

I. A look at how GALS geared women's evolution in leadership roles

"A Case Study of Appolinaria Akimanazanye"

Problem solving and decision-making are crucial for human evolution, as they enable one to understand the current situation, identify desires, and make necessary changes. They are the skills that drive progress and development in various aspects of life, including leadership roles.

In the rural district of Kirehe, Rwanda, the introduction of the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) methodology has played a significant role in empowering women and transforming their position in leadership. By equipping women with problem-solving and decision-making skills, GALS has been able to help women in Kirehe break barriers, challenge traditional gender norms, and contribute to the development of their society.

In the Gahara sector of Kirehe District, once a shy woman, Appolinaria Akimanazanye, lived a life of lack of confidence; she could not present or give advice in public until she joined GALS. She said that "Previously, I could not stand in public and deliver a speech or present any idea, but since joining GALS, I have participated in the workshops with other fellow women, and the teaching methodology of using diagrams (GALS) has helped more women like me to open up and express their ideas."



According to Akimanizanye, GALS is a unique teaching methodology served as a platform for nurturing women leaders and providing peer learning, support, and mentoring for young women in different aspects of leadership, including politics, entrepreneurship, and community engagement.

"The village has voted me to be a healthcare worker, and I credit GALS workshops for empowering me with the confidence and skills to take on this leadership role", she said. "The use of diagrams in the workshops helped me to visualize and articulate my ideas effectively, and the supportive environment created by my fellow women participants encouraged me to share my

thoughts without fear of judgment. I am grateful for the impact GALS has had on my personal growth and development as a leader", she added. "Girls and women leaders, when empowered, possess problem-solving and decision-making skills to make informed decisions and contribute positively to their families, groups, and communities", said Akimanizanye.

2. GALS helped communities embrace green cooking

“A case study of Esther Mushimiyimana”

In 2012, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that air quality causes between 7 and 8 million deaths every year, making air pollution the leading environmental cause of premature deaths. A half of the deaths caused by air pollution came as a result of indoor pollution, the main source being indoor cooking and heating with solid fuels and wood over open fires.

In Kirehe, through GALS methodology integrated into climate change, communities were introduced to green cooking practices and planned climate change mitigation and adaptation practices in their dreams. GALS, empowered women in these communities to take charge of their cooking methods by promoting the use of clean and efficient cook stoves. This initiative not only improved the air quality in households but also significantly reduced the health risks associated with indoor pollution.

Esther Mushimiyimana, a resident of Kirehe district, Gahara Sector, is one of GALS champions trained by SAFE. Before receiving GALS training, she used to cook with traditional three-stone fires, which emitted harmful smoke and consumed large amounts of firewood. However, after joining GALS, Esther learned about the benefits of clean cooking stoves and planned to use this in her GALS dreams. She now uses a clean cooking stove, which not only saves her time and money but also protects her family's health.



She said, "I am proud to be part of this green cooking transition for women; I used to have breathing problems and constant headaches due to the smoke from the traditional three-stone fires. But since practicing the GALS lessons we learned from workshops, I bought a gas stove, and my health has improved significantly; I no longer suffer from respiratory issues. The clean cook stove requires less firewood, which means I spend less time collecting it and have more time to focus on other productive activities."

Esther Mushimiyimana has managed to end the risks that were associated with open-fire cooking. According to her, the GALS methodologies have not only transformed her own household but have also inspired other women in her community to adopt new practices. she said, "I have managed to sensitize other women in my community about the dangers of open-fire cooking and have introduced them to safer and more efficient cooking methods". Now, more and more households are using clean cook stoves, reducing their exposure to harmful smoke and decreasing the risk of respiratory diseases", she added.

3. Ending malnutrition: how kitchen gardens are driving the agenda in Mahama

“A case study of Rachel Uwibambe”

According to the Rwanda Demographic Health Survey (RDHS) of 2014–2015, 38% of children are stunted. To reduce these rates, communities in Kirehe District have ventured into kitchen gardening with the help of GALS methodology integrated into nutrition. Through GALS methodology, trainees planned nutrition practices in their dreams and received nutrition training by SAFE. They were trained on how to construct and maintain a kitchen garden filled with a variety of vegetables. This approach not only improves the nutritional status of individuals but also reduces the burden on healthcare systems, leading to healthier and more productive families, as well as helping women combat malnutrition-related diseases such as Kwashiorkor and intestinal worms in children.



"With limited arable land and a high population density, we learned from GALS training that kitchen gardens can help people grow their own fruits and vegetables" said Rachel Uwibambe a 43-year-old mother of seven. "Before using kitchen gardens, my grandson and daughter had signs of malnutrition-related diseases because their skin color was changing and they suffered hair loss, but since feeding them with vegetables from the kitchen garden, I noted that those children are getting better without going to the doctor thanks to the GALS training that showed us how to take care of kitchen gardens," she added.

