tanzania – she branched out and joined a group called weave marketing.

"I was excited to post the scarves and fabrics I was weaving- one day I put up a kikhoi for sale but didn't realise that rather than indicate 15000 TZ Shs – I put 15000 USD which was a lot. The next day I had so many messages it was overwhelming with people asking what was so special about the cloth I was selling – I tried to explain but I struggled with writing English."

A 'good Samaritan' who had lived before in Tanzania inboxed Jennifer to understand her product pricing better. She was kind, patient, and explained that the amount was in Tanzanian shillings, this helped clarify things to the group. It was also the beginning of a special friendship that would catapult Jennifer's efforts.

"She asked me about my dreams, and I told her I wanted to use the skills I had learned to help other girls. I believe that when a woman has her own source of income, no man can make her life a living hell. She has our own voice, makes her own decisions, and her partner will listen because she is earning her own money. When we have our own money, we have our own voice – a voice equal to one's partner."

After several conversations, the 'good Samaritan' expressed interest in being part of Jennifer's dreams, promising to buy her a sewing machine.

"I had never received any money from Western Union and did not know how to go by it but the dear lady told me what to do, I was worried that she maybe a scammer but actually she wasn't."

The lady wasn't a scammer and she helped Jenni get her first sewing machine. Jennifer also bought materials to use, started creating beautiful products and selling them.

After a few years with Jennifer having gotten better at weaving, they revisited her dream. Coincidentally, Jennifer's dream had grown bigger, she wanted to buy a big weaving machine to start a factory. Her benefactor took it seriously and told Jennifer to find an affordable one, which she did, negotiating a payment plan which her benefactor paid off.

Beyond that, Jennifer started shipping her items to the lady for sale until the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted their business. Today, Jennifer's Workshop is thriving. She has one staff with whom she creates beautiful fabrics, an incredible dream come true.

Future Notes

"When I see myself now and think about Jennifer back then, I can't believe it. A few years ago I met a wonderful man who works with children we dated and got engaged but, I told him I wanted to buy my own land before marriage. He was willing to contribute half but, I insisted because I had seen what my mother went through having nothing to her name. He has been gracious about this. I paid for the land every month with my savings and now it's mine with a land title in my name. We got engaged, Francisca made our cake all the girl leaders were there I couldn't believe they came so far.

If I could meet 10-year-old Jennifer, I would tell her just one thing: 'You must focus on your education. Don't give up, because education will open many doors for you.' I now understand how crucial it is. Sometimes I struggle to communicate effectively because I lack

certain knowledge, and I believe that if I had pursued education, life might have been easier.

I remember how much I admired my father and wanted to become an engineer like him. Although things didn't go as planned, my desire to achieve and live a fulfilling life remains strong. I would also advise young Jennifer to be cautious and selective about her friends and to prioritise herself without neglecting others. Helping people is important, but it's essential to ensure your own well-being first.

I thank God for everything, even the difficult things if I didn't overcome them, I might not have been driven to fight for the girls. I might not have become the owner of '*Jennifer's Workshop*' or learned how to weave, batik, or make soap. I might not have met the people I know now, the girls, CRVPF, government leaders and others. I plan to go back to school one day, I am still proud and believe that God has put something special in me, which is why I am the way I am."

Wadada Wa Leo took off despite initial resistance from community leadership. Jennifer and the other leaders of the safe space have had to be diligent in their activities to prove that they could be trusted. They continue to bring together girls within their communities in a safe space; freely discussing their challenges, recognising their purpose, and gaining skills to help them achieve their dreams, and contribute positively to society.



MY STORY IS EMPOWERING

It is almost unimaginable that in a short time 5 girl leaders (Francisca inclusive) would start Social Empowerment group - impacting many girls, their families and communities.

At first it was difficult to get into schools, the community didn't trust them, but Francisca was encouraged by her friends and her family who were impressed and proud of who she had become - a leader of girls.

"CRVPF supported us and helped us learn how to lead other girls. We kept on building relationships with leaders and parents in the community and when they observed how we were carrying ourselves, our safe space, the products we made and sold they trusted us more. The social empowerment safe spaces grew, and as more girls wanted to join, they realised that it would be important to take the spaces closer to the community to cut down on transport costs. Social empowerment now has three smaller safe spaces within the community. From 5 girls in the beginning to the 19 girls and counting, currently."

