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UGANDA WOMEN'S NETWORK
QUARTER #1 HER-VOICE NEWSLETTER

Transforming unequal gender relations through collective visioning and action

INSIDE THE ISSUE

We are pleased to share highlights from the first quarter of 2026, reflecting our continued progress in advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE). We thank our partners, allies, and donors for their collaboration in driving our mandate to strengthen women's organizations, institutions, and the broader women's movement.

During this period, we strengthened the capacity of young women leaders in governance and advocacy, commemorated International Women's Day, and disseminated research on gender responsiveness of government economic programs to the care economy. We also convened staff reflection spaces, convened a commission on the status of women (CSW70) Side Event on Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV), and worked with district networks to mentor women's groups on value addition, marketing, and organizational development.

From January to March 2026, Uganda's gender equality landscape reflected both emerging opportunities and persistent challenges. While engagements such as participation in CSW70 provided a platform to align national efforts with global priorities on survivor-centered justice. The electoral period intensified challenges, particularly electoral violence against women, limited access to justice, and rising cases of GBV and femicide. This context underscored the continued relevance of UWONET's interventions in promoting gender-responsive governance, strengthening community justice systems, and amplifying women's voices through advocacy, capacity building, and grassroots engagement.

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

READ MORE

- *Disseminated Research Findings of Government Economic Programs to the Care Economy.*
- *Participated in International Advocacy Forums*
- *Facilitated a Digital & Writing Sessions for Young Women Leaders*





EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: UWONET STRENGTHEN YOUNG WOMEN LEADERS VOICES

From 4th–5th March 2026, a dynamic group of young women leaders gathered at Bamus Sarovar Portico Kampala for a transformative capacity enhancement session. Organized by Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) and Women's Democracy Network – Uganda Chapter, sessions focused on strengthening leadership through writing, public speaking, personal branding, and digital advocacy.

Why Young Women's Leadership Matters: In Uganda, meaningful participation of young women in public life remains essential for advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE). Yet, entrenched patriarchal systems and harmful social norms continue to limit their influence in decision-making spaces. The training responded directly to that gap, equipping participants with practical tools to challenge inequality and shape inclusive development.

A key highlight of the session was its strong focus on advocacy messaging. Participants were guided on how to craft clear, compelling messages by defining their "ask," supporting it with credible evidence, and grounding it in lived experiences. This approach enabled them to communicate community challenges more effectively while proposing realistic, gender-responsive solutions.

Equally impactful was the writing for advocacy component. Participants developed policy briefs, petitions, and concept notes; practical tools used to engage policymakers and influence decisions. By the end of the training, they demonstrated notable growth in their ability to communicate in structured, persuasive, and professional ways—an often overlooked but essential leadership skill.

The Power of Storytelling: Storytelling emerged as a powerful vehicle for advocacy. Through hands-on opinion writing exercises, participants learned how to transform personal experiences into compelling narratives that humanize policy issues and inspire action. By blending emotion with evidence, they discovered how individual voices can shape public discourse and drive meaningful change.



Leading in the Digital Age: Recognizing the expanding role of digital platforms, the training also emphasized online advocacy. Participants explored how to turn community issues into engaging campaigns across platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. They gained insights into audience targeting, message clarity, and maintaining consistency—key ingredients for effective digital engagement.

Importantly, the training also addressed digital safety. Participants learned strategies to protect themselves online, manage harassment, and uphold ethical standards in digital spaces. This balance between visibility and safety is essential for sustaining credible and impactful leadership in the digital era.

From Learning to Action: By the end of the session, participants had not only acquired new knowledge but also built the confidence to apply it. The training reinforced that impactful advocacy is rooted in clear communication, credible evidence, and authentic storytelling. At the same time, digital platforms were recognized as powerful tools for amplifying voices and mobilizing collective action.

In the closing remarks, Women's Democracy Network – Uganda Chapter emphasized a shared commitment: the responsibility now lies with these young leaders to use their voices to influence systems, challenge inequality, and advance GEWE across Uganda.

