HER VOICE

NEWSLETTER

UGANDA WOMEN'S NETWORK

EDITION # 3-25 MARCH 2025

Transforming unequal gender relations through collective visioning and action

By; Roland Musasizi

Special Edition #3-25: March 2025

In this special edition (#3-25), we are proud to share key highlights from the impactful work carried out in March 2025 in the pursuit of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE). We extend our sincere appreciation to all our partners and supporters. Your unwavering commitment continues to inspire progress and fuel transformative change, even amidst complex challenges.

A major milestone during the month was the hosting of a high-level CSW69 Side Event titled "UNSCR 1325 in the Context of Beijing+30: Reflections on Progress and Practice in Uganda." The event, held on 17th March 2025 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, was convened by UWONET in partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) of Uganda, the Government of Chad, and OXFAM in Africa. The session offered critical insights into the progress and practical implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Regionally, UWONET spearheaded several initiatives to promote GEWE, including the commemoration of International Women's Day in Kamuli, Namutumba districts and at national level. Additionally, advocacy campaigns and a Women Leaders' Summit were organized to amplify women's voices and leadership in local governance and community development.

Together, we continue to break barriers and shape a more just, inclusive, and equitable society for all.

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COMMEMORATION OF DISTRICT WOMEN'S DAY IN NAMUTUMBA AND KAMULI DISTRICTS

In celebration of Women's Day and Women's Month, Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) marked the District Women's Day on March 18, 2025, with a community dialogue held at Namutumba Health Centre III. The event, under the theme "Accelerate Action", brought together health workers, district stakeholders, and expecting mothers to advocate for improved women's health services and reproductive rights.

The dialogue emphasized the urgent need for accessible healthcare and called for efforts to empower mothers, particularly in addressing GBV and creating safer environments for women and children. The event saw participation from key figures, including the District Chairperson, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Principal Social Welfare Officer (PSWO), police representatives, cultural leaders, paralegals, survivors, and dedicated health workers.

Key Issues Raised by Women: During the event, women voiced concerns about delayed antenatal care, inadequate medication, and the neglect they often face from health workers. These pressing issues were addressed directly by health professionals and district officials, sparking a collaborative approach to finding sustainable solutions. The dialogue encouraged participants to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

In a heartfelt address, Enrolled Midwife Ms. Mutesi welcomed all attendees on behalf of the health facility. She expressed deep appreciation for the strong turnout of expecting mothers, emphasizing that all services provided at the health center were free of charge. Her passionate message reinforced the health center's commitment to prioritizing the well-being of the community and ensuring that mothers receive the care they deserve.

This event not only highlighted the importance of women's health but also reinforced the collective responsibility to create an environment where women can thrive and access the healthcare they need.

Some of the expectant mothers

In-charge maternity wing (Namugaya Esther) paused to ask the expecting mothers why they come for antenatal services and cautioned those who are not consistent in attending, emphasizing that these visits are crucial for the unborn baby's healthy development. She urged women to give their children a chance to live a healthy life through immunization, highlighting the protection against 13 immunizable diseases, and reminded them that the health center offers these services for free. Esther also acknowledged past issues with the attitude of some health workers toward expecting mothers but assured that improvements have been madepromising a better approach from the current maternity team and reinforced the importance of the professional code of conduct.

Phyllis Achwa, the **officer in charge of ART**, encouraged mothers to undergo HIV testing to determine their status. She emphasized that the virus can be transmitted in several ways, including from mother to child, through unprotected sex, and by sharing sharp objects.
She advised that in cases of suspected HIV exposure, it is critical to begin PrEP medication within 72 hours to help prevent infection. For breastfeeding mothers, she stressed the importance of consistently taking their antiretroviral (ARV) medication, noting that missing doses significantly increases the risk of transmitting the virus to their babies.

