

# SOCIAL INNOVATION ACADEMY.

Transforming Challenges into Possibilities


## Case Study

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# Foreword.



It was serendipity that brought my daughter Jasmine and I to the Ugandan village campus of SINA, the Social Innovation Academy, in 2016. While visiting other organizations we support in the region, we booked a stay at SINA thinking it was an alternative B&B. Within minutes, we knew we'd landed in an extraordinary place. The values of connection, collaboration, creation, and community that I hold so dear were evident everywhere you looked. Through a "freesponsible" community approach, scholars between the ages of 18 and 27 years old were transforming their lives, overcoming severe challenges or trauma, to recognize and realize their own potential. Moving from the margins to entrepreneurship, SINA nurtures and shines a light on these young people as they grow and make significant contributions to their families, communities, and the world. Founder Etienne Salborn has created a replicable method of transformation with transferrable learnings that can be taken elsewhere in Africa and beyond, while developing and implementing simple yet life-changing technology. I was so moved by the work of SINA and the stories of the young people we met, I commissioned this Case Study to further highlight their impact and learn more about some of the graduates.

**Charles Holmes, CE Holmes Consulting, Inc.**



# SINA: TRANSFORMING CHALLENGES INTO POSSIBILITIES

**How the Social Innovation Academy's freesponsible approach to education and entrepreneurship is creating powerful ripples that impact the lives of its graduates, local communities, and far beyond.**

Founded in 2014, the Social Innovation Academy (SINA) has won multiple awards, including the 2019 Pan-African Award for Entrepreneurship in Education, and has created over 49 social enterprises and 348 jobs. 100% of SINA graduates say they are proud to have been part of the organization and are more confident and a better version of

themselves than before joining. Three of those graduates – Joan Rukundo Nalubega, Marjorie Angella Atuhurra, and Rebecca Bahati Aimee – have overcome immense challenges to create their own successful businesses and fulfilling lives. In this case study, we share their stories and the work they're now doing in the world as a way to explore the

larger human-centred impacts of SINA and how the SINA model and approach creates such impact.



**“SINA helps you realize your purpose in life – I’m really connected to my purpose, my passion. Every time I am faced with challenges, I find the strength to pull through.”**

**JOAN RUKUNDO NALUBEGA**

Founder of Uganics, a social enterprise, producing and selling affordable mosquito repellent soaps.

<https://www.uganics.org/>

Graduated SINA: 2020



# Joan Rukundo Nalubega

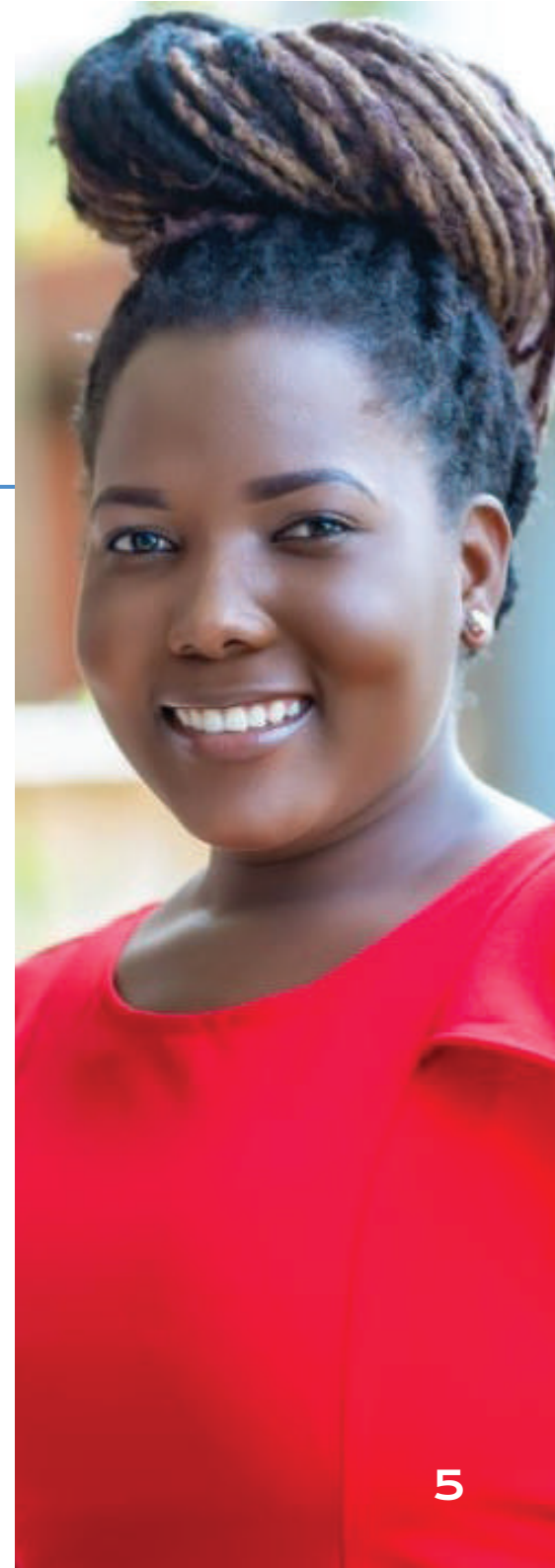
## Transforming Painful Childhood Memories into Strength

