

VIEWFINDER REPORT

2019



**A PROJECT OF VIJANA CORPS
SUPPORTED BY CIVICUS SOLIDARITY FUND
2019**



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INTRODUCTION

01

In July 2019, Vijana Corps became one of the first ten beneficiaries of CIVICUS Solidarity Fund (CSF). A grant of USD 7,500 was awarded to enable Vijana Corps carry out film-based activities that would build cohesion among community youth groups across northern Uganda by empowering youth to work together to be seen and heard. The project which was dubbed Viewfinder would eventually engage over 300 youth from three sub-counties in Pakwach district in West Nile, north-western Uganda. The immediate tangible output in addition to the over 300 youth exposed to understanding of governance and accountability processes, was a mouthpiece in the form of short film made by a small group of the youth who were engaged in this initiative. This report is an insight into how this grant enabled Vijana Corps to engage this community of youth through the tools of film, photography and digital storytelling.

PROJECT BRIEF

Youth engagement on governance and accountability in northern Uganda has been insufficient because of poverty, mistrust, and corruption. Their vulnerability and neediness have often exposed youth to exploitation by politicians. With the breakdown of family structures and cultural practices in the long years of war in northern Uganda, youth have suffered mentorship vacuum which has not only worsened the already insufficient structures that ought to promote democratic and good governance processes and engage the youth in rebuilding their communities, but has also encouraged a general lack of political will by the government to develop young leaders and empower them to challenge bad governance and promote democratic structures at local levels. The overall consequence is that the views of youth in northern Uganda are seldom heard and continue to suffer marginalization, dis-empowerment and a chronic cycle of intellectual and economic poverty. The Viewfinder project was designed to create a platform for these youth to be seen and heard.

The primary objectives of the project were:

1. To build capacities of marginalized youth of northern Uganda to use digital media (film and documentary photography) to be seen and heard.
2. To promote voices of the unheard by training in-school and out-of-school youth to participate in governance and accountability processes.





PLANNED ACTIVITIES

This project was designed to build cohesion among community youth groups across northern Uganda by empowering youth to work together to be seen and heard. To build capacities of youth groups and give them a forum and the tools to bring out their communities to light through telling their own stories using film and photography. To support the process of checking entrenched causes of poverty and marginalization while cultivating the youth with skills and empowerment to enhance their participation in shaping political and policy decisions that affect their daily lives.

In order to achieve the foregoing, the following activities were implemented;

- Three **Film-based workshops** were ran in nine sessions to train and expose youth to regular debates on human rights, democracy and good governance
- A **Film making and photography boot-camp** was conducted and 10 youth selected from each of the three sub-counties were trained as Community Viewfinders. The community Viewfinders are a corps of youth equipped with skills in digital storytelling, film and photography. These will become Vijana Corps' local voices for citizen data collection, monitoring and local content populators for social media.

- **Produced a short film.** As a capstone, the newly trained Viewfinders wrote and produced a short film depicting a story that deeply affects communities in Pakwach district, the issue of child marriage. *The Activist* is a film that tells the story of a young girl who is struggling to stay in school against the odds of poverty and a drunkard father who would rather marry her off to a suitor who is ready to resolve his financial debacle. This film draws from the all too common thematic narratives of poverty, gender disparity and early marriage, all which sit at the heart of the kind of problems that contribute to bad governance and marginalization in this part of Uganda.

Film-based workshop:
A screening session of "The
Story of John Akii-Bua in
Pakwach Town Council



HOW WE DID IT

This project started with film-based workshops aimed at introducing participants to the basic precepts of good governance, accountability and participation. Three films were carefully selected to form the basis of discussions on these issues and a discussion guide written for each film and a facilitator prepared to lead the post-screening discussions. Each film lasted about 90 minutes and post-screening discussions lasted about 60 minutes with breaks in between.

1 Film-based workshops and debates on civic participation

Up to nine film-based workshops and debates on civic participation were delivered in three sub-counties including Pakwach Town Council, Panyango and Wadelai sub-counties in the district of Pakwach. The watch-and-talk screenings and post-screening discussions were based on thematic human rights and civic engagement films that encouraged discussion from all participants. The films included; The Great Debaters, the John Akibua and Lost in Africa. These three films offer foundations to broadly discuss the importance of citizen participation in the processes of governance and accountability at all levels. The nine workshops brought together a total of 393 in-school and out-of-school youth participants, including some youth leaders in local government service. The post-screening discussions generated recommendations to respective stakeholders involved in service delivery.