OC CFPU IP Sarah Bayiga urged mothers to speak out against domestic violence, emphasizing that silence can have harmful consequences that affect the well-being of the entire family. Addressing the issue of physical abuse, she called on men to speak out against violence toward pregnant women, highlighting the potential risks such abuse poses to unborn children.
She also reminded women of the importance of balancing professional responsibilities with their roles at home, noting that neglecting children and partners can result in poorly raised children and strained relationships, including unfaithful spouses.

The event was a significant milestone in advancing maternal health and strengthening partnerships between stakeholders, health workers, and expectant mothers in Namutumba. It not only provided a platform for sharing critical information and on-spot healthcare services but also amplified the voices of women, shedding light on persistent gaps in service delivery and awareness. Through collective engagement, meaningful insights were gathered that will inform future planning and interventions. While challenges such as inadequate health staffing and limited awareness remain, the commitments made especially by district leadership signal a promising step forward. With sustained collaboration, strategic planning, and community-driven advocacy, the journey toward improved maternal and child health outcomes in the region is well underway.

MENTORSHIP OF WOMEN FARMER GROUPS

UWONET is supporting women farmers in Lamwo and Nwoya districts through a mentorship program enhanced by the engagement of agricultural extension workers. These experts are guiding the farmers in selecting suitable enterprises for the March–June 2025 planting season, while also providing practical, hands-on training in agronomic practices throughout the production cycle.

This collaboration aims to build the capacity of women farmers by equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to increase yields, shift from subsistence to commercial agriculture, and adopt sustainable practices that address challenges like climate change and market volatility.

In **Lamwo District's Palong Sub-county**, soybean was selected as the priority crop for the upcoming season. The extension worker recommended the MAKSOY3N variety, known for its resistance to pests and diseases, quick maturity, and ability to improve soil fertility through nitrogen fixation. Soybeans also offer diverse value addition opportunities such as milk, porridge, sauces, and fried snacks. They are low-maintenance, suppress weeds, and are easy to harvest—saving time and effort for farmers. Meanwhile, in **Nwoya**, one of the groups opted for hybrid maize (Bazooka) due to its fast growth, drought resistance, and strong market demand. The extension worker emphasized the importance of post-harvest handling as the first step in value addition. For instance, using tarpaulins while shelling keeps produce clean, while proper drying, sorting, and storage help maintain quality, reduce spoilage, and fetch better market prices.

These activities are part of a broader effort to establish a demonstration farm that will serve as a hands-on training hub for women. The farm will facilitate learning on improved agronomic techniques, post-harvest handling, and value addition.

Ultimately, this initiative aims to boost food security, increase incomes for women at the group level, and empower them economically by strengthening their roles in agriculture.

Insights that inspire actions

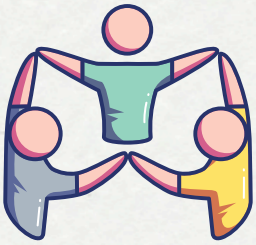
WRITTER: ROLAND MUSASIZI - MEAL OFFICER

USING COMMUNITY DRAMAS TO DRIVE CHANGE IN LAND RIGHTS AND GBV AWARENESS

Community drama has proven to be a powerful tool for learnig and advocacy. In Madi Opei Sub-County (Lamwo District) and Koch Goma Sub-County (Nwoya District), UWONET facilitated community dialogues to explore the intersection between land rights, gender-based violence (GBV), and economic empowerment.

Locally performed dramas were central to these dialogues, vividly portraying real-life challenges and solutions. These performances emphasized the critical role informal justice actors play in preventing and resolving GBV and land-related disputes. They showcased how community-led, cost-effective approaches contribute to justice and the empowerment of women.

The dramas highlighted how denying women access to land directly contributes to GBV. As primary providers of food in many households, women's inability to access land leads to food insecurity, economic strain, and increased domestic tension. In contrast, when women have secure land rights, families experience improved nutrition, greater food security, and reduced economic hardship—fostering peace and harmony. The plays also addressed the destructive impact of alcohol abuse, which often results in poor financial decisions and entrenched poverty. By spotlighting these issues, the dramas sparked critical conversations within the communities. Importantly, the dialogues served as accountability platforms where informal justice actors reaffirmed their commitment to resolving land and GBV disputes through mediation. Their accessibility and trust within communities make them key agents in promoting peace.



