

2022

ANNUAL REPORT

CHOOSE
yourselves!



BUILDING A WORLD WHERE GENDER EQUITY REIGNS

CHOOSE YOURSELF



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FORWARD FROM OUR ED

This report shows different ways we continued transforming women's lives around the African continent in 2022. We sustained a young Pan-African feminist movement thanks to our **Girl Talk spaces** centering conversations on gender-based violence, bodily autonomy, and feminist consciousness. We continued our work with women refugees in the Nakivale Refugee camp in Uganda. Our **Grow With Us program** welcomed a new cohort of mentees as part of the online entrepreneurial fellowship.

The work done in 2022 could not have been possible without the hard work of every **staff member** at Choose Yourself Organization, to whom we are forever grateful, and the contribution of our partners who offered us technical and financial support to make this work possible.

We remain grateful for your service!



OVERVIEW OF 2022



2022 was another opportunity for Choose Yourself to impact young women's lives on the African continent through our various programs that offer feminist spaces, create sustainable activities that change the lives of young women refugees in Uganda, and finally equip young African women to become successful entrepreneurs.

The **Girl Talk Africa program** offered at least three spaces centering on gender-based violence awareness in 11 African countries. The program managed to launch for the first time **Girl Talk Africa journal** in collaboration with local feminist individuals and organizations, where we get to document the impactful work done throughout the African continent.

The **Home Away from Home program** continued transforming the lives of young women refugees in the Nakivale Refugee settlement in Uganda. Thanks to the entrepreneurship training offered to the community, ten businesses were successfully created and are still operating today. Young girls continue their education and get to grow in their academic journey thanks to the educational activities the program provides.

The **Grow With Us program** this year organized a cohort of young African women from different African countries from, Benin, Malawi, Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda. This entrepreneurship fellowship facilitated different online sessions to assist the participants in maximizing their full potential to become great entrepreneurs in their communities.

GIRL-TALK AFRICA

- GIRL TALK AFRICA RETREAT
- GIRL TALK AFRIQUE JOURNAL



Girl Talk Africa Program, throughout 2022, offered spaces in **11 African countries** with a focus on **creating awareness** of violence against women, bodily autonomy and feminist consciousness. In collaboration with our young feminist organizers, who are **coordinators** and **ambassadors**, the program is led according to the needs of the communities, and we shape the **spaces around conversations** ranging from rape culture, breaking silences around gender-based violence, and many more.

We are on a journey of allowing young women and girls to view themselves as powerful agents of change and collaboratively imagine ways to create that change and build a **safe Africa for women**. Since its inception, **Girl-Talk** has operated in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Malawi, Zambia, Nigeria, Burundi, Ivory Coast, Benin and Kinshasa.