Watch-and-talk:

Participants gathered for a film-based workshop in Panyango sub-county.



2

Trained in-school and out-of-school youth to participate in governance and accountability processes by promoting voices of the unheard



Articulate:
Participant stressing a point during a post-screening debate.

Through the nine watch-and-talk workshops and debates, 393 youth were exposed to debates and understanding of governance and accountability processes. The workshops were practical and based on thematic human rights and civic engagement films. These engagements created platforms and acted as eye openers for the youth to experience how digital media can be used by ordinary people as a tool to project unheard voices and contribute to addressing key issues in their communities. *Safe spaces were created during the watch-and-talk sessions which allowed participants to discuss their participation in issues of service delivery, human rights, democracy, good governance and accountability. The participants called their leaders to account over the missing links on service delivery and accountability.

*Vijana Corps' safe spaces are platforms and tools designed to continuously empower the last-mile youth to be seen and heard. These are both physical and ideological spaces and opportunities that allow youth to participate on issues pertinent to their civic rights.

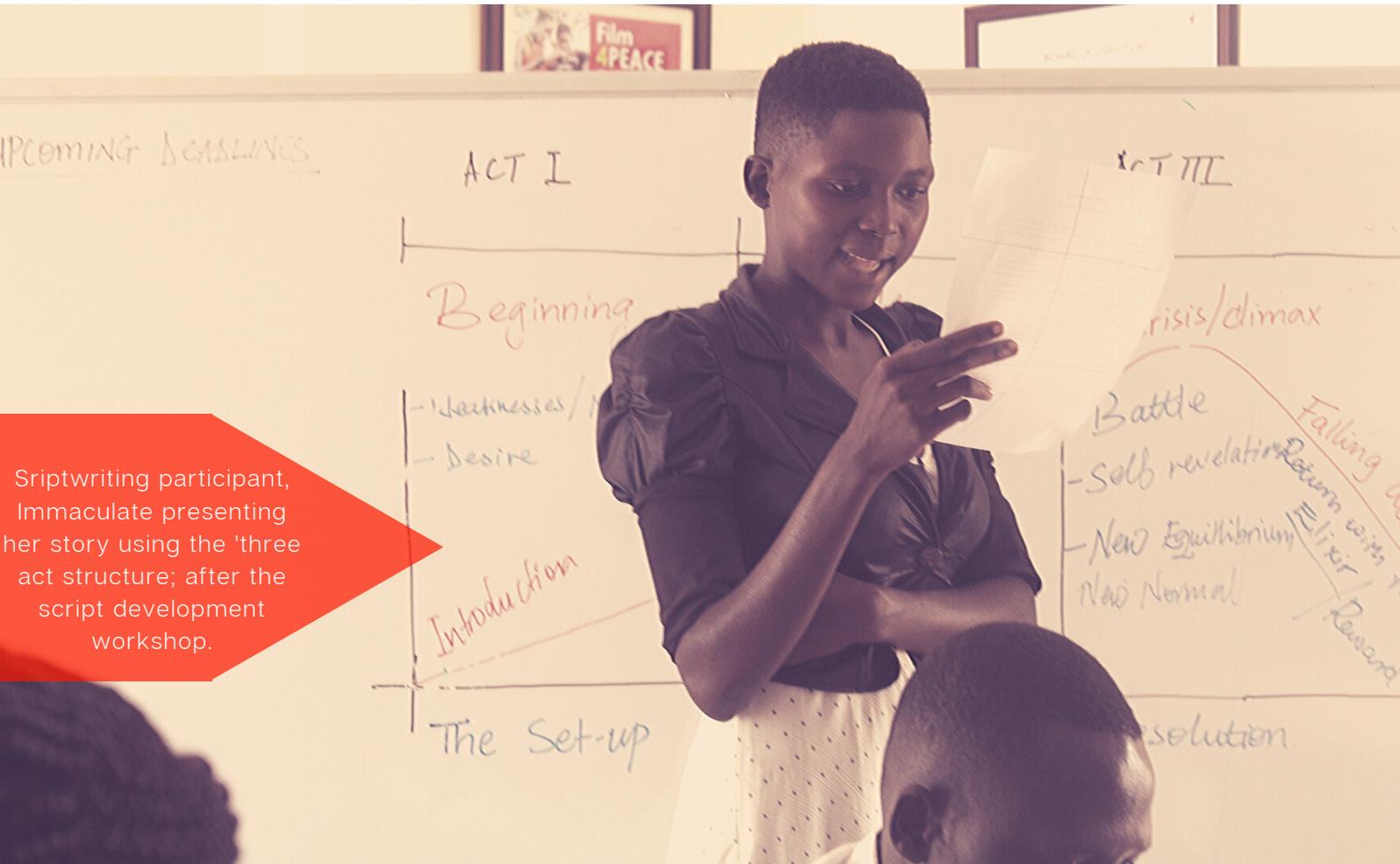


3 Built capacities of marginalized youth of northern Uganda to use digital media to be seen and heard.



The goal of exposing youth to the basic tenets of governance and accountability was to empower them to be able to ask the right questions and hold their leaders accountable. To become voices that shape their communities. To be able to control the narrative of governance, accountability and development in their communities. Which is why the exposure to such issues and the debates around them in relation to the participants' communities would have been useless if we did not give these participants the opportunity to begin to tell their stories. But for this to happen, they needed to be organized and equipped. So, the second component of the Viewfinder project focused on equipping participants with skills in digital storytelling and the use of film and photography as tools of change. To this end, a boot-camp was organized to give participants the opportunity to learn script writing, cinematography and editing. Ten participants were selected from three sub-counties to take part. Each with a special role, the participants under the guidance of professional and experienced technical mentors underwent one week of rigorous training, which was followed by one week of back-to-back field capstone experience which we called the 'film lab'. The result of this lab would be one short film depicting a topical community issue chosen by the participants.