Girls have obtained many opportunities through the Social Empowerment safe space - learning life skills, getting trained in fashion and design while being supported by their peers. For example, Jasmine, who was part of our safe space, learned how to sew. Her brother was impressed; he helped her buy a sewing machine and set up a tailoring space where she sells clothes, and has also recruited other girls to work with her. At that place, she also sells soaps, which allows her to earn more income and support her family. Jasmine also referred the girls and customers to participate in the adolescent power program at our safe space.

Another girl I am proud of is Sofia, who got pregnant early, she wasn't prepared for a baby as she herself was barely an adolescent. It was overwhelming for Sofia. She had given up on life, but after meeting the girls from Social Empowerment, she attended peer education and vocational training. Now, Sofia has learned how to bake, and she has her own shop where she sells different kinds of foods, soaps, and more. This income now supports her and her baby. Sofia is confident, she has hope now and this makes all of us happy.

My vision is to become someone who defends other girls, and I aspire to create an even bigger organisation in this country to help many more girls. Already the leaders in my community see '*Social Empowerment*' as an organisation, a movement that is spreading to reach many girls, not just a small group.

Joy In Becoming

I am proud of who I have become. The government recognises me as a leader of girls in the community and of the group "Social Empowerment." Before our group was supported by CRVPF, they didn't acknowledge me as a leader or a change-maker. However, after we became formal with CRVPF, I feel more confident and have gained more knowledge on how to be a good leader for other girls. When there is a small project for supporting young people by the government, they call on me because they see that I am confident, wise, and capable of handling tasks without any problem. These opportunities are beneficial for me as they allow me to earn some money as well.

I have also gained respect from my family, neighbours, and other communities. They no longer take me for granted and try to mistreat me because they know I will take them to the law if necessary. They now provide me with the tools I need and value and respect me in general.

I love talking to girls, listening to them, and encouraging them, something I couldn't do before because I wasn't confident. I was ashamed because as a child being raised with my single mother we were looked down upon. But after CRVPF gave me the knowledge on how to value myself and fight for myself, I am now fighting for other girls' rights to be free from violence, from depending on men for money, I consult with them and advise them. For me this is success. Some parents even refer their children who are misbehaving to get help from me because they believe I can help them.

Going Places

When CRVPF invited Francisca and the other girl leaders to participate in an Adolescent Girls Power Program partner convening, she was ecstatic.

"It was my first time going to Kenya, and it was my first time flying on an aeroplane. When I got the news, I was very excited. When I went there, I knew I had to be a good representative for the girls I left behind. I felt like I needed to represent them in Nairobi.

In Nairobi, I learned that many cases in Africa are alike, whether in Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, or other parts. I learned how to overcome those situations that put other girls down by listening to their stories of how they stood up and worked together as peers to change things. I also learned how to support girls in different ways, how to encourage girls, and how to teach them to prevent and avoid violence."

Building Upwards

Early on Francisca decided that one of the ways she could help others was through living by example. Besides, she had promised herself to never have to depend on other people's money. Francisca did her best to improve the skills she gained at the vocational school and decided

to explore other enterprises such as: baking, make up, and chicken rearing. Since she had grown up cooking for her brother, making snacks to sell with her mother, Francisca was eager to apply for a grant with the other leaders to pursue bakery. CRVPF provided up to 500 dollars which she used to attend and complete a baking course. Francisca felt that this would be a double win as she could build her bakery while also teaching others.

More Happy News

Francisca did not only start baking and selling her cakes in the community she saved up and recently bought an oven which she is using to expand her product line.

When Jennifer got engaged, Francisca baked a divine cake that they were all proud of. She posts her cakes on social media especially WhatsApp, and has cake orders every week. She is working on expanding her supply list to reach schools and institutions.



What We Learned

The girls admit starting the journey was hard, people are not willing to listen to young girls for many reasons but nothing is impossible, if you have each other.



12 Things We Learned

About Bringing Girls Together and Setting Up Safe Spaces

1. CREATE AN INSPIRING NAME THAT SPEAKS TO YOUR VISION

WADADA WA LEO

Behind the Name: Sisters of today, don't leave any girl behind
Location: Kinondoni
Main Safe Space: 37 girls
Additional Spaces: Kunduchi - 24 girls, Mbopo - 30 girls, and Kawe - 15 girls.

JITAMBUE

Behind the Name: Awaken, recognise your power
Location: Temeke
Main Safe Space: 30 girls
Additional Spaces: Azimio - 25 girls, Sandali - 17 girls, and Tandika - 17 girls.