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When Joan Rukundo Nalubega left high school, she was uncertain about her future, and had little idea of who she really was and what she wanted to do in life. In 2015, one of her close friends lost a child to malaria, which brought back Joan's own painful memories of living with the disease. Joan contracted malaria several times as a child, with severe and recurring symptoms that negatively impacted her emotional as well as physical health. She was also affected by seeing people, particularly those in rural communities, suffer at the hands of the disease. In the midst of this pain, an entrepreneurial spirit was growing in her, which led her to SINA, and the spark of an idea to find interventions for malaria for low-income communities.

During her time at SINA, Joan worked with other like-minded scholars as well as coaches and mentors. She learned the importance of being open-minded, taking action, and following a path you're passionate about. She also saw how collaboration benefits everyone.

**“The best way to create value is by involving the people you're creating the solution for.”**



SINA provided her with the tools she needed to start up and run a successful business by developing a product that solves an issue for customers. Initially, she had no access to funds and no real idea of what product she could create that would help solve the problem of malaria. By being part of SINA, she was able to develop a network, and reach out to scientists who were experts in the field as well as look at what was already being done, what was working and what wasn't.

She took with her a spirit of continuous learning and active listening when talking with everyone she met. She saw that lots of people had lost hope; they were sleeping under mosquito nets yet still contracting malaria. This confirmed for her that there was a gap in the market for a better solution. Through her extensive research, listening to people's needs, and connecting with healthcare professionals and scientists, the spark of an idea turned into a product prototype: a mosquito repellent soap.

## **“You learn from failure instead of giving up.”**

However, once she'd landed on a solution, more challenges appeared. She realized the product would be too expensive for the low-income communities she was hoping to be of service to. The same creative problem-solving and open-mindedness she'd used when developing her product led her to an economic solution: co-finance the soap for the low-income communities by selling it at regular price to tourists, for whom the price tag was not expensive.

With this model in place, she was able to launch Uganics, a line of mosquito repellent soaps made using pure essential oils that offer up to six hours of protection.

In the early months of operation, she faced further challenges, especially in terms of supply issues with the essential oils needed for the soaps. Again, she

leaned into her SINA education to find solutions to these new challenges and further connected with her own deep sense of passion and purpose. She wanted Uganics to do more than provide a solution to malaria; she wanted to empower women in her community. With this purpose clear in her mind, she let go of unstable suppliers and empowered women in agriculture, teaching them how to grow the herbs and flowers she needed and extract the essential oils from them. Prior to supplying Uganics, these women would have barely scraped \$10 a month, and now they're earning \$150 a month or more while Uganics is guaranteed consistent raw materials to continue creating quality soaps.



“SINA helps you realize your purpose in life – I’m really connected to my purpose, my passion. Every time I am faced with challenges, I find the strength to pull through.”