In conclusion, the capacity enhancement session was not just a moment of learning, but the beginning of a powerful journey for young women leaders in Uganda. Equipped with strengthened skills in communication, advocacy, and digital engagement, these leaders are now better positioned to influence decision-making spaces and challenge structural barriers that hinder gender equality. As they carry forward the knowledge and confidence gained, their collective voices have the potential to drive meaningful change, reshape narratives, and advance Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment across Uganda.



CSW70: UGANDA'S CALL TO PROTECT WOMEN AND GIRLS

From 9 to 19 March 2026, global leaders, activists, and policymakers gathered at the United Nations Headquarters for the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The agenda was urgent and unmistakably clear: ensure justice for all women and girls in a world where inequality continues to evolve especially in digital spaces. Among the voices shaping this global conversation was Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), bringing frontline insights from Uganda into an increasingly complex issue; Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV).

A New Frontier of Violence: Technology has opened doors for women's participation in leadership, business, and public life. But it has also created new risks. TFGBV is no longer a distant or abstract issue. It is happening now; silencing voices, undermining leadership, and pushing women out of digital spaces. The question posed during the session cut straight to the core: Are our justice systems evolving fast enough to keep women and girls safe?
At a high-level side event, leaders confronted this reality head on.

Hon. Betty Amongi, Uganda's Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, opened the discussion with a strong message. She pointed to the rise in cyberstalking, online harassment, and digital abuse threats that are not only affecting women's safety but also their livelihoods and participation in public life. Her call was direct: Uganda has made strides in establishing legal frameworks, but laws alone are not enough. Real protection requires stronger collaboration between government, tech companies, civil society, and justice institutions to build digital spaces where women can participate freely and safely.

Echoing this urgency, Mr. Bouwe-Jan Smeding of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands highlighted a troubling paradox. Digital platforms are expanding women's voices, yet they are increasingly weaponized to silence them especially journalists, politicians, and public figures. The solution, he noted, lies in accountability. Stronger laws must go hand in hand with responsible digital platforms, public awareness, and sustained partnerships with civil society.



The Lived Reality Behind Technology: For Rita H. Aciro-Lakor, Executive Director of UWONET, TFGBV is not a new problem, it is a continuation of long-standing inequalities, now amplified by technology. Women leaders, journalists, entrepreneurs, and even young girls are being targeted through cyberstalking, harassment, and image based abuse. These attacks are not random; they are designed to silence.

But the barriers go deeper. Gaps in reporting systems, persistent victim blaming, and limited institutional readiness mean that many survivors never access justice. The system, in many cases, is not built to respond to the realities of digital harm. Rita's message was clear: addressing TFGBV requires more than policy. It demands digital literacy, stronger solidarity among women, responsive justice systems, and sustained investment in women's movements.

Beyond Technology: Challenging Social Norms: The conversation did not stop at digital violence. It expanded into the social norms that continue to shape women's lives offline and online. Deeply rooted beliefs still influence who gets to lead, who has access to resources, and whose voice is heard. While some norms foster resilience and entrepreneurship, others reinforce inequality and limit opportunity.

Women across Uganda are pushing back. They are building savings groups, attending trainings, and investing in their businesses. Yet internalized barriers shaped by years of structural inequality still hold many back. Transforming this reality requires collective effort. It means engaging men and communities, strengthening women's networks, promoting gender-responsive policies, and addressing the burden of unpaid care work.



The discussions at CSW70 made one thing clear: the fight for gender justice is entering a new phase. As technology reshapes society, it is also redefining the risks women face and the protections they need. Ensuring justice for women and girls is no longer just about courtrooms and laws. It is about creating systems that work in both physical and digital worlds. The challenge now is not whether change is needed. It is whether institutions, policies, and societies can move fast enough to deliver it. Because for millions of women and girls, justice delayed in the digital age is justice denied.



COMMEMORATION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY AT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

International Women's Month was more than a moment of reflection. It was a call to action. A reminder that gender equality and women's empowerment can not happen by intention alone but requires real and sustained investment. This year's theme, "Give to Gain," speaks directly to that truth. Across Uganda, women and girls continue to face persistent inequalities. Closing these gaps demands more than promises. It calls for bold decisions, collective responsibility, and consistent action that transforms commitment into reality. Throughout the commemoration of International Women's Day 2026, UWONET stepped forward with purpose. From developing impactful press statements to amplifying voices through social media campaigns on women's access to justice, UWONET ensured that the conversation stayed focused where it matters most; on systems, rights, and accountability.

