

Arise

A Women's Development Magazine

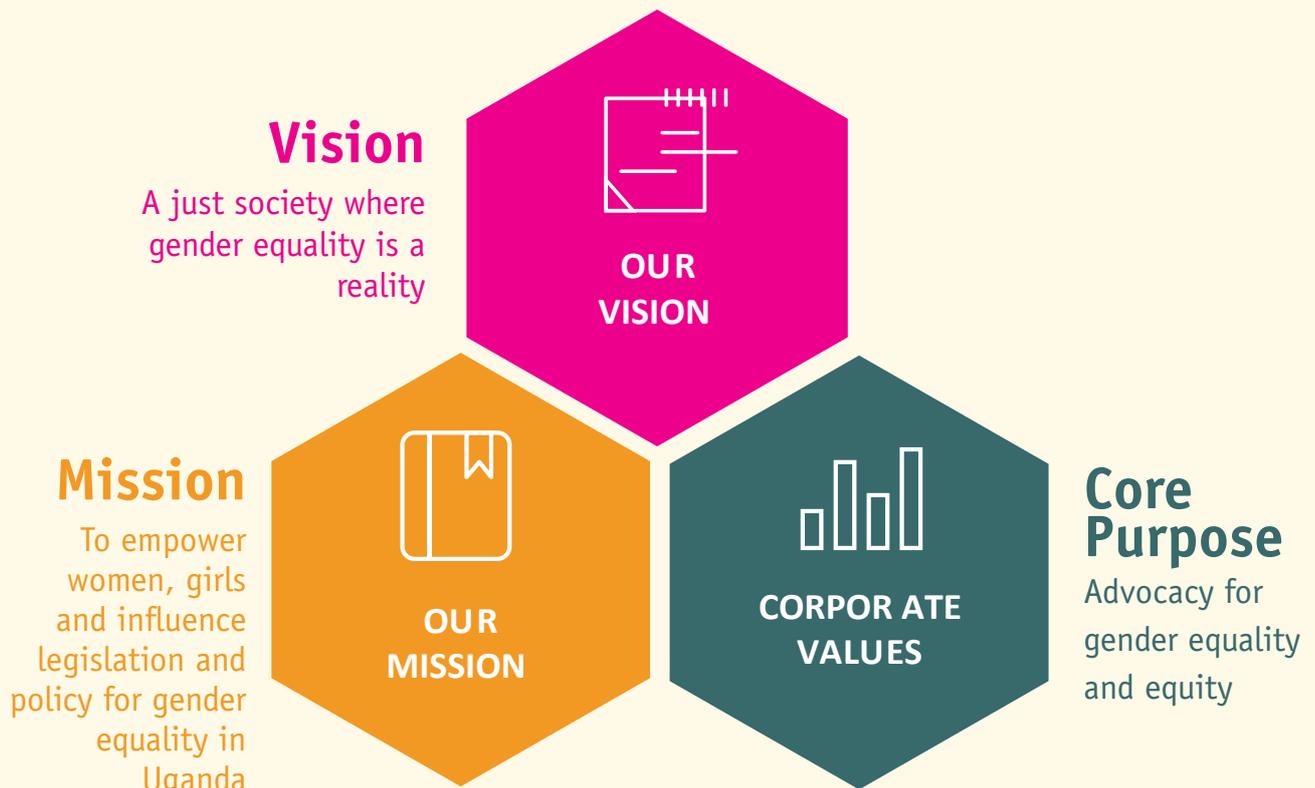
Published by **ACFODE**

and
Gender
youth
activism



“ I think the importance of doing activist work is precisely because it allows you to give back and to consider yourself not as a single individual who may have achieved whatever, but to be a part of an on-going historical movement.” — **Angela Davis, American political activist & academic**





Editor In Chief

Violet Nakiggwe

Editorial Team

1. Regina Bafaki
2. Hellen Twongyeirwe
3. Julius Ocwinyo

ACFODE Board of Directors

1. Chairperson – Dr. Euzobia M.Baine
2. Vice Chairperson – Jean Kemitare
3. Treasurer – Gladys Nairuba
4. Regina Bafaki- ED/Secretary
5. Board Member (Male Representative)- Kisembo Julius
6. Board Member - Linet Awor Agnes
7. Board Member - Hilda Twongyeire
8. Board Member - Carol Idembe
9. Belinda Kyomuhendo- Staff Representative

Contributors

1. Brian Mutebi
2. Deo Tumusiime
3. Jenipher Asiimwe
4. Agatha Christie Akello
5. Hope Kansiime
6. Eddie Semakula
7. Aanyu Sarah
8. Kisolo Elizabeth
9. Zuurah Karungi

CONTENTS

ISSUE 72



8

GENERATION NOW: HOW THE 21ST CENTURY YOUTH ARE STRIVING TO SAVE THE WORLD THEY INHERITED THROUGH GENDER AND YOUTH ACTIVISM



12

ART AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM UPLIFTING WOMEN

14



11

BEST PRACTICES IN YOUTH ACTIVISM, CREATING IMPACT, AND COPING WITH THE RISKS AND DANGERS ASSOCIATED WITH YOUTH ACTIVISM



18

BUILDING INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY - YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON AND EXPERIENCES IN ACTIVISM IN THE CONTEXT OF AGE-BASED POWER DYNAMICS



REDEFINING YOUTH ACTIVISM; THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN UGANDA

26



THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA IN ACTIVISM

22

POSITIONING FEMINIST ORGANISING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN ACTIVISM

30

YOUTH ACTIVISM AS A TOOL TO FIGHT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

33

KALUNGU DISTRICT ADVOCATING FOR AN END TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN THROUGH GENDER-EQUALITY ACTIVISM

37



39

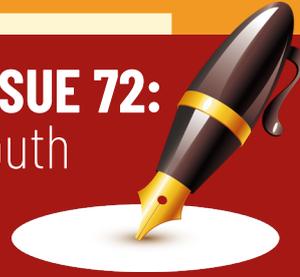


42

Disclaimer: Some pictures used are downloaded from the internet.



EDITORIAL ISSUE 72: Gender and youth activism



“To say nothing is saying something. You must denounce things you are against or one might believe that you support things you really do not.” —

Germany Kent

For years, many have argued that young people are the key to solving many of society's biggest problems. But it's been difficult to prove that young people actually make a difference, especially when it comes to issues that don't directly impact their lives. In the last few years, many youth have turned their attention to issues that affect their communities such as education, politics, sex and gender based violence and many more. They have used social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to share information, organize protests, and raise awareness. However, youth activism has also been criticized for being too narrow in its focus and failing to reach their intended audiences.

In the past few months, the world has been captivated by the activism of young women around the globe. Women as young as ten years old have led protests in several countries, including France, Poland, and the United States. Some of these protests, like the Women's March on Washington and the protests in France against the ban on birth control, were organized by groups of women. Other protests,

like the protests in Poland against the passing of a bill that would have limited the rights of women who have abortions, were organized by young men.

Introduction: Gender and Youth Activism in Uganda

The past few decades have been marked by a resurgent and unprecedented youth activism in Uganda. Thousands of young people have flooded the streets of the capital, Kampala, to protest the government's proposed policies and laws over many issues. In 2018, the government of Uganda introduced a new tax on social media services called (Over-The-Top (OTT) was later discarded after the tax failed to raise revenues and constrained internet usage. However, this was partly due to protests online and in media against the tax. Vanessa Nakate, Uganda's globally renowned environmental activist took up the cause of speaking out on environmental sustainability and climate-related problems were human-activity induced and her cause has gained global attention helping her gain a bigger platform to further the cause. Such protests

are among others like university students striking against tuition increment, medical students protesting and many more.

Over the past decade, gender activism has become a primary source of political mobilization for young people in Uganda. Young women and men have used gender to challenge traditional norms, build institutions, and shape the country's development agenda. This activism is rooted in the experiences of young people in Uganda but has also been shaped by global contexts and movements.

“Do it! What are you waiting on? Do it! Stand up for what you believe in. The world needs your voice. Whoever you are, you have something to say. Say it,” Washington told Women's Health. *As a well-known actress, Washington has been a vocal proponent for women to stand up for causes they believe in.*

Violet Nakiggwe- Chief Editor

violet.acfode@gmail.com

The opinions of the external authors do not necessarily represent the positions of ACFODE

Letters *to the Editor*



Arise

A Women's Development Magazine

Dear Arise team,

I was delighted to read the articles highlighting the mental health in Uganda. Mental health issues ought to be given much attention especially after the pandemic and coping with the economy. When organisations like ACFODE continuously highlight such issues that affect the society, the stigma around them will eventually reduce and we have open conversations about mental health. Continue doing good work and I look forward to your next Issue.

Nanozi Rosette- Lubowa



Arise

A Women's Development Magazine

Dear Editor,

I came across the magazine on your website as I was scrolling through your work. In today's society, there are many health issues that people have to face in their lives due to the busy life they live. These health issues can be physical or mental, such as anxiety and one of the most prevalent mental health issues that people face today is depression. It is enlivening to read about how employment affects people's mental health especially in regards to depression. I would have to see places where people can seek treatment for such cases.

Kalyango Edwin - Washington





Arise

A Women's Development Magazine

Hello Editor,

I enjoyed reading the article about understanding the mental health issues among the elderly. In Uganda, the health system has focused so much on the health issues among the youth and neglected the elderly. The elderly in Uganda deal with a lot of mental health caused by loneliness and the deteriorating health among other issues. I hope such magazines eventually encourage the government to address some of the issues that affect people and also improve the health standards. **Batebe Harriet - Gayaza**



Arise

A Women's Development Magazine

Dear Editor,

Mental health issues are not a thing of the past, but a current-day reality that affects people in every corner of the world. They are also a thing that is often not given enough attention. We live in a world where it is possible to answer almost any question in a matter of seconds, where we can send letters and packages to the other side of the world in a matter of hours, and where we can communicate with people on the other side of the world as if they were in the next room. It is a world of incredible progress and innovation, but it is also a world in which millions of people are living with mental health issues that are so severe that they are unable to function in their everyday lives and yet we continue to stigmatize and shun away from these issues. Thank you **ACFODE Byenkya James - Mengo**



Arise

A Women's Development Magazine

To the Arise Editor,

Dear Arise team, thank you for consistently rising issues that affect mental health. Over the last few years, we've seen an increase in the number of women coming forward to share their experiences of sexual harassment, assault, and abuse. This has led to a discussion about the prevalence of such issues in our society, the impact they have on women, and what can be done to prevent them. One of the most significant aspects of this discussion has been the extent to which women are sharing their experiences and raising awareness about the issues that affect them in-depth, such as the prevalence of mental health issues in women who have experienced sexual violence and the unique challenges that women who are survivors face in seeking help. Continue writing and highlighting these issues. **Kawagga Veronica - Mutungo**



GENERATION NOW: HOW THE 21ST CENTURY YOUTH ARE STRIVING TO SAVE THE WORLD THEY INHERITED THROUGH GENDER AND YOUTH ACTIVISM

By Brian Mutebi

In the world of youth activism, the slogan “nothing for us without us” is a common locus. The slogan was first used in the Disability Movement in the 1990s. Back then, various disability activists used it to emphasise the need for people with disabilities to be involved in formulating, implementing and evaluating policies and programmes that affect them. In 2004, the United Nations used the phrase as the theme for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and it is also associated with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Today, the slogan is widely used by activists, especially youth, to underscore the importance of having active and meaningful participation of the youth in policy and decision-making processes. It can as well be said that “nothing for us without us” is one of the pathways the 21st-century youth are using to take up leadership in matters that are important to them.