GIRL TALK AFRICA RETREAT

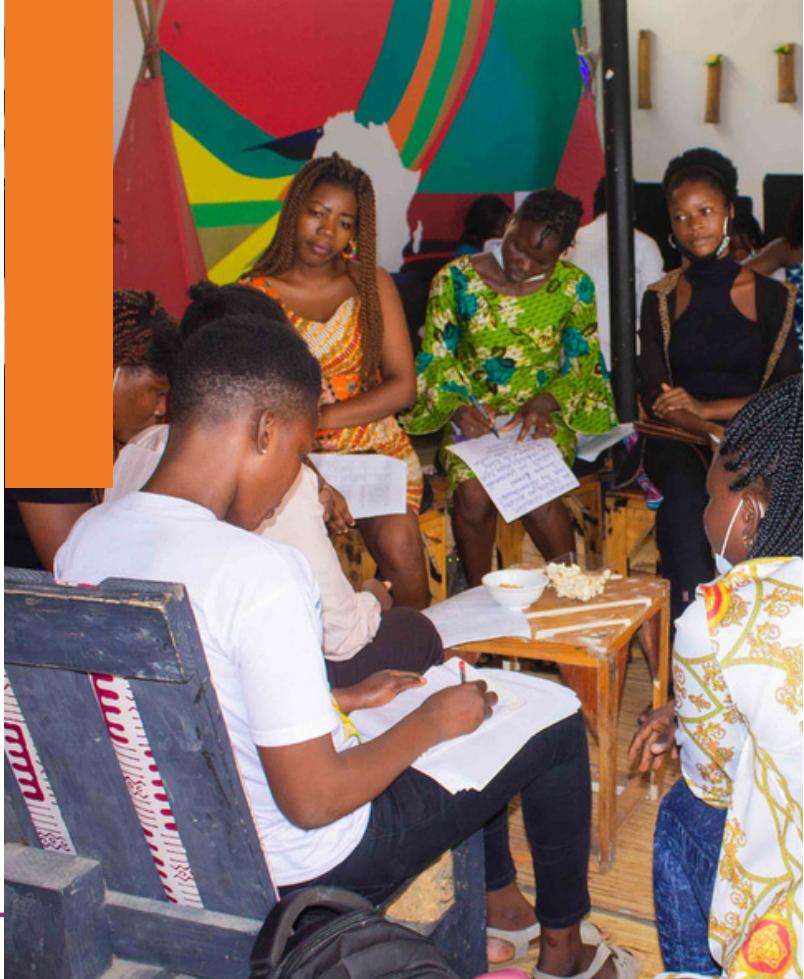


2022 started with a **3-day retreat** for all Girl Talk members in **Kigali, Rwanda**. The retreat was primarily held with the aim of bringing all the **Girl Talk Coordinators** to build enthusiasm and commitment for the team to develop strategic plans and be as **well-equipped** with skills and knowledge for **feminist organizing**.

This was an opportunity to cultivate a sense of shared experience and bonding, considering the fact that they all lived in **different countries** and were **meeting** for the first time. This **retreat** aimed to strengthen the members' knowledge about effective ways of community and feminist organizing with an in-depth analysis of **intersectional feminism**, followed by implementing practical steps to ensure the **safety** and **well-being** of the organizers. During this retreat, the team also mapped out strategic long-term and short-term **goals** for the program, resulting in a well-structured manifesto. The retreat was also organized to mark and celebrate the **Girl Talk's 5-year anniversary**, along with the accomplishments and lessons accumulated over the years.

GIRL TALK AFRIQUE JOURNAL

Thereafter, the very first **Girl Talk Journal** was launched in **March 2022**. This was a milestone not only for us in Choose Yourself but also marked a step in our contribution to **knowledge production** within the **African continent**. The Girl Talk Journal is a publication that seeks to tell stories, state facts, and offer the on-ground reality of the status of women and girls in the countries where our program **Girl talk Africa** currently operates. This first journal report was a collaboration of work between Girl talk Coordinators, Girl Talk Africa Ambassadors, and Girl Talk program directors. The report was also co-authored by different **African feminist individuals** and **organizations** who shed light on various topics and centered on three themes of Girl-Talk: to **end rape culture**, to **achieve reproductive justice**, and to **raise a feminist consciousness**.



GIRL TALK BENIN



Girl-Talk Benin organized three safe spaces within the year and covered issues on access to **contraception**, **sexual-based violence among minors**, and **violence among the LGBTQ community**.

During the GT session titled "**Les stéréotypes liés à la contraception: un frein à la justice reproductive au Bénin**" which was hosted online via zoom, we had a discussion not only on stereotypes, myths, and misconceptions related to contraceptives but also an in-depth look into young women contraceptives use and access and the related challenges.

In our **second Girl Talk**, we organized a **safe space** to discuss sexual assault within our homes, how to report, and how survivors can heal and reconnect with themselves after such traumatic events. Talking about sexual assault within the home is often considered taboo among many family units in Benin. One of the participants during this session shared, "**When one tries to talk to the parents, the parents may prefer to hide the abuse because of several factors such as criticism from society, religion or existing ties, family or friends between them and the aggressor.**"



Our third discussion was centered on the **LGBTQ community in Benin**. Sexual minorities are indeed present in Benin and experience violence, especially because they have no legal rights protecting them. It is with the aim of not only learning more about the community but also of establishing the link between the **social perception of LBTQ+** in Benin and the violence they suffer, and that's why we organized this conversation in collaboration with **Afro-Benin**, a local association of Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queers (LBTQ) and Sex Workers. This space allowed sexual minorities to **build healthier relationships** with themselves and to be able to explore ways in which they can keep themselves safe despite the criminalization. "





GIRL-TALK KINSHASA DRC

These **girl talk spaces** brought together **young women** and gave them an opportunity to put words on their daily experiences of **patriarchal oppression** and society and provide solutions for a future of equity. We anticipate changes by and for young women with an **awakening of mind**, a **collective consciousness**, and a **sorority**.

