



HOPELVB GENDER EQUALITY

At the Center of Health, Rights, and Sustainability

A successful population, health, and environment (PHE) project requires the full and equal participation of women and girls and men and boys. In order to address the urgent, interconnected challenges in the Lake Victoria Basin—poor maternal and child health, a lack of access to contraception, dwindling fish supply, deforestation, and more—interventions must also work towards gender equality. Women must be able to exercise their right to sexual and reproductive health care services, including their ability to choose if or when to have children. They must be able to participate in income-generating activities, which improve their economic situation and better equip them to protect their families and the natural resources they depend on. The Health of People and the Environment in the Lake Victoria Basin (HoPE-LVB) project works to promote gender equality. HoPE-LVB implements a range of activities, including training women's and young mother's groups on integrated health and conservation practices and conducting community dialogue sessions surrounding the intersection between gender, sexual and reproductive health, and the environment to bridge gender divides and encourage input and support from all community members.

"WE SPACE OUR CHILDREN LIKE WE SPACE OUR TREES. SO THEY GROW BIG AND STRONG."



At 15, Fausta gave birth to her first child. By 23, she had four. Like many girls on Uganda's Bussi Island, Fausta felt pressure to marry young and grow her family fast. Today, everything is different. Fausta kneels between

rows of lush green plants. Sweat collects on her forehead as she concentrates on her graft—joining a local orange species and an improved lemon species. Fausta is one of the nine women that run the Mirembe tree nursery cooperative. These women are trailblazers. They do work traditionally reserved for men. With support from the HOPE-LVB project,* they do it better.

Three things you should know about Fausta's remarkable tree nursery:

1. Trees are just the start

Every member of the group completed reproductive health and conservation training, conducted by the HoPE-LVB project.

Right away, the women started the nursery, planting trees to replenish their depleted forests. While they worked, they discussed the benefits of contraception. Women like Fausta—who wanted desperately to prevent pregnancy—learned they had options.

"Before my training," says Fausta, "I didn't know the truth about family planning. I heard bad things—that it gives a woman cancer." After learning the facts, Fausta spoke to her husband, Paul.

"We agreed we could not afford another child. Together, we decided we wanted to use family planning." Fausta is proud. "Family planning is the greatest thing in my life."

2. With money comes power

Fausta's nursery is abundant with cash crops—25,000 passion fruit seedlings, 7,000 coffee plants, and rows of trees perfect for building boats. In 2015, the women sold their harvest for 1,000,000 shillings. That's nearly \$300—a substantial amount of money for families suffering extreme poverty. After splitting their profits, the women returned home with income for their families. Imagine how important this money is.

HoPE-LVB recognizes that these opportunities for income generation can increase women's ability to make decisions about how those resources are used. Maye, the chair of Fausta's group, agrees. "Because of the nursery, women no longer have to ask for everything from our husbands. We can decide what we need for our children's wellbeing. We can get it."

3. Men are lending a hand

Fausta's nursery was started by nine amazing women. Today, a group of men stands beside them. "Our husbands saw what we are doing and wanted to get involved," says Fausta. "Paul and I work together in the nursery now. We have divided responsibilities. We join hands." All the men have completed the project's training. "The husbands have learned things," says Fausta. "They no longer believe we want to use family planning to go with another man. They no longer put pressure on us to have children." That means the women in Fausta's tree nursery—and the six other nurseries supported by HoPE-LVB—have freedom to make their own choices. They have freedom to manage their natural resources by planting trees that grow strong and healthy, like their children.

"I never imagined I could have such knowledge and skills," says Fausta. "I feel ready to teach others. I will do it with courage. Because I am a strong woman, and this is my profession."

MY IMPLANT IS MY BADGE OF HONOR



Dorothy was married and pregnant by 18. By 22, she had five children. "Family planning? I never knew what it was," says Dorothy. "I'd heard some rumors, but people talked about it like it was obscene."

Dorothy gave birth five times in five years. On Bussi Island, Uganda, many girls are expected to marry young, have a baby, drop out of school, then have more babies. That's if they can survive their pregnancies. Dorothy gave birth at home, without a skilled provider. "Four days," she says, describing one of her deliveries. "My labor pains were unbearable."

Dorothy didn't know she had a choice. She wanted to do what was best for her family's survival, but she needed information. She was never taught she should go for prenatal care. She never heard she should immunize her children. "One after another, they got sick," she says soberly. She didn't know that spacing her pregnancies could save her life and protect the health of the babies who rely on her. She didn't know she had the right to contraception. And *that* is obscene. But don't for a second think Dorothy's story is over.

Today, Dorothy is smiling. She lifts her left arm, proudly showing off her contraceptive implant. "My implant," she proclaims.

Dorothy is a member of a "Young Mothers' Group," started by the HoPE-LVB project. She finds courage in joining young women just like her, who have all beaten unbelievable odds. Together they share their experiences and gain knowledge about how to protect their health and the resources they need.

"I took what I learned about family planning to my husband," she says. "I explained, and he agreed. Now he sees that our baby is two and, for the first time, there is no new baby immediately after it. He is happy. And I am really hopeful for my future."

She should be. Dorothy is an inspiration. She and her fellow group members move across the island, sharing knowledge with anyone who will listen—about family planning, hand washing, child immunization, energy-saving stoves, and more.

"It's like this—" Dorothy begins to explain one of the most important changes in her life. "Before, no one knew me. But now I have new skills and new information. When people see me, they say, 'It's young mother Dorothy! She can talk to us about family planning.'" Dorothy may be young, but she is powerful. "I have a new identity. It's one I am proud of."

The HoPE-LVB project has been made possible by the generosity of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and individual donors, and through partnerships between:



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

E2A EVIDENCE TO ACTION
for Strengthened Reproductive Health



EXPANDNET