Because of the decades of war that have engulfed the Democratic Republic of Congo, conflict has become a way of life in many families, as societal conflict has juxtaposed itself on every aspect of society. This has led to violence against women, conflict in the home, and community challenges as well. Growing up, I observed firsthand the trauma that war inflicted on social units within my country, and I vowed that I would use my skills as a lawyer to address the issues facing youth, as well as to work for justice and rule of law in terms of dealing with conflict.

When I applied for the leadership program offered by the YALI Regional Leadership Center East Africa (Center), I was leading the communications effort for an NGO in eastern DRC that was a coalition of 40 women's associations. While this NGO's work was important, I knew I wanted to do more to help my community. I just wasn't sure how.

Through my participation in the Center, I came to understand how I could help my community and I was equipped with skills that enabled me to finalize a project proposal on which I had been working. I founded PHENIX, a national NGO in DRC that supports children who are in prison, those who are in conflict with the law, and those that have difficulties with their parents. It also provides support to children whose parents are in prison and to families whose children are returning home from prison. We provide free legal aid, and also facilitate access to healthcare services and psychological support. PHENIX's overall focus is to ensure that children and youth who are in conflict with the law and their families are able to seek justice.

When I enrolled at the Center, I was struggling to connect the dots to get the idea up and running. However, the lessons I learned, especially during Design Thinking class, helped me finalize the strategy for PHENIX. I was able to clearly identify the problem I was trying to address, and find a solution. When I returned home, I worked with my team to implement the Design Thinking steps, and in the end, we were able to launch PHENIX as an organization to assist children in conflict situations.

I knew I had the potential in me to be a leader, but I lacked confidence. At the end of the leadership program I was armed with the tools and experience to achieve my goals. After my graduation, I was yearning to get back to my community and put my commitment into action.

I am proud that the work that we do at PHENIX contributes to improving my community. Each day we positively contribute to changing one life at a time, and with time this will make a difference.
Each year, approximately 213,000 babies are born prematurely in Tanzania and over 9,000 almost 25% of these babies die from complications of being born prematurely. I was a pre-term baby, weighing only 900 grams when I was born. I know I am one of the lucky few who have survived. As a pre-term baby myself, I am committed to ensuring that those babies who are born too soon have a chance to survive. It is for this reason that I launched the Doris Mollel Foundation, the goal of which is to reduce the number of pre-term births, empower parents of premature babies, and reduce the number of newborns who are dying from complications of prematurity.

Premature babies are those born at less than 37 weeks old, while a full-term baby is born at 38 to 42 weeks. Babies who are born too soon are at risk of dying from complications, especially in cases when their parents do not have access to adequate healthcare services. Through the Foundation, I partner with like-minded organizations and deliver the much needed help to target communities.

Since we launched the Foundation in February 2015, we have saved more than 4,000 premature babies in Tanzania. This has been made possible through the support of our 142 volunteers who include doctors and 28 private sector and development organizations that have partnered with us. The Foundation has donated life-saving equipment and supplies to hospitals, as well as providing food supplies to families. It has also raised awareness among young and at-risk families to help them understand the challenges of having pre-term babies and provided information on how to assist them in their development.

My experience at the YALI Regional Leadership Center East Africa was very beneficial to my work. When I got back home I was bubbling with ideas on how to improve what the Foundation was already doing. For me, the highlights of the 12-week program were going through The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People and Design Thinking. During the courses, I learned to appreciate the power of diversity and collaborate with others. Indeed, at the end of the first three weeks of the program, I collaborated with other participants in my cohort to produce a song and video, calling on others to join the movement to ensure premature babies have a chance to survive. The video can be accessed at the following link: http://bit.ly/2mYsKso.

The lessons I learned from the Design Thinking class helped my team and me to develop a mobile application, which we are using to track premature babies. Using the application, we are able to record births, deaths and the status of expectant mothers. This helps us track teenage and early-age pregnancies especially, as both are found to have the highest percentage of pre-term babies. We involved the community in every step of the application's development, which is a key principle of Design Thinking. Before understanding the principles of Design Thinking, I did not appreciate the value of working alongside communities to mutually identify solutions.

