

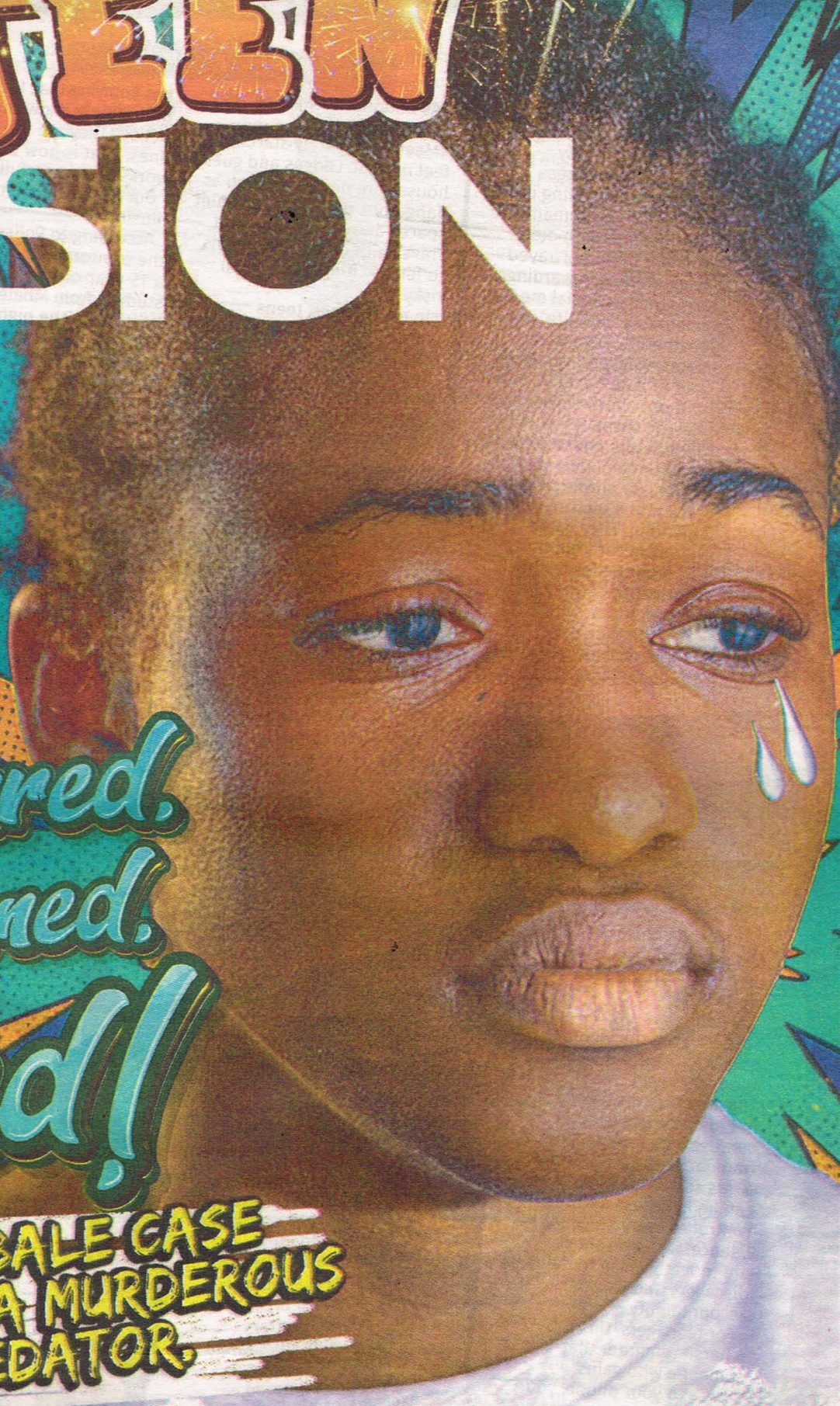
FREE
TO OUR
READERS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2026

TEEN VISION

Lured.
Groomed.
Killed!

HOW MBALE CASE
EXPOSED A MURDEROUS
PREDATOR.



BY BRENDA BALUKA

On the surface, it looks like just another police story. An arrest. A suspect. A long investigation finally looking like it will be closed. But beneath the headlines lies a creepy, scary, and far more urgent

lesson every teenager must come to understand. It is a lesson emerging from a Mbale case that Police say began as one crime, but may point to something far bigger and more disturbing. It is not new to the ear that younger girls in high school prefer,

and sometimes fantasise about, dating older men because they can provide what their peers cannot: smartphones, airtime, and, for the most part, quick cash at any time.