4 Trained youth in film, photography and digital storytelling for social change



Scriptwriting participant, Immaculate presenting her story using the 'three act structure'; after the script development workshop.

The entire process began by asking participants to submit stories that resonated with the reality of life in their community. Over 50 stories were submitted and after a long iterative process, one story was chosen by a select committee to be further developed into the capstone project. Three days of Script Development workshop produced a corps of ten participants who understood the story process, structuring and how to write a film script. The participants zeroed on the issue of child marriage versus education as the theme of focus. This is how the short film *The Activist* was born. *The Activist* is a film that tells the story of a young girl (Sarah) who is struggling to stay in school against the odds of poverty and a drinking father who would rather marry her off to a suitor who is ready to resolve his financial debacle. Sarah is frustrated by lack of support from all quarters of her life, until she decides to take the path of activism to save her future and that of other girls in her village.



THE ACTIVIST

Based on a true story

**WRITTEN BY
IMMACULATE AKERA**

**DIRECTED BY
DEFENDER TEKAKWO**

PREMIERING THIS FRIDAY

**Date: 25th, 10, 2019 ,Time : 2:00pm , Entry : Free,
At Vijana Youth Hub, Opposite Royal Wave Hotel**

The end of this boot-camp saw ten young participants graduate with skills in writing, film making, photography and digital storytelling. This is only the beginning of the journey. As stated earlier, this is the corps of community viewfinders who will begin to build the web of other viewfinders and work with Vijana Corps to shape the narrative of governance, accountability and inclusion in their communities. The vision is to have a couple of Viewfinders in every village in northern Uganda where poverty and marginalization is most pronounced. These Viewfinders will be armed with simple cameras which they will deploy to gather and tell local stories and collect data that is critical to monitoring service delivery, governance and accountability at local levels, hence creating an opportunity for the last-mile citizen to be seen and heard. Working with Vijana Corps, the Viewfinders will continuously document real life stories of poverty, marginalization and destitution arising from poor to complete lack of service provision, as well as success stories where public policies are working well to the benefit of the last-mile citizen. These Viewfinders will collect evidence-based citizen data which will form debates around policies and holding the duty bearer accountable.