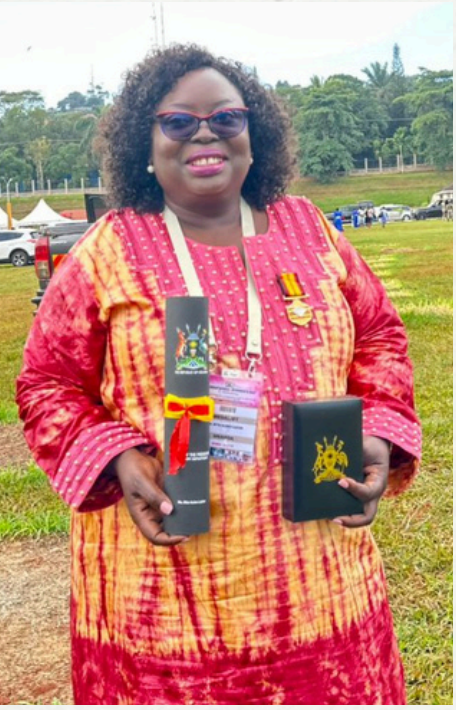
Beyond national-level advocacy, district engagements (*i.e in Gulu district)* created space for grassroots influence. These platforms pushed forward critical conversations on gender equality and women's economic empowerment, ensuring that change is not only discussed in boardrooms, but also felt in communities. Recognition also came at the highest level. Invited by the Government of Uganda, UWONET's Executive Director was honored for her exceptional leadership and unwavering commitment to advancing women's rights. It was more than an award, it was a reflection of years of tireless advocacy and impact. At the same time, UWONET together with the Domestic Violence Act Coalition delivered a powerful statement, reinforcing a shared message: celebrating women must go hand in hand with investing in their protection, rights, and opportunities. Words of praise are not enough without the resources and systems to back them. Across Uganda, the story of women is one of strength, resilience, and transformation. From rural villages to bustling cities, from farms and markets to classrooms and courtrooms, women continue to shape the nation's progress. Their contributions sustain families, strengthen communities, and drive development.



This year also shone a light on women who stepped forward as candidates in the recent General Elections. Their courage signals a growing wave of leadership, built on the foundations laid by pioneers who refused to be silenced. Together, they are redefining what leadership looks like in Uganda.

But even as we celebrate progress, the message remains clear: more must be done.

"Give to Gain" is not just a theme, it is a strategy. When we invest in gender-responsive services, we strengthen the systems that prevent and respond to gender-based violence. When we support women's economic participation, we unlock national growth. When we recognize unpaid care work, we acknowledge the invisible engine that sustains households and economies alike.



The progress we see today is the result of collective effort. Government institutions, civil society, development partners, cultural and religious leaders, and communities have all played a role. Yet the moment demands more. It calls for scaling up what works, closing funding gaps, and ensuring that no woman or girl is left behind. Amid these reflections, there is also room for celebration.

Congratulations to Ms. Rita Hope Aciro-Lakor on receiving two prestigious awards during International Women's Day 2026. Her recognition stands as a powerful testament to what dedicated leadership can achieve. It also mirrors the impact of countless other women across the country who continue to champion change in their own spaces.

Their stories remind us of one simple truth: when we invest in women, we all gain.

And that is the Uganda we must continue to build together.





COMMEMORATION OF THE WORLD WOMEN'S DAY OF PRAYER: FAITH MEETS EMPOWERMENT

On 6th March 2026, something powerful unfolded in Uganda. UWONET, Women, students, mothers, professionals and grandmothers came together under one roof for the World Women's Day of Prayer, hosted by our ally the Uganda Orthodox Church. What united us was not just faith, but a shared longing for enjoyment of human rights. Under the theme "Come, I Will Give You Rest," drawn from the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 11:28, the gathering spoke directly to the silent burden many women carry every day. The exhaustion of caregiving (Unpaid Care Work). The pressure of leadership. The invisible labor of holding families and communities together. This was more than a prayer event. It was a moment of pause and a call to renewal.