Rachel Uwibambe is among the GALS pioneers who have been trained to use the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) methodology in Rwanda. Through this methodology, Rachel and other pioneers are empowered to take charge of their own lives and make positive changes within their communities. With the knowledge gained from GALS training and nutrition sensitive agriculture, Rachel has been able to educate her community about the benefits of growing their own vegetables and incorporating them into their daily diets. "I have shared the knowledge on the importance of growing vegetables in kitchen gardens with other 5 families who had issues with small land and could not afford to buy vegetables for their children; there has been a significant impact on their improved lives," said Uwibambe. She added that besides at home, ECDs have also been supplied with vegetables, which have improved the livelihoods of children whose parents cannot afford expenses on vegetables.

Through GALS methodology, by visually mapping out their aspirations and the steps needed to achieve them, individuals are empowered to take control of their lives and work towards positive change. This approach not only fosters a sense of ownership within the community but also encourages women to become leaders and mentors themselves, inspiring others to follow suit and take charge of their futures."

4. The Power of Pictorials in Fostering Women's Decision-Making

“A case study of Shakira Muteteri”

For nine years, Shakira Muteteri, 30, a resident of the Mahama Sector in Kirehe District, had been living in family wrangles due to her husband's alcohol addiction. The husband's ability to provide for the family had faded away, and she found herself taking on the responsibility of providing for their two children.

However, everything changed when she attended a GALS workshop empowering women through pictorials, giving women and men more control over their lives, and catalyzing and supporting a sustainable movement for gender justice. She said, "With the support of GALS and the knowledge I gained from the workshop, I finally found the courage to confront my husband about his addiction. We had lived in family turmoil for nine years. but now, together with my husband, we make informed decisions that positively impact our family's well-being. We use pictorials to maintain our family targets, and we have achieved a lot more in the 8 months than in the 9 years we have spent together with my husband."



According to her, the power of pictorials has proven to be a transformative tool in empowering uneducated poor rural women to take charge of their lives and create harmonious family dynamics in Kirehe. "Using the GALS tools, we have drawn the most important priorities in our family, all embedded in gender equality and equity, and it has paid off. We have managed to build a four-bedroom house in our village; we have bought 18 goats; and I have also managed to spread the gospel to six families who had family wrangles, including our village leader in Bwiza village."

Through visual GALS tools, Shakira Mutetri said that she learned about her rights as a woman and the available resources and services within her community, empowering her to take control of her own life and break free from the cycle of dependency. Now, Shakira is not only able to make informed decisions for herself and her children, but she has also become an advocate for women's empowerment in her community. "I lead a cluster of other fellow women in our cell of Kamombo, in Mahama Sector, Kirehe District, and we have managed to plant 6,000 avocado seedlings. Besides that, With the profits, we anticipate investing in other income-generating activities such as poultry farming. We are committed to inspiring and mentoring other women to take control of their lives. She said.

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5. Turning dry land into Green land; how Gals helped residents in Gahara

“A case study of Xaverine Nyiraneza”

Residents in Gahara Sector in Kirehe District have embraced agro forestry, which has sustained their land and increased production. They transformed once barren land into green, productive gardens that are no longer affected by soil erosion due to trees planted along garden boundaries. According to them, the approach has not only improved the fertility of their land but also the trees planted in the garden boundaries, which have acted as windbreaks, protecting the crops from strong winds and further enhancing their productivity.



Xaverine Nyiraneza, 42, is a resident of Gahara Sector in Kirehe District. Her 1 hectare of land is located on a steep slope, and she said that not only has agro forestry helped to combat soil erosion, improve soil fertility, and increase crop yields, but it has also increased the value of her piece of land.

She said, "My garden is on steep land. During rainy seasons, soil erosion made it nearly impossible for me to grow crops that could sustain my family. But since enrolling in the GALS program, where we learned about the importance of planting trees in gardens, the land is no longer erodible, fertility has improved, and I have managed to harvest 1.2 tones of maize. With the trees I planted in the land, I believe the value

of the land doubled."

Besides that, she also managed to buy a Rwf 65,000 mobile phone and a piece of land worth Rwf 300,000 for her eldest son. She added that she expects to feed fruits she planted to her children during harvest and will keep sensitizing others to plant trees in their gardens. Thanks to the GALS program for providing her with the knowledge and resources to transform her garden into a sustainable source of food and income.

She now feels more confident about the future and believes that her family's livelihood is secure thanks to the improvements on her land. Empowering rural women through climate change adaptation initiatives provided by GALS, which include equipping women with knowledge to combat the impacts of climate change, has not only benefited the women themselves but also had positive ripple effects on the entire community. To create mindset extension through sensitization and teaching, Xaverine Nyiraneza has introduced the benefits of tree planting in gardens to 18 households in her village of Nyagasenyi in the Gahara sector. So far, GALS has trained 96 pioneers who are tasked with building up their own networks in their villages and teaching peers about the importance of planting trees in gardens.

According to the residents of Gahara, they have started to notice an increase in crop yields and a reduction in soil erosion, leading to improved food security for the community. GALS initiative has fostered a sense of pride and unity among the villagers as they collectively work towards a greener and more sustainable future in Gahara.