Yet that has not come without criticism. There is a school of thought that holds that young people are too young and unready to provide leadership, and that young people are not prepared to be civic leaders in their communities. Indeed, CIVICUS, one of the leading global civic awareness organisations that work with grassroots youth and youth organisations, notes that



young activists are often seen as less credible than their older peers owing to a lack of experience and informal organisation. The youth often respond to such criticism with, “We’re not leaders of tomorrow but today.”

Why the youth?

“You cannot make any decision for the youth without engaging the youth,” says youth activist Patricia Humura. This, however,



is sometimes interpreted to mean the youth are fighting the older generation for space. Humura disagrees. She states, “I don’t think the youth are fighting the older generation. What the youth want is for the older generation to understand and listen to them. The youth seek to have intergeneration conversations. What we see is the older generation’s feeling of ‘we know it all. They are not open to discussion with the youth.’”

Harriet Kamashanyu, a Coordinator Ambassador at One Young World, and founder and team leader at Rhythm of Life, a youth empowerment organisation, says that there is no war being waged against the older generation. Rather, it is a new generation of people that are prepared to speak for themselves

and be fully part of the solution to their most pressing needs. “I believe this is the true meaning of change from within rather than from without,” she argues.

What the youth bring to the table

The youth care about so many causes. For some young people, climate change is urgent. For others, democracy and political leadership are a calling. Some seek transformation in the well-being of girls and women. Others are leading the tech revolution. From governance, mental health and sexual and reproductive health to gender equality, inclusion and diversity, the youth are bringing

awareness to some of the critical socio-economic and political issues affecting their generation.

“The youth are young, creative, energetic, so if you want meaningful action, you should have the youth at the forefront,” says Humura. She states that youth activism envisages fixing the gaps that existed in the prior era. “The older generations were not intersectional in their approach. They were not inclusive: They did not consider minorities such as people with disabilities. The older generations were not gender-conscious but much into a culture, and did not consider the fact that the world is evolving. The older generation had a lot of patriarchy. They did not believe in the youth; they may give the youth a platform but do not believe in them. That’s

what they miss; that's what we bring to the table."

It is not all rosy though

CIVICUS observes that working with the youth is required now more than ever. Yet the youth in civil society face multiple obstacles in carrying out their work. An overwhelming portion of the funds that are available for development and activism in the Global South, for example, goes to long-established, Northern organisations. A 2017 UN Office on Youth study entitled *Mapping a Sector: Bridging the Evidence Gap on Youth-Driven Peace building* notes that a majority of the youth-led organisations operate with limited funding, with 49 per cent of such organisations operating with under USD 5,000 annually and only 11 per cent with over USD100, 000.

In developing countries such as Uganda, not all youth have access to schools and programmes that truly give youth a voice and a role in their communities. Kamashanyu illustrates that in the after-school realm, families with lower levels of income and from historically marginalised racial and ethnic backgrounds report having less access to high-quality after-school options for their children. Yet because of schools' curricular demands, many of the opportunities for engagement in social and political activism come through after-school and youth development programmes. Unequal access, therefore, can thwart opportunities for greater engagement of the youth.

Nonetheless, Kamashanyu contends that society may as well not have played its role in supporting the youth – especially youth from marginalised backgrounds – to engage. "We tend to place blame on the youth for not being civically engaged. But shouldn't we be asking ourselves what role we have played as a society to invite the youth to meaningful civic engagement?"

Positioned to tackle the challenges?

To activate the youth agency, CIVICUS formed a Youth Ambassador Programme aiming to create a global community of exchange and learning between activists from all over the world to bring about powerful transformation in the world. It is a local-to-global and diverse group of support, action, peer learning and collective leadership, which exists to raise awareness about national youth movements as well as to co-create and connect practices and decisions related to meaningful youth engagement in civil society. By providing them with a platform and tools, CIVICUS believes that a new narrative, where the youth are effective change makers, is possible.

Humura observes that the success of youth activism is going to vary according to the area of activism. She predicts that while areas such as climate justice will relatively be 'fun', the terrain is not going to be smooth for political and democracy activists in the era where arrests and imprisonment, torture and sometimes killing of activists are witnessed. She, however, stresses that the youth ought to be resilient in their conviction rather than despair. "Sometimes you may need to slow down so as not to burn out, but you do not give up," she counsels.

Kamashanyu advises that diverse platforms should be created to boost voice, opportunities and collective youth civic action in a wide array of ways – from research to policy and practice. She opines that bringing together a diverse group of people who care about common issues can spark new insights and commitments. Social media is one platform and tool the youth use to position themselves and their cause. Social media grants the youth freedom of expression and an open door to engage on issues that are of interest to them, their communities and the globe at large.

Utility: 10 Ways the Youth Can Engage in Activism (adopted from the Anti-Defamation League)

01 Educate others

02 Advocate for legislation

03 Run for office

04 Protest

04 Create a public awareness campaign

05 Survey the issue and share the results

06 Survey the issue and share the results

07 Raise money

08 Write letters

09 Engage in community service

10 Invest the press.

BEST PRACTICES IN YOUTH ACTIVISM, CREATING IMPACT, AND COPING WITH THE RISKS AND DANGERS ASSOCIATED WITH YOUTH ACTIVISM

By Deo Tumusiime



A historical perspective: Far away in Beijing, a seed for gender equality was planted by our forebears. And while Beijing may sound several thousand miles away from whichever axis anyone may imagine, the issues raised then, the energy generated, reverberated so close to everyone's heart across the world, and remain ever so relevant 27 years later. Critical issues underscored were: Women and the environment; women in power and decision-making; the girl child; women and the economy; violence against

women; human rights of women; education and training of women; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; women and health; women and the media; and women and armed conflict. That these matters touched a delicate nerve in the realm of our human existence and co-existence made it easy for campaigners all over the world to have their way across the political spectrum, even if this did not mean the battle would be any lighter.

Youth and the Ugandan political arena: Uganda is credited for taking

“the bull by its horns” when it came to the implementation of the wishes expressed in Beijing. The “bull” analogy may momentarily appear to undermine the gender shift but tells of how matters of gender imbalance were traditionally discreetly enshrined even in language to make it just normal and acceptable. Of course, cows (the females) also have horns, and could be dangerous too if not handled carefully! But away from the semantics, there's every reason to say, “Oh, Uganda, we celebrate”. A few examples from the top echelons of power: In 1995,



Ms Jessica Alupo was a youth of about 20 years, but today this youth is Uganda's Vice President. In 1995, Ms Robinah Nabbanja was a youth of about 25 years; but today this youth is Uganda's Prime Minister. In 1995, Ms Anita Among was a youth of about 19 years; but today this youth is the Speaker of the 11th Parliament. Yet this is just at the top! Below is a nutshell of the 11th Parliament composition by gender and age, showing the massive youth visibility in leadership.

Considering the competitiveness of political office, those attained by election and appointment alike, the above statistics reflect what the situation must be like in very many other areas where women have been able to leap forward on their own. Oh yes, we have seen this in the banking sector, the NGO world, academia, media, environmental

protection, name it. Simply put, the dreams and aspirations outlined in Beijing have been actualised to a great extent. UN Women confirms this when it says: "A new generation of young women are actively involved in different issues that affect their lives personally, reflecting an acute awareness of the limits of legal and social change that has taken place. Young feminist advocacy, activism, and mobilisation have increased worldwide, gaining momentum, force and support from the public and private spheres". The UN is, however cognisant of the fact that the youth cannot go it alone, and as former youths begin to position themselves at the helm, the UN is underscoring the need for inter-generational, inter-sectional approaches focusing on shifting social norms, supporting policy change, fostering girls' leadership

and amplifying their voices through effective partnerships across the gender divide.

Thanks to youth activism, we are increasingly seeing young people, through small organisations and social online platforms, promoting human rights and socio-economic justice, subscribing to counter-power where their governments are lacking. During the 2021 General Elections, a youth wave swept across the country as lots of youths presented themselves for political office countrywide and at all elective levels. It worked in their favour, thanks to the numerical advantage of a generally youthful country.

The downside of the recent elections: In the lead-up to the 2021 presidential and parliamentary elections, many youths, though, are reported to have lost their lives



in the skirmishes that occurred in Kampala, following the arrest of their youthful leader, Robert Kyagulanyi (aka Bobi Wine). And while the ensuing emotions may have played into the hands of those that would later win the elections, the lives lost could have been saved if the players had been better organised and politically conscious of the trend of events in the country. A lot of other youth continue to languish in prison for their activism, which has significantly diminished the voices of the youth.

Financial activism! Recently, it appeared that a lot of youth, especially young women, continue to struggle for their livelihood. This was evident during the Covid-19 lockdown and the post-Covid-19 period, which saw the prices of basic items skyrocketing. A few weeks back, the country woke up

earnings. The so-called money for akameeza does not only speak of young women's struggles but the need for more effort aimed at creating opportunities for financial independence.

Student activism: Youth activism has also traditionally been evident in institutions of learning where students advocate in connection with issues of injustice in the society they live in. While I'm not condoning strikes per se, this appears to be one of the ways some youths seek to have their voice heard. These student voices have become more strident in post-Covid-19 times, pointing to young people's increasing exposure to key issues and solutions. Their civic engagement programmes and activities are deemed to be representative of what adults have determined that future good citizens should be. It ought to be noted that it is in the school setting that youth awareness of their environment often gains a kick-start. Some of the modern leaders we see today include our very own President H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, former Vice President Dr. Speciosa Wandira-Kazibwe, DP President Norbert Mao and, of course, fallen Speaker Jacob Oulanyah, who were renowned youth activists in their time. They didn't attain their current status through the breaking of glass and the throwing of stones, and from these, today's generation of youth could borrow a leaf for constructive engagement.

We have seen increasing youth usage of social media channels for their campaigns, and even when the likes of Facebook and Twitter were blocked at some point, there was never any shortage of alternatives. Social media, while sometimes overtly provocative, remains a key non-violent tool for the youths to assert themselves. The youth voice is thus unstoppable.

Youth and the environment: The story of youth activism is incomplete without the real-life experience of environment activist Vanessa Nakate (25). Her solitary

inspirational climate change campaign led her to speak at the COP25 gathering in Spain. She was later joined by other youths that rallied participants at the World Economic Forum in Davos, calling on governments, companies and banks to stop subsidising fossil fuels. This is only one among many other related campaigns that constitute a formidable example of just how much the youth could directly engage in attempting to change the world into a better place.

Vanessa would later gain more prominence when the Associated Press (AP) cropped her off a photo she had appeared in featuring Greta Thunberg and activists Luisa Neubauer, Isabelle Axelsson and Loukina Tille after they attended the World Economic Forum. The racist incident, for which AP apologised, further enriched her activism credentials, making her one of the most inspirational youths of her time.

The hindrance: Apart from the risks so far underscored in the above reflections, youth activism is not always well received by society, and their causes are often disregarded as an over-ambitious attempt to redefine societal norms. I witnessed a cross-generational youth attempt to cause reforms at one school in the Mbarara district. The Old Boys' Association was pushing from one end, the students from the other, but both sides vying for a similar cause – improvement in the school's service delivery. But with the school being a church-founded institution, student agitation is easily seen as disrespect to authority or sheer unruliness.