Joan doesn’t even want to think about where she would be without SINA. She credits the program for completely changing her life and helping her realize her purpose. In her SINA community, she felt her own freedom and learned she needs to be responsible as a person and a businesswoman. She was able to practise skills and mindsets, and learned different ways of communicating with people, including non-violent communication training and active listening. SINA, she says, changed her attitude, her way of thinking and improved her confidence.

And it’s not only Joan’s life that has changed for the better thanks to SINA. Her graduation from the program started a ripple of positive change and empowerment in her community and beyond.

Her soaps are helping prevent potentially fatal cases of malaria, thereby saving or improving the quality of lives in Uganda, while the women who grow and supply the raw materials have also experienced a marked increase in the quality of their lives.

How far will this ripple flow and how many more lives will be transformed for the better? Given Joan’s connection to passion, purpose, and people, the ripple is likely to reverberate beyond anyone’s expectations. As Joan herself says, “*I don’t believe in impossibilities.*”

“Every time we face challenges, I don’t only think of myself – I think of how we benefit the community.”





“SINA not only changes you, but your thinking. You can freely express yourself, you learn to unlearn and vice versa. It’s a community where people thrive.”

**MARJORIE ANGELLA**

Founder of Gejja Women Foundation, a social enterprise that empowers marginalized women and girls from rural Uganda.

<https://gejja.org/>

Graduated SINA: 2019



# Marjorie Angella Atuhurra

## Transforming a Vicious Cycle into a Virtuous One

Marjorie Angella Atuhurra was 19 years old and pregnant when she left home, with no formal education or any idea of where she was going or what she would do. Her own parents had also been teenagers when they started their family; her mother was only 14 when she gave birth to Marjorie. This vicious cycle of challenging family life, with low incomes and little education, could so easily have been replicated by future generations. But Marjorie changed that. She reimagined her future and in so doing, has empowered her daughter and countless other women through the enterprise she started during her time at SINA.

She joined SINA in 2014 as a facilitator trainee, and quickly found a loving community, where people supported one another and shared their experiences. The idea of free-

sponsibility instantly appealed to her, and she was also inspired by the novel system of governance with “no boss.” By working through SINA’s development model, she learned skills such as mindfulness, active listening, and non-violent communication, and, like all scholars, she was assigned a coach and mentor to work with on a one-on-one basis.

“SINA not only changes you, but your thinking. You can freely express yourself, you learn to unlearn and vice versa. It’s a community where people thrive.”





Etienne Salborn, SINA's founder, noticed that Marjorie also seemed to be a natural magnet for other women who wanted to share their stories. They would gravitate towards her and the connections she made were contributing to building community. This inspired Marjorie to think about becoming a change-maker herself. Then, in 2015 she had two encounters that pushed her toward finding her passion and turning it into an empowering social enterprise.

A young girl from the local community came running to her, telling her she wanted to stay in school, but her parents were trying to send her away to get married. Around this time, she also saw a girl fidgeting with a roasted banana leaf and thought back to how her own mother had told her to use a banana leaf during her periods. After a restless night, she approached Etienne for funding to begin a social enterprise that would provide safe sanitary protection for girls and break the taboo of talking about menstruation.

It was through leaning into her natural affinity for community building that she started talking to other women, who, like her, had little formal education, about their ideas for a better future. She realized that regardless of how much education a woman might have, she can still have an idea for a sustainable, successful business.

**"I don't want my daughter to grow up thinking, my mother never did this, never tried to make something of herself."**

In addition to menstrual health, Marjorie saw a need to provide women with professional development opportunities and funding to start their own small businesses, from candle making to wine making and more, so they can earn a living and help sustain their families. With these two passion projects in mind, the Gejja Women Foundation was born.



The Foundation has already provided support to over 135 women and is involved in a range of programs that empower women and girls, such as offering scholarships to marginalized girls so they can stay in school, and raising awareness about menstrual hygiene, distributing over 35,000 reusable menstrual pads.

“I want to see a girl thrive, a local woman holding a business and sitting at tables without discrimination. I want to see girls finishing up school and making their own choices.”

For Marjorie, the key factors to her business success are patience, persistence, and passion. She's grateful for the connections she's made through SINA and through her own business, and as her team grows, she continues to be inspired

by the SINA model and divides tasks, so staff have the freedom to grow in their roles.

