

The clubs are commended for empowering learners to make informed decisions regarding sex and reproductive health.

BY DAVID SEKAYINGA

**F**orty-three years after Uganda registered its first HIV/Aids case among the fishing communities, the epidemic remains a major challenge in island districts like Kalangala.

The burden is heavy on islanders, especially the young generation, who navigate daily pressures linked to poverty, risky behaviours, and limited guidance.

For Mr Godfrey Galiwango, 21, a student at Bumanji Polytechnic Institute, growing up in Kalangala meant being surrounded by temptations that put boys at high risk of contracting HIV.

“At landing sites, we have sugar mummies. They offer us money between Shs10,000 and Shs20,000 to sleep with them. For boys whose families cannot afford scholastic materials or school fees, it becomes tempting to have unprotected sex,” he explained.

Mr Galiwango added: “When it comes to boys involved in money-making activities like fishing, they are a target for grown-up women who seduce young boys to engage in risky sexual acts.”

He commended school health clubs for keeping him and others safe from such temptations through peer-to-peer education, training, and continuous engagement on HIV/Aids and other diseases by focusing on abstinence and condom use, among others.

“I joined what I thought was a music class, but later learnt it was a health club. From primary to secondary, we were trained on how to protect ourselves from being dragged into unprotected sex,” Mr Galiwango said.

Today, as a peer educator at his school, he shares the same knowledge with others, including those living with HIV.

“If a fellow student has HIV, I advise them to take their medication and give them hope for a better future,” Mr Galiwango said.

Beyond school, he uses community radios and village visits to spread HIV prevention messages.

“I see myself as a foot soldier for HIV prevention in my village and school, es-

# How school health clubs are curbing HIV, teen pregnancies



Pupils of Kibanga Primary School attend a health club meeting on November 23. PHOTO/DAVID SEKAYINGA

## DATA ON HIV/AIDS

According to the country HIV/Aids estimates 2025 by Uganda Aids Commission, people living with HIV/Aids who are aged 0-14 years are 71,000, adolescents (10-19 years) are 50,000, and young persons (15-24 years) are 150,000. In Kalangala District, the HIV/Aids prevalence currently stands at 12.0 percent, with 7,200 people living with HIV. Kalangala has so far recorded 140 new infections of persons aged 15 and above this year.

change for sex,” Ms Awori said.

She said clubs have also helped her support vulnerable girls across landing sites such as Kasekuro, Kagoonya, and Kasenyi by providing sanitary pads and offering peer to peer guidance.

At Bridge of Hope Nursery and Prima-

ry School, Joshua Ssemenda, a 12-year-old pupil, encourages all boys to join health clubs to be moulded into better citizens.

“I couldn’t join groups of boys who take marijuana and alcohol. We receive counselling that keeps us from sexual acts,” he said.

At Serwanga Lwanga Memorial SS, Ms Grace Nakayaga, 18, said health clubs have taught her to be assertive.

“I now have the confidence to say no and keep myself in school to avoid sexual acts that would expose me to HIV and pregnancy,” she said.

Ms Nakayaga added that clubs provide important information, including the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), abstaining, and self-control. The student said with such information, she can help others.

“No one should undermine us. We can help more girls reduce HIV prevalence among our age group. There are things I can influence a fellow girl to do which another couldn’t,” Ms Nakayaga said.

District records show that since 2017, Kalangala’s HIV prevalence has reduced from 18 percent to 12 percent. Ms Teddy Namuli, the district HIV focal person, said the decline reflects the collective efforts from all stakeholders.

Ms Namuli applauded the health club programme for equipping young people with vital information to keep safe.

“Youth spreading prevention messages has also played a big role among people of their age,” she said.

Available statistics show that Kalangala’s teenage pregnancy rate has also dropped—from 32 percent to 23 percent.

At Serwanga Lwanga Memorial SS, the deputy head teacher, Mr John Paul Ewong, said health clubs have reshaped students’ behaviour.

“We allow students from these clubs to speak during school parades. Their interactions have improved their morals,” he said, adding that there is a dramatic decline in school pregnancies.

Mr Ewong added: “We used to start every term with pregnancy tests, and many girls would test positive. But this year, we have not registered any girl pregnant.”

He, however, said there is a need for more comprehensive training sessions beyond the short parade messages.

“We need a full day off each year to let peers fully exhaust all information into fellow youth,” Mr Ewong said.

The peer-to-peer programme, delivered through the school health clubs is part of the health care ambassador programme introduced by the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Brass for Africa. Mr Ronald Kabuye, the national coordinator of Brass for Africa, said more than 300 schoolchildren across Kalangala have been enrolled in the Health Care Ambassador Programme since 2017.

He explained that the programme uses music to attract youth, whom health workers train to become health care ambassadors.

The programme has trained 392 ambassadors who have conducted over 1,000 peer-to-peer sessions in various schools since 2017.