This is not too far from the perception elsewhere in society! Such hesitance in approval based on religious undertones can be discouraging even to genuine causes. Additionally, the cost of sustaining youth activism sometimes leads certain causes to end prematurely, but with proper mentorship and partnership with experienced adult activists, some of these issues could be mitigated.

ART AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM UPLIFTING WOMEN

By Sarah Anyu

The Gender Equality Context in Uganda

Gender equality has for a long time been an issue in many parts of Uganda. In a quest for equality, there have been many movements that have been formed by women human rights defenders. As a result, women are getting liberated.

A report disseminated by UN Women, Uganda noted that, in 2018, 26.1 per cent of women aged 15-49 years reported that they had been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Also, women and girls aged 15+ spend 14.6 per cent of their time on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 8.8 per cent spent by men.

As of December 2020, only 42.6 per cent of indicators needed to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a gender perspective were available, with gaps in key areas, in particular information and communications technology skills. In addition, many areas such as gender and poverty, physical and sexual harassment, women's access to assets (including land) and gender and the environment lack comparable methodologies for regular monitoring. Closing these gender data gaps is essential for achieving gender-related SDG commitments in Uganda.

As of February 2021, 34.9 per cent of seats in Parliament were held by women and 75 per cent of legal

frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality under the (SDG) indicator, with a focus on violence against women and children were either passed or had been tabled for debate by Parliament to ensure that some laws protecting women's rights are in place.

The two laws that are now awaiting presidential assent are the Succession Amendment Bill and the Employment Amendment Bill 2020.

The Succession Amendment Bill seeks to address the inequality and marginalisation of women and girls after the death of a spouse. The bill provides for gender equality following internationally accepted human rights standards. The Employment Amendment Bill, on the other hand, includes a provision addressing sexual violence and harassment in the workplace.

How art and social activism are contributing to gender equality activism

Gender equality in Uganda has for a long time been advocated on different platforms and avenues. To reach out to a wider range of individuals, art and social activism are one of the creative and interesting means that are being used.

Historically, arts have proven to be a useful means of sharing messages with the public. They provide different formats in which people can share their information while

catering for all.

With art, people can get more of a virtual reality experience of what is happening in the world, especially concerning males and females.

This has been achieved through movies, write-ups, paintings, drama, music, drawings and poetry using different kinds of platforms and technologies that provided men with the perspective of what it means to be a woman in a hostile male dominated environment. Using art and social activism does not only speak to the literates but to the illiterates, too.

Through telling stories about the past and present, and through envisioning the future, we notice that a lot is changing in that we now see a difference in aspects concerning culture and behaviour that were taken for granted.

In art, identities are formed and performed, hence exploring different ways of being a man or a woman and coexisting. This specifically has broken the gender stereotype that was eating up society.

The arts allow people to validate themselves, and collectively express themselves visibly in public spaces. With it, people have been given platforms to speak and be heard not only by audiences but also by the persons responsible and this has seen to it that a notable change is registered in different settings. Here are opinions from some artists who are actively involved in gender equality activism. »»



Racheal Magoola

Musician and Member of Parliament

Being raised by a mother who was empowered made me view women from a different angle.

My mother was a Principal at a teachers' training college at the time women were not taking up bigger roles. I remember her narrating to us a story of how men always asked her if they could speak to the Principal and, at one time, she walked out and walked back into the

office and said the Principal is here. She said she did that because the person did not believe that she was the Principal.

Seeing her boldly stand up for her rights and do what men did, I felt a lot of pity for the women in the neighbourhood who struggled in marriages where they were undervalued, suffered violence and all they thought was that is how it is supposed to be.

At that point, I thought of a how I could enlighten them on what they deserved and how they ought to be treated, and music was my way to reach out to them.

Music as an art is a beautiful and easy way to reach both the victims and violators. Some may dance to it and others may simply listen but, at the end of it, they will pick the message being conveyed.

The lyrics in songs are usually inspirational messages that encourage women to do better no matter their circumstances. This does not leave the men behind because, in the same message, the men are also encouraged to support women in their homes and community.

For example in my song "Obangaina" where a woman was complaining about her husband's absence, I noticed that most women started speaking out about the way they were treated, resulting in being listened to and ultimately change happened.

Apart from music, we use films, images and poetry, among others, for activism purposes and this has gotten people out of their comfort zones. Seeing that change, I felt I could do more by joining politics.

By joining politics, I wanted to socialise with the lawmakers, be part of them and make sure that all sexes are catered for so that gender stereotypes that are hindering the development of the country are done away with.

Currently, women are taking up roles that were previously taken on by only men. For instance, women who are singers, actresses, in entrepreneurs and politicians have bigger posts and the men have been receptive to them.

However, there is still a challenge when it comes to interpreting some messages, especially if the artist has conveyed them with a hidden meaning.



I grew up in a community where women were taking up full responsibility for the family and at the same time facing domestic violence. This was a harrowing situation for me because I could not understand why that had to happen to a woman.

As a result, I resorted to music, which has helped a lot of women speak out and heal. With music, there has been more transparency in the way public issues are conducted, hence involving women, too.

I first realised the impact of my music when people who were affected started attacking me for pointing out the injustices committed against women and women appreciating me.

There is also evidence that women are well represented in the world of business, professional work and politics, among others, where their numbers continue to grow. In politics, women leaders represent a whole district which was not the issue in the early 2000s.

The beauty of art is that there are no limitations to what you are to say as

Jamal Wasswa

Musician

Using art and social activism for gender equality activism is not something to be taken for granted. They have played a great role in activism, especially when it comes to women's concerns. Both gather a group of people with the same interest and in the process, a message is easily conveyed.

Most information that is passed out

to the people is done artistically. It may be through music, drawing, painting, poetry, sign language, writing, movies and drama. For people to understand the message, it has to be well packaged with a good presentation.

In art, you can see and feel what the person is communicating and at the call to action.



Andrew Kaggwa

long as you are not breaking the law.

Writer and arts journalist

Art is usually deliberate and not trying to be an activist. When using art, the artists intentionally convey their message the way they want it to be received. Looking at the society we live in and the gender issues at hand, the artists cannot escape it because they find themselves moving in the direction that society is going, hence involving them in activism.

The fact that art is entertaining means the message is easily understood and this leaves people informed. As it is said, knowledge is power, so whatever they get from the movies, writings and art pieces avails women with information and

enables people to communicate from an informed view and are listened to.

Being part of the film industry, I have seen a tremendous change in the presentation of women in movies.

Before, we had movies that showed a woman crying all the time simply because that was the situation they were going through. Currently, the situation has changed and so has their presence in movies. We now watch women tell stories of empowerment and encourage other women to change their situations.

The change in the script of the movie has happened because there has also been a recognisable change in women's and men's lives.

As artists, we are informed that the presentation of women in movies plays a great role in changing the mindset of the future generation since in most cases they copy movie personalities.

The art industry not only advocates but gives women the platform to showcase their capability, the situation they are going through and find ways they can get out of it.

In the industry, we now have movies that are written by men and directed by women, which was not the issue before. That alone shows that there is a change and I am sure the same change is taking root in other places, too.

BUILDING INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY - YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON AND EXPERIENCES IN ACTIVISM IN THE CONTEXT OF AGE-BASED POWER DYNAMICS

By *Agatha Christie Akello*

“The older the wiser” is a commonly misapplied phrase in the field of youth activism. The gains of one generation should not be achieved at the expense of the other. That is to say, much as older people have an upper hand in terms of resources, knowledge and experience, the active and meaningful participation of young people in areas of social change goes a long way in ensuring sustainability. Nonetheless, although youth are creative, energetic and innovative drivers of social progress – whose participation is essential for development – their exclusion is strongly evident in spaces where key decision-makers are of an older generation. History has proven that societies achieved fundamental growth and development once counterintuitive ideas were embraced and nurtured, regardless of the innovator’s age.

Intergenerational solidarity refers to the degree of cohesion between different generations. In the context of age-based power dynamics, it is best understood against the backdrop of shared expectations and obligations regarding the ageing of individuals, along with the succession of generations. With a growing gap in terms of knowledge, experience and resources between the young and the old, it is important to create a system that allows for both generations to initiate and effect changes toward the advancement of society.

Sociologists have generally focused more on conflict than on solidarity,

and with the coming age boom, many observers have warned about a “war between generations” as the young begin to protest what they see as an inequitable distribution of public resources favouring the old. Youth have fresh contact with the political status quo and economic institutions; they also see the deficiencies and hypocrisies of adult society and have marshalled themselves to reform them. The recurring problem of generations and age groups in human society involves the challenge of ensuring group continuity over time as well as adaptability and innovation in the face of time-related changes (Bengtson and Oyama 2007).

Youth perspectives and experiences in the context of age-based power dynamics

Frauen Initiative Uganda started early in 2020 at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic that led to a nationwide lockdown. With the increased use of social media, there was a #metoo movement that took off on Ugandan Twitter wherein women came out to share personal stories of sexual violence and ensuing isolation from society upon speaking out. In search of a solution, a group of young women came together and formed a safe online community where victims of sexual violence could find much-needed emotional support.

However, they quickly realised that there was a big gap in terms of medical, psychological and legal assistance; consequently, the Frauen Initiative Uganda has offered emergency support to victims of sexual assault by giving them access to rape kits, post-exposure prophylaxis, and psychological as well as legal aid.



such as the Model Peace Forum to carry out different campaigns and activities.

“Our justice campaigns, fundraising for therapy and PEP, among others, have been possible due to the support from our online and feminist community,” observes Safina.

In African countries where holding older people accountable is still considered disrespectful, it is harder to facilitate conversations that would directly benefit young women – particularly in the fight against sexual harassment. Respectability politics often overshadows youth capabilities as they are expected to lean towards the older people’s beliefs that downplay the youth’s skills and abilities regarding activism.

Ms Virani added that being an older feminist comes with its perks, like vast knowledge and experience, but does not make one immune to cultural inertia. “Many older feminists struggle to effectively support young ones without centring their internalised beliefs and occupying spaces meant for the youth.”

Despite the imbalance between the older and younger generation activists, there have been instances of support and collaboration. Part of the services provided by Frauen is legal aid to victims who seek justice. This would not be possible without engaging older experienced people who went ahead to involve lawyers willing to offer women pro bono services and start the cases. Furthermore, some older activists have funded and supported projects in terms of groundwork, like their ongoing Pads Project.

In her experience, Safina Virani, a learning radical feminist, co-founder and director at Frauen Initiative Uganda, says youth activists are broadly misunderstood regarding the ways they practise activism both online and offline. “Despite the visibility and increase in activism among youth, we have encountered age power dynamics that have demeaned, undervalued and altogether silenced our voices,” she adds.

The founders of Frauen required alliances with older established organisations as a way of accomplishing their targets. They have barely been successful and this has affected their outreach.

“Young feminists continue to experience marginalisation, adultism and tokenism in official and informal decision-making arenas, despite momentum; this has greatly affected our outreach,” Safina asserts.

Sexual violence cannot be singlehandedly fought by one organisation. Through community engagement, involvement and support, Frauen has achieved some of its objectives. Because the majority of their work began during the lockdown, Frauen is more visible in online communities like Twitter and Instagram where they continue to host spaces and discuss different issues surrounding sexual violence. In addition, they have collaborated with several young feminists and organisations



“ Old people are clogging the system and should all resign to give room for new ideas,” insists Mable.

