

John Jessy's Story of Change

It is said that "information is power" but I believe this is partially correct because you can have all the information in the world but when you don't do anything with that information, it is rendered useless.

As a young boy growing up in a small village called Katoogo in Uganda, I was always curious about different things including my bodily autonomy during circumstances when I had to make decisions regarding my body like when to shave, and why sex and reproduction are things not to be talked about, because the only knowledge I had about sex and reproduction was based on how people around me viewed these topics. Having sex and choosing when to start having children are seen as immoral and information to be kept away from young people because society believes that this would expose them at an early age and increase their curiosity to experiment. Well off-course there are those who break the rules and talk about it in a way they understand. I'll give an example of how I always referred to sex as the act of having sexual intercourse instead of looking at it as the difference in biological and physiological characteristics of human beings. So without knowing, as I was growing up I discriminated and stigmatized young people different from me for example, I looked at girls who were menstruating as dirty, people living with HIV as abnormal and I didn't want to associate with them.

While at college, my curiosity to learn more led me to joining a youth club where I found young people of my same age group with knowledge on Sexual and reproductive health and rights. During the course of learning from my peers, I was selected as a youth champion by Action 4 Health Uganda where I was trained on advocacy for young people's access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. The first time I stood up to speak out on issues concerning young people's Sexual and reproductive health in a meeting with stakeholders of my district, I felt nervous and shaky in the beginning but later on managed to stabilize and delivered a good speech. Since then, I've gained courage to talk about sex and how young people can make safe personal decisions on their reproductive health and rights without fear of being judged.

Remember "information is power?" Well, this is the story that shows how I feel empowered to use the information I got out of my curiosity to normalize talking about sex and reproduction amongst young people in my community, inspiring them to become actors of change in their communities and the world.

So the advice I want to give to my fellow young people out there is to never lose that child-like curiosity to learn, because in the end, what you learn may give you power just like the power I have now to make informed decisions concerning my sexual and reproductive health and rights.