In March this year, a 15-year-old Senior Two student from Mbale lost

her life at a guest house in the city according to a harrowing news story published in the New Vision on Tuesday, December 16, 2025. Nine months later, Police arrested a suspect in Mayuge District after a long investigation. While the

arrest brought a measure of justice, details emerging from the case have raised serious questions about how teenagers are being targeted and why vigilance matters now more than ever.

It rarely starts with violence. It starts with

conversation. A message. Attention. Someone older who seems confident, generous, and understanding. Someone who makes a teenage girl feel beautiful, hot, seen, and special. This is how many predators begin.

➔ CONTINUED ON PAGE 18-19.

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What's KAWA NOT KAWA



ALICIA ATUHAISE, 17, YEAR 13.

KAWA?

...waking up to a house full of joy. My parents and siblings are alive and happy.

NOT KAWA?

...the fact that teens are not allowed to vote. Now Sevo will be one vote short coz I can't vote.

SEND US UR DOPE PHOTO AND TEXT US
WHAT'S KAWA—WHAT'S NOT VIA OUR
WHATSAPP: +256 783 002 805.

STEP ONE: ATTENTION THAT FEELS LIKE AFFECTION.

In today's world, teenage girls are constantly exposed to messages that suggest growing up fast is normal. Romantic relationships with older men are often portrayed as glamorous, rewarding, or harmless. Social media celebrates "soft life" aesthetics, expensive dates, weekend getaways, and private travel to Dubai, without showing the risks behind them.

Predators understand this environment very well.

They do not force their way into a teen's life. They blend in. They listen. They promise care, support, or money. Slowly, they normalise secrecy and dependency.

By the time danger appears, trust has already been built.

STEP TWO: NORMALISING RISKY SPACES.

As boundaries weaken, so do warnings.

Meeting privately starts to feel normal. Lodges and guest houses are no longer seen as dangerous places but as quiet spaces away from judgment. Travel with older men begins to feel exciting rather than risky.

In many cases, teens convince themselves that they are in control. In some cases, the girls even tend to think that they are outsmarting older men and getting free money and gifts from them,

not knowing that the older men simply allow the girls to believe they are the smarter ones. That is how the trap works so successfully.

But control is often an illusion.

According to Police, this is the environment in which a 15-year-old Senior Two student from Mbale found herself. On the night she was killed, she was at a guest house in the city. A place that should never be normal for a child became the setting for tragedy.

Teenagers deserve time to grow without being pulled into adult worlds that carry adult dangers and adult responsibilities.

STEP THREE: WHEN THE PREDATOR'S INTENTION IS NOT LOVE.

For some predators, sex is not the end goal. It is only the entry point.

Police say the suspect in this case allegedly confessed to killing the Mbale student and went further to make claims that shocked investigators. He allegedly stated that he had killed more than 40 other girls and that his actions were tied to ritual practices.

According to Police, the suspect claimed he removed victims' left index fingers and collected blood, which he allegedly delivered to a witchdoctor in

Iganga District in exchange for money. He further claimed he was working toward a target of killing 50 girls.

These claims are still under investigation and have not yet been proven in court. However, Police have confirmed that they are treating the allegations seriously and investigating possible links to other crimes.

For teenagers, this reveals a terrifying reality. Not everyone who approaches you wants a relationship. Some want power. Some want money. Some want something far darker.

STEP FOUR: CONTROL DOES NOT END WITH DEATH.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this case is what happened afterward.

Investigators say the suspect used the victim's phone to make calls and send messages. Even after her life was taken, her identity was used to confuse, manipulate, and traumatise the girl's family.

This shows how predators can be heartless and seek control at every stage. Silence, fear, and shock are tools they use to delay discovery and escape accountability.

For teenagers, this is a harsh reminder that someone who gains access to your phone, your location, or your private conversations can also gain power over your safety.

STEP FIVE: PATTERNS THAT WERE ALREADY THERE.

Police records show that the suspect had previously been arrested earlier this year in a separate case involving a 16-year-old girl in Mayuge District. He was later released on bail.

This detail matters because predators rarely stop on their own. When behaviour is ignored, excused, or hidden, it escalates, leaving more victims in its path.

What feels like a "private relationship" to a teen may be part of a pattern the predator has repeated before.

STAYING SAFE IS NOT ABOUT FEAR, IT IS ABOUT AWARENESS.

Abstinence, boundaries, and delaying relationships are not about punishment or control. They are about safety.

Teenagers deserve time to grow without being pulled into adult worlds that carry adult dangers and adult responsibilities.