Joan Atimango, the Programme Officer and Child Protection Lead at Girl Up Uganda, has had a bittersweet experience in six years of working with different generations. “Older people are more experienced so you get to learn and receive mentorship in different aspects of life. However, they often think they know it all and therefore cannot be wrong, which is constrictive at times. It is generally a worthwhile experience.”

For 22-year-old Mable Atugonza (alias), a gender and health activist, working with older people has largely been a terrible experience,

particularly with people in their mid- and late twenties. “They give off competitive energy and cannot believe that at my age, I am in their spaces. It’s as if they want young people to suffer as they did.” Mable also adds that for older people, there is no in-between, it’s either an overprotective parent relationship or sexual advances.

“Old people are clogging the system and should all resign to give room for new ideas,” insists Mable.

Suggestions on how to build intergenerational solidarity

For many young people, working in spaces with a dominating older age group is often sterilising as the majority tend to be hostile, controlling and rigid. In cases where they are accommodative, they tend to be overbearing and leave no room for active participation since the idea of collaboration and working together is farfetched. On the other hand, older people are more than willing to support the youth but find their methods questionable along with wrong preconceived ideas of what to expect. Recognising that both parties have a lot to offer and capitalising on their respective strengths will establish the foundation for intergenerational stability.

Julius Labeja Gunya, a professional social worker, public servant and popular Luo commentator, attests to the fact that age does not determine maturity. With over 13 years of experience in the field of community development and formerly the Executive Director of CEED Uganda Gulu, a community-based non-profit organisation that empowers youth as change agents, Mr Labeja believes that there is a need for meaningful conversations to enable us to better understand the root cause of the gap between generations – particularly in matters concerning social change.

“We need to acknowledge the time shift in which different generations have lived. Take, for instance, education, and various cultural and social factors which favoured one gender over the other. Before we critique and ridicule the older generation, we need to understand why they did things the way they did.”

Through persistent conversation and engagement between respective age groups, we can attain realistic and sustainable solutions to the solidarity deficit.

Julius further stated that in his many years within the field of youth activism and advocacy, he has noticed a monotony and lack of originality among young people. According to him, the majority of the young people at conferences and workshops are there only for show. They have raw agendas, are often selfish and lack patience as they do not respect the work it takes to achieve some of these changes. One question can completely disqualify their arguments. Therefore, a mindset shift is important. There is a need for younger people to acquire authentic and applicable knowledge in their fields of interest before they bring it to an older audience; because it gets tricky to support a baseless cause.

In line with the need for conversation, Mr Labeja suggests that the foundation should know whom you're talking to and meet each other halfway. In addition, there should be policies allowing for independent participation. “The older generation should have a mindset shift, value youth opinions, and be more accommodative listeners; whereas the young generation should build character, emotional stability and knowledge before approaching the former generation,” he advises.

According to Safina Virani, we need to unlearn individual hierarchical styles in favour of more collaborative power-sharing options to build intergeneration solidarity. This will equally counter the deeply ingrained competitive narrative that dictates the dominance of one generation over the other.

Safina also emphasises the need to centre more possibilities for genuine co-leadership across generations, power-sharing and abundance in the light of a shared end goal that builds women's liberation and justice. “Most importantly, we need to prioritise rest and hold space for healing and collective care because fighting injustices takes a physical, mental and spiritual toll on all of us. We must take time to celebrate our victories, recognise and be there for each other to strengthen our

bonds.”

Not all hope is lost when it comes to different generations working together. With a few mindset shifts and meaningful conversations, we can realise immeasurable growth and development in various social aspects.

The bottom line is to build relationships that matter, persistently have meaningful conversations to gather solutions and capitalise on the respective generations' strengths as a bedrock for cohesion and collaboration.

“We need to acknowledge the time shift in which different generations have lived. Take, for instance, education, and various cultural and social factors which favoured one gender over the other. Before we critique and ridicule the older generation, we need to understand why they did things the way they did.” says Julius

THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA IN ACTIVISM

By Hope Kansiime

Mass media and activism

One of the things that excited me about my university course when I was enrolling was my imagination of what its name – “Mass Communication” – meant. Fresh from secondary school, I

imagined it in an assembly form, where masses stood, alert, all eyes at the front, eager to drink in all sorts of information, while someone, and in some of my imaginations, I was that someone, read for that mass of people news or certain types of communication using a megaphone.

Mass media and activism are similar to this memory because activism involves an audience to support or implement the desired change while mass media is epitomised by someone with a megaphone disseminating information to the audience but various media





technologies used to reach a large audience. Some of these technologies include television, radio, the internet, magazines, newsletters and newspapers, among others. Mass media is the primary source of news and information for the public. People rely on mass media to get information regarding political issues, economic issues, social issues, entertainment and other news.

The newspaper was the original platform for mass media because the public relied on writers and journalists to provide them with the latest news.

Later, in the 1890s, came the invention of the radio. Families would gather around the radio to listen to their favourite radio station programmes to and the latest news.

Television followed suit and soon became the most effective platform to reach the general public.

Today, the internet is the most relevant form of mass media, has become a major tool for news outlets, and is a major platform for activism. Since the advent of the internet, the general public has been able to access news outlets in an instant with just the click of a mouse, or by scrolling on their phones instead of having to wait for scheduled programmes.

Activism is engaging in action or involvement as a means of achieving political, social or economic goals. This includes activities that are vigorous and are in support of or in opposition to an issue, policy or situation. As Gitlin (2003) wrote in his letter to a young activist published in the New York Times in 2003, “so ‘activist’, though not a lovely word, is a useful one because it reminds us that the world not only is but is made”. This statement is profound because it reminds us of the power we hold to make a better

world through activism and social change theory.

Activism in Uganda comprises protest movements and creative campaigns to influence policies or to effect various changes, among other forms. Since time immemorial, various groups of stakeholders have taken action and protested against malpractices like gender-based violence, corruption or other societal ills. An example is the “Black Monday” campaign initiated by civil society organisations (CSOs) in 2012 and re-launched in 2019. The campaign called on workers to dress in black every Monday in protest against corruption in government.

In the past, we have had women protesting against various issues using different mechanisms. One of these activities is the naked protest in 2015 when women in Apaa village staged a nude protest against border demarcation exercises between



Amuru and Adjumani districts. Similar protests have ensued since.

A more recent example is science teachers who staged a strike at the beginning of the second term in May 2022 asking that the government fulfils its past promises of better pay. We can all think of many other times when different categories of people protested against a certain policy and sometimes achieved the change they wanted.

Mass awareness

Mass media closes the gap between targeted audiences and activists since it provides a medium to reach these audiences. Mass media is key in activism because without awareness then activism is in vain as it involves and targets the masses that can be reached through the different platforms of mass media.

As already noted, there are different methods used to reach the audience; articles, information about protests or organised activities, information on websites, news on radio and television, and discussions or posts on social media. It is crucial to remember that one of the successes of activism is how many people come on board and mass media is the easiest way to reach and continuously engage different audiences.

A voice for the people

Mass media is the voice through which the public is heard. It provides a platform for the public to give their views and opinions, thus adding weight and contributing to various activism programmes. In addition, all kinds of people, including the disadvantaged, can use mass media as a voice to raise various issues or demand change. Thus, people have written opinion columns in newspapers, engaged on radio or television talk shows, written on their twitter handles, and managed to reach the masses with various messages

When it comes to social media, access is much better since everyone with the internet can communicate their opinions to the world without much hindrance. Take the example of the young people interested in certain topics. While they are unable to vote or contribute in some spaces, they can share their opinions or express any grievances on social media or even join different campaigns of their choice. By having a voice, they can contribute to a better society by sharing solutions to various issues, including corruption, abuse of power, gender-based violence and poor economic conditions, among other issues.

Some people have described the internet as liberation media (e.g. L Diamond, 2010, Liberation Technology) since the different platforms enable the users to create, publish and distribute information without necessarily going through gatekeepers (FN Selnes 2020, Social Media in Uganda).

Promotion of a given cause

Mass media is a major conduit for promoting various causes. This is personified by, for instance, Dr Stella Nyanzi, who launched a fundraising campaign dubbed “Pads4Girls” in 2017 to raise funds and supply menstrual pads to some of the less advantaged school girls in Uganda. People all over Uganda and beyond were able to collectively contribute over USD 5,000. As a result, in various corners of Uganda, a disadvantaged girl sat smiling, holding a necessity that before was only a dream. All this was possible because of the media platforms used to reach a diversity of audiences who were able and willing to support to the cause and make contributions. Without this conduit of mass media, many willing contributors would have remained ignorant of the ongoing campaign and this would have led to fewer contributions being made.



Facilitation of activism

The above roles all boil down to the fact that mass media is a major facilitator of activism. With mass media, greater numbers come on board. Mass media also helps to influence public opinion on certain topics and, in addition, is used to reach and continuously engage the targeted audiences.

Phyllis, who works in one of the media houses in Uganda, shares how the media provides a space for debate “given the political tantrums on personal views, ranting on social media platforms under a pseudonym makes it easy to raise my opinion without the fear of being tortured. When you hit the nail hard, they start to, for example, re-tweet, share, and comment. In that way, we all get to spread, promote or even solve various issues.”



Hilda Flavia Nakabuye

Another interesting aspect is how the public has lately taken to giving their feedback on different products or services on social media platforms. Most companies are now keen to iron out any disgruntlement shared by their clients on their Twitter pages or other platforms because they know the impact that negative comments may have on the market for their products or services.

On another hand, mass media can harm activism. We have seen some campaigns and protests which have disrupted peace in various environments. Sometimes people hear about campaigns and join them without knowing the desired goal of the activists and may end up engaging in purposeless activities, including violent ones. Violent protests may sometimes be caused by the protestors either consciously or ignorantly. In other instances, the violence may be due to police shootings or beatings in a bid to curb violent protests.

Another example of how mass media can negatively impact activism is when wrong information circulates or when an individual or institution is defamed and the defamation spreads like a wildfire. This could affect the desired change by turning the targeted audience against the cause.

It is therefore a shame that something meant to support activism may turn out negatively when wrongly used. The onus is therefore upon us to use mass media rightfully so that we make a positive impact or cause the desired change and reach the masses and the targeted audiences as we work

towards creating a better society and world through activism.

The role and impact of mass media in activism are crystal clear. Activism involves people who engage in different actions for the desired result and engaging the people who undertake the action, or ensuring that the message reaches the targeted audience. All these depend on mass media. Not everyone can be a lead activist. However, every lead activist needs a mass of people to share their vision with and to join hands and walk the needed journey until the desired change is achieved. Without mass media, it would be next to impossible to reach this mass of people with a shared vision or the people who are to implement the desired change. It is therefore right to say that the role and impact of mass media in activism is vast and endless.

REDEFINING YOUTH ACTIVISM; THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN UGANDA

By Jenipher Asimwe

Since the dawn of civilisation, young people have been the driving force behind social change. Today, youth activism is still an important part of advancing social values like democracy and gender equality. Young people have increasingly turned to digital media to change the world in ways never before possible. In Uganda, youth activism takes many forms, from expressing opinions in schools and the community to voting and protesting. In many countries, youth activism is also expressed through protests, demonstrations and marches.