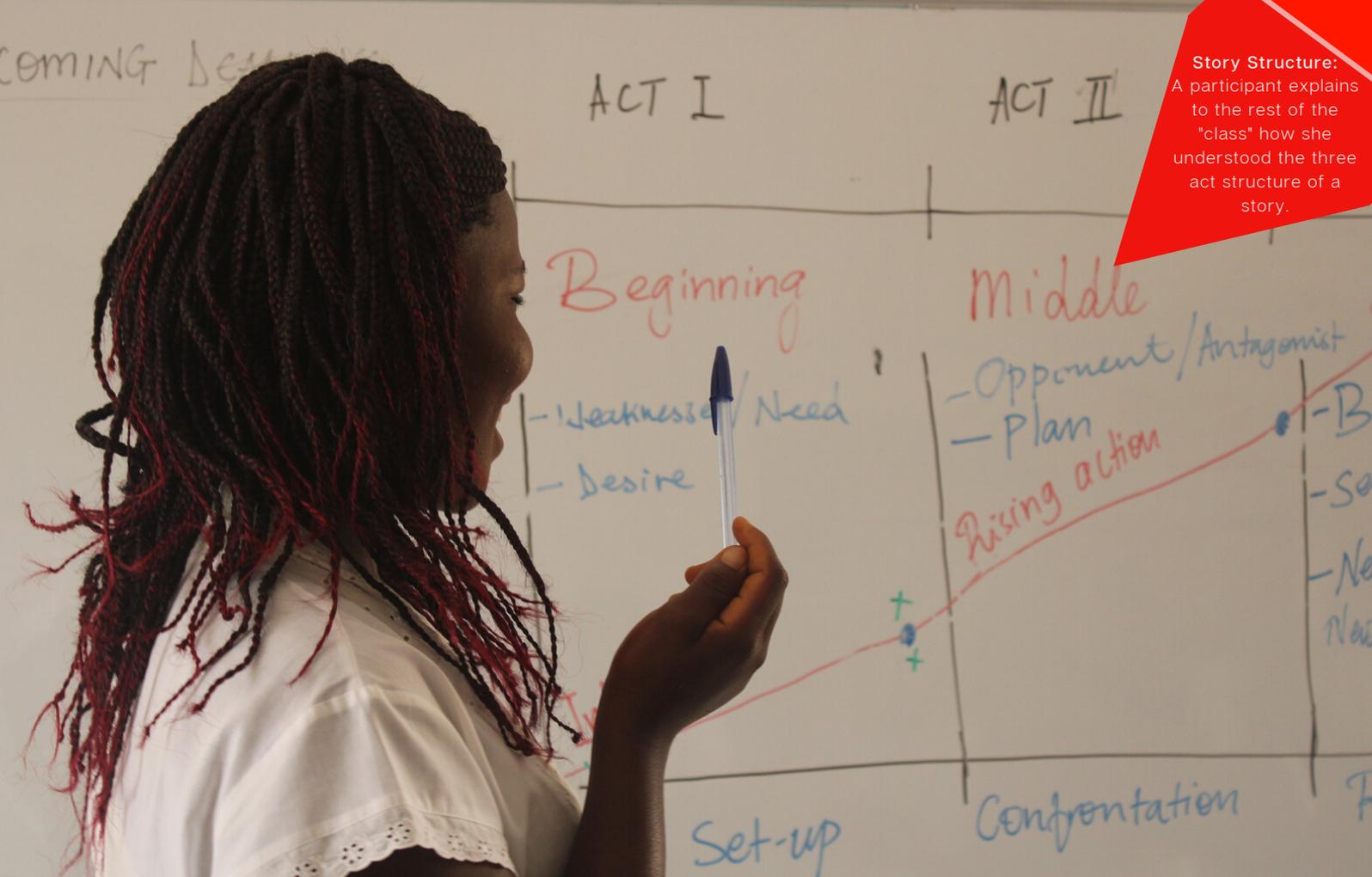
To ensure that the stories are credible and decent for public consumption, Vijana Corps will work with the Viewfinders to edit their video and photography documentaries for various platforms. Vijana Corps will also take full responsibility for the stories in order to protect the Viewfinders. The finished stories will be curated and shared on public domains including social media, with the aim of generating debates around the issues in the story, the end game being to effect change at local and policy levels. The Viewfinder project is therefore a work in progress whose continuity should be supported until there are enough youth who are angry enough about marginalization and bad governance.



Participant Anita stages her camera to capture the project 'Behind the scenes.'



The making of "The Activist": Cast and crew on set during the shooting of one of the scenes in the film made by the participants.



Story Structure: A participant explains to the rest of the "class" how she understood the three act structure of a story.

5 Support to the organization with mobilization, training logistics and back-office costs.

The CIVICUS Solidarity Fund provided core support to the implementation of the Viewfinder project. Vijana Corps spent the fund efficiently and effectively to mobilize and administer the project and its logistics. Challenges of constraints notwithstanding, the organization ensured that objectives and expectations were adjusted accordingly in order to deliver the project within the grant availed to us.



Part of the Viewfinder Project Team in a planning meeting



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