



Gender Transformation & Empowerment



JOURNEY OF PASSION

Two Decades of Advocacy for Gender Equality and Women's Rights

1993–2013

JOURNEY OF PASSION

Two Decades of Advocacy for Gender Equality and Women's Rights

1993–2013

First Edition

Dedication

**The Journey of Passion is dedicated to all women of Uganda;
counting your struggles.**



This photo was taken after a National Council Women's Meeting at the National Theatre in the early 1960's

Acknowledgment

With profound gratitude, Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) acknowledges the contribution of the women who laid the foundation to women's rights work in Uganda in simple and humble ways at a time when it was not an issue of public concern. In a special way, we would like to thank the initial women's organisations that laid a foundation for the formation of UWONET, including; Women's Finance and Credit Trust now Uganda Women's Trust (UWT), Federation of Women Lawyers in Uganda (FIDA-U), Action for Development (ACFODE), National Association of Women Organisations in Uganda (NAWOU), Department of Women and Gender Studies of Makerere University now School of Women and Gender studies, Makerere University among others.

We are humbled by your contribution that led to the formation of UWONET. We acknowledge that the work of UWONET would not have been easy without government's support, mainly the Ministry of Women Affairs then (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development). We recognise and appreciate the role of all the individuals from the different institutions that formed UWONET. To the first Executive Committee of UWONET chaired by Maude Mugisha; the staff at UWONET Secretariat that was led by Sheila Kawamara Mishambi; the foundation you set was built on solid ground.

UWONET's work would not have been possible without the support of all our development partners especially SNV Uganda that provided the seed fund/ resources in the establishment of UWONET and subsequently, OXFAM NOVIB that supported UWONET without wavering for close to 15 years. Without your support, we would not have seen the activism for gender equality and women's rights. To the member organizations that initially formed UWONET, your dream to have a women's network lives on. We appreciate your vision and UWONET remains the voice of women in Uganda, regionally and Internationally.

The visibility of our work would never have been realized without the various media houses and journalists who took a keen interest in our work, amplified our voices, and brought the challenges and realities of Ugandan women to the fore during advocacy to inform policy agenda and practices.

To all our members and allies, your work is what makes UWONET, we therefore take gratitude in our collective efforts that is documented here. We would also like to thank the women and men who have embraced and contributed to amplifying the voices that UWONET continues to raise in our communities.

We acknowledge the vivid memories by all the contributors to the first edition of this documentation, namely; Sheila Kawamara Mishambi, Elizabeth Kharono, Maude Mugisha, Sarah Jesca Agwang, Rita H. Aciro–Lakor and all the other contributors. We look forward to your contribution in subsequent editions. We acknowledge and thank Ms. Elizabeth Kanyagonya for the editing and Ms. Rita Aciro for the final review and editing.

This rpublication would not have been possible without the financial support from the African Women Development Fund (AWDF). We thank you for believing in us.

Last but not least, to the generation that continues to uplift UWONET, we thank the staff and management at the time UWONET clocked 20 years under the leadership of Rita Aciro–Lakor, Executive Director and Sheila Kawamara Mishambi, Chairperson, for having compiled this collection of key events, successes, learning points and challenges in the journey of advocacy for women rights.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgment - - - - -	iii
Acronyms- - - - -	viii
Foreword - - - - -	x
A Word from the Executive Director - - - - -	xii
Executive Summary - - - - -	xiii
Introduction - - - - -	1
THE NETWORK;	
A Space for All Women - - - - -	2
Inspiration for a Uganda Women's Network - - - - -	2
Key Events - - - - -	3
Key Players- - - - -	5
UWONET's WORK FROM 1993–2013 - - - - -	8
Women in Governance - - - - -	9
UWONET Entrenching Women in Leadership - - - - -	35
Eliminating Violence Against Women - - - - -	43
Research and Advocacy to End Gender Based Violence - - - - -	43
Activism to Denounce Violence against Women - - - - -	46
Public March against Domestic Violence - - - - -	46
Campaign for Justice against Celebrity Rapist - - - - -	47
Combating Harmful Cultural Practices - - - - -	48
Tackling Patriarchal Abuse of Women in Leadership- - - - -	49
Protesting Victim–Blaming at the Italian Embassy–Any abuse of Women anywhere is abuse on all women- - - - -	51
Fighting Impunity of Intimate Partner Violence - - - - -	51

Women and Peace Building-----53

Broadening the Civil Society Search for Peace-----	56
Setting Women's Advocacy Agenda for Peace-----	58
Appreciating Women's Experiences of Conflict-----	58
Engaging the Military-----	61
Documenting Women's Experiences of Armed Conflict-----	62
Joining the International UNSCR 1325 Campaign-----	62
Women's Peace Coalition Influences the Juba Peace Talks-----	63

Women's Land Rights and The Domestic Relations Bill-----65

The Campaign for Women's Land Rights-----	65
Research and Documentation on Women's Land Rights-----	66
Advocacy for a Gender Sensitive Land Law-----	67
Opposition to the Women's Lobby-----	69
Publicizing Women's Campaign for Land Rights-----	71
Advocacy after the Enactment of the 1998 Land Act-----	74
A Radical Approach to Demand for Land Rights-----	75
Lessons Learnt-----	77
Case Study of Activism and Advocacy for Marriage Law-----	79
The History of the Marriage and Divorce Bill-----	80
The Advent of the Domestic Relations Bill (DRB)-----	82
Advocacy for Tabling of the Domestic Relations Bill in Parliament-----	83
Opposition to the DRB-----	86
Back to the Drawing Board-----	87
Birth of the Marriage and Divorce Bill-----	89

UWONET Working at District Level - - - - -	90
Giving hope to women in post conflict recovery in northern Uganda - - - - -	93
Efforts towards ending Gender Based Violence (GBV) - - - - -	95
The launch of Police form 3 and 3A - - - - -	97
UWONET Members combat sexual and Gender Based Violence - - - - -	99
Movement building and continued learning - - - - -	103
Misinformation on the MAD Bill - - - - -	108
Male Champions of the MAD Bill Speak Out - - - - -	113
Conclusion - - - - -	115
THE FUTURE OF UWONET: Innovating for Collective Influence - - - - -	116
Selected Photography of UWONET over the years - - - - -	117
Annex 1: List of UWONET's Coordinators and Board Members 1993 to 2013 - - - - -	122