Over the past few years, there has been a dramatic rise in youth activism in Uganda. One of the most visible manifestations of this new activism is the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The use of digital media has provided youth activists in Uganda with the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences with a wider audience, which has, in turn, increased their capacity to influence policy and generate change.

In Uganda, civic engagements have been largely dependent on traditional forms of communication but young people turned to the internet and social media as a means of expressing themselves and making their voices heard and advocating for and improving the lives of others. I have spoken with young people, including youth activists, who have utilised



digital media in activism and in civic spaces across Uganda to advocate for social issues and I have shared some of their views.

One young activist, who uses the pseudonym Lola, is using digital media to create platforms for young people in Uganda to organise, share ideas and learn from one another. Lola's platform, called Youth-Unite Uganda, enables young people to organise in groups, share ideas and experiences, and learn from one another about creating positive social change in communities through leadership and gender equality, Lola shares her views:

“

“As young people, we often find ourselves having to fit into a mould of what an “activist”. We are told that we need to become experts on a myriad of issues and are expected to mobilise our peers to take action. The problem is that many of us don't feel equipped to do so. We don't feel that we have the time or the platform to make a difference in the world,” says Lola

”



The world is a very different place than it was twenty years ago. The pace of change has been exponential, and today's youth are better educated, more mobile and better connected than any generation before them.

It is no secret that youth activism is an important part of our democracy. It is the way that young people express and defend their beliefs, and it helps shape the country's future.

A few days after Uganda's presidential elections in January 2021, all social media channels were blocked by the government. The total internet shutdown lasted four days, and even after it was lifted social media networks remained largely inaccessible without circumvention tools, until almost a month later. Information blackouts through shutdowns and restrictions are not

the only tactic for closing civic space nor is it unique to Uganda. It was not the first time people in Uganda experienced information blackouts. The country's 2016 general election was also tainted by social media restrictions.

From the 2016 experience, Ugandans, especially the youth, became more creative in gaining access to information in the civic space by creating social media platforms that engage and inform Ugandans.

It was out of such inadequacies that Civic Space TV, which is a strictly virtual channel, was created in Uganda. Civic Space TV is a platform that shares information on social, economic and political issues in Uganda. This has enabled young people to express their views and

raise awareness on political issues. It has also given them a platform to express their views and defend their beliefs. This has helped to shape how young people perceive the country's democratic process.

Civic Space TV also promotes meaningful participation of women and girls in leadership in their communities through their programme called Women at the Frontline by empowering them with information and a platform to speak out.

Fancy Laker, a lecturer and also a gender advocate who hosts one of the programmes on Civic TV called Inter-University Debates where university students discuss issues of gender equality, says the spread of digital media has empowered the youth to share their opinions and beliefs in new ways.



“I have witnessed transformation first-hand in Uganda, where I have worked with young people to use digital media to share information about gender equality. I have seen the impact that this has had on my university students, and as a gender activist, I have been inspired by how young people are using digital media to make a difference in Uganda,” reveals Fancy Laker.

These make it clear that there's a need to better understand the impact of evolving digital technologies on civic space, especially given how it has been completely reconfigured by the growth of the digital public sphere. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube have been used to raise awareness about political issues. They have also given young people a platform to express their views and defend their philosophies.

According to Dr Sabiti Makara, a political science lecturer at Makerere University, digital media has transformed the civic space in Uganda and the way people consume political news and information. When President Yoweri Museveni first acceded to power in 1986, the state-run media played a crucial role in keeping his government in power. Even when the president was in power, the state media was so widely viewed as propaganda that many Ugandans became desensitised to its sensationalised reporting and messaging. For years, the state-owned media served as the primary source of information for the country's citizens. Most people relied on radio and television stations for their daily news.

“In Uganda, digital media have transformed the civic space. New platforms have allowed citizens to share opinions and news about politics and public affairs with ease. The increased access to digital media has also opened up a space for the public to engage with their government and has democratised the space for news in the country. This has had a profound impact on the way people consume political news and has given a voice to a previously silenced group of citizens, the young,” asserts Dr Makara.

The digital era has changed the way people consume political news in Uganda. No longer do people gather in large venues to hear news from the government or the

opposition politicians. They now consume news from social media platforms and digital devices, which gives them a direct experience of the issues that matter to them most. This has transformed the way people engage with politics, creating a space where people from all walks of life can share ideas and information, and have a platform to express themselves and be heard, no matter their background or position.

The past two decades have seen an explosion of digital media across Africa. But while the internet has connected millions of people to global news and entertainment, it has had little impact on the way people get information about their governments and society. That changed when people in Uganda began using digital platforms like Twitter and Facebook to challenge the government and spark protests in 2017. The demonstrations, which were organised using digital platforms, were the largest and most sustained protests in the country since the African nation's independence in 1961.

Uganda has never been a digital society. The internet was inaccessible to most people until recently. But as the country has grown more connected, digital media has transformed the way people consume political news and how they engage with their government. The introduction of Facebook and Twitter has brought millions of Ugandans into the global conversation about their country and has played a role in some of the country's most significant political moments.

For example, the recent Uganda elections affirm, that digital technologies are not going anywhere. Global challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic, which came with restrictions on movement, saw a steep rise in reliance on digital media to access timely information, and this goes to prove that digital media usage is only growing in Uganda and it will continue to impact activism and the civic space positively.

POSITIONING FEMINIST ORGANISING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN ACTIVISM

By Brian Mutebi



Development practitioners pegged their hopes for a sustainable world on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in September 2015 – replacing the Millennium Development Goals since the turn of the 21st century – the SDGs – 17 in total – are ambitious development goals aimed to achieve three broad objectives: end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and reverse climate change. The Goals stand on five pillars: people, prosperity, planet, peace, and partnership.

Activism as a medium of social transformation

To realise a sustainable world, people must organise, demand accountability and drive the change they crave. One way people take charge of their destiny is through activism. Activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, direct or intervene in social, political, economic or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society for the perceived greater good. But in this noble idea, the cause for gender equality is often overlooked.

In a journal article, “Why gender matters in activism: feminism and social justice movements”, Bhattacharjya et al. argue that social justice movements can generate deep and lasting changes that policy change and development interventions alone cannot achieve. However, in many cases, women’s rights and gender justice remain low on the lists of priorities of movements, even when women are active members.

Women and media activism

One medium through which activists relay messages to their audiences is the media. Historically, however, the media seem to have excluded women and women’s causes. Writing on the history of women and the media

in 1978, Cynthia Fuchs Epstein stated that male-run newspapers and magazines largely ignored women activists. The news outlets that covered women frequently trivialised their goals. Women who departed from the social norms of passivity and deference to male authority, and the traditional roles of wife and mother, risked being characterised as inappropriate, insane or misfits. If they demanded equality with men, the media depicted them either as curiosities, loud, militant or aggressive.

However, in keeping true to the values of activism – resilience and organisation – women brought a gender analysis of the mass media to the global stage in the 1970s when a multipart critique was first presented at the 1975 Mexico Conference. Mexico in 1975 opened the UN Decade for Women. In 1990, one writer, Zinsser, reflected on the decade as a series of changes which altered how people viewed women’s experience, defined and valued women’s accomplishments, and ultimately how women would live their lives.

“By little gestures that led from one activity to another, by pages of reports, by transcripts of meetings, by carefully planned demonstrations and petitions, by the sheer weight of concern and conviction, the world’s women ceased to be the ‘invisible majority’ and gained a hearing for their grievances. Once heard, they worked for remedies: representation in government, changes in national laws and practice, a voice in international organisations, a Declaration of Rights, and finally, an international Covenant to protect those rights.” This is the historical 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Importance of feminist organising and gender equality in activism

In their ground breaking study of 70 countries over 40 years, Weldon and Htun found that the presence of a strong, autonomous women’s

movement was the most important and consistent factor mobilising progressive change and influencing government responses to violence against women. Responses included, for example, critical law reform or funding for refugees, shelters and rape crisis centres, or training for workers such as the police. The presence of such a movement made more of a difference than the number of women legislators, left-wing parties, or national wealth.

The study also established that strong local feminist movements bring home the value of international and regional treaties. That is, they use these treaties as levers to influence policy-making, and to call for and mobilise compliance with goals for equality in their national and local context.

On the other hand, it was found that where a strong, autonomous feminist movement was absent, ratification of the CEDAW harmed the adoption of the violence against women policy. So, while the presence of a strong autonomous women’s movement was key to whether international and regional treaties have an impact, the absence of such a movement not only stalls impact (and transformative change) but also has the potential to reinforce (or even reproduce) inequality and undermine women’s social, economic and political rights.

Weldon and Htun’s research also emphasised the importance of feminist organising in creating substantive agendas in which structural inequality and the normalisation of violence can be challenged and women’s rights can exist. For example, when women organise, they can understand and prioritise gender equality issues and their lived experiences, needs and contributions and they can do this without being subsumed within broader priorities that are not focused specifically on their goal of equality, which would otherwise be perceived as being important “only” to women and sidelined (or often excluded) in existing priorities.

Gender and intersectionalities

Australian women's rights activist Megan Morris says that women with intersecting forms of marginalisation and discrimination have overlapping but different experiences, needs and contributions. Morris writes, "Because these groups of women often face exclusion, their intersectionalities can be subsumed within mainstream women organisations. For example, women with disabilities often face violence in different ways and different contexts than women without a disability. As such, efforts to address the violence women with disabilities experience need to prioritise the specific (and different) types of violence they face, in the context or setting where this violence occurs, and in a way that is effective for women with disabilities; efforts taken to tackle violence for women without disabilities may not adequately or effectively do this." As such, efforts must be made to support women from and of diverse backgrounds to organise and form their nuanced issues.

Men in gender equality activism

The involvement of men in feminist organising and gender equality activism is increasingly receiving universal appreciation. The idea that men are aggressors and therefore should be side-lined in gender equality activism and the advancement of women's rights is viewed as counterproductive. Rather, having men as partners in gender equality activism is not only another progressive approach to achieving gender equality but one of serving humanity. At the Generation Equality Forum in Paris in July 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron famously stated: "I am a feminist because feminism is humanism in defending the dignity of human beings."



Tonny Muzira, team leader at Foundation for Men Engagement Uganda (FOME), says that increasingly more men and boys are championing the cause of gender equality and women's rights. We will thus witness less violence against women, but more peace-building efforts, and peaceful co-existence of men and women, he says.

FOME is a Ugandan NGO working with men and boys to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls. Muzira is a proud feminist whose Twitter name is "The Future is Female." The future and hopes for a sustainable world might as well not just be pegged on the SDGs but also strong feminist organising and gender equality activism.

YOUTH ACTIVISM AS A TOOL TO FIGHT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

By Kisolo Elizabeth Nagudi

The youth have been at the core of change in our communities in different areas. Africa is experiencing a disruption in its political, entertainment, innovation and invention and agricultural spheres, among other fields, because of the youth unrest and uprisings. Uganda is one of the countries with the largest youth populations, with more than 75 per cent under 30 years of age (Among & Muntemi, 2019). The youths' engagement in different spheres is always bound to impact whether being an eye-opener or a force towards change.

