

## Welcome to Our End-of-Year Newsletter!

As we close the chapter on an incredible year, we're thrilled to reflect on the progress, milestones, and inspiring stories that have shaped our journey. This edition is packed with highlights from our impactful initiatives, the partnerships that have fueled our mission, and a glimpse into what's ahead as we step into a new year of possibilities.

Join us as we celebrate the achievements and share the stories that continue to drive our vision for a healthier, empowered future.

## News Letter Highlights.

- Building a safer Uganda: Strengthening Epidemic Preparedness
- Driving Women's Health progress across Africa
- Breaking Barriers to SRH for Urban Youth
- An Innovative Approach to Monitoring Family Planning Progress
- Breaking Barriers: Samasha's Drive to curb Teenage Pregnancies in Luwero and Kole Districts
- Launch of the District Committee on Adolescent Health (DCAH) Guidelines
- Advancing Adolescent Health: Draft ADH Costed Implementation Plan Developed
- Reflecting and Recharging: Highlights from Samasha's Staff Retreat



## Building a Safer Uganda:

### *Strengthening Epidemic Preparedness*

In 2024, Samasha, with support from the Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHA), took bold steps to strengthen Uganda's readiness for health emergencies. Through an eight-month project launched in August, we focused on ensuring the timely release and effective use of the UGX 57.8 billion allocated for epidemic preparedness in the national budget.

By closely monitoring budget allocations, analyzing spending, and engaging key stakeholders, we aimed to secure the release and utilization of at least 25% of these funds by December 2024. Public awareness campaigns, coalition-building with civil society, and evidence-based advocacy have kept epidemic preparedness a national priority. We've laid a strong foundation for better outbreak detection and response thanks to collective efforts.

As we move into 2025, we remain committed to building a resilient health system to protect Uganda's families and communities from future health crises.

*'we aimed to secure the release and utilization of at least 25% of these funds by December 2024.'*

Together, we can ensure a healthier, safer Uganda!



*Fig 1. Launch of the National Action Plan for Health Security 2024/25-2028/29(NAPHS II)*



## Driving Women's Health Progress Across Africa

Samasha, with support from the Gates Foundation, is leading a three-year project (2024–2027) to improve family planning (FP) and maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) in Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Senegal, and Ivory Coast.

Using our innovative Motion Tracker, we monitor commitments by governments and partners, identify gaps, and push for practical, community-driven solutions. Through media campaigns, capacity building, and fostering collaboration, we aim to strengthen accountability, secure better policies, and improve healthcare services.

Together, we're creating lasting change to ensure every woman and child can access quality healthcare.



*Fig 2. Samasha's Executive Director, Asiimwe Cornelia, facilitating a training session on the Motion Tracker Approach at the Africa Health Budget Network (AHBN) office in Nigeria.*



*Fig 3. Young participants engage in a dynamic discussion on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) during the Bili Now Now Youth Summit.*

## Breaking Barriers to SRH for Urban Youth

Rapid urbanization leaves many youth in informal settlements facing limited access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. With support from Propel Youth & Gender, Samasha is addressing these challenges by working with local governments to develop youth-centered strategies in policy, advocacy, and governance. By fostering partnerships with municipalities, health departments, and youth groups, and integrating climate-resilient approaches, we aim to close SRH access gaps, empower youth-led organizations, and strengthen health program delivery.

This initiative ensures marginalized urban youth are prioritized, creating healthier communities and a more equitable future for all.

## An Innovative Approach to Monitoring Family Planning Progress

Samasha, in partnership with FP2030, is piloting an exciting new tool in Uganda: The Family Planning Accountability Dashboard (FP Dash). This tool helps track progress on family planning commitments, ensuring governments, civil society, and partners stay on course to meet FP2030 goals.

The FP Dash simplifies complex data, providing real-time updates and a clear view of how far we've come and what's left to do. It brings everyone to the table—health officials, organizations, and advocates to collaborate, share best practices, and focus on what matters most.

By starting in Uganda, we're learning what works to make this dashboard even better before expanding to other countries. Together, we're building a stronger, more transparent system to improve family planning and change lives.

## Advancing Self-Care in Liberia

Samasha, with support from PROPEL Health, is working with health experts in Liberia to adapt the WHO Guideline on Self-care Interventions for Health and Well-being to their local context. This effort will help people take better care of their health by giving them simple and practical solutions.

As part of this work, Samasha created a step-by-step guide entitled "Localizing WHO Guidelines on Self-Care; A Practical Guide From Uganda"

<https://samasha.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/Localizing-WHO-Guidelines-on-Self-Care.pdf>

The document serves as a how-to guide for countries seeking to create national self-care guidelines by using Uganda's model as an example. We are also helping to organize and co-facilitate meetings to ensure the guidelines are effectively adapted for Liberia. Additionally, Samasha is reviewing and revising the draft Liberia national self-care guidelines created by the Liberia consultant.

The Draft guideline will be piloted in a selected county and the insights gained will be used to revise the guideline into a final version. This updated version will then be approved by the Liberia Ministry of Health and shared nationwide.



*Fig 4 Participants during one of the validation meetings in Liberia*



# Breaking Barriers: Samasha's Drive to Curb Teenage Pregnancies in Luwero and Kole

Between December 2023 and September 2024, Samasha, supported by Planned Parenthood Global (PPG) and in partnership with the Ministry of Health's Adolescent and School Health Division, took significant strides in combating teenage pregnancies in Luwero and Kole districts.

With 24% of teenage girls in Uganda facing early pregnancies, our interventions aimed to create meaningful change.