Acronyms

ACFODE	Action for Development
AUWMD	Association of Uganda Women Medical Doctors
CA	Constituent Assembly
CAFOB	Conflict des Association et ONGs Feminines du Burundi
CDRN	Community Development Resource Network
CECORE	Centre for Conflict Resolution
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEDOVIP	Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention
CEWIGO	Centre for Women in Governance
CFPU	Child Care & Family Protection Unit
COPAW	Coalition for Political Accountability to Women
CP	Conservative Party
CRC	Constitutional Review Commission
DENIVA	Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations
DP	Democratic Party
DPP	Director of Public Prosecution
DRB	Domestic Relations Bill
DWNRO	Disabled Women Network and Resource Organisation
EALA	East African Legislative Assembly
EASSI	Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women
EAWC	East African Women's Conference
EC	Electoral Commission
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change

FIDA–U	Association of Women Lawyers in Uganda
FOWODE	Forum for Women in Democracy
GUSC.	Gulu Support the Children’s Organisation
IRI	International Republican Institute
Isis–WICCE	Isis Women’s International Cross–Cultural Exchange
NAWOU	National Association of Women’s Organisations in Uganda
NFLS	Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies
NRM	National Resistance Movement
PAWLO	Pan African Women’s Liberation Organisation
PVP	People’s Voice for Peace
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SNV	Netherlands Development Organization
UCW	Uganda Council for Women
UHRC	Uganda Human Rights Commission
ULA	Uganda Land Alliance
UMWA	Uganda Media Women’s Association
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UPC	Uganda People’s Congress
UWFCT	Uganda Women’s Finance and Credit Trust
UWONET	Uganda Women’s Network
UWOPA	Uganda Women Parliamentarians Association
UYD	Uganda Young Democrats
WCW	World Conference on Women
WDG	Women Democracy Group
WDN–U	Women Democracy Network Uganda Chapter
WETSU	Women Engineers, Technicians and Scientists of Uganda
WORUDET	Women in Rural Development Network

Foreword

Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) was formed because of the need for increased attention to issues that continue to undermine gender equality and women's rights. While the country was going through a process of reconstruction and development, there was need to pay attention to areas that would transform women's lives from subordination, abuse and poverty to empowerment and dignity.

The opportunity for Uganda to host the East African Women's Conference in 1993 as part of the preparatory processes for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women that would be held in Beijing China in 1995 was the springboard for the formation of UWONET. The East African Women's Conference held in August 1993 in Kampala supported by the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, brought together a good representation of women from the three countries.

The founding member organizations of Uganda Women's Network had a vision. The vision was to see women's organizations and individuals working together to make a positive difference in women's lives. These organizations worked on different areas for women's empowerment. However, there was a missing link. Women's voices on issues of concern to women were not strong. There were common concerns about violence against women, inadequate women's participation in politics and decision-making, women's marginalization in the economy, challenges related to women's and girls' education and health services for women in the country. Addressing such issues was beyond the mandate of any single organization. The need for women's organizations to work together was evident and this led to the formation of Uganda Women's Network as an 'issue network'. The purpose was to bring together women's organizations and individuals to work on issues of concern to women.

This publication is to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Uganda Women's Network. It tells the story of UWONET and its journey over the years. Indeed, it is a 'journey of passion'. What is documented in this story was all done because those involved were moved by the conviction of contributing to changing women's lives for the better. Gender transformation and empowerment of women has been the driving force behind what UWONET's has achieved.

While UWONET was initiated by Kampala-based organizations, it would not be a Uganda women's network without reaching and involving the majority of the women who are in the rural areas. Uganda Women's Network currently works with and reaches out to all women in Uganda. Two specific occasions have made me very proud of UWONET. One was when I was in Abim District in Karamoja in 2010 doing an evaluation. I met a group of women who invited me to the UWONET resource centre in Abim. Another one was in March 2015 when I was in Kotido in Kacheri sub-county near the border with Sudan in North Eastern Uganda.

While meeting the sub-county chief, he told me he had little time for the interview with me because Uganda Women's Network was coming to the sub-county to discuss a women's programme on women's land rights and Gender Based Violence (GBV). What was even more pleasant was that when they arrived, it was not UWONET staff from Kampala but a partner organization staff based in Kotido town. This is what UWONET has become, a gender equality and women's rights network that has reached all the corners of the country. Indeed that is what it was intended to be and I thank UWONET members, the board and staff that have made this happen. In 20 years of UWONET, so much has been achieved in different spheres of women's lives.

However, women's work is not yet done. It remains unfinished business because women are still poor; women are still battered and sexually abused; girls are given in marriage at a very early age and not able to complete school; women are not yet at helm to drive politics and decision-making; and, women are still dying during childbirth. Women in Uganda deserve better and we as a nation must do the work so that future generations will know that because there were women and men who cared, there situation is better.

Maude Mugisha

CHAIRPERSON UWONET 1993–1996

A Word from the Executive Director

“Being part of the 20 years and to lift UWONET to levels of great creativity and stronger social movement building and making UWONET the reknown champion for Women’s rights and gender equality has been the most gratifying contribution for me ; I could call it “pay back” to UWONET for the foundation and opportunities provided to me and many other young people out there, thank you UWONET”. **Rita.H. Aciro Lakor** (Executive Director–UWONET)

It is my great honour and pride to present to you the first documentation of UWONET’s experiences in advocacy over the years. This documentation is a collection of UWONET’s journey in Advocacy for women’s rights and Gender Equality. It gives an account of the strides made by UWONET in the socio–economic and political development of Uganda. It is our sincere hope that reading this documentation will provide insights on the work around women’s rights and Gender equality and more so be a learning point to all stakeholders.