My experience at the YALI Regional Leadership Center East Africa left an indelible mark on my life. The willingness of the team and participants to join me in creating awareness about preterm babies is something for which I am grateful. Not only did I learn lessons at the Center, they allowed me to create awareness about my passion. Perhaps this movement we started in Tanzania will spread across the 14 countries in East and Central Africa. Who thought that the Center would be a catalyst to save the lives of premature babies? That is the Center’s strength. It allows us to focus on our passion and turn it into something real!
People who knew my mother tell me that I am truly my mother's daughter. My mother, the late Florence Kalule Nalwanga, was many things, including a primary school teacher, orator, and candidate for the Constituent Assembly in 1995. She had immense power and she knew how to use it well. I draw a lot of inspiration from her legacy and this motivates my commitment to leadership and gender empowerment. Following in my mother's footsteps, in 2016 I ran for the position of woman member of parliament for Mubende District, and emerged second out of four candidates. Following the arduous campaign, I was looking for a fresh experience to refocus my thoughts, re-energize, and sharpen my leadership skills. I needed a non-conventional platform to be able to process and share my experiences.

Being accepted to the YALI Regional Leadership Center East Africa provided such an opportunity. However, when I was accepted to the program, I was faced with a dilemma of either passing on the opportunity in order to retain my job, or quit my job and accept the offer from the Center. I followed my gut feeling, resigned from my job and set off for Nairobi. I do not in any way regret this decision. In fact, leaving my job was the best decision I have ever made because if I had not taken the leap of faith, I would still only be dreaming about making an impact in young people's lives. The Center made my dream become a reality and at the same time enabled me to overcome a number of obstacles in my life, including lack of trust. The high ropes experience during the first week of our residential session taught me to trust others and overcome my fears.

The Center also opened up several opportunities for me, including my dream of mentoring youth. Through the Center's Gender Equality Task Force created by the Alumni Chapter of Uganda, we conduct visits to schools and interact with students, talking to them about topics important to their lives. This provides me a forum to embrace my passion for mentoring young girls. In addition, I advocate women's rights through the Alumni Chapter of Uganda using media to create awareness and partnerships with like-minded organizations. Since I graduated from the Center, I have joined members of the alumni chapter in visiting several schools across the country, and during the just concluded International Women's Day, we were at the forefront of advocating for women's and girls' rights through the media.

Following my experience at the Center I was inundated with invitations to speak in schools and participate in talk shows both on radio and television. This helped raise my profile as a human rights activist but most importantly it provided platforms for me to highlight the work being done by the Center's Alumni Chapter of Uganda.

Completing the program at the Center refocused my thinking and taught me that I can achieve whatever I set my mind to, as long as I build a strong network around me. The program provided me with an opportunity and platform to influence decisions, inspire others and change mindsets, especially those who thought a young woman could not be a leader. I am now considered an opinion leader in my country. That is my win! That is my passion! That is my greatest achievement to date…and it is only the beginning!
My entrepreneurial journey started when I was a university student. Although I am a veterinary doctor by profession, but I taught myself how to make potato chips by watching YouTube videos then started a food cart in Addis Ababa. On my first day of business, I only sold two burgers, one of them was to myself. I am considered somewhat “random,” and perhaps too crazy for some people. My way of doing things is unconventional, and some people might find me disruptive. When I reported to the YALI Regional Leadership Center East Africa, I was excited because I quickly realized the environment was conducive for people like me. The leadership program offered by the Center is not just an academic program, it’s a disruptive event, and it is a place where you can be yourself without fear of judgement. The people you meet will change your life for the better.

Participating in the Design Thinking program gave me a new approach to doing business and helped me improve my startup, Mak-Addis Tutors. I am the founder and CEO of the company, an academic initiative that connects students who need extra support in their education with registered tutors at an affordable fee via one-on-one connections. The lessons learned from the Design Thinking class helped me to get a new perspective of doing business. For two years the main focus of my business was providing tutors to individuals (parents and students). Using the Design Thinking tools, my team and I redesigned the program and employed a different marketing strategy, which resulted in the signing of a deal with a U.S.-based Ethiopian foundation (wegene.org) to provide tutors for 24 of its beneficiary students in Addis Ababa. The disruptive brainstorming sessions I adopted from the Design Thinking class made this possible.

The continuous creativity and innovation we are applying to the business is being noticed by other stakeholders. I was selected as one of the five social entrepreneurs to represent Ethiopia in Accra, Ghana during the Enterprise Africa Summit. I was invited by the Tony Elumelu Foundation to meet Mr. Elumelu during his visit in Addis Ababa, and I have also been selected as a 2017 Mandela Washington Fellow.

Immediately after the first three weeks of the program, I was notified that I was a semi-finalist in a national competition for startups organized by TOTAL. I reached out to one of my instructors at the Center, Rich Nadworny, and requested he review my final pitch for the competition. Rich worked with me over several days to put together my final presentation. I used the Design Thinking concept to improve on my pitch and the hard work and support paid off. I was declared the winner of the national Start-Upper of the Year Challenge by TOTAL.

