The Opportunity: In high-income countries, such as the United States, cervical cancer is rare because of regular screening and HPV vaccination, which prevents the infection that causes cervical cancer. In Uganda, however, cervical cancer causes 80% of cancer death among women. Every year 3,195 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer. This number is projected to increase to 6,400 by 2025.

In 2015, a national HPV vaccination program for cervical cancer prevention was rolled out for girls in primary (grade) 4, or at 10 years of age, utilizing a school-based platform because of high enrollment. However, a full HPV vaccination requires two doses, six months apart. While over 80% of eligible girls have received the first dose of the HPV vaccine since the program started, more than half of those girls were lost to follow-up, never received the second dose, and therefore, have never been fully vaccinated.

Evaluations of the program revealed insufficient knowledge and awareness of HPV vaccination and cervical cancer among health workers, teachers, school girls, parents, and the community at large. To ensure that the next generation of Ugandan women are fully vaccinated to prevent cervical cancer, now is the time to increase the knowledge and awareness among these key partners on HPV vaccination and cervical cancer prevention.

The Project: With the support of American Cancer Society’s All of Me Grant, Uganda Women’s Cancer Support Organization (UWOCASO) is working to increase awareness and demand for cervical cancer screening and HPV vaccination through the development of strategic and culturally appropriate communication materials. The development of these materials is based in research and behavior change theory. Therefore, a deep understanding of current knowledge, attitudes, and practices, as well as common barriers surrounding cervical cancer screening and vaccination coverage guides the content and messaging. Key stakeholders have been involved in the process and all materials will be pretested among target populations prior to dissemination. By early 2019, materials will be ready for production and dissemination to increase awareness of HPV vaccination and cervical cancer prevention to support the national HPV vaccine program and efforts to ensure that girls are fully vaccinated.