UWONET has contributed to uplifting the political, social and economic status of women through its work of amplifying women’s voices in the public domain. It has groomed a cohort of foot soldiers of whom I am proud to be a member. The cohort of women and men that UWONET has groomed over the years are changing the discourse towards gender transformation and empowerment.

While we acknowledge the pivotal role UWONET has played in transforming the gender relations at the social, economic and political spheres, it is certain that the challenges remain enormous. We are more than ever committed to confronting the unfinished business in the years to come.

Uninted Women Can

Rita.H. Aciro Lakor

Executive Summary

The founding of the United Nations after the Second World War and the emergence of independent States following decolonization were important events in the political, economic and social liberation of women. Commitment to the advancement of women began with the signing of the United Nations Charter in 1945. In 1946 the Commission on the Status of Women was established to promote the advancement of women throughout the world. By the mid-1960s, the Commission had begun to address women's role in economic and social development.

Following the 1975 world conference on women in Mexico City, the UN General Assembly in its resolution 3520 proclaimed 1976 to 1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women. This, and subsequent world conferences on women created exceptional momentum for change.

The end of the women's decade Conference of 1985, held in Nairobi, Kenya agreed on the agenda for action—The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies. The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies sought innovative ways of overcoming obstacles for achieving the objectives of the Decade with a theme; *"Equality, Development and Peace"*.

The conference brought the spirit of greater organizing to Kampala with a call to deepening action. Organizations which were already in existence like FIDA-Uganda reenergized themselves as local chapters while home grown organizations including Women's Finance & Credit Trust, Action for Development sprung up, to start the process of implementing the Nairobi Forward looking strategies. A national women's conference organized by Action for Development (ACFODE) set the agenda for action for implementation of the Nairobi Forward looking strategies in Uganda.

The motivation at the time was for women to embrace the challenge of dealing with strategic concerns related to policy, power, social & economic transformation of women and push for gender equality on the local scene. After a decade of implementation of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, the United Nation Fourth World Conference on Women was planned to be held in Beijing China in 1995. In preparing for the Fourth World Conference on Women, women from the East African Region convened in Kampala Uganda, for the preparatory conference. The East African Women's Conference provided an opportunity and platform for sharing experiences and brought to light the need for joint action, continued networking and sharing information among women's organizations in East Africa and at national levels.

For Uganda, the East African Women's Conference was the conception of Uganda Women's Network (UWONET). The Uganda Planning Committee for the Conference continued and operationalized UWONET as an issue network for women in Uganda. A constitution was made and UWONET was registered in 1994.

It must however, be noted that the struggle to emancipate women in Uganda has long been in motion, and dates as far back as the early 1940s. Secular women's groups such as the Women's League of 1945 which became the Uganda Council of Women in 1946 were instrumental in enabling important events like the 1960 conference on the status of women. Relatedly, an East African Women's Conference had also been held in 1964 in Limuru, Kenya thus the processes that led to the formation of Uganda Women's Network and its work today is a reaffirmation and enhancement of earlier efforts of women's organizing.

Coming back from Beijing, the renewed passion to operationalize the network's mandate needed to be approached with a compound strength of intellect and valued instinct. With a clear mandate, the network was incorporated, and activism set in motion based on five priorities selected from the Beijing Platform for Action. These were: women's access to power and decision making positions in all sectors and at all levels, the improvement of socio-economic conditions of women and other marginalized groups, the achievement of equal opportunities and rights to women in all sectors and increased access to and control of resources and benefits, the elimination of defilement, rape, Violence Against Women and other forms of abuse against women and children in society; lastly, collect and disseminate information on the priority issues of concern to women.

Among some of the initial issues tackled by the network were; the task to unpack the broad conceptual framework of women and the economy which begun with the move to engage on the effects of structural adjustment program and national debt. At the time, Standardized policy packages that were introduced by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund for highly indebted third world economies in the 1980s and 1990s called for slashing government spending, privatization, and opening up countries to foreign investment, among other measures. These recommendations were directly affecting women.

Uganda Women's Network participated actively in campaigns for debt cancellation for Uganda in Netherlands and Ireland (1994 and 1995 respectively). However, UWONET realized that the debt campaigns needed to be localized to include civil society in Uganda. UWONET worked with the Development Network of Indigenous Associations (DENIVA) and other interested organizations to form Uganda Debt Network (UDN) in 1996. The campaign for debt relief for Uganda at national and international levels contributed to Uganda's debt relief in April 1998 and 2000, respectively. Debt relief amounting to one billion US dollars was granted. This also meant that Substantial cash savings were realized, an average 60 million dollars per annum over a four year period; accounting for almost a quarter of the total budget support over that period.

During the processes of drafting of the Uganda 1995 constitution, the network saw this as an opportune moment to engage in the key issues of women's participation in leadership and decision-making processes. Behind the scenes, the network worked hard to support the women in Parliament caucus through lobbying, research and providing information on issues affecting women and ultimately securing what has been deemed the most gender sensitive constitution of the time. The constitutional making process was from 1989–1995. The constitutional process brought to light and informed a number of women's human rights concerns that undermine the intents and purpose of the supreme law of the land (the 1995 constitution).

At the same time, Land being an important factor of production, Women and Land Rights Advocacy in Uganda, was instrumental in shifting the discourse around the 1998 Land Act. The active involvement of the network was crucial for advancing discussion's on women's land rights. To concentrate advocacy on issues highlighted by research and enable continued flow of information about subsequent land rights advocacy efforts, UWONET was active in the formation of the Uganda Land Alliance.

When the debate to return Uganda to a multi-party political dispensation system was on going; a referendum had been scheduled and it was therefore strategically sensible for the network to carry out much needed civic education. For women, a strong Multi-party democracy is important in ensuring a platform for policy options, for women to participate and engage in issues of governance, freedom of association and expression. This became more evident during the debate on the Bill for minimum education requirements for leadership positions, particularly at the local government level. It had been observed that legislators were not effectively consulting with their constituents. Technically, the passing of this Bill at the time would undermine women's efforts enshrined in articles 32 and 33 of the 1995 constitution. It took the network's active lobbying to get Parliament to return to the electorate for further consultations.