At the heart of the conversations was a simple but often neglected truth: rest is not a luxury, it is essential. Speakers challenged the idea that constant sacrifice by women and girls defines strength. Instead, they reframed rest as a form of empowerment. A woman who pauses to restore herself, they argued, is better equipped to lead, to nurture, and to make decisions that shape families and communities.

Participants left with practical tools including prayer, meditation, journaling, and intentional reflection. To care for themselves without guilt. *"I realized I am not alone,"* one participant shared. *"Finding rest in God gives me strength to keep going."* Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) ensured that this message extended beyond the spiritual. By integrating our International Women's Day theme "Give to Gain" into the program, UWONET connected faith with agency. UWONET called for investment in gender equality, an end to gender-based violence, and greater support for women's economic empowerment.

This gathering blended prayer and advocacy into a powerful platform for change. Beyond sermons and songs, it fostered meaningful connections—young women found mentors, while older women rediscovered purpose. New support networks emerged, promising impact beyond the event. Women left not only spiritually renewed but practically empowered: able to rest without guilt, lead with clarity, and advocate for themselves and others. It demonstrated that when women are given space to reflect, connect, and be heard, they don't just heal—they transform communities. In a demanding world, it served as a bold reminder that pausing can be the very source of renewed strength and collective rise.



RECLAIMING POWER: HOW FEMINIST ACTION IS REDEFINING THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

In February 2026, UWONET conducted a Grate Lakes Participatory Action Research and convened feminist activists and women's rights organizations for a validation of the report. More than a research exercise, the validation created a dynamic space for reflection and action, enabling activists to collectively interrogate research findings and key issues shaping the women's movement.

Deliberately designed to go beyond traditional research, the PAR process shifted power to those most affected. By centering lived experiences, it enabled activists and communities to lead their own analysis; identifying gaps, defining priorities, and shaping context-specific solutions. Discussions of the findings underscored a shared reality that gender inequality remains deeply embedded in social, economic, and political systems. From unpaid care burdens and workplace harassment to limited leadership opportunities and persistent poverty, women particularly those in informal sectors continue to face heightened vulnerability despite notable gains in education and women-led initiatives.

A critical insight emerging from the discussions was the need to rethink how the movement is framed. While the "women's movement" remains widely embraced, participants emphasized that a feminist lens more directly confronts the structural drivers of inequality. This distinction is not semantic; it shapes both strategy and impact.
The research also broadened the understanding of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), highlighting its multiple dimensions; physical, economic, emotional, and digital. Encouragingly, progress is evident. Strengthened coalitions, community-based protection systems, and survivor-centered services such as shelters, legal aid, and psychosocial support are improving access to justice. Legal reforms and more gender-responsive court processes are also contributing to this shift.