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Behind the Name: Build power together, change your lives for the better
Location: Kigamboni
Main Safe Space: 27 girls
Additional Spaces: Tungi - 16 girls, Mji Mwema - 20 girls, and Vijibweni - 27 girls.

JUHUDI GIRLS

Behind the Name: Girls with purpose
Location: Kiwalani
Main Safe Space: 35 girls
Additional Spaces: Vingunguti - 25 girls, Gongolamboti - 29 girls, and Ulongoni - 10 girls.

2. BE MINDFUL OF SET UP

Ensure the space is in a secure location protected within the community, accessible to girls and as much as possible with room for equipment such as sewing machines, and a place to display items for sale, an area for meeting and learning. Make it colorful, keep it clean and attractive. in an open place where the community can easily make referrals but also look out for the girls.

- FRANCISCA & ZAWADI

3. ESTABLISH A LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE FOR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

One of the winning approaches of these four safe spaces in Dar Es Salaam is a leadership structure that lends itself to shared responsibility- starting out each of the members were given a leadership role and with it came peer support, shared visions and commitments.

Being a leader comes with an expectation of exemplary behaviour to support other girls as well as additional responsibilities for example leaders are required to save a larger amount of money as a contribution to the group savings facility. They are also required to sell more products than the other girls as a contribution towards sustaining their space. The leadership team include: Chairperson (Mwenyekiti), Katibu (Secretary), Book Keeper (Afisa Mawasiliano), Finance Leader/ Treasurer (Mweka Hazina), and Store Keeper (Mtunza Stoo). The girls allocate part of the safe space to an office and strive to handle their acitivities professionally.

- MARIAM & JENNIFER

4. BUILD WIN-WIN GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIPS, GET PERMITS

Local Government leaders initially assumed the girl leaders had significant funding, recognising (the training institution and NGO) community activities but not theirs. The leaders required the girl groups to formalise their presence in the community. However, the girl leaders found it hard initially to get the local leaders to understand their activities and capacity as a group.

During a Wadada Wa Leo event involving government and non-profit organisations, a leader's representative received a transport and meal refund on his behalf. Later, the leader complained about not receiving this refund, this misunderstanding required tact.

"Our entire leadership team, including myself, the secretary, book keeper, storekeeper, and finance leader, were summoned. The leader was very upset but, we maintained our calm, practised smart thinking and faced him even though he held power over us."

The leader was furious, demanding to see the chairperson threatening to shut them down.

"I remained calm as the leader was visibly upset. When he asked for the chairperson, he was surprised that it was a girl. I calmly explained, "We are a group of girls helping other girls in your community for free, aiming to improve their lives. We believe you should be supporting us as this aligns with your responsibilities.

Another leader intervened, This was another demonstration of building allyship to face people in power. Jennifer then asked if he knew any girls in need of help, which helped defuse the situation. The leader composed himself and began discussing the issues affecting girls in his community. After resolving the conflict, we clarified the documentation needed."

All four safe space leaders worked hard to get the necessary permissions to mobilise, raise awareness and work with the girls in our community. However, they discovered later that they needed additional certification to allow them implement advocacy and other activities in schools and through street outreaches.

- JENNIFER & FRANCISCA

Girl Power

5. BE FLEXIBLE, THEY ARE MORE WAYS THAN ONE TO SUCCEED

Initially, the girl leaders requested community leaders to refer girls that would benefit from their services, and provided them with a criteria. The community leaders sent the older women with the promise that they would get some allowances and support starting their enterprises from the safe spaces. This was untrue. The girl leaders were frustrated; moreover, these women were not struggling to make ends meet but were riding on the opportunity provided by their friends in 'high places'. The leaders decided to take their outreach to the streets, house to house, after all, most girls required the permissions of their family to participate in the safe space activities. They would talk with the girls' parents and get permission. Doing it themselves was a more successful approach.

"We go house to house using the Nyumba Kumi model (ten house cluster strategy), meeting with leaders and parents to explain who we are, what we do, and why we support the girls.

Girls have a lot of friends so when you reach one soon, they will bring others and can look out for others. Understanding the nature of girls' networks and connections, we also decided to go to schools where we give talks and counsel students. Early on when we would finish our talks, I would give them my number and ask them to think about their homes and that if there is a girl not going to school, they would share my number. One of the students did and had their elder sister call *Wadada Wa Leo* - Jennifer was happy to welcome her along with the 5 girls she brought."