> With growing momentum, these community dramas are set to expand to other sub-counties, continuing to raise awareness about land rights, gender equality, and the importance of community-led solutions/interventions.

NATIONAL WOMEN LEADERS' SUMMIT ON WOMEN'S CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The National Women Leaders' Summit on women's civic engagement, held on March 5th, 2025, at Onomo Hotel in Kampala, brought together women leaders from across Uganda to reflect, engage, and strategize for greater inclusion in national governance and decision-making processes.

Recognizing that equal participation of women in leadership and civic processes is critical to sustainable national development, the summit was organized as part of UWONET's broader initiatives to strengthen women's voices in public life. The event created a space for dialogue on the current landscape of women's civic engagement—examining the challenges, celebrating progress, and identifying new opportunities to drive change.

Objectives of the Summit:

1. To foster dialogue on the setbacks, milestones, and emerging opportunities for women as they navigate Uganda's civic and political space.
2. To provide a platform for women leaders to share their experiences, celebrate their contributions, and candidly discuss the hurdles they continue to face.
3. To equip participants with practical tips and strategic insights for effective and impactful participation in leadership—particularly with a focus on the upcoming 2026 general elections in Uganda.

The space provided a critical platform for reflection, dialogue, and strategy development to enhance women's participation in leadership and civic processes. Discussions highlighted key achievements, persistent challenges, and actionable recommendations for advancing GEWE. Stakeholders emphasized the need for electoral reforms, strengthened legal protections, mentorship programs, and sustainable resource mobilization to create an enabling environment for women in leadership.

UWONET Executive Director Calls for Stronger Collaboration to Advance Women's Leadership; She has underscored the critical importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in shaping inclusive policies, breaking down systemic barriers, and promoting meaningful participation of women in leadership. Speaking during the engagement, Rita acknowledged that although notable progress has been made, significant challenges persist. These include widespread misinformation surrounding elections, entrenched negative social norms, gender-based violence, the burden of unpaid care work, and pervasive poverty — all of which continue to undermine women's leadership.

Uganda Police Reaffirms Commitment to Addressing Election-Related GBV; Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIGP) Bamunoba Ubaido, the Chief Political Commissar of the Uganda Police Force, acknowledged that VAW/G remains a serious concern during electoral processes. "Violence against women and girls during elections is unacceptable and undermines democratic participation. We are committed to holding offenders accountable and creating a safe environment for all citizens," he said

Hon. Dr. Miria Matembe Applauds UWONET for Championing Women's Political Participation; Hon. Dr. Miria Matembe expressed her gratitude to UWONET Secretariat for convening a strategic reflection and dialogue session aimed at enhancing women's participation in elections and civic processes.

Speaking during the event, Dr. Matembe emphasized the importance of such gatherings in providing Uganda's women's movement with a platform to reflect on past achievements and chart the way forward in the fight for gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE).

She also lauded UWONET for the development of the National Women's Manifesto 2026–2030, describing it as a critical tool for unifying and amplifying women's voices on GEWE issues in the lead-up to the general elections.

Dr. Sarah Bireete, Executive Director of the Centre for Constitutional Governance (CCG), highlighted the challenges faced by women in Uganda's political landscape, citing intimidation, harassment, and gender-based violence as major barriers to their participation in elections.

EC's Voter Education Efforts Praised Dr. Jenifer Somali Angeyo, Head of the Legal Department at the Uganda Electoral Commission (EC), commended the Commission's ongoing efforts to make voter education more accessible to the public. Speaking , she emphasized the importance of ensuring that all citizens especially women are well-informed about their rights and responsibilities in the electoral process.

"An informed electorate is fundamental to increasing participation in civic and electoral activities," she noted, highlighting the critical link between knowledge and democratic engagement.