Sexual violence continues to constitute an exclusion of girl victims and a manifestation of the domination of one gender over the other supported by patriarchal culture. This negatively influences the social-economic capacities of the victims and the failure to take account of this violence could lead to unequal approaches to development.

The second girl-talk space focused on the **psychological consequences** of sexual violence where the facilitator took the participants through **traumatic experiences** such as memory manifested through feelings of malaise, a feeling of **fear**, permanent **danger**, a strong **insecurity** (anxiety, panic, phobia) with hypervigilance and a need for control; addictive and compulsive behaviors; risky behavior; difficulty connecting with others; troubled sexual relations (abstinent or excessive); a difficult relationship with the body; somatic disorders and in particular depressive disorders, etc.), social and economic disorders of these rapes and the importance of holistic care including justice.

Through our engagements, we created a community where women and girls **feel safe** and **free** from any form of violence.

GIRL TALK IVORY-COAST



Girl-talk Ivory Coast has focussed on **Gender-based violence**, its cause, consequences, and instruments available to prevent **GBV** and the role of feminist organizations in the **fight against** gender-based violence. This was done through two **Girl-Talk spaces** which were both organized online via zoom and Twitter space.

The **fight against gender-based violence** (GBV) is vital for the **survival of women** but also for the **development of societies**. Women are **not safe** in this **patriarchal world** where they are considered inferior beings who can be subjected to multiple kinds of violence. And with the **Girl Talk Côte d'Ivoire program**, we organize conversations where we list the causes and consequences of this violence and where we become aware of the instruments of struggle to be an actor in this fight against **GBV** and this resistance against patriarchy.



GIRL TALK BURUNDI

This year, the **GT Burundi** team focused on strategies that can help **break socio-cultural stereotypes** and organized two girl-talk sessions online via zoom.

Burundian society has normalized several practices that serve as a **barrier to** the **emancipation, liberation, and empowerment** of **Burundian women**.

In the first GT conversation this year, we addressed one of the most **taboo topics**; consent and how the absence of consent perpetuates sexual violence. During this girl talk, the following needs were identified: sensitization among girls and young women on their bodily autonomy, advocating for improving the care system for victims of GBV, and how to take care of victims of sexual assault to avoid retraumatizing them.

This led to our second GT, which was centered on **Gender-Based violence** and looked at the concept of gender-based violence (GBV) and the impact of GBV on the daily lives of survivors. We also discussed the role of culture in caring for survivors and we talked about society's judgment in care, not forgetting to discuss the importance of reporting and the role each of us should have in protecting and **supporting GBV victims**.

GIRL TALK NIGERIA



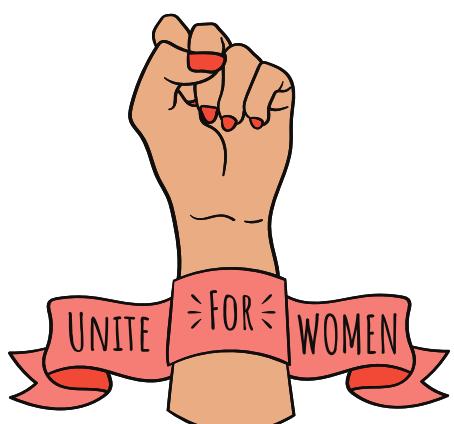
Conversations organized by the Nigeria GT team included: **gender-based violence against Trans and Queer people** in Nigeria, reimagining access to abortion, and SGBV.

The **spaces** were organized both online and physically with **school-going girls**.

Gender-based violence discussions more often than not exclude trans and queer people and tend to focus mostly on women and girls.

During this GT, which was our first GT, our aim was to **create a safe space** for the queer community to discuss and share some of the **community-based safety methods queer people** used since the law does not protect them. Participants spoke about the **need** to become more **vocal about queer people's experiences** of gender-based violence and the need to leverage allies to campaign for the safety and protection of queer people in Nigeria.

Our second GT: "**Imagining a world with better abortion access**". According to the World Health Organisation, **Nigeria has the 4th highest maternal mortality rate**. The goal of this space was to allow the participants to envision what **abortion access** means to them and what it looks like, identify gaps, and stretch their imaginations to include minorities.