On the political front, the implementation of the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was taken a step further when UWONET compiled the first Women's Manifesto Prior to the 1996 elections. This document was used to influence the manifestos of the Presidential and Parliamentary candidates' elections as provided for in the 1995 Constitution. In the same elections, UWONET introduced the gender monitoring concept with the aim of observing elections, looking at women's participation and their hindrances to participation in the cycle of elections, as candidates or as voters.

Marriage and Divorce has been a long time an issue of contention dating as far back as the mid-1950s when Young Wives Association initiated the advocacy to demand for the registration of all marriages in the country. UWONET's active involvement in the campaign on domestic relations contributed to the realization of a need for constitutional framework on marriage & divorce. The family law that protects the institution of marriage has not yet been achieved and the journey is far from being complete. The Marriage and Divorce Bill 2009, was presented on the floor of Parliament in 2013, it was debated and about 20 clauses were passed before the process was halted to allow for members of Parliament to further consult the public on some of the contentious clauses. Since then, the debate of the Bill was neither continued nor was a report of the findings of the consultations by members of Parliament presented on the floor to guide further proceedings.

The network has sustained continuous advocacy engagements associated with domestic violence incidents like the Sharma kook; Candida Judicial proceedings; Kababka Ronald Mwenda Mutebi mock marriage to 13 year old Sarah Nakku; Footballer Majid Musisi alleged defilement of 16 year

old girl; the demonstrations at the Italian embassy in Uganda related to a violent rape case in Italy, were important in influencing the realization of the Domestic Violence Act 2010.

In more recent times, the Network has stepped up its advocacy for the advancement of women by working closely with duty bearers in improving the quality of response to cases of Gender Based Violence through training, provision of material support and coordination mechanism with duty bearers.

During the war in northern Uganda, Women of northern Uganda experienced deep levels of violence, handed down at them by the warring parties at the height of the northern Uganda insurgency. It is for this reason that UWONET rallied voices of Ugandan women across the country to demand for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

The political and socio-economic terrain in which the network operates has mutated over the years. In equal measure therefore, the tasks being undertaken by the network cannot remain constant. There has been a lot of learning, lessons that ought to be acted upon especially in the areas of engaging in and influencing policy, gender responsive and building that critical mass of actors at different levels for women's advocacy and gender equality.

In the quest to engage in governance processes, UWONET has embarked on an intense capacity and skills development campaign of networks at the district and at community level. Indications are that progressive steps are being made in the right direction. Likeminded community based action groups and local government representatives have been supported by UWONET to form alliances, community engagements have enhanced UWONET'S advocacy initiatives because of its evidenced based approaches. On the other, the beneficiary communities have successfully generated key community and women's concerns for their leaders to handle and in due course hold leaders accountable. These developments are an illustration of the demystification of the divide between urban and rural women. Many a time, the network has been blamed for being elitist, not doing enough to better the situation of the rural women.

On carrying on the mandate, observation and analysis indicates that the women's movement in Uganda is now getting into its fifth generation. Each of these generations has had to contend with challenges peculiar to its moment. It is important therefore that each generation must endeavour to understand the dynamics relating to women's issues in their time. To sustain the momentum in delivering on the Network's mandate, UWONET has been consistent on mentorship for the future program. Young professionals

are identified and taken on at UWONET to be nurtured into performing a wide range of tasks that in turn develops their skills, knowledge appreciation and passion for not only development work, but become agents of change and women's rights advocates.

While the space and opportunities for mentorship continue to be provided, gaining ground on the theme equality, development and peace, not just for women but for the nation at large, calls for the unwavering will, initiative and commitment of the youth.

After twenty years of service with a passion, it is important that the network reflects upon its path to objectively redefine and broaden its mandate. This however, is dependent on the ever changing context of operation which is attributed to liberalization, globalization and technology on one hand or increased rate of citizen activism within an ever narrowing civic space, as well cultural aspects on the other.

Twenty years since UWONET was formed, the network continues to plan for the transformation foreseen over the next twenty years.

Introduction

The report of UWONET's two decades of work attempts to capture some of the network's struggles and its landmark achievements. UWONET's journey has been very eventful and a great learning experience. The network is indebted to its membership, allies in civil society, the Government of Uganda, and the development partners who have supported us. **Sheila Kawamara-Mishambi**

This document gives an account of Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) work from 1993 to 2013 and is part of the celebration to mark 20 years of existence. The report attempts to present UWONET's work chronologically from its formation in amplifying women's voices on gender discrimination at all levels; and sustaining their voices in the social, economic and political agenda in Uganda.

It highlights the processes towards UWONET's formation, its objectives and the work in fulfilling its mandate. The report does not only document the work UWONET has done over the years, but also provides points of learning especially in advocacy on women's rights.

THE NETWORK; A Space for All Women

Background

The Beijing Conference under the theme Action for Equality, Development and Peace was a continuation of a process that had begun in Mexico City in 1975, the International Women's Year. From 1976 to 1985, which was the UN Decade for Women, efforts had been made to re-examine the status and rights of women by bringing them into decision-making and addressing critical issues of concern to them. In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the Women's Treaty, on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which has since then been used internationally to address women's representation and participation in all development efforts. In 1985, another international Women's Conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya, to review the achievements of the UN Decade for Women. The Nairobi Conference adopted the 'forward-looking strategies' to be implemented by 2000. These strategies addressed the political, economic, social, and cultural changes that were taking place across the world, including the end of the Cold War; emergence of global information networks; worldwide democratization; rural to urban migration; increasing poverty levels; and the global economic recession.

