



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FROM QUANTITY TO QUALITY REPRESENTATION - WHAT DOES IT MEAN
FOR DISTRICT WOMEN COUNCILORS?**

Uganda is unique in as far as democracy and women's rights are concerned. On the one hand, women constitute more than 30% of Uganda's parliament and one third (1/3) of all local councils. However, women in political leadership continue to grapple with patriarchy, managing their leadership roles with family/ gender roles, negative religious and cultural beliefs continue to affect their performance and contribution among others. Yet there are reasons for hope and frustration.

It's notable that progress has been made in implementing the legal framework that mandates all local councilors to have at least one third (1/3) of the councils comprised of women. However, the elected women councilors continue to show varying degrees of fragility and face important challenges.

The press-release is informed by a pre-visit that Women's Democracy Group (WDG) conducted in 50 districts of Uganda prior to providing capacity building for district women councillors. The objective of the pre-visit was to introduce the project to the district leadership and conduct a capacity needs assessment of the district women councillors to inform the planned capacity building activities by WDG for district women councillors. To inform the assessment, WDG designed a form which it used to conduct face to face interviews with key informants on the status of district women councillors. . A total of 350 key informants were interviewed and included: the Local Council V chairperson, the Chief Administrative Officer, the District Speaker or Deputy District Speaker, the Resident District Commissioner (RDC), one woman on the District Executive Committee, two women councillors and the District Community Development Officer. According to data from districts visited by WDG member organizations during a pre-visit exercise and interface (conducted during the months of December 2012- February 2013), there are several challenges faced by women Councilors that has continued to affect their effectiveness in the Council such as;

- Inferiority complex and lack of confidence, low self-esteem, low funding for constituency servicing and high expectations of the electorate with

regard to meeting private citizen challenges like school fees scored **100%**;

- The women councilors also lack skills in lobbying and advocacy which scored at **94%**;
- The low literacy levels, failure to speak English the language used in councils and its effects on women councilors as they perform their roles as enshrined in the Constitution and Local Government Act of Uganda and limited knowledge of the rules of procedure of council scored **89%**.
- Lack of skills in planning and budgeting and lack of knowledge on government policies was rated at **79%**
- Lack of knowledge on their roles and responsibilities scored **74%**

Other skills needs identified by district administrative and political leaders and selected women councilors included: public speaking, lack of skills in gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting, lack of knowledge on making ordinances, lack of access to research and new tools of information to enhance their contribution to decision making, poor communication and debating skills among others.

What needs to be done?

Today most of the debate for women in political leadership is shifting from numbers to quality. Quality representation is important for enhancing good

governance. Women councilors need the support of government, NGOs, media and their fellow male councilors and the electorate to fulfill the expectations that are placed on them as leaders. **Two women councillors** in Kumi district interviewed in this regard stated that: : *“Trainings will help the women councillors to understand how council runs business and make them effective in moving motions and debating in accordance with the rules of procedure like , raising point of order, point of information/inquiry which are technical to us”.*

NGOs need to:

-  Build capacity of women councilors basing on their prior identified needs. This is critical to strengthening the participation of women in council. The capacity building should be regular coupled with monitoring to ensure that technical advice and support is offered to the women councilors as need arises.
-  Advocate against practices and laws that affect the performance of women councilors.

Parliament needs to:

-  Amend the Local Government Act and introduce a minimum academic qualification of at least Ordinary Level for all district councilors. This is important because most documents on which councils deliberate are in English; and most councils hold debates in English. As a result, councilors

who can neither read nor speak English are left out of the decision making process. This in turn has an effect on governance because the issues affecting their electorate are left un-communicated and not deliberated upon. It further diminishes the representation role that councillors are supposed to play.

The District Community Development Officer (DCDO) of Adjumani district in this regard recommended that *“a minimum level of education should be introduced in the Local Government Act for councillors as a prerequisite for contesting for election to create a balance between them and the technical staff”*

Citizens need to:

- ✚ Reduce the monetary demands they make on councilors. This affects communication between the leaders and citizens and has resulted in despair among some women leaders and lack of constituency meetings with citizens.
- ✚ Change their attitude towards women in leadership. . The attitude change can be enhanced through provision of civic education by government and Civil Society Organizations.

Cultural and religious Leaders:

Cultural and religious leaders should play a role in changing the negative attitude towards women in leadership. Women in Uganda comprise about 50.9 percent of the population (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

Democracy without women is no democracy at all.

On the issue of culture and how it affects women in leadership the Deputy RDC of Arua district stated that *“In Lugbara culture women do not speak in public particularly in meetings with men. However, the culture is changing particularly in favour of courageous women who speak on real issues. Good female debaters can play a major role in highlighting the issues that affect women and the community”*

Political parties:

Political parties should establish platforms, and provide training and funding for women programs in their parties to ensure that the quality and quantity of women in leadership improves since they are the main vehicle through which women and men get elected into leadership.

About WDG:

The Women's Democracy Group is a consortium of five women's organizations in Uganda. The organizations include: Action for Development (ACFODE), Women's Democracy Network (WDN)-Uganda Chapter, Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), Center for Women in Governance (CEWIGO) and Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) which also coordinates the consortium.

The Women Democracy Group (WDG) was formed in 2009 prior to the general elections of 2011 with a common goal of enhancing women's participation in politics and decision making under the coordination of Uganda Women's Network (UWONET). Since its formation, WDG has held several engagements with women leaders which include; Building their capacities on gender budgeting and accountability, using new tools of communication as WDG have we done this? We have left out the work we did with women candidates prior to the last election, roles and responsibilities of councillors among others; monitoring the 2011 elections from a gender perspective and engagement with political parties for meaningful and increased involvement of women in leadership..

In 2012, WDG with support from the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) began implementing a project "Enhancing District Women Councillors' Leadership Roles". The two year project aims to build the Capacities of Local Women Councillors and to facilitate the formation of women caucuses to enhance their effective participation in council. The project is being

implemented in 50 districts of Uganda including: Oyam, Dokolo, Lira, Amolatar, Kalangala, Rakai, Sembabule, Kisoro, Kanungu, Rukungiri, Mbarara, Kiruhura, Kamwege, Bushenyi, Isingiro, Sheema, Bundibugyo, Kabarole, Kasese, Kyenjojo, Arua, Nebbi, Yumbe, Koboko, Adjumani, Kumi, Amuria, Soroti, Katatkwi, Kaabong, Moroto, Nakapiripirit, Iganga, Bugiri, Maguge, Jinja, Kaliro, Kamuli, Kiboga, Kampala, Wakiso, Mukono, Buikwe, Tororo, Busia, Mbale, Butaleja, Manafa, Sironko and Kapchorwa. The project as illustrated by the districts covers the regions of West Nile, Karamoja, Central, Western, Eastern and parts of Lango-sub-region.

The pre-visits in pictures of women councilors from Karamoja districts of Kaabong, Moroto and Nakapiripirit



Explaining the existing capacity gaps of the women in the council



Dancing for the visitors and excited to receive the new project



Listening closely and sharing experiences of Council work



A WDG member interviewing the Vice chairperson, Arua district-December 2012



A WDG member interviewing the district CDO of Yumbe district-December 17, 2012

For more information please contact;

Rita Aciro Lakor

Coordinator,

Women's Democracy Group (WDG)

Tel: +256 414 286539

Mobile: +256-075933002

Email: raciro@uwonet.or.ug