Letter from the Board

In reflecting on the past year, I am deeply moved by the remarkable progress that I Am A Girl has achieved, and the unwavering support we have received. This year, we have made incredible strides in empowering young girls and women and addressing pressing gender issues.

In the pages of this year's annual report, you will find a tapestry of accomplishments and stories of transformation. Each narrative underscores the power of I Am A Girl to foster change on individual and community levels — a power that is magnified by your involvement.

Our menstrual hygiene program continues to break down barriers, empowering girls to attend school with confidence. We have also witnessed the transformative impact of our economic empowerment program, as 162 women have taken charge of their financial futures.

Our women's clinic has emerged as a vital source of holistic care in a time of rising teen pregnancy, intimate partner violence, and unmet maternity needs. Through comprehensive support, we are forging deeper connections and making a real difference in the well-being of women.

The urgency of climate change hit home for us this year as flooding and landslides affected our communities. In response, we launched a "green schools initiative" with tree-planting efforts, and have renewed our commitment to environmental sustainability.
The name and brand transformation of I Am A Girl into ACESO Community Gender Action LTD marks an exciting new chapter in our journey, allowing us to serve more diverse communities across Uganda and address gender issues on a broader scale.

In closing, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your support. Together, we will continue to make a meaningful impact in the lives of the girls and women we serve.

Miranda Cohen

Miranda Cohen, Board Chair
2022 Highlights

1,434 Reusable pads made
30 New women-owned businesses
$27,000 RAISED

1 Menstrual Safe Space built
162 Women trained in financial literacy
1,200+ Patients seen at our women's clinic
Menstrual Health
The Menstrual Health Program stands as the cornerstone of I Am A Girl / ACESO’s initiatives, embodying the core essence of our ideology. Made up of two programs, reusable menstrual pad program and menstrual safe space program, we empower young girls by providing them with essential resources to manage their menstrual health with confidence and dignity. In doing so, we not only ensure their well-being but also create a path for them to pursue uninterrupted education and future employment opportunities.

In 2022, we successfully conducted workshops for approximately 478 girls, teaching them the skills to sew their own reusable menstrual pads. In addition to this, we trained 85 dedicated teachers who will now be instrumental in expanding the reach and impact of this program across Eastern Uganda.

478 girls trained

"In 2019, we found that 11% of girls in our community drop out of school due to lack of menstrual supplies and bathrooms at their schools. In response, our program educates girls about menstruation, teaches them to make reusable menstrual pads, and offers lifetime access to our resources. Each girl receives three reusable pads and lifelong access to supplies and sewing machines at our offices. This isn't just about menstrual hygiene—it’s about dignity, equality, and empowerment. We are committed to keeping girls in school, one pad at a time."

— Desire Grace Kirabo, Executive Director, I Am A Girl / ACESO
Reusable Pad Program Impact

5 SCHOOLS

478 GIRLS REACHED

85 Teachers trained to expand the program

1,434 REUSABLE PADS MADE

Photo: Our Executive Director, Desire Grace Kirabo, working with students at Bujoloto Primary School during a hands-on workshop on crafting reusable menstrual pads.
In November 2022, we achieved a milestone by constructing a "Menstrual Safe Space" at Bujoloto Primary School. A sanctuary where girls can change their menstrual pads and find respite from societal stigma. Our 2020 study unveiled a dire need, revealing that a staggering 97% of girls had no access to hygiene facilities at their schools, leading them to skip classes during their periods.

This successful pilot project targets this pressing need by providing a comprehensive support system for girls. Our safe space is more than a facility – it’s an empowering environment, fully equipped with reusable pads, clean water, soap, and educational materials about menstruation, ensuring every girl's experience is dignified, informed, and unimpeded.
Economic Empowerment
Empowering women economically and fostering financial independence is key to reducing gender-based violence. In 2020, we introduced our Women’s Lending Circles program, which expanded significantly in 2022. This year, we facilitated five lending circles involving 162 women across four villages. Following the I Am A Girl/ACESO economic development model, members from each village self-elected a chairperson and treasurer, driving community-led initiatives.

Each group participated in weekly savings while receiving training in a trade or practice to generate income. On their one-year anniversary, women from each group could apply for loans to fund business ventures. This year’s business proposals included two street vendor models – one selling bananas and another charcoal. All businesses thrived, with loans being repaid in full within six months.
We run an entrepreneurship program alongside our lending circles to equip participants with the tools they need to thrive. In partnership with finance professionals and bankers, we offer financial literacy and budgeting training for each group. Participants learn to craft business proposals and funding requests in preparation for launching their own businesses. Every year, we invite trainers specializing in different business fields to teach income-generating skills. This year, we concentrated on basket weaving, beading, and mushroom growing.

To identify the most viable activities with the best economic outcomes, we conducted multiple trainings across different villages. Basket weaving was introduced to 33 women in Bumuluya and 46 in Jewa, while beading was taught to 26 women in Wabukhasa and 57 in Lukii. The basket weaving group demonstrated greater success, as there was a larger market for their goods. In late 2022, we introduced mushroom farming to two women from Lukii and Bumuluya, with this new project set to launch in early 2023.
Our Economic Empowerment program has achieved remarkable success, driven by community-led initiatives and a strong commitment to accountability. Enhanced by training and educational opportunities, this program has catalyzed transformative change in the lives of the women we serve and the communities they inhabit.

We eagerly look forward to expanding this program in 2023, creating new avenues for income generation and fostering sustained economic growth in the communities we support.
Women's Clinic
Women's Clinic

Our Women's Clinic was established in response to a growing community need for accessible, affordable healthcare. The pandemic had heightened instances of teen pregnancy, unmet maternity needs, intimate partner violence, and sexually transmitted diseases, adversely affecting the well-being of women in the community. In addressing these health issues, we realized that merely offering medical care was not sufficient; a holistic approach was needed.

Our clinic goes beyond traditional medical services. We have an on-staff social worker ready to address non-medical needs that often accompany health issues. For instance, we offer additional mental health support to patients who have suffered miscarriages or recurrent UTIs, recognizing that these may be signs of underlying issues. Understanding that many community members find it difficult to identify intimate partner violence, we believe that building trust through medical care is a crucial step toward offering the mental health support these women need.
Looking Ahead
As we forge ahead into the new year, our resolve is clear: I Am A Girl / ACESO is committed to scaling our impact, and we will integrate climate solutions into every facet of our programming.

The close of 2022 marked a turning point for us, leading into a comprehensive strategic planning process. This brought forth a wave of critical questions about our programming, communications, and governance that demanded our attention.

The most pressing question was, "How can I Am A Girl grow?" With a surge in need and requests from areas beyond Mbale, the time had come to expand. We made the bold decision to become an NGO in Uganda, freeing us from the constraints of our previous Community Based Organization status. In this transformation, we rebranded ourselves as ACESO Community Gender Action LTD. We are thrilled to extend our reach to a more diverse array of communities and address gender issues with a fresh, expansive perspective.

Simultaneously, the stark reality of climate change made its presence felt in 2022, as Mbale was hit by severe flooding and landslides, leaving our communities exposed. In response, we partnered with local organizations to launch a “green schools initiative” in 2023, which includes tree planting to mitigate the effects of climate change. Our strategic plan now prioritizes environmental sustainability as one of our core focus areas.

Our journey continues to be guided by the success and impact of our menstrual hygiene and economic development programs. At the end of 2022, we received an in-kind material contribution that will allow our menstrual health program to reach a staggering 10,000 girls by the close of 2023. The excitement for what lies ahead is palpable, as we continue our mission to create lasting change.
# Financials

## Revenue

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributions &amp; Special events</td>
<td>$23,348</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>$4,520</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$27,868</td>
<td>100%</td>
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## Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>$20,688</td>
<td>74%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting Services</td>
<td>$7,180</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$27,868</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

## Resources Spent for Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women's Savings and Loans</td>
<td>$10,344</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Menstrual Health</td>
<td>$5,172</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Materials &amp; Resources</td>
<td>$4,672</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency Fundraising (landslide)</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$20,688</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Board of Directors

Miranda Cohen
Board Chair, Nonprofit Consultant

Paul Tuhairwe
Finance Manager, Save the Children Uganda

Elsuida Brunga
Director of Research & Strategy, Hudson Ferris

Jimmy Isaraza
Business Manager, Airtel

Britt Robinson
Sr. Communications Specialist, International Center for Research on Women

Gary Agaba
Project Coordinator, TPO Uganda

Annet Nandelenga
Manager, Centenary Bank

Desire Grace Kirabo
Executive Director, I Am A Girl / ACESO
Partners & Sponsors

Thank You

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AORI
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CECOD
City of Mbale
Bujoroto Primary school
Confluence Institute
Design by Liberty in North Korea