Inspiration for a Uganda Women's Network

As the women organised internationally for the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, women from East Africa convened in Kampala from 5th to 8th July 1993, for the East African Women's preparatory conference. During the conference women from different organisations showcased their work and shared experiences, bringing to light the need for joint action, continued networking and information sharing among women's organisations. The conference addressed 12 critical issues to be debated in the Beijing Conference, including poverty; education; health; violence; armed conflict; the economy; power and decision-making; mechanisms for women's advancement; women's human rights; mass media; the environment; and, the girl child. These interrelated areas were all of high priority, requiring immediate attention from all stakeholders in civil society, government and the donor community.

To a great extent the creation of UWONET was stirred by the global women's movement whose vibrancy and strength many women in Uganda encountered for the first time at the End of Women's Decade UN Conference on Women (1985). The result of that conference saw the formation and revitalization of national chapters of a number of organizations¹.

The Nairobi conference had demonstrated that the real energy, innovation and drive for gender transformation and change came not from the official deliberations of governments, but from the women's movement. In Nairobi, women had forced the UN open up space for civil society/non-governmental organizations to engage with the issues concerning women. Parallel sessions to those of governments and would enable them to make inputs into official deliberations.

This opening up of space at the global in official UN processes inspired Ugandan women because it became possible for us to mobilize and organize as autonomous women's civil society organizations, and to engage and hold government accountable for the declarations and commitments made at the global level. UWONET's identity as a gender activist and policy advocacy network was largely informed by this context and the opportunities it presented.

Key Events

1990:

The idea of holding an East African Women's Conference was first mooted at a meeting held at ACFODE, with the visiting Vice-President of the Women's World Banking, Ms Mary Adhiambo hosted by the Women's Finance and Credit Trust in 1990. With Ms Sarah Mangali an SNV technical advisor at UWFCT, Ms Odhiambo visited ACFODE and held a meeting with Miria Matembe, the Chairperson, and Maude Mugisha, the Executive Secretary. Ms Adhiambo pointed out that East African women would do better to organize as a region. She mentioned that in 1964, women in the region had converged in Limuru, Kenya to discuss women's agenda in the post-Independence East Africa. It was noted that since that time women in the region had not met again. The preparations for the UN Third World Conference held in Nairobi in 1985 happened when Uganda was in turmoil and not able to participate fully in the preparations or in the conference itself.

During the meeting, the SNV technical advisor working with UWFCT at the time promised to share the idea of an East African Women's

¹ For instance ACFODE was formed by a group of women who attended the Nairobi Conference; FIDA-Uganda and Uganda Women's Finance and Credit Trust became active as national chapters of FIDA-International and Women's World Banking, respectively.

Conference with the SNV Director in Uganda. She wrote a loose minute and put it on a file at SNV but the idea was not followed up until 1992 when SNV employed a gender advisor, Ms Elizabeth Kharono. Internally SNV decided to take forward the idea of the East African Conference linking it to the 4th World Conference on Women scheduled to be held in Beijing in 1995.

1992:

Elizabeth Kharono worked as the gender advisor in SNV (Netherlands Development Organization), which was operating in partnership with NOVIB. On learning about the Beijing Conference (1995) SNV/NOVIB agreed to play a role to add momentum to the process leading up to that conference. This was through different events leading up to the July 1993 East African Women's Conference (EAWC), which was held in Uganda. An expected outcome of the conference was a framework for networking amongst women's organizations in Uganda.

1993:

UWONET was formed in 1993 almost a decade after the Nairobi Conference (1985) and as the United Nations prepared to host another global conference on women. With just two years to the 4th World Conference on Women (WCW), it was apparent that there was limited awareness amongst women's organizations about the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (NFLS) as the agreed plan of action for addressing gender inequality worldwide. The fact that the Beijing Conference would review the extent to which countries had acted on the NFLS provided an opportunity to create greater awareness about the strategies and mobilize women's organizations to engage with the issues ahead of the Beijing Conference.

Events leading up to the East African Women's Conference (EAWC) were designed as a process in which women's organizations in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania were mobilized to review implementation of the NFLS and the status of gender equality within their contexts. The conference enabled women from the region to share experiences, connect and agree on steps to accelerate action on the forward looking strategies before the 4th World Women Conference (WCW).

Conference organizers brought together different women and women's organizations to review and engage with the NFLS issues ahead of the 1995 Beijing conference. The process highlighted the hurdles women had to overcome to organize themselves. UWONET in Uganda and

the Tanzania Gender Networking Program in Tanzania emerged out of this process as gender activist and policy advocacy networks.

Key Players

SNV/NOVIB:

The staff of SNV/NOVIB and particularly Johan Veul, the Director then, fully supported the process. The organisation provided Elizabeth Kharono and Catherine Mugisha Rwanika and later Evelyn Nyakoojo who replaced Elizabeth Kharono as Gender Advisor for SNV, all the funds required and convinced the SNV offices in Kenya and Tanzania to support similar processes in these countries. Other key players in the events before and after the EAWC included Demere Kitunga and Terry Kantai from SNV Kenya and Tanzania. They used their understanding of the national contexts to engage organizations and individuals involved in the EAWC process. Both Demere and Terry were gender activists engaging at national level on gender and women's rights issues.

Planning Committee:

A planning committee was set up to handle conference preparations and the most enthusiastic members included Action for Development (ACFODE) represented by Maude Mugisha and Margaret Kikampikaho; Association of Women Lawyers in Uganda (FIDA–Uganda) represented by Theo Bitature and Dora Kanabahita; Uganda Women's Finance and Credit Trust (UWFCT), represented by Rose Kiggundu. National Association of Women's Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU), represented by Norah Matovu; Department of Women's Studies at Makerere represented by Maria Musoke and the Ministry of Women in Development, represented by Jane Mpagi.

Government Partners:

The First Lady Janet Museveni and the Prime Minister of Uganda, Hon Eriya Kategaya participated in the conference as guests of honour during the opening and closing sessions. The Ministry for Women and Development and the National Association of Women's Organization's in Uganda (NAWOU), which were the mandated machineries for women affairs were fully involved in the preparatory process of the conference. Mebo Mwaniki, who was responsible for women affairs within UNECA, was keen to participate as her office would be hosting the 5th Regional Conference on Women, in Dakar, Senegal in 1994.