“There are bumps in the roads, hills, times when I cried, but as long as you're passionate, persistent, and patient, you'll find a way to make it work.”

Marjorie doesn't know where she'd be today if SINA didn't exist, but her faith in

God leads her to believe finding the organization was always meant to be part of her life's plan. She feels proud she is now a role model for her daughter, and one of the young people in Uganda who is having a tangible impact and doing something good for their country. She wants to continue to be an inspiration for other women and girls, to help others soar and improve their lives the way she has hers. When you love something, she says, you can't let it go: “Maybe today it didn't work, but tomorrow it will work better.”







“I found myself, who I am now, because of what I learned at SINA.”

**REBECCA BAHATI AIMEE**

Founder of Patapia, a social enterprise that empowers refugee women to turn business ideas into viable enterprises.

<https://www.patapia.org/>

Graduated SINA: 2017

# Rebecca Bahati Aimee

## Transforming Past Trauma into Passion

Rebecca Bahati Aimee arrived in Uganda in 2010 with her mother and younger siblings, all refugees fleeing the Republic of the Congo, where her older brothers had been kidnapped. Her mother had been a business woman and initially thought she'd be able to start a business in their new home, but was faced with insurmountable challenges and no way to borrow the start-up funding required. After working a physically gruelling manual labour job, the only one she could find, her mother developed a back problem, which led to paralysis.

At just 12 years old, Rebecca found herself needing to walk to different markets to scavenge food for herself and her siblings. An excellent scholar, she had once dreamt of becoming a lawyer when she grew up, but the harsh conditions she now found herself in meant she could no longer go to school but instead had to find work to support her family. As a refugee and barely a teenager,

the only job offer she received was to walk to different towns and villages selling product. Sometimes she ended up walking for five hours or more, sleeping on the streets as nightfall approached, cradling her bags of product to sell again the next morning. On one of her walks into a new village, the unthinkable happened.

A group of men dragged her into the bushes, planning to steal her product, rape, then kill her. She screamed and kept screaming, and thankfully passers-by intervened, and took her to hospital. It took her some time to recover physically and emotionally from the attack, and she was determined never to return to those same villages, doing the same dangerous work. Her boss, however, accused her of lying and stealing the product herself, and she eventually agreed to work until she had paid him back.





She was now 15 years old, and the only thing that kept her going was seeing her mother and siblings. Life held little meaning for her beyond that; all her dreams of studying and becoming a working professional had been stolen from her.

At this lowest point in Rebecca's life, a friend offered a glimmer of hope. She told her about an organization giving scholarships to people who wanted to study with them. The two friends went together, and Rebecca took a chance, applied, and was selected by SINA for a scholarship.

She didn't think she could accept the place as she needed to work, but her mother encouraged her to attend. At first, she couldn't speak English, knew nothing about entrepreneurship, and found the teachings confusing. Then, something magical happened. She was paired with a coach and the work they did together was the catalyst for transformation.

**"I found myself, who I am now, because of what I learned at SINA."**

Rebecca started to re-find some hope for the future and, through following the SINA model, learned how she could translate her own suffering and challenges into positivity and opportunity for herself and others.

"They [at SINA] told us, 'think of where you are coming from,' and I thought about my mom and how she struggled when she arrived in Uganda, how she just needed a little money to start a business to provide for us children, and I thought of my fellow refugees around us, and thought, What can I do to support my community, the people around me?"

She started Patapia, a social enterprise that equips refugee women with the skills and resources they need to start and successfully run their own Small

and Medium Enterprises. Rebecca's vision is for refugee women to become self-sustainable, so they can provide for themselves and their families in a safe and secure way.



This vision is directly connected to her and her mother's own experiences: "No person should go through what my mother went through." She makes it as easy as possible for women to get the funding they need and be able to re-pay it slowly. She also passes on the teachings she learned at SINA by giving women knowledge about running a business, so they feel supported, even when times are tough.

**"Anyone can start a new life if they're given the opportunity."**

Patapia has already trained over 300 women and helped launch hundreds of self-sustaining enterprises. Rebecca feels proud when she talks to the women she's helped and sees them working hard to make their businesses successful: "These women are just amazing. They've gone through a lot and they're working a lot. Women who were getting \$15 a

month are now earning \$400. They're taking their kids to school, they can handle medical challenges."