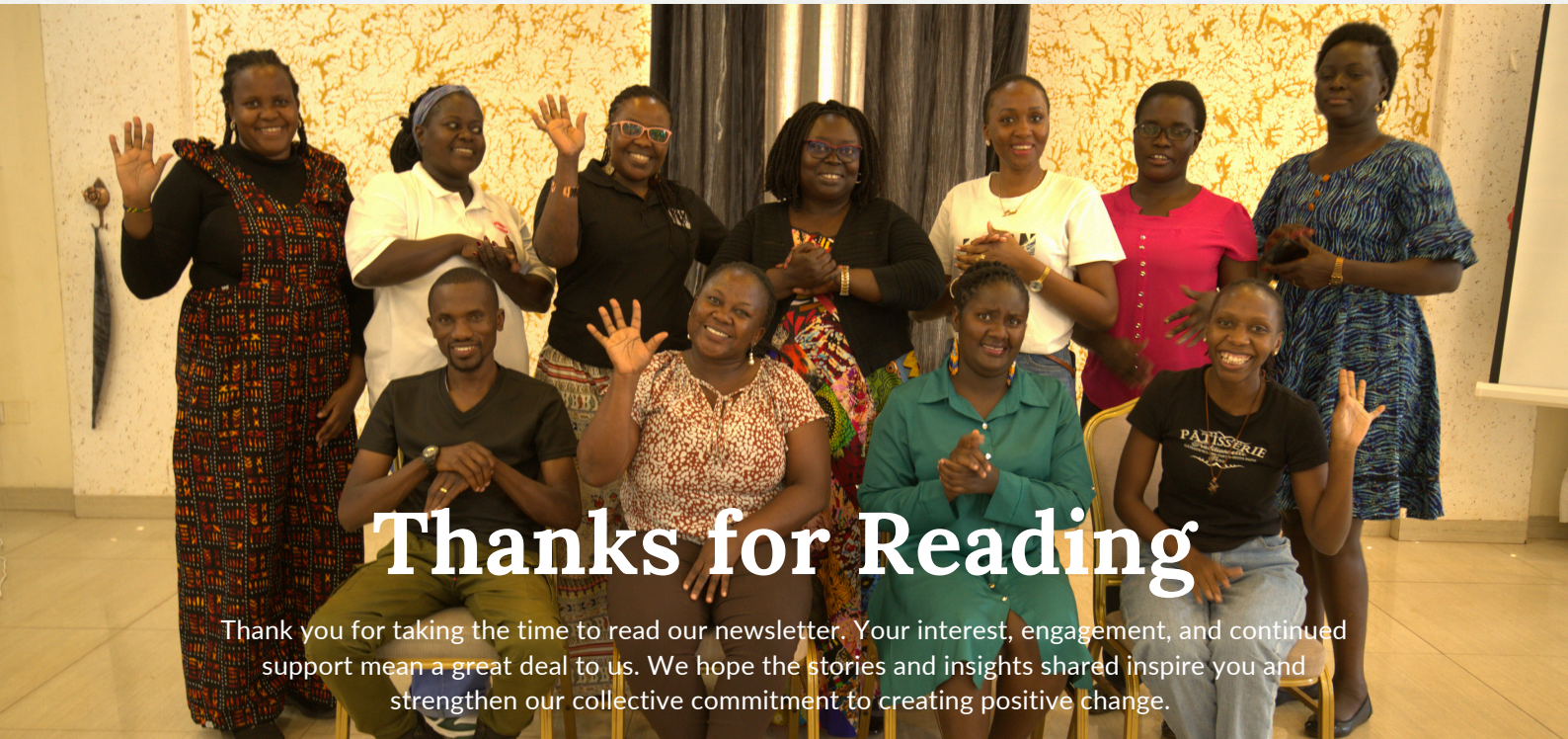
However, persistent challenges remain. Stigma, backlash against survivors, case backlogs, and affordability barriers continue to undermine justice systems. Power imbalances endure, often sidelining those closest to the issues. At the same time, collective care practices, while vital, remain largely informal and under-resourced.

Participants called for renewed investment in feminist organizing, expanded access to justice, and sustained efforts to transform harmful social norms. Priorities include nurturing young feminist leadership, strengthening mentorship, deepening regional solidarity, and institutionalizing collective care. Leveraging frameworks such as the Maputo Protocol, alongside stronger coordination and digital innovation, presents a clear pathway to accelerate progress while ensuring sustainability of the movement.

POSE, REFLECT & ACT: SETTING THE PACE FOR 2026

At the start of the year, UWONET convened its staff for a reflection meeting designed to pause, take stock, and set a clear direction for the 2026. The session created a structured space for teams to revisit the past year examining what worked, what fell short, and why. Through open dialogue and shared learning, staff were able to surface practical insights from their experiences, aligning individual contributions with the organization's broader mission. This collective reflection not only strengthened institutional memory but also ensured that lessons learned were intentionally carried forward into planning and decision-making.

Beyond reviewing performance, the meeting played a critical role in re-energizing staff and fostering a renewed sense of purpose. It provided an opportunity to realign priorities, clarify expectations, and build cohesion across departments. As teams engaged in honest conversations about challenges and opportunities, a stronger culture of accountability and collaboration emerged. By the close of the session, staff left with a shared vision, clearer goals, and a deeper commitment to delivering impact in the year ahead.



Thanks for Reading

Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter. Your interest, engagement, and continued support mean a great deal to us. We hope the stories and insights shared inspire you and strengthen our collective commitment to creating positive change.