Founding Secretariat:

The Planning Committee of Uganda Women's Network nominated some of its members to a smaller executive committee and charged them with the responsibility to register the network and establish a secretariat. The following were members of the Executive Committee. Maude Mugisha as Chairperson, Maria Musoke as Secretary, Rose Kigundu as Treasurer; Bernard Amwine as Publicity Secretary and Evelyn Nyakoojo of SNV as a member. The Executive Committee registered Uganda Women's Network in 1994 and later secured a one-room office provided by the Uganda Women's Finance and Credit Trust. The Executive Committee was supported by other members of the Planning Committee to establish the Secretariat of UWONET.

The Birth of UWONET:

In 1993, UWONET was formed as an advocacy platform to unite and amplify Ugandan women's voices in addition to providing a space to address women's concerns and their marginalisation within national policies, governance and development processes.

Vision and Mission:

UWONET was formed with a dream of creating "a Ugandan society free of all gender-based discrimination". The network sought to coordinate action among its membership through networking, capacity building, resource mobilization, policy research and advocacy for the attainment of gender equality. UWONET was also founded with an operational agenda, which combines human rights and democratic principles while targeting policymakers, decision makers and implementers of laws and policies at different levels.

Thematic Focus of UWONET:

The members of UWONET sought to develop and promote a national women's agenda influenced by the lived realities of women in Uganda. Twenty years after its formation, the network has remained committed to the mandate of ensuring that Ugandan women are recognised and their issues addressed in key areas at all times.

Discussions during the EAWC had centred on getting more women into positions of power, improving the legal and policy frameworks to address women's concerns, eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women, enhancing the economic status of women and ensuring that information about women is generated and shared with relevant stakeholders.

UWONET was therefore founded with an operational agenda, which combines human rights and democratic principles while targeting policymakers, decision makers and implementers of laws and policies at different levels. During the past two decades, UWONET has targeted and worked with politicians (including the president, cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, and local government officials), heads of government departments, law enforcement structures (courts, prisons, police), local governments, religious leaders, cultural leaders and development partners.

The gender activism and policy advocacy work of UWONET centred around four areas of priority to Ugandan women's development.

1. Women in Governance
2. Eliminating Violence Against Women
3. Women and Peace Building
4. Women's Land Rights

UWONET Members

UWONET derives its strength from the diversity of expertise and experience of its membership. The network was founded by nine members but has grown to be composed of 16 women's organisations and nine individual activists. These include Action for Development (ACFODE), the Association of Women Lawyers in Uganda (FIDA-U), the Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA), the Association of Women Parliamentarians (UWOPA), Women Engineers, Technicians and Scientists of Uganda (WETSU), Association of Uganda Women Medical Doctors (AUWMD), Uganda Women's Finance and Credit Trust (UWFCT), the Ministry of Gender and Community Development, the Department of Women's Studies, Makerere University and the National Association of Women's Organisations in Uganda (NAWOU).

The Ministry of Gender withdrew their membership when UWONET was to be registered because a ministry could not be part of a CSO and later NAWOU withdrew. However new members have joined the network including Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP), Isis-WICCE, the Bahai Faith, Slum Aid Project, Send a Cow, Disabled Women's Network and Resource Organisation (DWNRO) and Community Development Resource Network (CDRN).

UWONET's WORK FROM 1993–2013

I am writing these memories shortly after participating in UWONET's end-of-strategy external evaluation, which enabled me to catch up with UWONET's level of growth. I have had the opportunity to reflect on the legacy of UWONET's origin, with which I was closely associated, and how it continues to shape the new strategic direction. It is gratifying to note that UWONET is actively reflecting on the strategic needs of the wider women's movement in Uganda. **Elizabeth Kharono**

Women in Governance

In 1993 when UWONET was formed, one of its prime objectives was to promote and ensure women's increased access to positions of power and meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making. A task force on 'Women in Governance and Politics' was constituted to ensure women's effective participation in the democratic processes in Uganda.

This section reflects on the efforts of UWONET and its allies in engendering the Constitution in 1993; the referendum in 2000; the national election processes; and promoting women's leadership within local councils, local government and Parliament. It also celebrates UWONET allies and trailblazers Dr. Speciosa Wandera Kazibwe, Uganda and Africa's first woman Vice President as well as Rebecca Kadaga, Uganda's first woman Speaker of Parliament amongst those who have overcome the enormous challenges women face.

1994: **Engendering the Ugandan Constitution Drafting Process**

Uganda embarked on a process to draft a Constitution to cater for all the interests of its citizens and create the democracy that had eluded the country since independence in 1962. The drafting of the new Constitution was therefore intended to reflect a fundamental change from the manner in which previous Constitutions were made. This was supposed to be a popular Constitution emanating from the people as a true reflection of their interests and aspirations. The

Constitution was seen as an opportunity to articulate the principle of non-discrimination and promote equal rights of women and men. Through an Act of Parliament in 1989, the Uganda Constitutional Commission was established and charged with the responsibility of formulating and structuring a draft Constitution. The constitution making process was largely embraced by women not only as a healing process to a shattered nation, but also as a golden opportunity for them as Ugandans to shape their country's destiny. As the Constitutional Commissioners traversed the country collecting views for the drafting of a national Constitution, women mobilized in their national and districts organisations to highlight critical gender issues.

UWONET's participation and the inclusion of women's concerns in the constitution was facilitated by two prominent women lawyers, Miria Matembe and Mary Maitum, who were appointed onto the Commission along with 21 men. These two women leaders, despite their being a minority on the Commission did a commendable job to engender the constitution by working closely with national women's organisations including UWONET ACFODE, UMWA, FIDA-U, NAWOU and the Ministry of Women in Development, Culture and Youth. These organisations collected and synthesized the women's views about their lives and rights and ensured their incorporation into the 1995 Uganda Constitution. A Gender Information Centre was created by NAWOU, a founder member of UWONET. The information centre was a very important meeting place for the electorate, CA delegates, as well as NGOs focusing on women to influence the inclusion of Article 31 (on the family), Article 32 (on affirmative action) and Article 33 (on the rights of women) in the draft constitution.