Our third Girl talk was organized for **school-going girls** and was centered on **Sgbv** and explored rape and issues of consent. What constitutes **sexual assaults** and rape and consent. The young girls were curious about what constitutes rape and whether **same-gender rapes** were possible. The discussion moved into an explanation of how sexually any gender can commit assault and rape, and one of the teachers present shared an experience she had with her roommate, who tried to assault her sexually. During this GT, we also read the **Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act provisions** and what they need to do in case of sexual assault. We shared with them the **Sexual Assault Referral Centres** in Lagos, and their addresses were given out.



GIRL TALK TANZANIA

Ending **rape culture** within our societies is a massive step toward the **creation of safety and equity** within society. Conversations organized by the **GT Tanzania team** explored rape culture within Tanzania. The program's goal is to implement a better understanding of **women, girls, and LGBTQIA+** autonomy which is still severely underperformed within the Tanzanian community. This year we organized two spaces online some of the issues discussed brought attention to the victimization and rape culture is perpetuated, how the implementation of an **SRHR curriculum** in schools would be helpful in addressing some pertinent issues, the culture of silence in TZ, the role of media and the society at large in holding perpetrators accountable and resources available in TZ to victims/survivors of sexual violence.





GIRL TALK UGANDA

Girl-talk Uganda has organized both online and in-person attendance. The first Girl Talk Uganda to happen this year was about **classism & ageism within feminist spaces** in Uganda, explicitly aiming to provide a space for feminists to share their experiences with ageism and classism, deconstruct the ideas of younger feminists being too radical, **exclusion of the LGBTQ community**, and therefore what it looks like to have a feminist inclusive community that practices intersectionality.

The second Girl Talk was on the **Impact of Abortion Laws** and Regulations on the Feminist Movement and Advocacy for **Abortion Rights**. The challenge with the existing regulations against abortion is that it has not stopped women and girls from procuring abortions but have led to an increase in the number of unsafe abortions for women and girls. Enhancing awareness on **protecting women's right** to choose parenthood and protecting medical practitioners willing to perform an abortion procedure was highly recommended.

The third Girl talk was on **Bodily Autonomy** and why it matters for everyone. The conversation's goal was to be interactive and participants spoke on their lived experiences for us to brainstorm how to work around the limits we face against the right to bodily autonomy.



GIRL TALK MALAWI

Our First Girl Talk Malawi was "**shaping the future of an intersections women's movement in Malawi**". Intersectional approaches are often dismissed as a problem instead of embracing them as an advantage to the movement with the diversity that comes with it.

The second GT was on practicing Solidarity and Organizing with the **LGBTIQ community**, with a particular focus on **sexual violence**. The participants in the session were open to discussing types of sexual violence they faced within the LGBTQI community and in public spaces. Still, they were very reluctant to discuss the violence happening at home. They also shared the need for documentation of lived experiences of **LBIQ women** as a critical effort to **combat discrimination and violence**.

The third GT was on **sexual harassment** in the workplace. Sexual Harassment in the workplace in Malawi is a persistent form of **violence against women**, with many cases left unreported, leading to many women leaving their jobs or living in silence in fear of losing their jobs and **being stigmatized** within the workplace.

Participants shared that **workplace harassment** often happens in the office setting, as well as all work-related events such as dinners, conferences, off-site meetings, and fieldwork, and shared the need for **further dialogue** as opposed to once-off dialogues on the issue as a way to encourage victims of harassment to speak up and promotes **solidarity** and **justice** for sexual harassment victims.



GIRL TALK ZAMBIA



The Girl-Talk activities were organized both online and in-person attendance. The topics explored during the GT spaces centered on **sexual reproductive health rights**.

The first GT was on "**Advocating for intersectional and accessible SRHR services in Zambia**" and questioned how inclusive the centers and trained personnel offer **SRH services**. It was highlighted during our discussion that a woman from the **LGBTIQQ+ community**, for example, will find it hard to access and seek these services because of the attitude in the country about LGBTQ persons risking their safety and denying them access to fundamental rights.

The second GT was on **SGBV** and was mainly targeting **school-going girls**. For the past few years, Zambia has experienced an increase in **sexual gender-based violence** cases, with 99 percent of victims being women and girls and most of them being young underage girls. This focused our attention on this group, and we organized a conversation on "**SGBV: First aid, reporting channels, consent, and bodily autonomy**". We spoke on SGBV first aid, emphasizing that victims or survivors needed immediate medical response for their **health safety** but also that it was necessary to identify safe people in the community that they could go to in the case they need extra support in seeking help and justice.