The network I created through the program has extended even beyond the 80 participants in my cohort. In June 2016 I was a finalist in the People’s Choice Award of hackthedcd.org. Winners are selected based on the votes they receive. For the first time in the organizing company’s history, I got more than 1,000 votes, all from Africa. The website had never gotten a click from Africa before the competition in which I was among the finalists. It was at this point that I realized my network had grown beyond what I could imagine. This success gave me the necessary visibility and I was recognized by the africanyouthawards.org as one of the 100 Most Influential Young Africans...and I’m just getting started. I am thankful every day that the Center’s model of leadership allows for disruption of the status quo and thus promotes innovation and change. It has made me a better entrepreneur and has created vast opportunities for my business.
One month before I joined the YALI Regional Leadership Center East Africa, I was appointed the Commissioner of the Information Commission of South Sudan, and towards the end of the first three weeks of the program, I was recalled to Juba by the President to be sworn in. Thinking back it is indeed a moment of celebration when I look at my progress from being a child-soldier to serving in a senior position in government.

I was born into a livestock-raising family of seven and grew up herding our goats and cows. When I was eight years old, I was taken by the SPLA, a rebel group who was fighting the Sudanese government. They took me along with over 5,000 other children to another part of South Sudan, where I was trained as a child soldier. I was in the army as a child soldier for five years. In late 1994, when I was 13 years old, I deserted along with other child soldiers. We trekked for about a month and finally made it to the Kenyan border town of Lokichoggio, where we presented ourselves to UNHCR for registration and subsequent transfer to Kakuma refugee camp. That was the turning point for me as I was able to begin school. I was adopted by a Kenyan friend who took me to a better school in Lodwar, where I completed my primary and secondary education. I then proceeded to Daystar University in Nairobi, where I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications in 2013. I was reunited with my family 20 years after I was taken from my home.

While studying in Nairobi, I was among the founders of the South Sudanese Students’ Association in Kenya. During the referendum for the independence of South Sudan, I actively mobilized South Sudanese living in Kenya to vote. After graduation, I returned to South Sudan. I am proud that despite the tough early years of my life, I am the first person under-35 years to be appointed to a high-level position in the government since South Sudan became independent in 2011.

My desire has always been to rebuild my country into an environment where every child is safe, and grows up in a stable, peaceful home. It is for this reason that I am working with other former child soldiers to start a school dedicated to the education of young, talented, economically-disadvantaged South Sudanese boys and girls.

I was inspired to apply to the leadership program offered by the Center because I strongly believe that African youth will lead this continent to prosperity. My country has had more than its share of leadership challenges and my hope was that through the program, I would gain skills and knowledge to serve my people better. My hope became a reality as participation in the Center’s program provided a transformation in my way of thinking. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, for instance, helped me to be more proactive in my daily interactions and particularly in my professional position. I religiously use the principle of ‘begin with the end in mind’. This has kept me sane and I have learned to hold myself back when I am about to angrily react to a situation. This has tremendously improved my relationship with different people around me, particularly my staff.

Even though I enrolled in the program while in a senior position in government, the experience tremendously changed my attitude and understanding of the role of youth in Africa. My challenge now is to make sure that youth are empowered to positively contribute to rebuilding a peaceful Africa. We need to start telling our African story as we see it, not as others see it. We are now in the process of establishing the YALI Regional Leadership Center East Africa Alumni Chapter of South Sudan. I hope to be involved because I believe through this program we can positively influence youth in my country.
Little Africans, Big Things – Empowering Kenyan Children

By Sue Wanjiru
Kenya (Cohort 5)

When studying the beliefs of African children, one of the most frustrating realities is that they don’t believe in themselves. There are likely a variety of reasons for this, but one is the lack of a “hero” culture. Much of the information obtained by children comes from television or computer. In the case of the former, approximately 70% of the media content they are exposed to is international and primarily targets adults. Coupled with a rigid education system that lacks in creative leadership skills, I consistently grapple with the fact that African children, particularly those from disadvantaged homes, do not have role models.

In 2013 I registered Lokhem Kids an organization that has the goal of using various forms of media to teach African children ages 6-12 how to become better leaders. Through Lokhem Kids we host a quarterly leadership training known as ‘African Youngiez’, which specifically targets children from disadvantaged backgrounds. So far, we have 235 alumni of the program and our African Youngiez kids’ quarterly magazine has reached over 1,000 children.

