



REVITALIZING THE BATWA COMMUNITY THROUGH LOCAL PHILANTHROPY

SUCCESS STORY



Introduction

UNNGOF, under the Change the Game Academy with support from Wilde Ganzen Foundation undertook the Match Funding Programme in Uganda in 2013. This initiative was open to organizations that have trained in Local Fund Raising, successfully develop and roll out fundraising plans. The goal of the programme is to empower organizations that were trained in Local Fund Raising with a 50% financial contribution, towards project budgets for which they locally raise funds as per their Fundraising plans developed, as a result of the skills acquired through the Change the Game Academy training on Local Fund raising.

Kigezi Orphans and Vulnerable Children Living with HIV/AIDS (KADOLHA) rolled out a livelihood project that sought to skill Batwa girls and young mothers through enterprise development to reduce poverty. The organization set out to procure 20 sewing machines and pieces of cloth to facilitate the training. At least 4 sewing machines had been mobilized by November 2023 and the community members had offered pledges that would be fulfilled by the end of December 2023. At least 30 young women are set to benefit from this skilling intervention, which will have a ripple effect, as these trained women will cascade this knowledge to their counterparts in the community.

The Situation

The Batwa, also known as the “Pygmies” of Uganda, are one of the most marginalized indigenous communities in the country. Originally forest-dwelling hunter-gatherers, the Batwa were evicted from their ancestral homes in the 1990s when the government declared their forests as national parks for gorilla conservation. This displacement stripped the Batwa of their land, traditional means of livelihood, and cultural identity, leaving them landless and destitute.

Today, the Batwa community faces extreme poverty, social exclusion, and limited access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Many Batwa families live on the fringes of society, struggling to meet their daily needs. Their economic exclusion is further compounded by social stigmatization and discrimination, making it difficult for them to integrate into mainstream Ugandan society.

For Batwa women and girls, the situation is even more challenging. Cultural norms often restrict their roles, and without income-generating skills or assets, they remain dependent on external aid. As a result, the community continues to face high levels of food insecurity, poor health outcomes, and limited educational opportunities for their children. Supporting the Batwa women to generate income and achieve financial independence is critical for breaking the cycle of poverty and ensuring sustainable development.



The Response

To address the pressing needs of the Batwa community, Kigezi Orphans and Vulnerable Children (KHADOLA), a local community-based organization, mobilized 23 members from the Murubindi Batwa Group, including three men, and launched a skills training initiative aimed at promoting economic resilience and self-reliance. KHADOLA identified the production of reusable sanitary pads as a viable income-generating activity, given the high demand for affordable menstrual hygiene products within the community.

In February 2024, KHADOLA began providing hands-on training sessions on how to make reusable sanitary pads using sewing machines. These sessions were conducted by experienced community volunteers who generously offered their time, skills, and expertise to uplift Batwa women and girls. The training covered the entire production process—from fabric selection, cutting, and sewing, to quality control and packaging.



Fig.1: A group women and girls from the Batwa Community that have benefited from sewing sanitary pads.

The initiative aimed to provide technical skills and to instill confidence and a sense of purpose among the participants, many of whom had never engaged in income-generating activities before. The program created a safe and supportive environment where members could learn and grow together. For many of these women, acquiring the ability to produce reusable sanitary pads was a steppingstone toward financial independence and a better quality of life.

In 2023, Robert Ngabirano, the Batwa Focal Person; Andrew Buhungiro, the Programs Manager; and Amos, the Executive Director of KHADOLA, attended a Local Fundraising training session organized by the Uganda National NGO Forum (UNNGOF). The training equipped them with practical tools and strategies for local fundraising, enabling them to mobilize resources within their community and reduce dependency on external funding. Inspired by this training, the KHADOLA team spearheaded a series of local fundraising campaigns over the next six months. These drives took place at various locations, including Karengyere Trading Centre and Muko Market. The team utilized diverse strategies to encourage contributions, such as organizing public meetings, holding awareness events, and sharing the project's impact story on local radio stations.

Through these campaigns, the Batwa community rallied around the cause, contributing in-kind support such as sewing materials, fabric, food, and clothing. Their efforts culminated in a successful fundraising campaign, collecting a total of 9,598,000 UGX in cash and in-kind support. With these funds and additional match funding of 9,540, 000 from Uganda National NGO Forum, KHADOLA acquired 11 more sewing machines, increasing their total to 21 machines. To ensure community ownership of the project, they held an orientation meeting, including board members, local council leaders, and head teachers, which generated an additional 1,635,000 UGX. KHADOLA organized two dialogues to involve all stakeholders from the outset. During these dialogues, the community contributed 3,400,000 UGX, including pledges of two sewing machines and sewing tools for four months of training for the learners. To diversify income for the Batwa and other vulnerable populations, KHADOLA facilitated 12 market visits where the group sold 82 reusable pads, earning 693,500 UGX. They also received donations of a sewing machine and two rolls of cloth, with a local shop owner providing a free three-month training program for quality pad production.

KHADOLA also conducted a one-day orientation meeting for service providers focused on partnership building, enhancing synergy among relevant stakeholders. A campaign meeting was held, targeting 25 people and raising 1,540,000 UGX, with contributions from local farmers and business owners.

To sustain their fundraising efforts, KHADOLA conducted weekly house-to-house visits, targeting individuals and business owners, which resulted in a collection of 1,920,000 UGX in cash and other supplies. The Batwa drama group also played a role in mobilization, performing at various events and fundraising campaigns, which helped raise over 620,000 UGX in cash along with additional cloth donations.

As a result of these collective efforts, KHADOLA continues to build a sustainable community support network that uplifts the Batwa Community through income-generating activities and essential skills training.

The Results

The initiative has transformed the lives of the Murubindi Batwa Group members and their families. With their new skills, the group has made over 450 reusable sanitary pads, each sold at 3,000 UGX, generating an income for members. The increased production capacity has also created new opportunities. The Kalengyere Teenage Mothers' Group secured a tender to produce uniforms for the Mothers' Union, further boosting their income.

The initiative has benefited 119 households, impacting approximately 476 individuals. Families now have a stable source of income, enabling them to purchase food, cover daily expenses, and sew school uniforms for their children. Beyond economic benefits, the project has created a strong support system within the community, fostering solidarity and collaboration among members.

The success of the local fundraising campaign allowed KHADOLA to exceed their target and provide sewing machines for the community. Members of the Batwa Community have reported increased income and the ability to better support their families. Their journey from financial vulnerability to self-reliance highlights the potential for communities to create lasting change when they have the right support and opportunities.



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