Hon. Flavia Kabahenda Calls for Greater Inclusion of Child Mothers in Education, Hon. Flavia Kabahenda, highlighted significant gaps in the education sector, particularly regarding the reintegration of child mothers into the school system. She emphasized the urgent need to create supportive structures that enable young mothers to continue their education. She noted that without deliberate intervention, many of these girls are left behind, further widening the inequality gap.

REGIONAL DISSEMINATION OF THE NAP III ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

In 2024, UWONET conducted an assessment to track the implementation status of Uganda's NAP III. This assessment was conducted in selected 5 Districts of Uganda (Kasese, Kitgum. Kotido, Kampala and Yumbe). The assessment aimed to achieve the following objectives: Assess the progress of NAP III; Assess the relevance and effectiveness of strategies, approaches and interventions of NAP III delivery and assess the factors that are enabling or hindering the achievement of NAP III objectives and make recommendations for improvement. The findings were disseminated earlier in the year at the national level that sparked important conversations among stakeholders hence drawing possible strategies to advancing women, peace and security agenda.

The findings indicate that deeply rooted social norms continue to hinder women's participation in decision-making and peace-building processes across Uganda. The study highlights a lack of training opportunities for female peacekeepers at the district level, limiting their capacity to contribute effectively to peace efforts. While Uganda's security sector has made strides in gender mainstreaming—with notable female representation in the Uganda Police Force (UPF)—leadership positions remain predominantly occupied by men. This imbalance underscores the urgent need for stronger enforcement of gender equality policies within the sector.

Despite these challenges, women-led initiatives aimed at countering violent extremism are gaining ground. Programs such as Sisters Without Borders have engaged thousands in Kampala, Masaka, and Bugiri through grassroots campaigns. Other efforts include the Second Chance Education initiative in Kasese and widespread community dialogues designed to raise awareness on the prevention and countering of violent extremism (PCVE).

District Women Networks Acknowledges Decade-Long Partnership with UWONET, Highlights Milestones in Gender Equality Initiatives

Ms. Ataa commended the longstanding partnership between the National Association of Rural Women's Organizations (NARWO) and Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), noting that the collaboration has spanned over a decade. While UWONET operates as a national women's rights organization, NARWO functions at the local level. According to Ms. Ataa, UWONET has played a pivotal mentorship role in NARWO's growth and development, contributing significantly to its current achievements.

Key discussions

Electoral Violence, Monetized Politics, and GBV Undermine Women's Role in Peace and Governance

The rising trend of electoral violence in the country is significantly undermining women's participation in elective politics, posing a serious challenge to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. This climate of insecurity continues to discourage women from pursuing leadership positions, thereby restricting their involvement in crucial decision-making processes essential for peacebuilding and national stability.

In addition to violence, the increasing monetization of politics presents another major obstacle for women, many of whom face financial constraints. The high cost of political participation effectively excludes a large number of qualified women from the political arena, further entrenching gender inequality in governance. Advocates emphasize that economic empowerment is a cornerstone of the WPS agenda, and eliminating financial barriers is vital to enabling women's full engagement in political and peace processes.

Moreover, persistent gender-based violence (GBV) continues to marginalize women, weakening their ability to participate meaningfully in governance and peace efforts. GBV restricts women's mobility and civic engagement, fostering an environment of fear that directly contradicts the WPS agenda's goal of ensuring women's active and safe inclusion in peace and security initiatives.

Stakeholders stressed that addressing these challenges is essential to promoting women's leadership and achieving lasting peace and inclusive governance.

Yumbe Women's Peacebuilding Contributions Remain Overlooked, Says Activist

Charity Farida, a community activist from Yumbe District, raised concerns over the continued marginalization of women in peace-building and decision-making processes, despite their critical contributions during times of conflict. Farida mentioned that while men are now enjoying the peace, it was women who laid the foundation for it. She highlighted the pivotal roles women played during the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict, including efforts to combat gender-based violence (GBV). "Women in Yumbe, like Ayikor, took on courageous roles, mediating between conflicting parties and helping to restore peace," Farida stated. "Yet, their contributions remain undocumented and largely unrecognized."

