



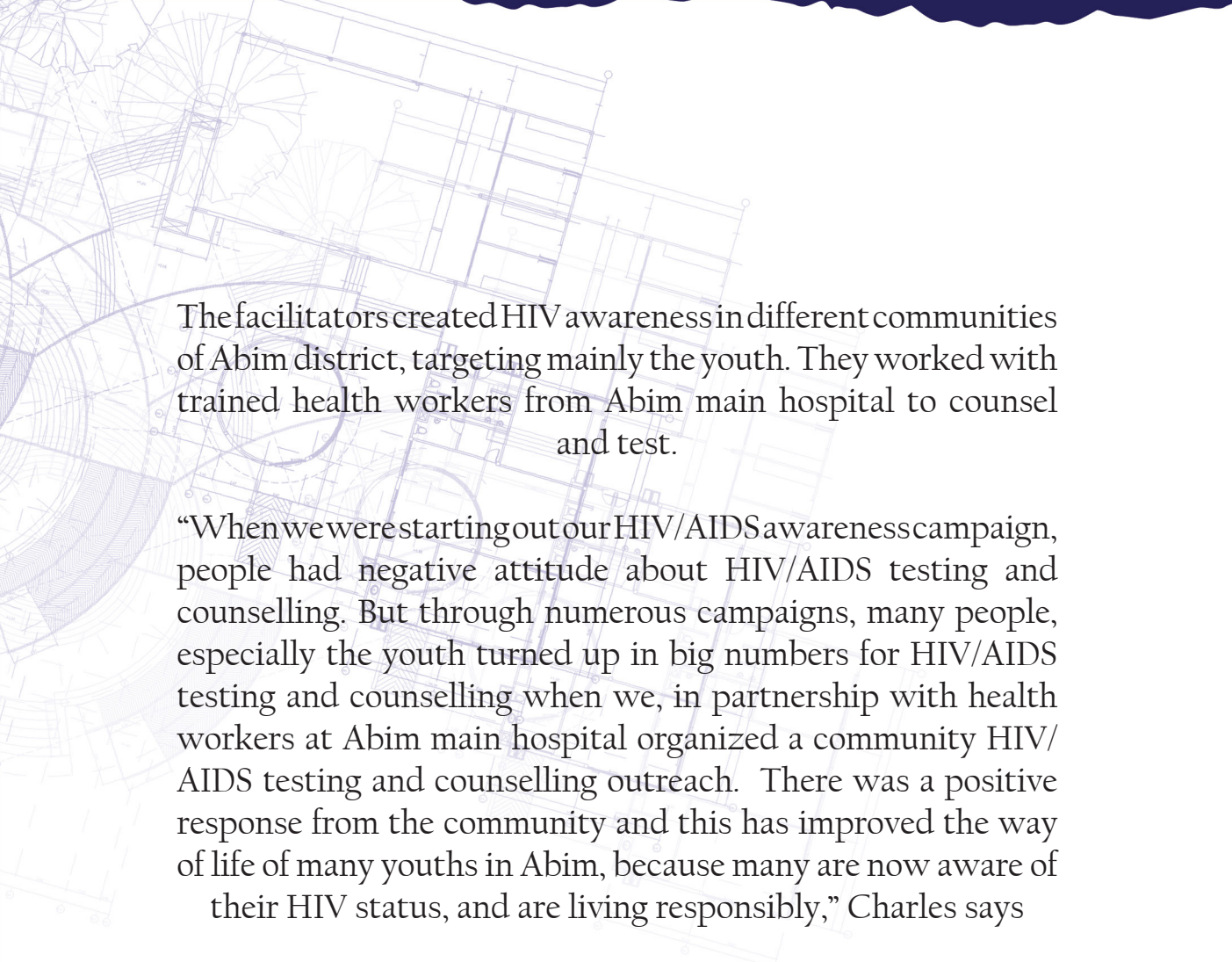
HIV/AIDS RELATED STIGMA LESSENS IN ABIM DISTRICT

The fear of being stigmatized by society after one has tested HIV + has for long been one of the barriers hindering some people from testing for HIV and knowing their status. And the situation wasn't any different in the communities of Abim district, Karamoja region.

Something had to be done to address and create more awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention, testing and treatment. Following UNNGOF's training where community facilitators were equipped with community mobilization, facilitation, communication, and problem-solving skills, they had to get to work.

Charles Lochoro, community facilitator, Riamiriam Civil Society Network (RCSN) points out that as a team of four facilitators, they have carried out about 18 community dialogues including 10 fire place conversations after the training, to address a number of challenges affecting people in the region. They have conducted community dialogues on peace building, the 'Go back to school campaign', radio talk shows, and HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis (TB) awareness campaigns, testing, and counselling.