Although Rebecca is still working towards her own goals for Patapia to make the business fully sustainable, she is aware of and grateful for the positive impact SINA has had on her life.

"Imagine I hadn't gone to SINA," she muses, "where would I be now?" For her and other refugees, the answer is almost too devastating to consider. Before SINA, she describes herself as having nothing, and being no one. She now describes herself as "newborn" – she not only survived horrific personal attacks and prolonged hardship, but, through the belief and support offered by her coach and others at SINA, she took those challenges and transformed them into hope. Now, every day, she offers that same hope to women refugees and their families.





# MEASURING THE TANGIBLE IMPACTS OF THE SINA MODEL WITH MORE THAN STATISTICS

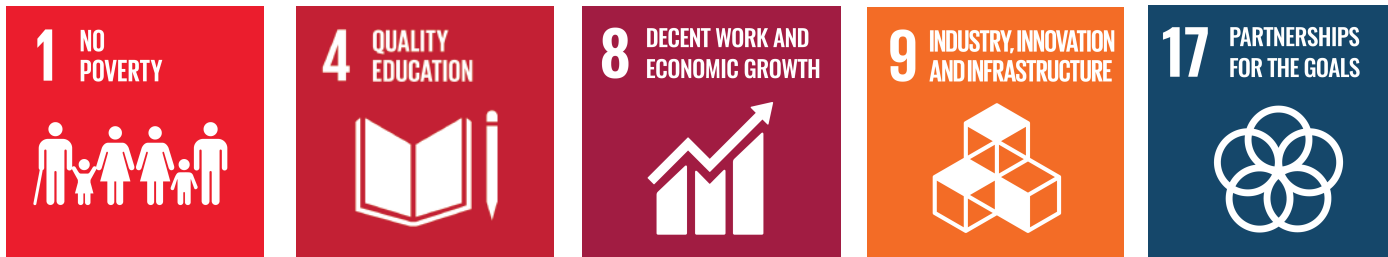
The stories shared by Joan, Marjorie, and Rebecca, while all unique to them, highlight shared impacts of the SINA model. Impacts can be measured in many different ways, and SINA's statistics are in themselves impressive:



## MULTIPLE AWARD-WINNING



## Direct impact on 5 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals



**Over \$160,000 USD in capital raised independently by SINA social enterprises in 2021 alone** 16

Beyond the statistics, though, these stories show us that SINA is having very concrete positive impacts on human lives in small and large ways. These include:

Increased self-awareness and acceptance

Increased confidence and self-esteem

Increased ability to communicate

Mastery of non-violent communication

Deeper connection to own sense of purpose

Knowledge of own passions and how to both live those passions on a daily basis and translate them to a sustainable business model

Deep knowledge of own strengths and how to use them to overcome challenges

Adoption of a positive mindset, where nothing is impossible

Increased sense of belonging, connection, and community (to oneself; smaller and wider communities)

Stronger belief in creativity and innovation (developing creative, innovative solutions)

Spirit of continuous learning and flexible adaptation, while staying true to own vision and purpose

Deep practice of collaboration at all levels

# HOW DO THESE IMPACTS COME ABOUT?

## WHY DOES THE SINA MODEL WORK SO EFFECTIVELY?

### **Freesponsible approach >**

Gives scholars sense of personal responsibility; they are no longer told what to do or how to do it; their opinions, ideas, and ways of thinking are valued (sometimes for the first time in their lives), which increases their sense of motivation to “succeed”.

### **Engagement with coaches and mentors >**

Scholars learn to look at themselves, their lives, past experiences and beliefs through a more objective, non-judgmental lens. This allows them to understand the limiting beliefs they may hold about themselves, their potential, their value in the world and practise shifting to more positive and accurate ways of thinking. This leads to an increased belief in their ability to turn their ideas into action; this belief, in turn, translates to the creation of successful enterprises.

## **Practical business model development >**

Scholars are shown and practise how to start, run, and grow a sustainable, healthy, successful enterprise. This practical knowledge, rooted in a coaching mindset and deep connection to passion and purpose, equips them to financially support themselves and others when they leave SINA.