Youth are considered to be people in transition from childhood to adulthood. UNESCO goes ahead to place youth in the age bracket of 15 to 24 ("By youth, with youth, for youth", 2022). However, this is a flexible age range as there is a firm conviction that youth are defined by their mental awakening for self-awareness and knowledge attainment. The vigour that youth has is unmatched by what is expected of them, given that they are dreamers and have lots of imagination. On these grounds, youth participation or engagement in any given activity is characterised by vigour, and therein lies a great force to have an impact.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as detrimental behaviour

towards an individual based on their gender, that is likely to cause significant physical or psychological torture arising from gender inequalities ("Gender-based violence", n.d.). It is important to note that due to the high prevalence of GBV towards women, it can also be referred to as violence against women and girls (VAWG). This is because GBV disproportionately affects women and girls. There are a couple of forces that continue to foster GBV in our communities, and they include:

Harmful gender norms

In many societies, traditional norms dictate the vulnerability of women and create a subordinate sense of fear toward men in them (Nakisanze & Agiresaasi, 2019). A community is likely to glorify a man's ill manners towards a woman, given the superiority complex among men in society and other norms that permit such behaviour.

Poverty

Poverty aggravates GBV as it places vulnerable groups in positions that are prone to acts of GBV. A poor homestead is less likely to have its children educated, exposing them to acts of GBV, given their ignorance about their rights (Thelwell, 2021).

Conflict

Uganda is estimated to host more than 1.4 million refugees, with women and children constituting an estimated 81 per cent of this group (2020). This indicates the high GBV incidence that is likely to take place or takes place in refugee camps among women and children.

Uganda registered an increase in GBV over the past years, which saw a significant increase in 2020–2021 following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic that led to the country's lockdown. Six months into the lockdown in 2020, rape cases had increased by 24 per cent, while sexual violence had increased by 30 per cent (Susman, 2021). The longer the time spent in lockdown, the more the statistics increased. This can be attributed to the ready availability of girls and women at home, given the closure of institutions like schools, places of work and places of worship that would have been their haven. The perpetrators similarly had ample time to be home or within the community since they were not occupied.

The categorisation of GBV is broad as there are many forms which are physical and non-physical (verbal). Physical forms of GBV include female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual harassment, sexual violence such as rape, and forced abortion,



among others. Non-physical GBV can include stalking, verbal abuse and psychological torture (“Types of gender-based violence”, n.d.).

Barely two weeks, after the story about the harassment Alexandros Marinos of the National Unity Party (NUP) had experienced at the hands of the Uganda People’s Defence Forces (“Marinos archives – Independent Uganda”, 2022) rocked media houses, Sheeba Karungi, a renowned secular music artiste, came out to speak about the sexual harassment she had recently experienced from a top government official guarded by the Special Forces Command (Kalangi, 2022). All parties accused denied having been perpetrators of the GBV crimes they were alleged to have committed. However, this showed the power of youth using social media and their platforms to

speak up against acts of GBV. The two stories were met with mixed reactions, but it’s plausible that these actions by the victims caused alarm and authorities had to be involved. Nevertheless, the victims’ ability to speak up against their perpetrators sends a message of empowerment to the youth to speak up against acts of GBV.

The youth have harnessed the power of social media to speak up against acts of GBV. There are a lot of GBV activism social media spaces. Over the years, the youth have built momentum in addressing GBV issues using social media (Gordon, 2022), for example, the MeToo Movement, which dates back to 2006. The movement, started by a youth who had experienced sexual harassment, soon grew to become a hashtag that has been used repeatedly by different individuals to condemn

acts of GBV, whether at home, in the community, or workspaces. At one point, Twitter was be-sieged by a story about a sexual harassment survivor who fell victim while on a birthday tour in Zanzibar (Nseyen, 2022). Following the appearance of her story about the ordeal on Twitter, the hotel’s ratings went down from 4.5 to 1.4 in just a few hours. The Zanzibar Commission for Tourism immediately called for an investigation into the allegation. More women worldwide opened up about their GBV experiences at different hotels. Social media is a worldwide connection where a call to action or any informative piece of information never goes unnoticed. The youth have taken advantage of this global connection to amplify their voices against GBV.

Activities by organisations that call for youth action towards combating GBV are on the rise. This indicates a realisation of how vocal and transformative the youth can be. Organisations such as ActionAid have been at the forefront of using male champions in the fight against GBV. These male champions have an ample number of youth whose role is to engage with the community, especially fellow men, and play a vital role in changing attitudes. These youthful champions are tasked with counselling survivors, community case mediation, authority involvement, and community sensitization (“The role of male champions in ending gender-based violence within communities”, 2020). ACFODE has also been instrumental in the fight against GBV through the use of youth in communities. This can be seen in the success stories that the organisation prides itself in following the model couple approach (“Prevention of sexual and gender-based violence”, ACFODE, n.d.) that challenges archaic social norms which seemingly give authority to one gender over the other in the communities. These organisational activities have placed power in the hands of the youth to speak up and act against GBV.



The youth have taken up the responsibility of educating people about and fighting against GBV, whether at an organised group level or individual level. While at the International Conference of Family Planning in 2013, Amanda Banura, founder, Uganda Youth Alliance realised that GBV as a form of sexual harassment was not unique to her but affected other groups of women worldwide as well. This was an eye-opener for the 27-year-old and led her to form the Uganda Youth Alliance upon returning to Uganda. The alliance focuses on harnessing the youth's potential to become change-makers in their communities, focusing on family planning and sexual and reproductive health rights (Jalan, 2017). It's important to note that a UNFPA report of 2021 indicated

that nearly all the 57 developing countries involved in the research indicated that only 55 per cent of women were empowered to make decisions over health care and contraception, and enjoyed the ability to say yes or no to sex, only 71 per cent of the countries had access to maternal care, while only 56 per cent of the countries had laws and policies that supported sexual education. The statistics indicate the gap in fighting GBV as few women are empowered as decision-makers. Some communities still live under unfair discriminatory laws such as the "marry-your-rapist" law, which protects the men who carry out rape (Wright & Chaoul, 2022).

The entertainment industry has been an excellent avenue for the youth to speak up against acts of GBV.

Celebrities and individuals with platforms have taken up the fight against GBV through edutainment such as artworks, writeups/blogs and movies, and even through the formation of organisations. Edwin Katumba, commonly referred to as MC Kats, is a TV personality who is vocal about HIV/AIDS. He has been at the forefront of educating the masses about HIV/AIDS following the publicising of his status in 2019. He has been recognised as a champion in the fight against HIV/AIDS through his initiative in working with organisations like Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS (UGANET), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and Open



Society Initiative for Eastern Africa (OSIEA) (Ssemwanga, 2021). Other individuals in the music and art industry who have used their platforms to speak up against GBV include Eleanor Nabwiso. Her movie, “Bed of Thorns”, follows the story of a newlywed whose husband is violent (Mogoatlhe, 2019). These and many more celebrities in the entertainment industry continue to challenge GBV through their work. This is a way of engaging the youth, given that the entertainment industry majorly survives on youth participation, hence creating awareness among youth and for the youth.

However, it’s absurd that we are part of a generation that still protects perpetrators and that has GBV apologists. The laws and policies that protect women or any other victim of GBV are barely implemented, making the justice system fail the youths’ effort against acts of GBV. The legal

system has been singled out for its delayed dispensing of justice, which is itself full of loopholes, for its biased police or law enforcers, its hegemonic masculinity, and for having a stereotype-filled judicial system (“Blog: Justice system should not fail in protecting victims of gender-based violence”, 2020). This has been one of the significant setbacks in the fight against GBV, as the victims find it useless to report their abusers and remain at risk of re-victimisation. Because of tradition, some societies, such as Karamoja, still find acts of GBV normal. In Karamoja, for instance, the instances of GBV remain widespread since, culturally, it’s acceptable to inflict physical pain on girls and women. This amounts to a systemic failure to protect the vulnerable in the community as they feel inferior and have no voice to speak up against these acts. There is a steady increase in the militarisation of GBV acts, which is another reason behind the rise of

GBV perpetrators and the denial of justice to the victims. The fight against GBV by the youth is alive, and their interventions continue to be eye-openers to the authorities, informative platforms to the masses, and a bulwark of justice for the victims.

Nevertheless, the fight against all forms of GBV has gained momentum. With the great amount of support, it enjoys from organisations and at the individual level, the fight against GBV is going in the right direction.

JF Kennedy, the former President of the United States, once said, “All this will not be accomplished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be finished in the first 1000 days... not even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.” So the fight against GBV through youth activism and other channels continue to forge ahead.



KALUNGU DISTRICT ADVOCATING FOR AN END TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN THROUGH GENDER-EQUALITY ACTIVISM

By Zaurah Karungi

Hard labour, forced marriages, What's violence against women and children

The UN Declaration on Violence against Women, adopted in 1993, defines violence against women as encompassing “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations

of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”.

As Per the Uganda Children (Amendment) Act: “ Violence’ means any form of physical, emotional or mental injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation, including sexual abuse, intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against an individual which may result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation.”

Violence against women and children is often taken lightly but has a major negative impact on their lives. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in 2017 named “Uganda Violence Against Children Survey” indicates that children who went through any form of violence create a cycle of violence, where childhood survivors of violence are more likely to mature into adult perpetrators of violence. It also noted that children who suffer violence are sometimes less able to find employment, due to issues



such as stigmatization or injury. In addition to the effect on the individual, this also leads to a loss of productivity for Ugandan society as a whole. Worse, violation of women and children leads to death, the Uganda Police crime report 2020 indicates that 169 female adults and 57 children were killed due to GBV.

Article 3 of the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women shows that women are entitled to the equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fun. These rights include; the right to life, the right to equality, the right to liberty and security of person, the right to equal protection under the law, the right to be free from all forms of discrimination, the right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health, the right to just and favourable conditions of work, the right not to be subjected to torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995 (Constitution) recognizes the rights of the child

and specifically provides for children's right to health, right to education, and right to protection from exploitation. Yet violation of women's and children's rights remains a major concern in Uganda. However, through collective effort, this vice can be put to an end.

The Case of Kalungu District

Hard labour, forced marriages, human trafficking, harmful traditional practices (like female genital mutilation), cyberbullying, and sexual, psychological, physical and emotional violence are the common types of violence against women and children in Uganda today.

Despite the solid Uganda government laws and policies meant to protect victims/survivors as well as punish perpetrators, violence against women and children is continues to rise.

According to the Uganda Police Force's annual crime report 2020,

17,664 cases of domestic violence were reported to the police compared to 13,693 that had been reported in 2019 translating a 29 per cent increase. And of the 18,872 people who were victims of domestic violence, 3,408 were male adults and 13,145 were female adults; and 1,133 were male juveniles while 1,186 were female juveniles.

The police and the Ministry of Health – the two leading public institutions involved in GBV response – spend an estimated UGX 37.7 billion (about \$10.4 million) annually dealing with GBV.

As the Government of Uganda continues to strengthen laws to end violence against women and children, different implementing partners in Kalungu district have joined forces to eradicate this vice by promoting gender equality.

These include CSOs, police officers, community members and religious, cultural and local leaders.

Gender equality activism is the key approach the different stakeholders

are using to fight violence against women and children in Kalungu district. The stakeholders believe that when women and children, who constitute the bulk of the population, are empowered and protected right from the grassroots, there will be economic, social and political development in the district and the country at large.