- JENNIFER & FRANCISCA

6. OUTREACH FOR GREATER IMPACT

"All four spaces did better through reaching the girls themselves. While on street outreach, Mariam talked with the girls about fashion and design and how art can transform their lives. She shared her story in this regard and one of the days a young girl Asha who reminded Mariam of herself as a shy talented young girl waited until they were closing the outreach in the evening and reached out to her about her art.

I was excited to meet Asha, encouraged her to come to the safe space and see how she could improve her skills. When she came Asha couldn't believe we were not charging her to learn and practise with us – it turned out that she had some tailoring skills and just needed support and practice. Asha was at the safe space every day we were open. In a short time, she started getting orders in her community. We supported her to do them. During the life skills course Asha asked Mariam and the other leaders to come and talk with her mother - Asha's mother was shocked at her daughter's potential and decided to use some of her savings to add on to what Asha had accrued to help her buy her own machine. Today Asmil is thriving in her own space, an active saver and has successfully opened up her own 'office', brought other girls from her community to the safe space."

- MARIAM & ZAWADI

7. SKILLS FIRST

"Girl power is a new concept in these parts. When we tell girls about power during outreach they don't understand, they may not even want to come to the safe space but all girls understand beauty, fashion, getting skills to make their own money and change their lives. Once the girls come to the safe spaces they learn skills but also discover their power, recognize their strengths, and begin to transform their futures with the support of their mentors and peers in a safe space."

- MARIAM, FRANCISCA

8. SHINE THROUGH YOUR STORY

"All four girls were well known in their communities and residents witnessed their lives transform. We have had many parents come to find out the details of the safe space but most importantly to ask us to help their daughters become like us.

Mariam's Auntie is another example of an ally who holds talks in the communities with other parents and elders and tells them about Jitambue Safe Space, tells them about Mariam's success story and encourages them to send their girls there to improve their lives."

- ZAWADI & MARIAM

9. REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN

Every month, the leaders draw up a program with various classes celebrating the girls' lives through music and arts. At Juhudi girls, Zawadi and the other leaders negotiated with local leaders for time on Saturdays to let the girls play music, drums, sing and dance in their space which they love.

- ZAWADI & MARIAM

10. DIVERSIFY

"When the girls first started, they had focused on fashion and design which was their strength as well as soap making, another popular trade they gleaned from their schooling. However, as more people have started producing soap the market is difficult. With the support of CRVPF the girl groups are diversifying starting with new enterprises including cake making, and make up.

CRVPF supported some of the girls including leaders like Francisca to learn baking with a teacher and mentor at Tori's kitchen. Two of the girls in Juhudi safe space learned makeup currently one is becoming a go to makeup artist for weddings and the other works in a saloon and also takes on individual clients."

- FRANCISCA

11. PARENTS AS PARTNERS

Because the girls are young, Wadada Wa Leo has adopted a parental involvement model to make it easier for the girls to participate at the safe space and in the various activities by setting up two meetings with new girls and their parents.

The first meeting is about introducing Wadada Wa Leo, its mentors, and how it is going to help girls in the communities. This is done so that parents can have peace of mind knowing their daughters are going.

Whereas, the second meeting focuses on helping parents recognize that their daughters are still children not fully-grown women, and that girls are just as capable as boys. In addition, this meeting also informs parents about advocacy and outreach activities that their children will be participating in.

- JENNIFER

12. CO-CREATING WITH GIRLS BUILDS POWER

As part of orienting the girls and CRVPF in their new working relationship, CRVPF organised a girls' convening in Naivasha, Kenya where they brought girls under the Adolescent Girls Power Program in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. This is part of CRVPF culture, of providing a period for partners to reflect and learn about their community needs (situation and power analysis) and the other partners they will work with on a particular project. This ensures interventions are meaningful for the community and optimise the talents and resources of our partners for a strong and lasting impact.

"The girls we work with are from various backgrounds, in the Naivasha meeting we began to understand that while some on the look conservative on the outside because of social norms, when they are away from their communities, their behaviour changes. For example, girls who go out to marketplaces can be vulnerable to boda boda riders who prey on girls – exchanging money for sex, opening them up to multiple risks. In other cases, girls are required to support their parents at all costs, this also increases their vulnerability. We do our best to offer an opportunity for girls to discover themselves, their power, their talent in a safe space and as such a caring environment."

- ZAWADI

HEAR IT FROM THE GIRLS



Voices from Other Safe Spaces



A PLACE OF LEARNING

“When I joined the safe space, they taught us many skills, I learnt how to make clothes; I am wearing a skirt I made. This was a good skill to learn because I love clothes and fashion, and I had always been interested in learning how to make them.”