The motivation to start Lokhem Kids came after I volunteered to work with children in church. Through my interactions with them, I realized the gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from affluent families. After working with children who lacked self-confidence and looked up to socialites as their role models, I was determined to change the status quo. As a participant in the YALI Regional Leadership Center East Africa’s Cohort 5, I conducted design-driven entrepreneurship research, which reinforced prior studies that highlight a lack of belief in themselves as a significant challenge for African children. This is especially acute among those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This being the case, I made the decision to develop a television program to focus on instilling children with a sense of pride and ownership in society.

The concept I developed at the Center took many months to refine, but the hard work paid off. I recently launched a kids TV talk show – Little Africans, Big Things, which promotes positive influences and leadership among children by allowing them to express their views and explore important social topics. In short, it is a talk-show format that features children. It allows them to think and explore real issues and challenges facing Africa and the world. The show can be accessed at http://rununu.tv/series/9.

New episodes are posted on a weekly basis. We have produced the first season which has 21 episodes engaging a cast of 35 children and reaching thousands, since the launch in January 2017. Our vision is to impact over one million children in the next five years. Through this television show, children throughout Kenya will be exposed to some of the concepts and values of leadership that will lay the foundation for their growth as individuals.

The Center provided a platform to develop my concept and it has now come to fruition. My network has expanded, and through the Center I have access to potential partners and a clear business model, which will allow Lokhem Kids’ to achieve its vision of reaching one million children with solid leadership principles and life skills.
Essential to the YALI Regional Leadership Center’s success is its partners, who provide critical financial and in-kind support to empower East and Central African youth. One such partner is the Citi Foundation, which provided $200,000 in funding to the U.S. Africa Development Foundation (USADF) to support 20 of the Center’s social entrepreneur alumni. These youth received $10,000 startup/expansion grants to scale their enterprises. The grantees are:

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Country</th>
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<td>Mr. Gift</td>
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<td>Ki-Pepeo Kids Clothing</td>
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This support is part of Citi Foundation’s Pathways to Progress global approach to prepare urban youth to thrive in today’s economy.

The seed capital grants will be used to strengthen systems to support the growth of the grantees’ companies, which include agri-business, clean water and sanitation, financial education and lending services. The goal of the USADF, Citi Foundation and YALI partnership is to increase the access of East and Central African youths to business skills and seed capital. Over and above the grants, the young entrepreneurs will be provided technical support for 6-12 months, allowing them to gain valuable business skills. They will also have access to one-on-one business advice and mentoring, which will increase their knowledge and networks.

In addition to its cooperation with USADF in support of the Center’s graduates, the Citi Foundation committed an additional $110,000 to support a Business Skills Immersion program, implemented jointly by the Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF) and the Center. Through this program, 55 of the Center’s alumni from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania will be taught the skills necessary to help them achieve their business and social goals. Female beneficiaries will also get one-on-one mentoring from established and successful business owners in the region.

The Center is continuously reaching out to like-minded partners who are keen to invest in the next generation of African leaders. If you would like to forge a partnership with the Center, please contact Maggie Kamau-Biruri (maggie.kamau@yalieastafrica.org) or Edna Gathigia (edna.gathigia@yalieastafrica.org) for more information.

Impact that Matters

During its 12th commencement ceremony, the Center marked a very significant milestone, celebrating the graduation of more than 1,000 young leaders from East and Central Africa. By April 30, 2017, this number will have risen to approximately 1,180.

While this is an impressive number, even more important is the impact the Center’s graduates are making in their communities and countries.

The following vignettes highlight a small portion of what is being accomplished by the Center’s alumni:

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Kraus Mulaya Kanku (CH 4)

As one of 28 entrepreneurs who won a scholarship to attend the 2017 Sankalp Africa Summit, held in Nairobi in February, 2017, the summit is an annual convention of investors, multi-laterals, entrepreneurs and policy makers, and serves as a forum to facilitate dialogue and partnership around socially-conscious and high impact business solutions. Through his attendance, Kraus was able to significantly build his network within the region, which has strengthened his ability to launch specific programs and outreach through the DRC Alumni Chapter that targets at risk youth.

Masudi Radjabu Papy (CH 12)

Mobilized youth in his home town of Kindu to volunteer to clean the town’s streets. This selfless act shocked local government leaders, who were immediately inspired to join the youth in cleaning city streets. Radjabu says the work he has been doing with youth has raised the profile of a local NGO which he founded, which focuses on youth empowerment and entrepreneurship.
Caroline Chege (CH 2)

Was featured in the Ladies #Under35inPolitics initiatives, as she is a Senate candidate for Kajiado County.