## **Self-organized communities, “SINAs” >**

Living and studying together in a holacracy allows scholars to practise collaboration across many different levels. Scholars become their own and each other's champions, sharing ideas and learnings with the mindset that everyone can succeed, and one person's success has a positive effect on everyone. This leads to continued collaboration when scholars graduate and are running their own enterprises, thereby continuing the virtuous cycle of empowerment.



## **Passion-centric mindset >**

At the heart of all the above approaches is a deep acknowledgement and celebration of one's own passions and abilities. Through self-reflection and support, scholars see their own inner strength in their sometimes painful or traumatic past. They learn to trust their own passions and sense of purpose in life, and trust their fellow scholars so they can all work together to create a better country and world. By centring their enterprises in passion (rather than sterile metrics), they are motivated to keep moving toward their goals, even when things are difficult.

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR SINA AND WHAT NEW CHALLENGES IS IT NOW LOOKING TO TRANSFORM INTO POSSIBILITIES?

Since 2014, SINA has continually grown, with SINA Global founded in 2018 to focus on expansion beyond Uganda. In 2020, its first Transformation Innovation Hub opened in Zimbabwe at the Tongogara Refugee Camp. The organization has continued to respond to challenges with the mindset that they open up opportunities, whether it's a quick response to the COVID-19 pandemic or long-term growth connected to their vision.

With a replicable model that is creating measurable impacts for its scholars, their communities, and beyond, it's time for SINA to reflect on what's next. Working with marginalized youth and refugee communities will always have its challenges, of course, and expansion and growth naturally leads to new obstacles.

Founder Etienne Salborn, shares that:

"We are on the verge of a movement whereby the young generations can create a prosperous future for themselves through their own solutions. We have chosen a replication model to scale the impact and not our organization. Youth and organizations interested in exploring the model of SINA experience it first-hand and are trained to become changemakers with all the necessary skills and tools to create their own SINA Community. Each SINA is then locally owned and run through self-organized principles while unleashing the potentials of youth to become social entrepreneurs contributing to a world that works for everyone."

Wherever SINA communities emerge in the future, it's clear that they will empower young people, transforming shame into strength, and offering hope for the future. As Joan, Marjorie, and Rebecca all attest – SINA changes lives and communities for the better, every single day.



# DEFINING RESILIENCE AND SELF-RELIANCE:

## Resilience means...

- ➡ You keep going, you have an end in mind and keep going until that goal is achieved, setting and celebrating smaller goals along the way. **Joan Nalubega**
- ➡ Managing the pressures that can come from within – if you're resilient and passionate, you can manage them. **Marjorie Angella.**

## Self-reliance means...

- ➡ Working with people, involving people in decision making and connecting with a network, including the people your company is trying to support. It's not about making decisions purely for your benefit or from your point of view. **Joan Nalubega**
- ➡ Not relying only on yourself! It's about learning to trust in a shared vision and the people around you. When you give your powers away, you're relieving a burden. **Marjorie Angella**
- ➡ Creating a big impact, being able to grow and create a self-sustaining business, both your own and seeing other women do this too. **Rebecca Aimee**

#### **SINAs :**

Jangu International (SINA Mpigi) | Uganda, Mpigi, founded 2014

Unleashed | Uganda, Nakivale Refugee Settlement, founded 2018

SINA Loketa | Uganda, Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, founded 2018

Lazima Nipate Academy | Uganda, slum area in Kampala, founded 2019

Arise Youth Academy | Uganda, Kyakali Refugee Settlement, founded 2020

Transformation Innovation Hub | Zimbabwe, Tongogara Refugee Camp, founded 2020

Congo Innovation Academy | DR Congo, Kinshasa, founded 2020

Social Entrepreneurship Academy | DR Congo, Bukavu, founded 2020

#### **SINA Global:**

Uganda | "SINA (Social Innovation Academy) Ltd. by Guarantee", founded 2018

Germany | "SINA (Social Innovation Academy) gUG", founded 2019

The Social Innovation Academy (SINA), originally started as a project, is supported by "Jangu e.V.", founded 2009