A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

“A few years ago, I felt hopeless when I was forced to drop out of high school. Today, I am graduating from an information communications technology program.”

GROWING CONFIDENT

“Before I joined. The safe space. I was not confident. Today I am an aspiring actress, A talent I did not know I has before I joined the safe space.”

THE POWER OF WORD OF MOUTH

“Since word spread in my village that I can make clothes, I now accept different orders and make different people, different items of clothing.”

VOICE & AGENCY

“When I joined the safe spaces, I learned so much and I felt protected from all the judgement I was getting. The facilitators helped me to discover my strengths, and when I mentioned that I enjoyed braiding hair, they quickly arranged for a hairdressing instructor to come and help me to improve my skills. Through these lessons, I became skilled and confident at doing hair.”

A NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

“The loving environment within the safe space not only helped me come out of my shell and make new friends but also pushed me to pursue leadership roles.”

PEER STRENGTH

“The confidence I gained through the safe space has helped me to step into the role of a peer mentor.”

EMBRACING GIRL POWER

“I was bullied in the past, which led to prefer being alone. Finding the safe space has helped me become more confident. And now, as a peer mentor, I love presenting and performing, even in front of big crowds.”

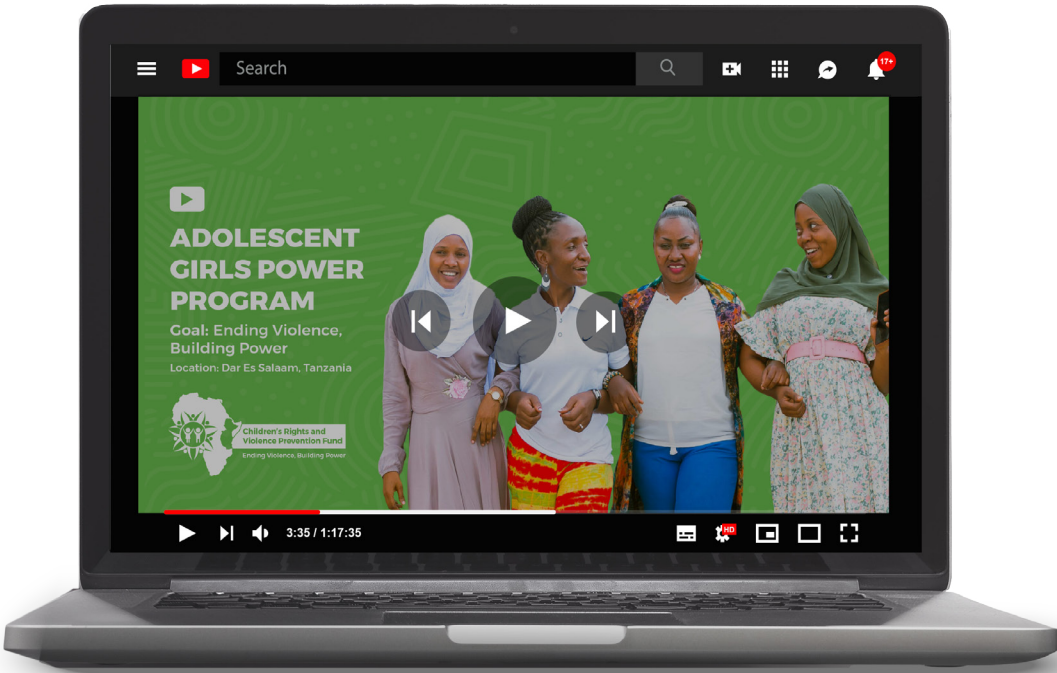
A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

“I had always wanted to learn ICT. My father did not have the money to take me back to school. When they opened after the COVID-19 lock down, I took the chance to learn it.”

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

“My friend told me about these meetings called safe spaces where I could go and meet other girls my age and learn new skills like how to braid hair, how to make pads, liquid soap and so many other things.”

More About CRVPF's Adolescent Girls Power Program



Take A Peek



THE ADOLESCENT GIRLS POWER PROGRAM

Children's Rights and Violence Prevention Fund (CRVPF) is intentional about focusing its grant making and capacity strengthening to support community organisations that prioritise building power of adolescent girls to enable them to access safe, fulfilling and dignified lives free from all forms of violence.

Through our Adolescent Girls Power Program, we are supporting adolescent girls and young mothers in transforming the structures that deny them choice and power. The program currently supports 64 partners clustered in 22 groups in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia.