## Key Milestones Achieved:



**2691** Adolescents Reached during the school health outreaches



**20** School awareness campaigns conducted



**3000** Fact sheets distributed (Educational materials)



**8** Integrated community campaigns were conducted reaching over **3225** community members.



Provided Technical and Financial support to the Luwero and Kole DICAH

*“By empowering adolescents with knowledge and resources, we are not just addressing teenage pregnancies; we are creating a future where young people thrive, lead, and make informed choices for their health and well-being” stated Dr. Innocent Nkonwa, the District Health Officer Luwero District.*

By collaborating with district leaders, health workers, Village Health Teams, and schools, this initiative has built a strong foundation for improving adolescent health. Samasha remains dedicated to empowering Uganda's youth and ensuring they have the tools to thrive.

*‘With 24% of teenage girls in Uganda facing early pregnancies, our interventions aimed to create meaningful change.’*



*Fig 5 Photo collage of the school and community health outreaches in Luwero and Kole Districts*

## Launch of the District Committee on Adolescent Health (DICAH) Guidelines

Samasha, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, proudly supported the development and dissemination of the first edition of the District Committee on Adolescent Health (DICAH) Guidelines. Launched during the Safe Motherhood Conference, these guidelines aim to enhance district-level coordination, leadership, and resource mobilization for adolescent and school health programs.

This milestone marks a significant step toward improving adolescent health outcomes by strengthening planning and coordination at the subnational level.



*Fig 7 The permanent secretary Ministry of Health Dr Diana Atwine and stakeholders during the launch of the guidelines*

## Advancing Adolescent Health: Draft ADH Costed Implementation Plan Developed

Samasha provided technical assistance in drafting the Adolescent Health Costed Implementation Plan (ADH CIP) 2024/25–2025/26. The plan focuses on strengthening the capacity of health service providers to deliver adolescent-responsive health services and improving evidence-based coordination to enhance adolescent health outcomes.

The top priorities include reducing teenage pregnancies and child marriages, addressing injuries and violence, combating communicable diseases like HIV and malaria, managing mental health and substance abuse disorders, and tackling nutrition disorders among adolescents.

The draft was presented to the Ministry of Health's Maternal and Child Health Cluster for review and feedback, marking progress toward a coordinated and impactful approach to adolescent health in Uganda.



## Reflecting and Recharging: Highlights from Samasha's Staff Retreat

Samasha held a two-day staff retreat, bringing together team members to reflect, strategize, and reenergize for the year ahead. The retreat focused on aligning priorities, enhancing team capacity, and fostering collaboration to strengthen Samasha's impact in health advocacy and accountability.

Key sessions included training on the SMART Advocacy framework, which emphasized setting actionable goals and identifying opportunities for impactful decision-making.

Staff also engaged in capacity-building activities to enhance their skills in project management and advocacy, as well as the effective use of tools like the Motion Tracker to track commitments and progress.

Financial planning and accountability were highlighted as critical components for program success, with practical discussions on budgeting, requisitioning, and ensuring efficient use of resources.

The retreat concluded with team-building activities facilitated by Ant Feet Uganda, designed to strengthen collaboration, strategic thinking, and mutual support among staff.

This retreat reaffirmed Samasha's commitment to teamwork, excellence, and delivering impactful results in health systems strengthening and advocacy.



*Fig 8 Team Bulls explaining their tower project design*



*Fig 9 & 10 The Samasha staff on a photo moment during the team building.*



## In the Spotlight

In the New Vision on Wednesday, December 11, 2024, our Executive Director Cornelia Asiimwe shared insights on the importance of strengthening Uganda's epidemic preparedness.

The article underscores the need for robust health systems, timely funding, and coordinated efforts to prevent and manage potential health crises.



### Prepare for future epidemics

**EDITOR:** Uganda is prone to disease outbreaks due to highly dangerous pathogens.

With the ongoing outbreaks like mpox, measles and influenza, Uganda risks having millions of preventable deaths every year, much more illness and avoidable suffering.

In FY2024/25, Uganda affirmed its commitment to strengthening epidemic preparedness and resilience by allocating sh57.8b (\$15.4m) from its revenues. Currently, less than 20% has been released. How can we ensure that we create a strong healthy system capable of withstanding future outbreaks?



**CORNELIA ASIIMWE**

#### LESSONS FROM PAST OUTBREAKS

According to the Ministry of Health, Uganda faces an estimated loss of sh4 trillion annually due to health crises, underscoring the need for strategic investment in the country's preparedness and response. For example, with the ongoing mpox outbreak, Uganda has registered 784 cases and only had four deaths across 52 districts since the outbreak in July 2024. This success is attributed to robust surveillance systems, improved co-ordination, vaccination advocacy and community engagement activities. To sustain these efforts and achieve more, there is need more than ever to have targeted domestic investments to improving our healthcare system.

#### ACTIVATE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND FUNDING FOR DISTRICT RESPONSE PLANS

National governments only spend about 1% to 3% of their health budgets on planning and responding to epidemics. Much of the funding is short-term, focused on addressing ongoing epidemics rather than preventive and long-term preparedness.

With more resources, strong leadership and political will that lasts will make sure that the right things get the attention, money they need, starting with the district's plans and budgets.

#### EXPANDING LABORATORY CAPACITY FOR EARLY DETECTION

Outbreaks like COVID-19 and mpox have made it clear that there is a need for advanced testing hubs to facilitate early detection. Uganda has nine regional public health emergency operation centres attached to the regional referral hospitals with inadequate laboratories incapable of diagnosing and handling highly contagious pathogens like Ebola, Marburg and haemorrhagic fevers.

Establishing or upgrading these labs and equipping them with

*Thank you for Reading!*

# Samasha

Advocacy for Improved Health Systems

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