If someone pressures you into secrecy, private meetings, travel, or situations that feel uncomfortable, stop. Talk to a trusted adult. Speak to a teacher, parent, counsellor, or report to authorities.

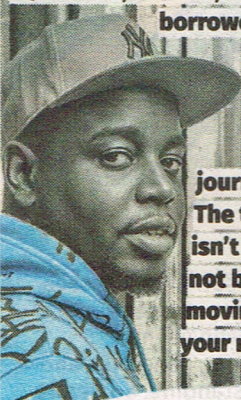
Your life is not a risk worth taking.

EDITOR'S WAGWEZ!

Hey Squadrino! Jump in!

I have listened to teens whisper their fears after class, scroll through Snapchat with a heavy chest, and ask the same question in different words: "I'm late to my own life?" Social media makes success look like a race with checkpoints at 16yrs, 18yrs, and 21, but no one tells you those timelines are edited, filtered, and sometimes

borrowed. I have seen brilliant teens doubt themselves because their journey doesn't trend. The truth is, growth isn't a sprint. You're not behind; you're just moving at the speed of your real life.



HUMPHREY WAMPULA
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PERSONALITY TEST

INSTRUCTIONS: To answer, circle the option that best identifies you.
Flip paper upside-down to view results.

Stress Trigger Challenge

TEST

An older person starts giving you attention, compliments, money, airtime, or help and says that you are "more mature than your age." What do you think first?

- A.** Older attention can be risky because age difference creates power imbalance.
- B.** It feels flattering, but I remain unsure.
- C.** It feels normal... older people are more stable and helpful.

Someone insists that your conversations or meetings must remain secret "to avoid problems." What does that signal to you?

- A.** A serious danger sign. Secrecy protects the other person, not me.
- B.** I feel uncomfortable but stay quiet.
- C.** I understand. Privacy is part of relationships.

You are invited to meet someone privately in a lodge, guest house, or hotel. How do you interpret this?

- A.** Unsafe. These places remove witnesses and protection for minors.
- B.** Risky, but manageable if I'm careful.
- C.** Normal. Many people use lodges.

Someone says, "You're smarter than me. You girls of today are sharp. I like you." What is most likely happening?

- A.** They are lowering my guard to gain control.
- B.** They believe I'm independent.
- C.** They respect me as an equal.

Results:
Mostly A's: The Risk-Aware Protector
Mostly B's: The Hesitant Observer
Mostly C's: The High-Risk Target

An adult offers gifts or money and discourages you from telling parents or friends. What should happen next?

- A.** I stop contact and tell a trusted adult immediately.
- B.** I distance myself quietly.
- C.** I accept but stay alert.

If someone gains access to your phone, messages, or location, what does that mean?

- A.** They gain power over my safety and identity.
- B.** They just want to stay connected.
- C.** It doesn't matter if I trust them.

WORRR'D

Mostly A's: The Risk-Aware Protector

You understand power imbalance, secrecy, and manipulation. You recognise danger before it escalates.

What this means:

You are less likely to be lured into unsafe situations. Keep trusting your instincts, maintaining boundaries, and speaking up early.

Mostly B's: The Hesitant Observer

You sense danger but delay action. This hesitation can allow manipulation to grow.

What this means:

Predators depend on uncertainty. When discomfort appears, act immediately. Silence is not safety.

Mostly C's: The High-Risk Target

You normalise unsafe behaviour and underestimate manipulation.

What this means:

You are vulnerable to grooming tactics. Education, adult guidance, and firm boundaries are urgently needed to protect you.



GOT QUESTIONS? GOT CHALLENGES AT SCHOOL? IN YOUR LIFE? WRITE TO US AT
teenvision@newvision.co.ug

DEAR TEEN VISION



Dennis, 17, St. Mary's College Kisubi, Wakiso.

Sometimes I panic at night thinking about HIV, even though I haven't done anything risky. I replay past moments, like sharing drinks or joking with friends, and my mind starts blaming me: "What if you were careless?" I feel guilty for being afraid when nothing has happened. Why does this fear still haunt me?

Advice:

Dennis, fear does not always come from danger. Sometimes it comes from uncertainty and overthinking. Your mind is trying to protect you, but instead it has turned vigilance into self-blame. This is very common among thoughtful, responsible young people. The guilt you feel is not evidence of risk; it is a sign that you care deeply about your future and your health. What you need now is grounding, not punishment. Learn clearly how HIV is transmitted and how it is not. Accurate knowledge calms irrational fear. When anxiety creeps in, remind yourself of facts, not imagined scenarios. If these thoughts persist and disturb your sleep, speak to a counselor. Mental peace is also part of health. You are allowed to feel safe when you have acted wisely.