HOSTED A CSW69 SIDE EVENT

UWONET, Government of Chad, OXFAM Africa and the Ministry of Labour, Gender and Social Development Hosted a CSW69 Side Event on UNSCR 1325 and Beijing+30

New York, March 17, 2025 - Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), in partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) of Uganda, the Government of Chad, and OXFAM in Africa, hosted a high-level side event during the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69). The event, titled "UNSCR 1325 in the Context of Beijing+30: Reflections on Progress and Practice in Uganda," took place on March 17, 2025, at the United Nations Headquarters (UNHQ), Conference Room F, in New York.

The side event reflected on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), specifically in Uganda and across Africa. It examined how the resolution aligns with key pillars of the Beijing Platform for Action, such as:

- Women and Armed Conflict
- Women in Power and Decision-Making
- Women's Human Rights
- Education and Training
- Women and the Environment etc.

UNSCR 1325 underscores the critical role women play in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery. The event will bring together policymakers, civil society, and development partners to assess progress, address ongoing challenges, share best practices, strengthen partnerships, and advocate for a renewed commitment to sustainable implementation of the WPS agenda.

As part of this initiative, UWONET led the Civil Society Organization (CSO) Review of Beijing+30 in Uganda, highlighting national progress, identifying persistent challenges, and proposing strategic recommendations for the road ahead.

Uganda Reaffirms Commitment to WPS at CSW69; Minister of State for Gender and Culture, Hon. Peace Mutuuzo, expressed gratitude to all participants of the 69th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69).

She highlighted Uganda's continued commitment to implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, noting key achievements including:

- Implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security
- Strengthening of legislative frameworks supporting women in peacebuilding
- Increased women participation in leadership and decision-making
- Enhanced collaboration between government and civil society, with gender mainstreaming across MDAs.

Hon. Mutuuzo reaffirmed Uganda's dedication to advancing gender equality and sustainable peace.

Oxfam Africa Marks Milestones in Women's Rights, Calls for Bold Action; Ms. Fati Hassane, Director at Oxfam Africa, joined global voices in celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS.

She spotlighted key achievements, including cross-border resistance to authoritarianism, peace dialogues, and community transformation. But she warned that structural inequalities, anti-rights movements, and climate change particularly in Chad remain serious threats.

Hassane urged bold action and offered three key recommendations:

1. Government accountability in fully implementing National Action Plans.
2. Increased, flexible funding for grassroots groups and NGOs.
3. Stronger collaboration among activists to drive lasting change.

Rita Aciro Underscores Women's Role in Peace-building; Rita Aciro emphasized the transformative role that civil society organizations (CSOs) have played in influencing government processes, particularly highlighting the critical contributions of Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) in mobilizing for peace since Uganda's formation.

In her presentation, Aciro observed that the nature of conflict in Uganda has shifted from traditional armed struggles to more complex and multifaceted forms of violence. She commended the women's movement for its consistent and active role in ensuring women's direct participation in peace processes.

She outlined several key contributions made by WROs;

1. Influencing Governance – UWONET has been instrumental in shaping Uganda's National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS.
2. Advocating for Inclusion; Women continue to demand meaningful representation and a seat at the table in peacebuilding efforts.
3. Promoting Uganda's Peace Policy; Though still in draft form, WROs are championing the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive national peace policy.
4. Reconstruction Efforts; WROs are playing a vital role in rebuilding systems and structures to foster long-term peace.
5. Community Training; Organizations are actively training communities to recognize early warning signs of conflict and take steps to prevent escalation.

*Despite these advancements, **Aciro** cautioned that women and girls remain disproportionately affected by ongoing conflicts, with gender-based violence (GBV) still widespread. She issued a strong call to action: "We must empower women and girls to meaningfully participate in peace-building."*