Lone Felix (CH 1)

Spoke in Washington, D.C. on February 2nd on behalf of African youth to members of the United States Senate and other national and international dignitaries.

Amani Katana Karabu (CH 8)

Launched the Youth Empowerment Program Initiative (YEPI) on February 4, 2017. The initiative provides networking and support for youth and women entrepreneurs in the Mombasa area.

Peter Omondi (CH 5)

Travelled to Britain where he will remain for one year, working with the UK Scouts Association (https://www.scoutadventures.org.uk/). This is a great opportunity for Peter to learn more about project management, youth engagement and grassroots leadership.

Paul Mburu (CH 11)

Recently founded an organization called Soberlife to provide motivation and mentorship to youth facing addiction, behavioral, and/or social issues.
Somalia

Ahmed Nur Muse (CH 5)

Was awarded the Chevening UK scholarship and has begun pursuit of his Masters in Human Rights at the University of Sussex in Brighton, UK.

Ahmed Shawky (CH 2)

Was selected as a participant in the African Leaders of Tomorrow program, through which he is pursuing his Master’s degree in Canada.

Abdulatif Osman (CH 2)

Launched the first mentorship program in Hargeisa. The program called ‘Hage’, which means ‘Mentor Me,’ helps to coach and nurture university students and young professionals in a wide range of fields within leadership and professional development.

Kahuho Muthoni (CH 8)

Was elected as Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy for the Africa Youth Commission.

Gakii Biriri (CH 1)

Was appointed to the inaugural Deloitte Africa Mill _Board, a group of 14 millennials chosen from the Africa member firms to act as advisors to the firm’s leadership in terms of innovation and outreach to millennials.
Nancy Acayo (CH 4)

Was elected president of U.S. Alumni Association of South Sudan, which brings together all South Sudanese who have taken part in programs supported by the U.S. government.

Duha Hussein Ali Awad (CH 10)

Was chosen to represent her country and medical faculty in a research exchange program (Role of Mechanotransduction in Cardiac and Skeletal Muscle Cell Physiology) in Athens, Greece. Duha is now part of a research team at the Kapodistrian University of Athens. Duha says that her involvement in the Center's leadership program not only gave her the confidence she needed to pursue this opportunity, but also provided her parents with the impetus to let her travel to Greece.

Mustafa Sharif (CH 11)

Was elected as Chairperson of the Zanzibar-U.S. Alumni Association, which brings together all Zanzibaris who have taken part in programs supported by the U.S. government.

Leah Assenga (CH 13)

Decided after the third week of the Center's residential program to take a step that she had been afraid to for some time...opening her own coffee house in Arusha, Tanzania. Leah is a trained barista and now has her own coffee shop to showcase her skills. Check out her website at www.kitamuhouse.com.)
Evah Namakula (CH 8)

Was appointed Reach Out Integrated (ROI) Africa Global Youth Ambassador Fellow. The ROI Global Youth Ambassador Fellowship is a competitive initiative which allows selected Ambassadors to mentor and empower youth in their local communities engage in field work to address core social and economic challenges, and to speak on behalf of the organization. Evah's appointment is for a renewable term of three years (2017 to 2020), making her part of a community of change-makers from over 40 countries. By being selected to the fellowship, Evah demonstrated that she is a valuable change-agent and is on a path to becoming a leader who can make positive difference in Africa.

Joel Mukasa (CH 4)

Was chosen by the Fledge Accelerator in Seattle, Washington as one of seven initiatives to receive two months of business training, up to $37,500 in funding, and access to potential investors. Joel's waste-to-energy concept addresses Kampala's need for additional public toilets, while at the same time generating low-cost energy.

Agnes Kemigisa (CH 4)

Was honored with the Best Female Tourism Personality award during the 2017 edition of the Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo in Uganda. Agnes was recognized for her contributions to the tourism sector of Uganda.

Christian Mwijage (CH 5)

Who is the Managing Director of EcoAct Tanzania, won the Africa Finance and Investment Forum (AFIF) Entrepreneurship Award 2017. EcoAct Tanzania is a social enterprise established to address the challenges of urban waste management, plastic pollution, deforestation and climate change. EcoAct recycles and transforms consumer plastic waste into durable environmentally friendly plastic lumber. Christian received a cash prize as well as a one-year media and social media promotion.