**Empowering Refugee Deaf Young people & Host Communities in Uganda with Sexual Reproductive Health Rights Information and Services**

1. **Problem Statement (100-150 words). What health or service gap does this address?**

Deaf young people, particularly those in impoverished and marginalized settings especially refugee settlements, face considerable challenges in accessing Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) information and services due to among others, the lack of accessible SRH information in Sign Language and communication barriers with healthcare providers who often lack Sign Language proficiency. This has led to Deaf youth being at a heightened risk of sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, and other adverse health outcomes.

Addressing the barriers limiting Deaf young people living in and among refugee communities would empower them to make informed health decisions when it comes to accessing sexual reproductive health services such as the use of contraceptives, Menstrual Hygiene and access to HIV/AIDs services improving their well-being.

1. **Innovation or Practice Description (200–300 words) – What was done, by whom, and how? Geographical scope.**

The Diversity Health App is a digital platform designed by the Young people themselves to provide Deaf young people, including refugees and host communities in Uganda accessible Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) information with a unique focus in the provision of multiple Sign Languages (Ugandan, Congolese, Burundian, and South Sudanese). The mobile application not only makes it possible for Deaf persons to access accurate, youth-friendly health information but also connects them with healthcare providers trained in Sign Language as well as engage with counselors via WhatsApp video calls for mental health and SRH support. This innovation directly addresses the biggest health challenges faced by Deaf persons which is lack of SRH information in accessible formats and communication challenges with healthcare providers, which often result in poor health outcomes such as higher rates of STIs, unintended pregnancies, and gender-based violence (GBV)

Unlike existing solutions that primarily rely on printed materials or in-person interpreters, the Diversity Health App provides on-demand, location-independent access to vital health information.

This project will be implemented in Uganda’s refugee settlements (such as Bidibidi, Nakivale, and Kiryandongo) and urban centers with high Deaf populations (such as Kampala, Arua, and Gulu). It will directly benefit Deaf young people aged 15-30, who face the highest SRH risks due to inadequate information and poor access to services. Healthcare workers and GBV service providers will also benefit, as the application will support Sign Language training for medical and law enforcement professionals, improving inclusive service delivery.

1. **Results and Evidence of Impact (150–250 words) – Include quantitative or qualitative data, outcomes, or evaluation results**

The Diversity Health App has provided critical discernments into the needs and preferences of Deaf young people regarding sexual and reproductive health service access. Latest available data on user research and testing revealed that the critical need within the Deaf community is access to accurate, well-articulated and sign language based information due to a lack of materials in Sign Language and limited communication with healthcare providers.

From multiple engagements during the initial testing it is visible that a mobile-based solution offering SRH content in Sign Language is highly demanded by both Deaf users and healthcare providers seeking to offer inclusive services.

To date, the pilot has reached over 3,100 - Plus users through digital SRHR video content on YouTube, with an increasing number of views and engagements, demonstrating growing interest and demand. Also at least 132 healthcare workers have been trained in Sign Language, enhancing inclusive service delivery at select health centers. Application testing sessions with Deaf youth showed that users appreciate the ability to access SRH information anytime, anywhere, and in their preferred Sign Language, confirming that this innovation fills a critical gap in the Deaf community and has the potential to effectively address the challenge of limited access to health information and services among the Deaf communities in Uganda.

1. **Scalability & Sustainability (100–150 words) – Is it adaptable for other contexts?**

Over the next five years, the Diversity Health App aims to serve approximately 10,000 Deaf young people both locally in Uganda and in broader refugee-hosting regions. As the project scales, the app will expand to reach Deaf youth across East Africa, including Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and South Sudan, leveraging the app’s multi-lingual Sign Language content to ensure broader accessibility.

Traditional approaches, such as hospital-based interpreters that are currently being piloted in a rather small scale targeting only regional referral hospitals leaving out more health facilities closer to communities and inaccessible for Deaf refugees and those in rural areas makes the Diversity mobile application a more sustainable solution with a greater impact as it offers an interactive, digital-first approach that is more affordable, scalable, and adaptable to different Sign Languages. By leveraging mobile technology, that is currently a global transformation catalyst, the App gives access to life-saving health education and services at a fraction of the cost of conventional models that are slowly losing relevancy and becoming less effective in addressing the challenge on a larger scale.

1. **Available resources or policies to support it.**

The Diversity Health App is grounded in and supported by national and global frameworks promoting inclusive health. It aligns with Uganda’s National Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy and the Persons with Disabilities Act (2020), which mandate the delivery of youth-friendly and accessible SRH services. The project also advances Uganda’s commitments under the National Inclusive Education Policy and the Health Sector Development Plan (HSDP III), both of which prioritize digital innovation and disability inclusion. Internationally, the app supports the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG 3—Good Health and Well-being, and SDG 10—Reduced Inequalities). Strategic partnerships with UNHCR, Ministry of Health, and digital health accelerators offer technical guidance and funding opportunities, while collaboration with Deaf-led organizations ensures community ownership. These frameworks collectively create an enabling environment for the app’s implementation and scale-up in refugee and urban settings.

1. **Lessons Learned or Key Insights**
2. **Accessibility Must Be Multilingual and Culturally Responsive**: Providing SRH information in multiple Sign Languages (Ugandan, Congolese, Burundian, and South Sudanese) is essential to reach diverse Deaf communities, especially in refugee settings where language barriers exacerbate exclusion.
3. **Youth-Led Design Increases Relevance and Trust**: Engaging Deaf youth in the app’s development ensured that the content and delivery methods were age-appropriate, relatable, and trusted by the target users.
4. **Technology Can Bridge Longstanding Gaps in SRH Access**: Mobile platforms with video and chat functions (e.g., WhatsApp) have proven effective in overcoming physical and communication barriers, particularly for hard-to-reach populations in remote or underserved areas.
5. **Training Health Providers is Critical for Sustainable Inclusion**: The lack of Sign Language skills among healthcare workers was a recurring barrier. Equipping them with basic communication tools significantly improved service uptake and user satisfaction.
6. **Community Ownership Drives Impact**: Collaborating with Deaf-led organizations and local stakeholders fostered ownership, strengthened uptake, and built trust among users.

**7. Partner Quotes or Community Voice**Top of FormBottom of Form

**Partner Quotes:**

*“The Diversity Health App is a breakthrough in making sexual and reproductive health information accessible to Deaf youth. For the first time, we are seeing increased engagement from young people who were previously left out due to language barriers.”*
— **Ninsima clare**, Sign Language Interpreter, Ministry of Health Uganda.

**Community Voices:**

*“Before the app, I had no idea where to go for help. Now I can watch videos in my Sign Language and talk to a counselor who understands me. I feel safer and more informed.”*
— **Joyce N., 23**, Deaf youth user from Makerere university

*“We used to rely on friends to interpret health information. Sometimes it was wrong or embarrassing. With the app, I can learn privately and clearly.”*
— **Gilbert N., 24**, Deaf youth from Kamuli.