Andrew Kyomugoma, the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, Lwabenge People Living with HIV, Kalungu district notes that around 2019/2020 during Covid 19 lockdown, cases of violence against women and girls were on the rise in Kalungu district.

“There were many cases of early pregnancies and marriages. Defilement, incest and rape were also rampant cases as children were left home since schools were locked,” Kyomugoma says, adding that HIV cases were also on the increase.

He notes that due to poverty, many parents were willing to marry off their daughters in exchange for money and gifts.

Since both men and women were home, GBV was on the rise as couples fought over finances and children, among other things.

Kyomugoma adds that this was mainly because little to no advocacy existed for women’s and children’s rights. The few CSOs that did the advocacy had limited knowledge of how to address the issues.

Sadly, victims of violence didn’t get justice as local leaders connived with victims’ families and resolved serious offences through reaching a mutual understanding. This exacerbated violence against women and children as the perpetrators weren’t punished.

Furthermore, many women and children didn’t know their rights were being violated; in fact, most of them didn’t even know what their rights were. This saw many serious offences go unreported.

ACFODE, together with other implementing partners, went to the Kalungu district, gathered together leaders, police officers, CSOs, religious leaders and community members, and trained them on gender equality activism. Together, they laid strategies for ending violence against women and children in the district.

Brian Kasumba, the Probation Officer of Kalungu district, notes that this gave them more knowledge of how to end violence

against women and children. They established systems to receive information on GBV right from the village level and on time. Among those identified to take on this responsibility were community members, CSO and CBOs in the district.

Kasumba says that CSOs like Lwabenge People Living with HIV have been instrumental in referring these cases to the police.

Kyomugoma adds that their parish workers have been trained and placed at health centres to receive and refer these cases to the people responsible. They also work with lawyers to defend victims and survivors.

Many perpetrators have been punished, which has served as a lesson to other community members. This has resulted in a big reduction in the incidence of violence against women and children.

“In 2020, we used to receive over 70 cases on the violence of women and children rights per month. Currently, we receive 32 or fewer. This has been a very big improvement,” Kyomugoma says.

Kasumba says that through community training on women’s and



children's rights, people know when their rights are being violated and where or to whom to report to.

“Women and children were considered inferior in society. This fuelled violence and torture against them as they were defenceless. We have trained them to defend themselves when their rights are being violated. We have also encouraged them to come to us whenever their rights are violated. This has helped in reducing violation or torture cases in Kalungu district, especially at the household level,” Kasumba says.

Cultural and religious leaders in Kalungu district are also at the forefront of promoting gender equality and the rights of women and children. Abdru Kavuma, a religious leader, notes that since they are the most respected in the community, their involvement in reducing violence against women and girls has been extremely fruitful.

These leaders have carried out door-to-door outreach to advocate for peace in families, condemn violence against women and children and counsel depressed victims/survivors.

“We also package Sunday or Friday sermons with messages that discourage these acts. We deliver messages with biblical evidence to show people that God dislikes violent acts,” Kavuma says.

He adds that they also condemn acts of violence against women and children at other functions like weddings, graduation parties, and burials among others.

Grace Nakiyimba says training in economic empowerment equipped locals with financial literacy and led to stability, hence reducing GBV. She notes that when schools reopened in 2021, many children continued to stay home owing to financial constraints in families. This led to the resurgence of cases of GBV and children-related violations like hard labour and sexual harassment.

“Luckily, many people were given skills in tailoring, baking, art and craft, among others, by various implementing partners. Some were given start-up capital to start or boost their businesses, which saw many raise capital to take their children to school. In turn, the violence against children's rights has again gone down,” Nakiyimba says.

She adds that she has learned to handle a business and grow her capital. The people have also been empowered to form Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) so that they can borrow and grow their businesses as well as save what they earn.

Nakiyimba says this has seen many women become financially independent, hence relying less on men. This has solved the issue of GBV cases resulting from poverty as both men and women work and earn.

Gender-equality activism has also broadened women's knowledge of their capabilities. They have learnt that they can do what a man can do, and girls have learnt that they can do anything they set their minds to.

Men respect and support their wives in developing skills and in doing work, which wasn't the case before. There is peace in various homes and, according to Kasumba, crimes related to the violation of women's and children's rights have tremendously reduced.

Challenges and Recommendations

Kavuma says that since the economy has yet to pick up, some children haven't reported back to school. This has led to idleness at home, which has seen cases of violation of children's rights rise. He believes that economic empowerment at the household level will see parents earn and hence be able to send their children to school.

Kasumba says that there should be a call centre for Kalungu district

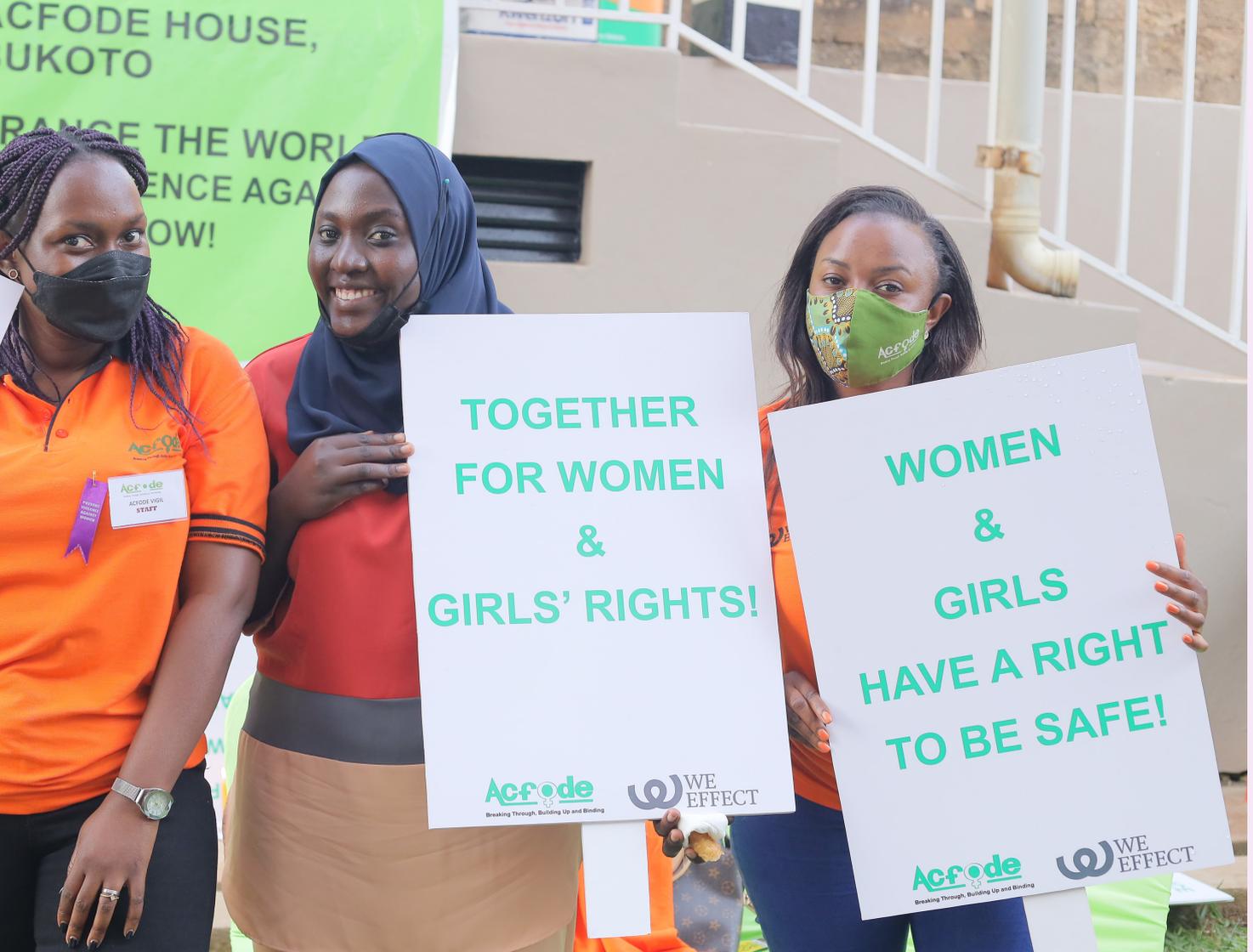


where cases of violation of women's and children's rights and GVB, in general, can be reported.

“People currently use the 116 call line which is at the head office Kampala. These are later referred to us, which is a longer process. Having our call centre will help people reach us easily and we will also be able to intervene in time,” Kasumba says.

He adds that there should be system strengthening right from the village level to the district.

He says some places like Lwabenge have 63 villages, and that these can't be covered by one or two individuals on foot. He says that the government, together with the different stakeholders, should put in place measures to ensure easy movement of leaders and volunteers to these places. This could be through the provision of bicycles or motorcycles.



He adds that interventions like the training of VHTs and local leaders to refer violation cases will be helpful.

Kasumba says that they have managed to fight violence against women and children despite the few cases that still come in.

He notes that together with the different stakeholders, they are determined to end violence against women and children in Kalungu district.

What the government and other stakeholders should do to eliminate violence against women and children in Uganda

Margaret Tumusiime, a counselling psychologist, notes that a safe environment should be provided for women and children. Areas with widespread violations of children's and women's rights should be identified and sensitised.

“Many people violate these rights out of ignorance. A big number of men I have interacted with say it's okay to discipline or beat a woman. Constant sensitisation can change these people for the better,” she says.

Patricia Ajok, an activist, notes that the government should strengthen and enforce laws against women's and children's rights violations, especially regarding sexual abuse and the exploitation of women and children.

Gender equality should be highly encouraged. Tumusiime says women should be empowered to take up leadership positions and work and should be encouraged to exploit their potential. With this, they will be able to defend themselves and others.

Ajok adds that the government should improve child protection structures like schools, hospitals and roads. This will guarantee the child's safety in society.

“Children should also be taught their rights and empowered to speak up. This will enable them to defend themselves or report to people responsible in case their rights are violated,” Ajok says.

Tumusiime also notes that there should be economic empowerment to eradicate poverty.

“Poverty is one of the major causes of GBV. If both women and men are empowered financially, these cases will reduce. Government should train women and men in skills and give them financial literacy,” she says.



What are some of the benefits of activism on gender-based violence (GBV)?

By Eddie Ssemakula

Peace Kadondi – Partner, Virindu Group

I am partly a product of gender activism. My grandfather, who was a teacher at the time when it was normal to educate your sons and marry off daughters, chose to educate his girls as well. When my mother had my siblings and me, there wasn't a question in her mind about which of her children she needed to educate. She took us to the best schools in the country at the time. It was about opportunities for her now. Not a battle of the sexes for learning, I am persuaded that communities are built and changed through individuals. But to sustain change, generations of families need to be moving in the same direction and building on the wins of the generations before.