Grace, 16, St. Andrew's Kaggwa Gombe Secondary School, Butambala.

In my family, HIV is never discussed. It's spoken about in whispers, like a disgrace. At school we are encouraged to ask questions, but I feel torn, if I show curiosity, I fear being seen as "spoilt." How do I learn without feeling ashamed?

Advice:

Grace, when a topic is surrounded by silence at home, it often becomes heavy with shame, even when it shouldn't be. Your desire to learn does not mean that you reject your family's values; it means you are preparing yourself responsibly for life. Knowledge and respect can exist together. You don't have to confront your parents or change their beliefs to protect yourself. Seek information from school counselors, health clubs, and trusted educational materials. Learning quietly is not rebellion, it is wisdom. One day, your understanding may even help your family heal their own fears.

Amina, 15, Kibuli Secondary School, Kampala.

I often hear adults say, "Protect your future." But HIV feels like a shadow I don't fully understand. I'm abstaining, focusing on school, yet the fear of "what if" still follows me. How do I live freely without constantly fearing HIV?

Advice:

Amina, living responsibly does not mean living in fear. Fear narrows the world; knowledge expands it. You are already making wise choices by abstaining and focusing on your education. What remains is learning to trust those choices. HIV prevention is not about constant worry but about informed confidence. Instead of asking "what if" every day, anchor yourself in what you know: how HIV is transmitted, how it is prevented, and how your decisions protect you. Let education replace anxiety. A future built on knowledge, abstinence as the smart choice, and self-respect is not fragile, it is strong.

**Counselors
answering
your
questions
from
Reach
A Hand,
Uganda.**



JOASH SSENKUGU

JOAN ATIMARIE AMUSA

SHAROT ABIRUNA

<< CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18.

THE LESSONS EVERY TEEN MUST TAKE SERIOUSLY.

This story is not about blaming a girl who trusted someone. It is about exposing how trust can be weaponised. Here are the hard lessons:

- **Older attention is not protection.** Age difference creates a power imbalance.
- **Private spaces are not safe spaces.** Lodges and hotels remove witnesses and support and are not places a teenager should be meeting anyone for any reason.
- **Secrecy is a warning sign.** Anyone who asks you to hide a relationship is protecting themselves, not you.
- **Phones can be tools of**

control. Access to your device means access to your life.

- **Not every relationship is about love.** Some are about exploitation, money, or violence.
- **Abstinence is still the smartest choice for teenagers.** Ignore campaigns that encourage condom use over abstinence because, with condoms, that is how teenage girls find themselves in lodges with predators. When teenagers choose abstinence, they are morally bound to keep away from sexual relationships and predators disguised as lovers.

"As Police, we strongly urge owners and managers of hotels, lodges, and guest houses to make identification checks a non-negotiable rule before admitting any guests. Verifying national IDs or other valid identification is one of the simplest but most effective ways to protect minors and strengthen security within our communities.

Parents also need to remain actively involved in their teenagers' lives. While it is easy to assume that teenagers can always judge situations correctly, the reality is that young people are still learning and can be vulnerable to manipulation. Knowing who your children spend time with, where they go, and how they spend their time is a critical part of keeping them safe.

Teenagers, too, must understand

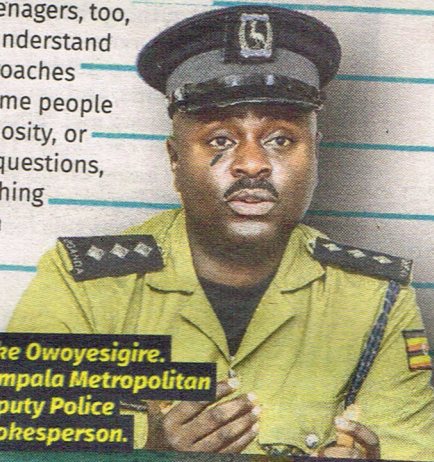
that not everyone who approaches them has good intentions. Some people deliberately exploit trust, curiosity, or silence. Staying alert, asking questions, and speaking up when something feels wrong can prevent harm before it happens."



Dr Sabrina Kitaka (MD, PhD). A senior lecturer and specialist paediatrician at Makerere University and Mulago National Referral Hospital.

EXPERTS' TAKE

Luke Owoyesigire. Kampala Metropolitan Deputy Police Spokesperson.



Early sexual activity refers to first sexual intercourse occurring at or before age 14. This represents a lived reality for many young people, especially girls, who face serious and often lifelong risks.

Globally, by age 19, nearly 70 percent of both males and females have had sexual intercourse. What deeply concerns me is when sexual activity begins before age 15. Consistent evidence shows that starting sex this early is strongly linked to risky sexual behaviours during adolescence with lasting consequences.

In Uganda, the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey highlights this challenge. The median

age at first sexual intercourse is between 16 and 17 years, with wide differences depending on family structure, education level, and region. Among girls, the median age is about 16.8 years. Boys tend to begin earlier, often between 14 and 15 years.

For girls, early exposure increases risks of sexual exploitation, unintended pregnancy, gender-based violence, and in extreme cases, death. These are real experiences many girls live through.

Preventing early sexual activity requires sustained commitment from health workers, educators, parents, community leaders, policymakers, and young people themselves.

Several interventions are urgently needed. First, adolescent reproductive health policies must be strengthened and implemented effectively. Second, we must address underlying socioeconomic drivers, especially poverty. Economic vulnerability places teenage girls in situations where they have little power to negotiate safety or make informed choices.

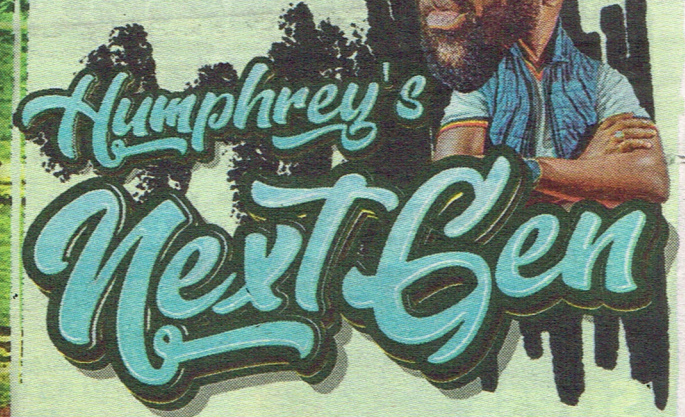
Third, sexuality education must move beyond abstinence-only messaging. Young people need accurate, age-appropriate information about their bodies, relationships and consequences.

Fourth, we must empower adolescents, particularly those from

vulnerable communities, through education, life skills, mentorship, and safe spaces.

Special attention is needed during long school holidays when children are less supervised and coercion risks increase. Families and communities must remain especially vigilant during these periods.

Parents play a critical role and must engage in honest conversations about sexuality. Silence does not protect teenagers; open communication does. Early sexual activity among adolescents is not a moral debate. It is a public health, social, and human rights issue requiring honesty, compassion, and collective action.



Humphrey's Next Gen

YOU MUST LEAVE YO' "SOFA" TO GO "SO FAR" IN 2026!

The Christmas madness has finally cooled off. The visitors are gone, the saucepans are empty, and the house is suspiciously quiet. Right now, many Ugandan teens are just there... scrolling, sleeping, snacking, treating these January like a waiting room for school time.

Easy mistake. Because if you blink, this time disappears into screen time and 2AM bedtimes. But if you want to kick off 2026 different, sharper, calmer and more confident, you need to stop seeing this season as a "break" and start seeing it as a launchpad.

Success isn't witchcraft or luck. It's preparation wearing confidence. So instead of "passing time," decide who exactly is reporting for duty when school opens soon.

1. Own Your Wins: The 'Flowers' List

Most of us are experts at remembering our Ls. The failed tests. The embarrassing moments. But confidence doesn't grow in self-attack mode. Real growth starts when you acknowledge progress.

Your task: Write down three things you're genuinely proud of from last year.

Keep it real: No trophies required. Maybe you finally passed that stubborn subject, helped more at

home, controlled your temper, or stayed out of drama when things got spicy.

2. The Game Plan: Don't Drift Into 2026

If you walk into a new year with no plan, you'll end up following noise; friends, trends, pressure. That's not freedom.

Freedom is steering your own *boda*, not sitting at the back complaining.

Your task: Write down three specific goals for your next class, term, or life level.

Be specific: Not "I want to do better," but "I want to lead a club" or "I want to save half my pocket money."

3. Sharp Mind, Strong Finish

Your brain is a muscle. Ignore it for a month and it goes soft.

Your task: Pick one thing to master this week. Learn a song. Nail a recipe. Build something small but real.

The payoff: That "I did it" feeling hits different. It boosts confidence that sticks, long after the holidays end.

The old way is waiting to see what 2026 does to you. The new way is using this quiet season to build the version of yourself that's ready to lead.

Your time is your most valuable asset. Spend it like it matters.

Humphrey Nabimanya is a community psychologist, sexual and reproductive health advocate and founder of Reach A Hand, Uganda.