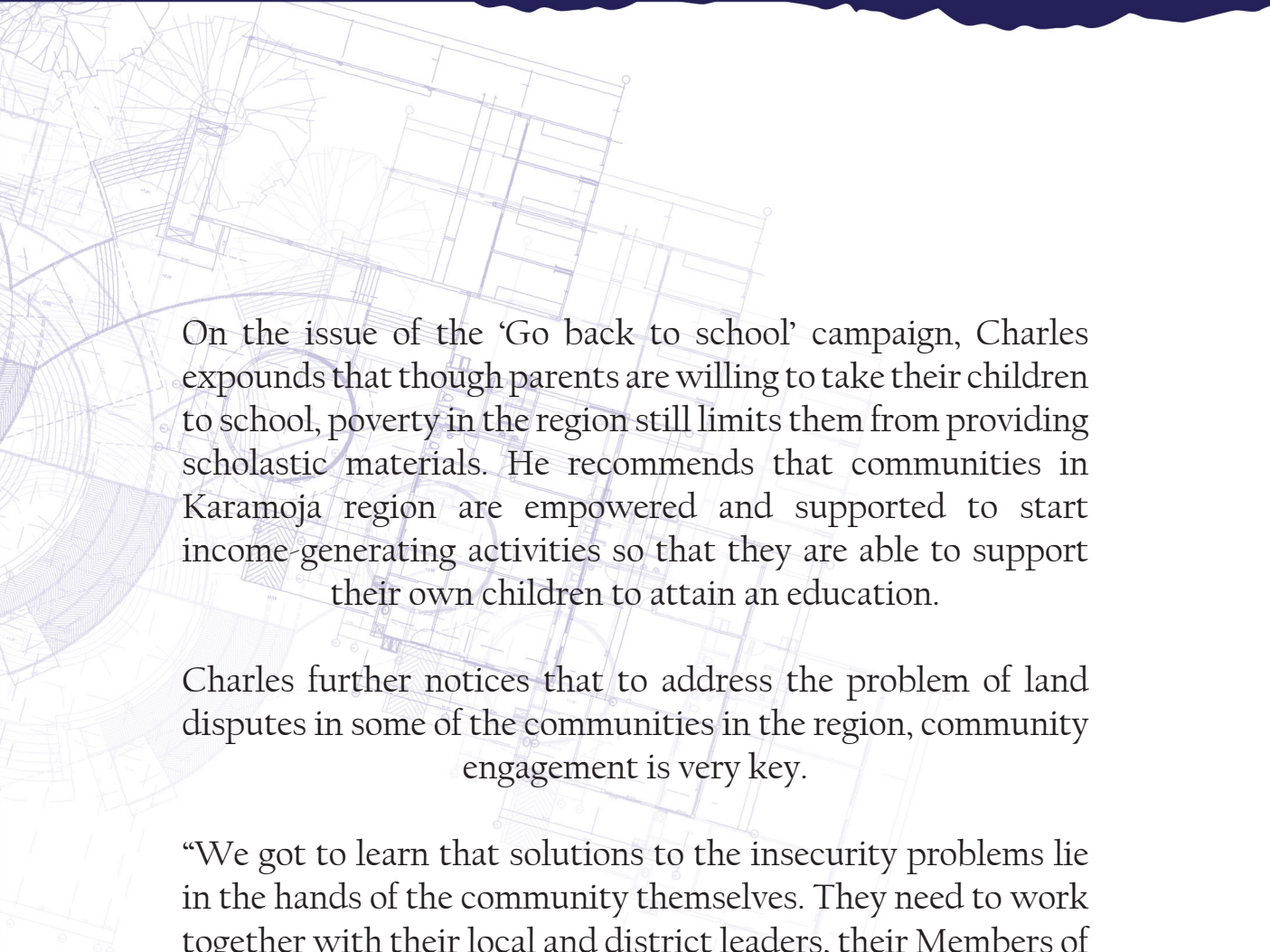


The facilitators created HIV awareness in different communities of Abim district, targeting mainly the youth. They worked with trained health workers from Abim main hospital to counsel and test.

“When we were starting out our HIV/AIDS awareness campaign, people had negative attitude about HIV/AIDS testing and counselling. But through numerous campaigns, many people, especially the youth turned up in big numbers for HIV/AIDS testing and counselling when we, in partnership with health workers at Abim main hospital organized a community HIV/AIDS testing and counselling outreach. There was a positive response from the community and this has improved the way of life of many youths in Abim, because many are now aware of their HIV status, and are living responsibly,” Charles says

He adds: “People used to fear testing for HIV/AIDS because of stigma, but this has since then reduced because community members were given correct information how the disease is transmitted, prevention, and treatment, but also sensitized about the danger of stigmatizing those with the virus, as it hinders them from seeking for treatment, and they could die, or infect others. Many people asked questions about HIV/AIDS which were answered by the health workers thus addressing the problem of myths and misconceptions about the virus.





On the issue of the ‘Go back to school’ campaign, Charles expounds that though parents are willing to take their children to school, poverty in the region still limits them from providing scholastic materials. He recommends that communities in Karamoja region are empowered and supported to start income-generating activities so that they are able to support their own children to attain an education.

Charles further notices that to address the problem of land disputes in some of the communities in the region, community engagement is very key.

“We got to learn that solutions to the insecurity problems lie in the hands of the community themselves. They need to work together with their local and district leaders, their Members of Parliament to find lasting solutions. Otherwise, I am hopeful that with our continuous engagement with our communities, we shall see better outcomes.”