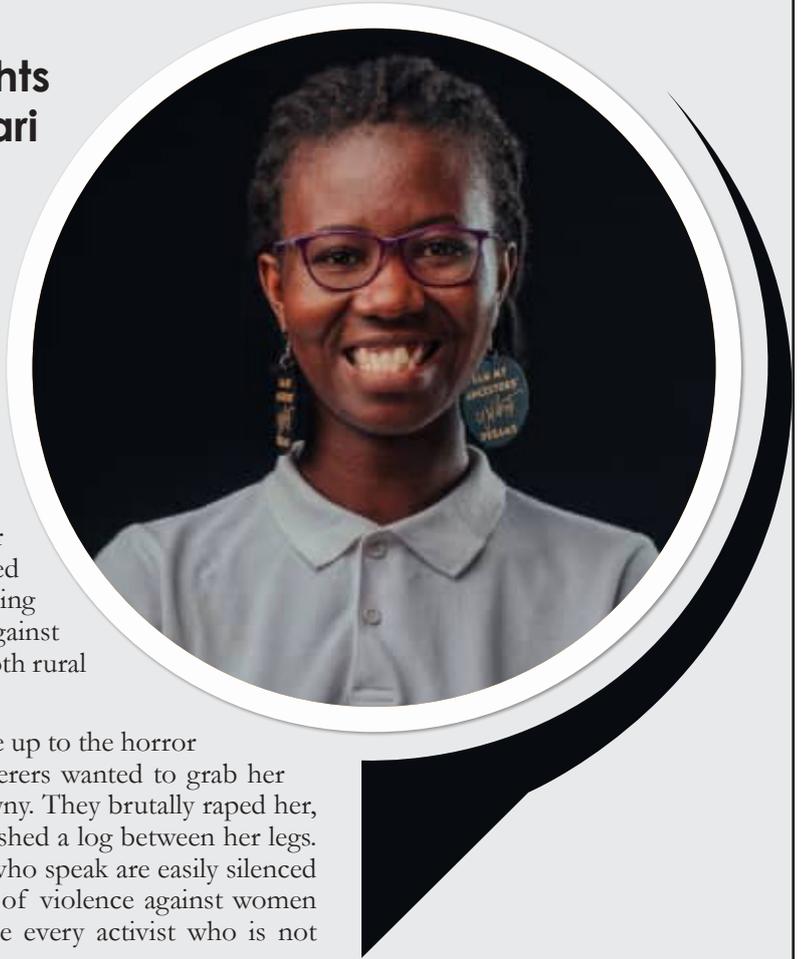


Racheal Mutesi Kwetolaku – Christian Apologist, Girls’ Rights Activist and Founder of Ufahari Girls Ministries

Gender activists have championed the campaign to keep girls in schools. This has taken various shapes like offering scholarships for girls to go to school, providing sanitary towels, preaching against menstrual stigma, and other cultural practices that keep girls down.

However, the greater impact of gender activism has been to point out the prevailing evils that are still committed against girls and women. Recently, gender activism is frowned upon – you can be easily labelled as a ‘man-hater’ and hence be dismissed without being given an audience. We need to remember that evils against women are still prevalent in many communities in both rural and urban communities.

This year, on the morning of Mother’s Day, we woke up to the horror of my great aunt’s brutal death. Though her murderers wanted to grab her land, how she was murdered only pointed to misogyny. They brutally raped her, cut her groin, dragged her to the front door and pushed a log between her legs. The pandemic exposed this violence and yet those who speak are easily silenced as ‘man-haters’. We need to speak till the problem of violence against women and children is dealt with. For this reason, I salute every activist who is not intimidated to speak up for the weak and vulnerable.



Penelope Sanyu – Chief Steward, Femme Forte Ug/Qweshunga

Sisterhood has been a huge benefit! That sisterhood that is ever-present in times of need and celebration. Gender activism has created bonds and sisterhoods around me that keep growing stronger with every strand, every individual or collective story, and every win or loss experienced.



Ruth Kendegye Ndyabahika – Child Psychologist, Founder Grace Villa Home & Sanctuary for At-Risk Girls



Through time and space, women have been important advocates for social justice. Yet even as I write this today, there is no country in the world where women can say that they have achieved gender equality. And where there is gender inequality, there are – subsequently – human rights violations. In our corner of the world, the situation of orphans and vulnerable girls is more often than not a helpless one – from abject poverty deprived of the necessities of life like dignified access to food, acceptable living conditions, social protection, education, and health care. And we hold the unfortunate rank of one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancies in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the ninth hotspot of child marriages in the world. It was with these alarming facts before us that I started an organisation called Grace Villa nine years ago, in the hills of Kigezi, southwestern Uganda. Under our motto, “We Rise by Lifting Others”, we exist to provide a home and safe space for at-risk girls, build capacity and agency through education and skills training, encourage dialogue, and create awareness.

The children in our care are brought to us by police, probation officers, church leaders, local leaders, and concerned community members. Our main interventions are against deprivation of access to education, health care, and proper nutrition, child trafficking, early marriages, endemic violence against women and girls, and deprivation of inheritance or property.

But how do we shift norms around the value of girls and women in the community? Our nine years on the ground have taught us that there are no quick fixes. Though important, it is not enough to change laws or engage in high-level advocacy. There is great power in community engagement to harness and transform mindsets. And there is great importance in allowing sufficient time – multiyear, intensive change interventions with well-trained and supported teams, that purposefully engage both women and men. Activists must go on the ground and engage individuals, families and communities. Exposure to normative messages, teaching by example, positive role models and seeing actual results can guide individuals, families and communities to alter what they think, change their attitudes, and have a desire to shift the public images they present.

At Grace Villa, our impact is measured through our children’s success stories, and we are thrilled with each one. But this is just the beginning. We remain deeply aware of the responsibility that is ours as informed women and men to keep the fires of gender activism raging.

Annette Kandole – Board Chair, CITA Uganda



Benefits I have found in gender activism. Some people think gender activism is “for them”, i.e. the champions or elite women.

Until it gets closer to you or me, then we realise that it’s good to be informed of the reason for gender equality.

I have been engaged in raising awareness of gender transformation. The benefits begin from self-awareness and empowering others.

It’s been rewarding for me to support women and men in need of information. It’s been rewarding to hear the responses from gender-based violence survivors that their life changed after hearing, and practising the principles or simple actions that promote gender equity and equality.

I have influenced women and men to be fair. This year I talked with the students of Uganda Pentecostal University on International Women’s Day. After a deep reflection about social norms, and the impact of GBV, the girls and boys said, “We should be the change we need to see.”

Let us fight for a violence-free environment.

Faith Mulungi – Media Personality, Feminist and Digital Content Creator

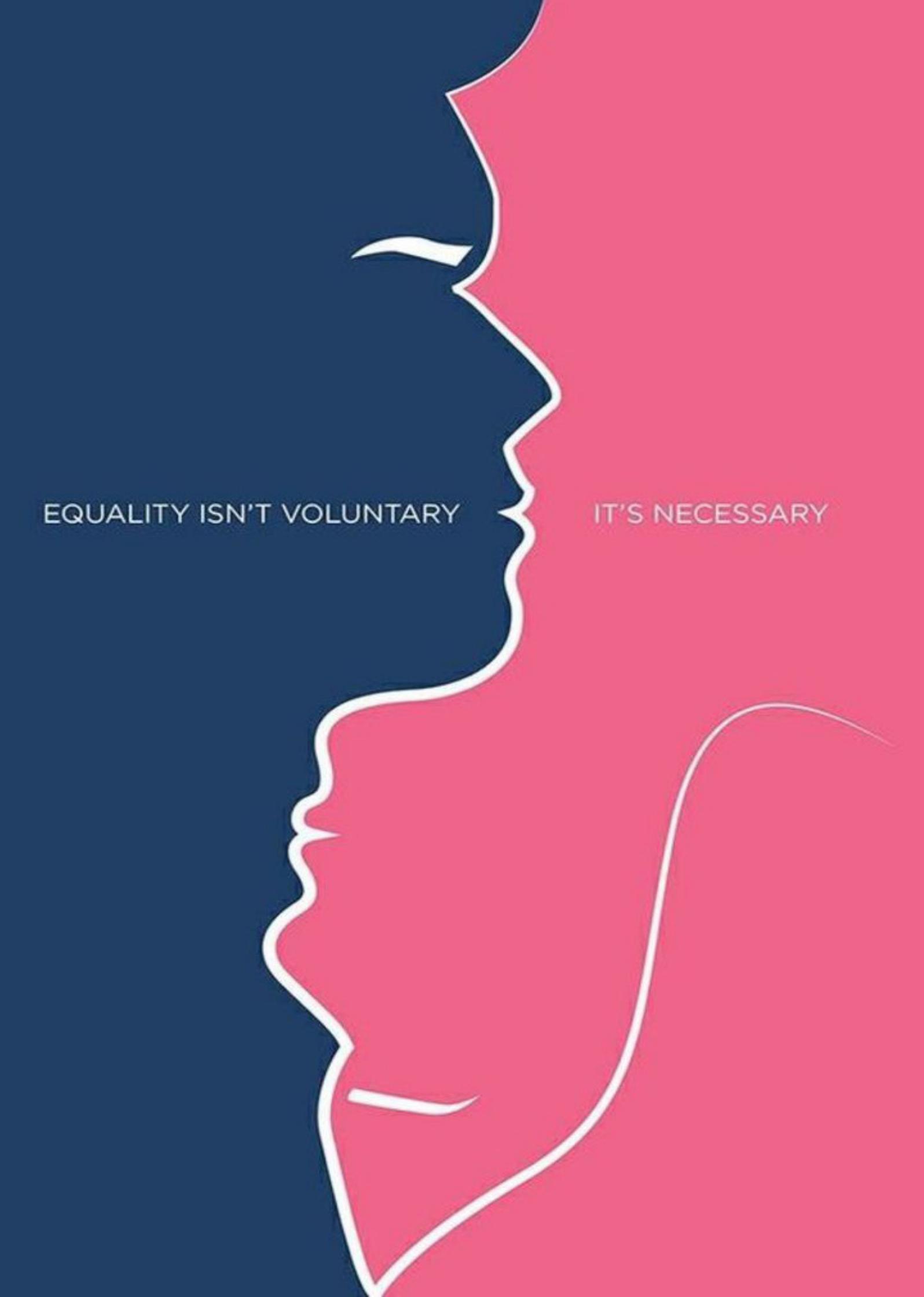
Activism for me is very thankless work, but what motivates me is that I am where I am because of women who have fought before me. I actually can’t even posture and say I have that many gains because these are deep-rooted systemic issues. I can only play my part.

This is why I avail my platforms and influence to help women whose cases I have learned to get the help that they need. I run an organisation called Amani mostly online and I help connect rape and sexual gender-based violence victims to bigger organisations that are best suited to help them. These are many. I would not want to frame them as personal wins.

But at the start of these lockdowns, I was able to join a campaign to help fundraise for a half-year-old who had been raped by their shamba boy. The family needed about 5,000 dollars to take her for reconstruction surgery. I helped use my Twitter following and a few personal connections and we were able to get a Ugandan doctor who willingly ensured she got operated on here due to the stringent travel restrictions at that time. She’s now fully recovered and lives in Luweero.

Activism for me is an on-going journey and the grounds to cover are vast, so I am not yet that satisfied to rejoice at the wins gained so far.





EQUALITY ISN'T VOLUNTARY

IT'S NECESSARY

What I want young women
and girls to know is:
You are powerful and
your voice matters.

—KAMALA HARRIS



RD

For More Information Contact

**The Executive Director
Action for Development - ACFODE House**

 Plot 623/624 Lutaya Drive Bukoto

 P.O.Box 16729 Kampala - Uganda

 +256 414 531 812, +256 393 114 890

 info@acfode.org

 <https://acfode.or.ug/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/acfode>

 @acfode

"This publication has been published with the support of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung - KAS. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung"