

15
YEARS

NEWSLETTER



Celebrating year 15
of impact heading
into year 16



A note from the Team Leader

Fifteen years ago, Open Space Centre began with a simple conviction: when young people are given space, information, and skills to lead, they can transform their communities and their country. As we celebrate this milestone, we also look ahead to our 16th year with gratitude, pride, and renewed determination.

From our early debates in lecture halls to initiatives like the University Debate Nationals, Annual Youth Festivals, Nile Explorer Mobile Classroom, Green Eco-Lab, Meaningful Youth Participation Projects, and Strengthening Youth Civic Participation initiatives, among many, our work has always focused on creating dynamic spaces that unlock young people's potential. Over the years, we have reached approximately 10,000 young people across various districts, engaged teachers and community leaders, conducted research, influenced policy, and provided platforms that turn aspiration into action.

These achievements have only been possible thanks to our partners, including the US Mission in Uganda, UKAID, Crossing Borders, the Uganda National NGO Forum, and others as well as the dedication of our staff, volunteers, trustees, and the young leaders themselves.

In this edition, we share stories of impact, innovation, and youth leadership from our 15th year of service (October 2024–September 2025) and invite you to join us as we step confidently into our 16th year of service. Enjoy!



Wakibu Bunnya
Team Leader, Open Space Centre

What We Have Been Up To

Research Report on Youth Participation in Elections

Youth participation in democratic processes is not just a demographic imperative, but a critical factor in shaping democracy in Africa. Mugisha et al. (2016) highlights the paradox of ineffective youth participation in governance and democratic processes in Uganda. To broadly and better understand youth participation in elections, in September 2024, Open Space Centre, in partnership with Centre for Basic Research, conducted a comprehensive research study on youth participation in elections across 9 districts, namely Kampala, Mukono, Wakiso, Mbarara, Kasese, Gulu, Adjumani, Mbale and Iganga in the Central, Western, Northern and Eastern regions, respectively.

Following the completion of the study, in March this year the OSC officially launched the research report, which highlighted key findings and recommendations, shedding light on the realities of youth participation in elections in Uganda. The event featured a keynote address on the status quo of youth participation in elections, where the keynote speaker, Mr Ahmed Hadji, reiterated the importance of media and digital literacy in the electoral process, emphasizing the need to equip young people with knowledge on the effective use of AI and social media during elections.

At the launch, a dynamic panel added further insights and recommendations. Particularly, Ms Charity Ahimbisibwe, an expert in elections and election observations, emphasized the role of contextualized youth voter education delivered in spaces where young people spend most of their time and using platforms they frequently interact with. The launch was officiated by the outgoing National Youth Council chairperson, Mr Eyeru Jacob, who called for strategic, as

opposed to resource-based, participation of youth in democratic processes. He urged youth to meaningfully and peacefully be part of the country's democratic processes, especially the upcoming 2026 general elections.

The key findings and actionable recommendations launched through the research report served as a guide to strengthening youth engagement in democracy and governance processes.



The Launch of the 2026–2031 National Youth Manifesto

Oftentimes, young people continue to face exclusion from meaningful participation in governance, national policy formulation and decision-making where their voices and priorities are sidelined in political and development agendas. Open Space Centre, a member organization of the Youth Coalition on Electoral Democracy, took part in the processes that led to the development of the 2026– 2031 National Youth Manifesto.

The National Youth Manifesto is more than just a document; it is a policy framework and social contract that ensures that youth priorities and demands are embedded in political parties' and aspiring candidates' manifestos ahead of the 2026 general elections. Subsequent to the validation of the draft National Youth Manifesto, the 2026– 2031 National Youth Manifesto was officially launched in the presence of key stakeholders, including youth in their diversity, political party representatives, media, and representatives from civil society organizations.

During the official launch, young people took center stage in confidently presenting the key priority areas in the 2026 – 2031 National Youth Manifesto, which included Education, Healthcare, Creative Arts and Sports, Youth Political Participation, Peace and Security, Rule of Law, Good Governance and Access to Justice, Digital Transformation and Integrated Transport Infrastructure and Services. Furthermore, key stakeholders acknowledged the policy priorities outlined in the 2026–2031 National Youth Manifesto and public commitment was secured from stakeholders on addressing the youth demands highlighted.

The successful launch of the 2026– 2031 National Youth Manifesto marked a pivotal point in the alignment of youth priorities with national and political party manifestos, a key step towards

the active and meaningful participation of young people in democratic processes.



A ride to the Nile Explorer 5th phase



In the fifteenth year of service, Open Space Centre rolled out the fifth phase of the Nile Explorer Mobile Classroom, bringing American-style STEM opportunities to schools in different regions of Uganda.

"During the holidays, I borrowed my sister's phone to research a project idea using ChatGPT," Caroline, an S.2 student, excitedly shared, illustrating how the program inspires curiosity and encourages students to explore beyond the classroom.

Worldwide, industries are being reshaped by artificial intelligence, automation, and data-driven innovation. Global studies consistently warn that many of tomorrow's jobs will demand STEM-based skills, technological literacy, and adaptable thinking. While Uganda's young people are rich in talent and ambition, what they need is access, mentorship, and the right tools to transform potential into impact, a gap the Nile Explorer Mobile Classroom is working to fill.

To enhance sustainability and increase impact, this phase concentrated on secondary schools capable of building further on the skills acquired during the four-day sessions aboard

the Nile Explorer. The programme is aligned with Uganda's lower secondary curriculum and extended beyond STEM to include civic education, leadership development, soft skills training, and exposure to American values and opportunities.

Insight

Since 2021, with strong support from the U.S. Embassy in Uganda, the Nile Explorer has thus far impacted **3000** students, **35** districts, **68** schools and **10** communities, sparking curiosity, nurturing leadership, and preparing students for the future as problem solvers. For learners like Lillian, the classroom-on-wheels is more than a project but a launchpad for putting dreams in motion.



The School-to-Work Transition

Uganda's youth population is at its peak, yet the 2025 World Economic Forum Report on Jobs sends a warning that nearly 92 million jobs will be none existent by 2030. For Uganda, this challenge underscores the urgent need for innovation in education, skills development, and employment pathways.

In April 2025, we collaborated with the National Planning Authority and the National Youth Council, and we convened a thought-provoking dialogue on the fate of young people in relation to employment and the critical transition from school to work. The conversation came at a pivotal moment just ahead of the NDP IV implementation process.

With a timely keynote by Mr. Richard Ssewakiryanga, she shared though provoking realities on the transition of youth from school to work and also presented an opinion paper that acknowledged government interventions but also laid out a clear roadmap for improvement. The key recommendations included:

- Aligning Uganda's education system with labour market needs.
- Enforcing youth transition-to-work programs.
- Expanding formal employment opportunities.
- Enhancing youth entrepreneurship support.
- Leveraging the digital economy.
- Closing the gender employment gap.

These proposals point the way toward a more inclusive, resilient labour market that empowers young Ugandans to thrive in an uncertain future.

Check out the opinion paper on our website.

Youth, Social Media, and Elections

Across Africa, young people are at the forefront of digital transformation by late 2023, the continent had over 384 million social media users, and in Uganda alone, 2.4 million people were active online by early 2025. This growing digital presence raises critical questions like *how young Ugandans are using these platforms, especially during the electoral cycle.*

In November 2024, Open Space Centre conducted a digital skills training for young leaders from Mukono, Wakiso, and Kampala a training that was strengthen their ability to use digital platforms responsibly during elections. It addressed pressing concerns such as misinformation, disinformation, and online intimidation, while also positioning digital platforms as tools to promote peaceful participation and civic engagement.

Uganda's experience reflects a wider global reality, while digital media presents risks including harassment, cyber-attacks, and



manipulation of democratic processes, and offers powerful opportunities. For young people, these platforms provide space to mobilise, exchange ideas, and actively shape their democratic roles as voters, candidates, and leaders.

This initiative is under the 3-year Strengthening Youth Civic Participation project supported by the British High Commission

Philanthropy for Development

In August 2025, we joined the Uganda National NGO Forum and other like-minded organisations and corporations to celebrate the inaugural Philanthropy Week 2025 under the theme “Celebrating and Reclaiming Giving.” The week provided a national platform to reflect, celebrate, and strategies around giving as a driver of development.

Uganda’s story of generosity is both inspiring and contradictory, as the Uganda National Household Survey 2023/24 indicates that 16.1% of Ugandans live in poverty. Yet, the *World Giving Report (Uganda edition)* shows that 79% of Ugandans give money and 44% volunteer, including many young people, affirming that African philanthropy is not new but deeply embedded in everyday life.

As part of the week’s activities, we extended this conversation on various digital platforms and

on the streets and market areas of Kalerwe and Kibuye, engaging young people on practical ways to give, not only through money but also by contributing time, service, and skills, while celebrating those who are already givers. The long week celebrations concluded with the Gathering of Givers, hosted by CivSource Foundation, where we showcased digital stories of young givers from Mukono, Kampala, and Wakiso as a way of inspiring fellow youth to join the movement of philanthropy.

Insight

Since 2020, Open Space Centre, in partnership with the Uganda National NGO Forum, has worked together in the Philanthropy for Development Program, promoting the mobilisation of domestic resources and shifting mindsets from aid dependency toward sustainable, locally driven development especially among the youth.



Enhancing Youth Inclusion in Governance and Decision-Making

Young people across Uganda continue to face barriers to meaningful participation in governance, despite programs such as the Youth Livelihood Fund and the Parish Development Model. To bridge these gaps, Open Space Centre, in collaboration with Faraja Africa Foundation and Advance Afrika and with support from the Royal Danish Embassy, early this year launched a three-year youth empowerment project in the West Nile Region (Koboko, Pakwach, Maracha, Yumbe).

THE SPOTLIGHT

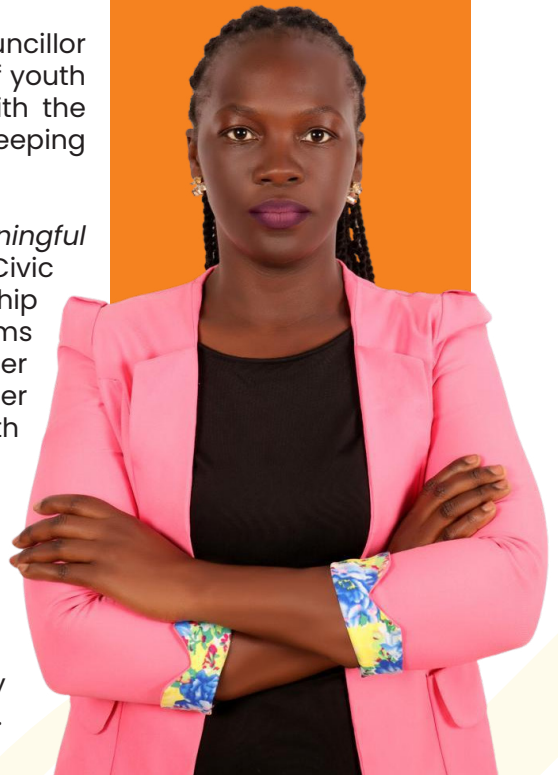
Nabukalu Phionah

For nearly a decade, **Nabukalu Phionah**, a Female Youth Councillor for Namugongo Division, has stood firmly on the frontline of youth empowerment, with a mission to equip young people with the knowledge, programs, and opportunities that matter, while keeping the local government accountable to them.

Through the Open Space Centre's *Youth Desk* under the *Meaningful Youth Participation* initiative and the Strengthening Youth Civic Participation project, Phionah has sharpened her leadership skills and multiplied her impact. She credits these platforms not only with boosting her confidence but also with giving her the leverage to lobby for an expanded youth budget in her council a win that has directly addressed pressing local youth needs.

Phionah's leadership is evident in her partnerships with other leaders to provide food relief to over 100 homesteads, her organisation of mentorship sessions through youth councils, and her efforts in nurturing the next generation of leaders. She has also spearheaded successful public awareness campaigns on issues like drug abuse, using edutainment by fellow youths to drive the message home in her community.

We celebrate her zeal.



Luyima Kenneth, an independent candidate aspiring to serve as **LC3 Councillor for Butabika Parish (2026–2031)**, has built his leadership on community engagement, youth empowerment, and strategic communication.

Through Open Space Centre's Youth Meaningful Participation Program, Kenneth has sharpened his leadership skills and expanded his impact. He credits this platform with equipping him with the skill to mobilize youth more effectively, amplify community voices, and practice inclusive leadership.

His leadership in practice is evident in organizing youth-led civic campaigns, promoting skills development across Butabika Parish, and crafting powerful narratives that connect cultural identity with modern communication. These initiatives have strengthened civic awareness, youth solidarity, and local participation in his area. Kenneth embodies what happens when young leaders are given the right tools and space to thrive, turning participation into progress and community voices into collective action.



A WORD FROM OUR INTERNS

Earlier this year, we had the pleasure of welcoming both local and international student interns into our daily work at Open Space Centre. Their fresh perspectives, energy, and curiosity enriched our team in countless ways. Here's what they had to say about their experience with us.

Nansukusa Sarah Sebunya

"My name is Nansukusa Sarah Sebunya, a student at Makerere University pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Population Studies. My internship at Open Space was both educational and insightful. The work environment was friendly and inclusive, and the staff were very helpful, generously sharing their knowledge with me. And of course, the meals were the tastiest!"



Katamba Rayyan

"My name is Katamba Rayyan, a student at Makerere University pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Population Studies. My favourite thing about Open Space Centre is that it provides a safe space that inspires youth-centred learning and collaboration."



Davis Semugabi

"My name is Davis Semugabi, and I am currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in leadership and governance at Makerere Business School. My favourite thing about my internship at Open Space was the team; they were friendly, approachable, and always willing to guide me."



Inspired by the Youth: My Fieldwork Journey at Open Space Centre

My name is Pernille Bjerg, and I am a master's student in Educational Anthropology at Aarhus University in Denmark. I am currently interning at the Open Space Centre, where I am also conducting my fieldwork.

In my eyes, Open Space Centre is an energetic workplace brimming with ideas, intentions, and bold visions for the youth and Uganda's future. It's a community filled with creativity and where brainstorming projects, debating solutions, and designing new ways to empower young Ugandans is the topic of every day's work.

My highlight so far of my time here was the Youth Manifesto event, 2025. I can still recall the electricity and energy that filled up the room. I was truly inspired by the conversations and discussions, which were driven with passion, big dreams, and optimism. The event was a space where everyone desired for a stronger, more united Uganda. It gathered a big crowd, including youth leaders, community leaders, people from other organizations, politicians, and citizens who all shared one belief: Uganda's development and future must be shaped inclusively, sustainably, and equitably by its vibrant youth population (Manifesto, 2025).



Events and communities like these transform the way you think—something you can only experience by showing up with an open mind and a genuine desire to make a difference. It has inspired and empowered me to take a deeper interest in the future of youth in Denmark, and I intend to explore my passions and become more actively involved upon my return.

So, if you are seeking real inspiration and encouragement, Open Space Centre will lead you there. Be curious, commit fully, and let yourself be swept into a meaningful community that will lead you to awareness and clear visions. Their space and network dream bigger for Uganda, proving that when young people are empowered and given the right knowledge, the entire nation moves forward.

Every Journey Begins with Curiosity and Mine Starts with Open Space Centre.

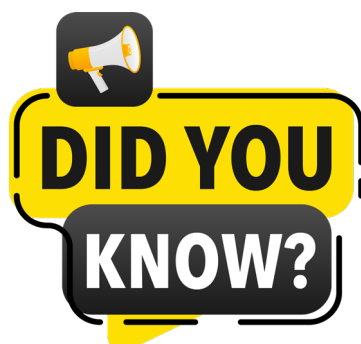
My name is **Nakayiwa Vivianne Kirabo**, a recent graduate from Bahçeşehir Cyprus University, where I studied International Relations and Political Science. I recently joined Open Space as an intern which has been both exciting and an eye-opening experience. Even though I am only just beginning, I can already sense that Open Space Centre is more than an organisation. It feels like a space where young people are encouraged to think differently, take initiative and see themselves as leaders with something valuable to contribute. So far, I haven't had a chance to do much, but I am eager to learn and observe. I am curious about how Open Space Centre translates its vision into action and how its work in leadership development, knowledge sharing and advocacy makes a real difference for young people in Uganda.

Being in this environment makes me reflect on my own journey—what I want to learn, how I want to grow and the role I might play in amplifying youth voices. I hope to learn not only from the programs but also from the people—their passion, knowledge and commitment to empowering the youth. As I settle in this internship, I carry a few questions with me: How does Open Space Centre connect local youth concerns to global development agendas? What strategies ensure that knowledge is shared in meaningful ways? How does working with Open Space Centre shape one's own sense of responsibility and agency as a young leader? And most importantly, how can I contribute in a way that leaves a positive mark?

Already, one of my questions has been answered. I wondered if Open Space Centre leaves up to its youthful and dynamic spirit. From the warmth of the staff to their openness in sharing knowledge, the team at Open Space Centre is youthful, welcoming and full of energy which makes it easy to connect and learn since you immediately feel included. I look forward to the experiences ahead, sharing more insights as this journey unfolds, and to learning from the incredible work Open Space Centre continues to do with and for the youth. This feels like a start of something impactful—not just me, but for the youth Open Space Centre continues to inspire.



FUN FACTS



- Listen to Classical Music: The “Mozart Effect” suggests that listening to classical music, even for 10 minutes, can temporarily enhance spatial reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- Did you know that your brain shrinks when you're dehydrated? Even mild dehydration can reduce cognitive performance by up to 20%. Drinking a glass of water can quickly restore focus and attention.
- Physical activity boosts teen mental health. Just 30 minutes of exercise (like running or dancing) three times a week can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression in youth by up to 40%

Coming Up

Multimedia Campaign on youth advocating for peace in the election

Mobile election awareness Caravans(Mukono, Wakiso, Kampala)

Mobile Community Drives (Koboko, Yumbe , Maracha and Pakwach)

Multi stake holder peace dialogue

Join us through the hashtag, #Youth4PeaceUg, #ReadyToVote

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