GROW WITH US



We are living in an era where people believe in the power of **accelerator programs** rather than the traditional form of higher education, which has proven to be expensive. **Grow with us** is an accelerator program that focuses on **empowering women** all around Africa who have taken up the path of **social entrepreneurship** to **solve the world's most pressing issues**. Their social enterprises cut across different thematic areas such as education, climate action, gender inequality and health. In the 2022 cohort, we had **5 women** comprising 4 Anglophones and 1 Francophone fellow from **Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda**, and **Benin** who went through 8 months of intensive entrepreneurial sessions.

The online sessions given to the program participants ranged from various topics, such as **understanding the cost of being an entrepreneur**, where participants got to interact with the mentor to understand what awaited them in their entrepreneurial journey. They also learned the **different components required in their business to succeed**, thus **handling the finances of their project** by knowing how to manage their finances as well as how to look for funds through project proposal and grant applications process. This was all made possible thanks to our **impactful mentors** Ubukombe Pacifique, Amanda Uhle, Naomi Dangbele, and Judicaelle Irakoze.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME



The **Home away from Home program**, is a **refugee integration project** operating in the **Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda**. This program's goal is to make sure we do not leave behind refugee women in the liberation journey by assisting young girls through educational activities as well as facilitating young women to become **financially independent**.

Here are the following program's activities:



- **Library**

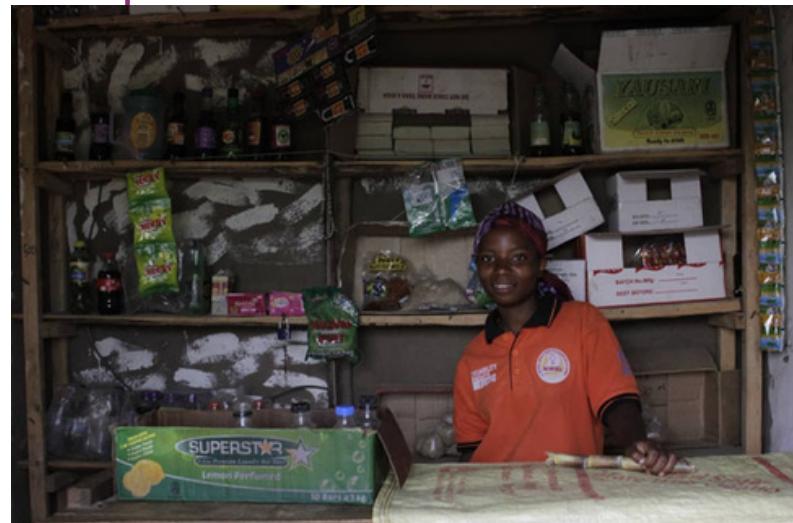
This community hub has facilitated many members of the communities, thus English lessons for students who have access to the library to enhance and improve in their journey in **learning English**.

Having free access to this space helps the community to foster all kinds of literacy benefits without mentioning that it provides a book club called Nice and **Sharp Book club**, which takes place every Sunday. The main goal of this club is to **improve children's English level**, mostly those with a francophone background who want to adapt themselves to the Ugandan system.

- **Education project**

The activity's main goal is to **facilitate free access to local schools** by sponsoring mostly **young girls** who tend to be forgotten as education is usually prioritized to young boys rather than young girls. The project offers an **educational reinforcement** to the **sponsored students** to accompany them in this academic journey by assisting them in succeeding in their school assignments.





This year's cohort had **30 young women refugees** from different backgrounds from **south sudanese, Ethiopians, Congolese**, etc.

The curriculum was well planned and facilitated by **Kisoboka Africa**, a financial inclusion organization.

- **The Entrepreneurship training**

The project's objective is to equip young women refugees with all the **learning materials** in becoming entrepreneurs so that they can become **financially independent**. It is with great pleasure that we get to announce that the 2021 cohort have successfully started their business into the community which gives them the **financial freedom** to take care of themselves and their families as well as continuing growing businesses.



OUR LEARNINGS



2022 has been a year that has been filled with great opportunities and lessons in equal measure. We are continuously looking to find better ways to serve our communities and be able to accommodate more girls and women in our spaces.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our online **community** that were able to join our online spaces and connect with us. We would like to thank our partners as well for their continuous support, not only through funding but they have also helped us build visibility for our work. We are also looking forward to sustaining connections we were able to make and we are looking forward to our work together throughout **2023**.



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