At an important time in Uganda's political history, women took the opportunity to discuss national issues as equal citizens. The women's organisations launched massive civic education campaigns to educate women about their rights and also compiled a memorandum that was subsequently submitted to the Constitutional Commission. During the consultations it was recognized that the political consciousness of the majority of Ugandans was very limited and women were ignorant about broader national issues. Women's input was dependent on the interpretation and guidance of the elite, who were influenced by their own personal and class influenced ideas of what was good for women.

Ugandan women have been subjected to a long history of systematic oppression and discrimination from pre-colonial times to the present

day. The oppressive customary and cultural practices together with the discriminatory and inadequate legal system introduced by the British continued to relegate women to a lower status and expose them to ridicule. It is no surprise that women were the most enthusiastic groups that embraced the exercise. As Matembe observed, “almost all the women who participated in the exercise had no doubts in their minds that the new Constitution was going to be a powerful weapon in their total emancipation and liberation”. Many women believed that the new Constitution could solve most of, if not all, the inequality problem and consequently many were prompted to engage in the debate.

The new Constitution was also seen as an opportunity to influence new laws or amending unacceptable provisions. Some of the issues advanced by women included their recognition as equal citizens as well as outlawing discriminatory or oppressive traditional practices, custom and laws. For example, under the Customary Marriage Decree the marriage age was 16 years and above and polygamy was legal under both customary and Islamic laws. Women in polygamous relationships had no protection in the event of dissolution of the union and in some ethnic groups, custom also provided for men to ‘inherit’ the widows of their deceased brothers.

By working together at this level, these organisations and the Ministry of Gender laid the foundation for UWONET’s future work to increase the numbers of women in positions of power and decision-making and their participation in governance and politics.

1994: **Women Leaders in the Constituent Assembly**

In 1994 as the country held the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections, women were determined to move to the next level and be part of national governance. Brilliant and competent women offered themselves to brave the adversity of Uganda’s unlevelled political ground and as one woman CA aspirant then commented, *“We have to show the men that we can compete with them on unlevelled ground and beat them in the game of politics which they have monopolized for so long.”*

New and old faces came on the scene and dared to join the race in the hotly contested campaigns that saw Winnie Byanyima defeating six men and one woman in Mbarara Municipality. The Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) strong woman and a critic of the National Resistance (NRM) government, Cecelia Atim Ogwal trounced five men for the

Lira Municipality seat. Dr Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe beat men in Kigulu South, Iganga District. Victoria Sekitoleko also trounced five men in Butembe county of Jinja District.

A total of 48 women made it to the CA with nine women defeating their male opponents, a feat that is celebrated in the women's movement. This was a rise from the two women that had defeated men in the 1989 Parliamentary elections. Thirty-nine women CA delegates were elected to represent their respective districts.

Out of 286 delegates, 52 (18%) were women and most of them actively participated in the women's caucus that closely coordinated with the women's organisations to advance common objectives. As a means of avoiding divisive topics, the women's caucus was non-partisan and did not take a stand on the country's political system or establish a relationship with the multiparty caucus called the National Caucus for Democracy.

UWONET therefore recognizes the women who contested in the CA elections and participated in producing a Constitution that for the first time addressed critical issues and deeply entrenched women's equality as citizens. These women are Professor Victoria Mwaka, an academic, who was finally elected as the Vice-Chairperson of the CA, Dr. Sophie Musana of Buikwe North, Mukono district, Hajat Janat Mukwaya of Mukono South, Rhoda Kalema, of Kiboga County, Kiboga District, Dr. Maria Veronica Nakyanzi of Ntenjeru South, Mukono district and Rebecca Kadaga of Buzaya, Kamuli. Robinah Kasadha contested for Bunya South, Iganga as well as Teddy Busulwa Babirye for Bukholi Central, Iganga, Miria Matembe for Mbarara, Jolly Mugisha for Mbarara Municipality, Christine Namonywa Oonyu for Bubulo East, Mbale, Wego Masifa for Bungokha in Mbale and Joan Rwabyomere for Mwenge South, Kabarole district.

Other women in the CA race were Christine Nabakooza Kaluma of Kampala Central, Rehema Nambalirwa Kasenene of Kawempe North, Joyce Juliet Sebugwawo of Rubaga North, Harriet Nakazana Kiyingi of Mawokota South, Birabwa Kiwanuka of Nakaseke and Tereza Nalubega Muzira of Buikwe North. Additionally, Juliet Kafiire Rainer stood in Kibuku, Pallisa, Grace Akello in Amuria, Soroti district, Betty Atuku Bigombe in Kilak, Gulu and Mary Okec in Omoro County Gulu.

1995: A Gender Sensitive Constitution

The previous Ugandan constitutions² did not have specific provisions which explicitly spell out the rights of women. Under Article 21 of the 1995 Constitution, Uganda for the first time acknowledged “all persons are equal before and under the law in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life and in every other respect and shall enjoy equal protection of the law”. The Constitution further stated, “a person shall not be discriminated against on the ground of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, social or economic standing, political opinion or disability.”

The 1995 Constitution guaranteed women’s rights to equal political, economic and social opportunities. UWONET hailed the Constitution as a positive achievement for Uganda’s women.

Article 31 (1) states that men and women of the age of eighteen years and above, have the right to marry and to found a family and are entitled to equal rights in marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

Article 32 (1) states that notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, the State shall take affirmative action in favour of groups marginalised on the basis of gender, age, disability or any other reason created by history, tradition or custom, for the purpose of redressing imbalances which exist against them.

Article 33 (1) states Women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men.

As indicated in the concerns gathered by UWONET and the women’s caucus during the consultations, all laws, cultures, customs or traditions that were against the dignity, welfare or interest of women or which undermined their status were prohibited. The Constitution also provided reserved electoral seats for groups of people marginalized on the basis of gender in order to redress historical imbalances and traditions of discriminatory cultural practices. It provided for one woman Parliamentarian per district and one-third of all local government council seats to be reserved women.

The Constitution also called for the creation of an Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) to apply this principle to education, politics,

² 1962 constitution, 1966 interim constitution, 1967 constitution, which was overthrown in 1971 when General Idi Amin Dada seized power and ruled the country through constitutional decrees.

economics and other areas. With a national legal framework in place and a set standard for all other laws, UWONET committed to defend its implementation and ensure that the relevant laws aimed at promoting women's rights were prioritized in Parliament. Such laws included the marriage laws, the land ownership laws and women's political participation in local government.

As provided for by the gender sensitive Constitution Ugandan women should have equal rights and opportunities with men in all spheres. However they continue to experience gender based discrimination. UWONET has continued to play a critical role in sensitizing the public and policy makers on the marginalization of women and the need to pass relevant laws and regulations to safeguard their interests and lives. In its advocacy work UWONET has consistently called upon Parliament to enact laws, policies and programmes to operationalize the 1995 Constitution.

Almost 20 years after the promulgation of Uganda's Constitution, and a decade after its first major review, there are still a number of laws that do not conform to it. For example it took UWONET and its partners 12 years of intensive advocacy work to persuade government to constitute the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). The 1995 Constitution provided for an EOC to effect constitutional mandate to eliminate discrimination and any inequalities against any individual or group of persons on grounds of sex, age, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion. The Constitution also provided for affirmative action in favour of groups marginalised on the basis of gender, age, disability or any other reason created by history, tradition or custom for the purpose of redressing imbalances that exist against them; and to provide for other related matters.

Unlike the Electoral Commission (EC) and the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) which were immediately constituted the EOC was not regarded as a priority. As such, several lobby meetings were held between UWONET and the different ministers and technical staff in charge of gender over the years on the need to hasten the establishment of the EOC. On various occasions the President and Parliament were equally petitioned, but with no positive response. When the Constitution was reviewed in 2005, the women's lobby group in their memorandum demanded for the EOC and the Amendment Act to

the Constitution stipulated that the Commission would be established within one year.

The EOC became a reality in 2007 by an Act of Parliament. Its birth and composition were given minimal publicity and appreciation from its key constituencies the women, youth, elderly, and persons with disabilities, who had lobbied for it for several years. Not only were its members not very well known figures amongst civil society activists, but it was largely under resourced. It had a broad constitutional mandate and range of powers, including conducting investigations on its own initiative or on receipt of a complaint, conducting educational campaigns and research. It was also charged with making recommendations and contributing to legislative processes as well as preparing and publishing guidelines for implementation of equal opportunities.

However, the EOC still has not found its feet due to lack of ample human and financial resources. With only five commissioners and a few support staff, it is struggling to prove its relevance and reach out to its key constituencies. It is expected to rely on existing government staff at regional level, particularly community service officers, who already have a defined job description and reporting line. The EOC does not even have its own office space. Given such circumstances, the EOC is unlikely to become effective.

1995: **UWONET study on Structural Adjustment Policies**

One of the key issues that UWONET started working on immediately was women's participation in the economy. In 1995, with support from SNV, UWONET carried out a study on the effects of structural adjustment policies on key sectors of agriculture, health and education and the implications for women. The research was carried out in Arua Districts as a case study. The results of the research study were disseminated at a national conference on 'Women in the Economy' organized by UWONET in Kampala. The conference was attended by a number of civil society organizations, officials from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education. UWONET members were in full attendance and coordinated all the activities of the conference.

1996: **Spurring Women into Local Council Government**

The groundwork began in 1996 when the UWONET Task Force on Women and Governance compiled the *Women's Manifesto*, a document that was used to influence the manifestos of the presidential and parliamentary candidates for the elections held that year. The members of the Task Force included ACFODE, UMWA, NAWOU and FIDA-U. The *Women's Manifesto* highlighted issues including peace, stability and unity in diversity; gender balance, equality and affirmative action; poverty and economic empowerment of women; violence against women; protection of family rights, orphans, children with special needs and the aged; people with disabilities; and women and health.

With its objective of increasing the numbers of women in positions of power and decision making, UWONET worked hard to influence the electoral process and encouraged women to participate both as voters and candidates at all levels. The 1996 Parliamentary debate on the Local Government Act attracted the attention of UWONET. This was due to a clause proposed by MPs requiring a minimum academic qualification of Ordinary level (O level) or 12 years of education for Local Council III Chairpersons and Advanced level (A level) for the LC V Chairpersons. In addition, the business of the Councils would be conducted in English. UWONET realised that these provisions would exclude women candidates due to the low literacy rates across the country.

UWONET argued that the presence of women in the Local Council would greatly influence deliberations, decisions and the quality of deliverables for local development. It was apparent to UWONET that women were going to be marginalized in the Local Government and Local Council elections. UWONET therefore carried out research to justify women's inclusion in the local government, organized lobbying meetings, media campaigns and held negotiations with policy makers to ensure women sit at the tables where critical decisions concerning their lives were being made.

A position paper was submitted to Parliament highlighting UWONET's concerns and indicating that those academic qualifications were not required for effective implementation of the councils' supervisory roles under a decentralised system. UWONET also argued that since the councillors were being elected to serve within their communities

they could effectively present the people's views and demands in their local languages. Parliament however rejected these proposals on grounds that the country needed 'learned' people to manage society and people that were not conversant with English would have difficulties supervising district technical teams. The Bill was debated and passed in Parliament in December 1996 with 152 votes for it and 16 against, in effect denying the majority of the rural population an opportunity to serve on the LC III and LC V councils.

UWONET immediately embarked on a media campaign, informing Ugandans that the MPs they had elected had passed a law referring to them as illiterate and incompetent to manage local government affairs. This attracted public interest and outcry against the proposed law. The President who was expected to assent to the Act referred it back to Parliament to address the concerns raised by UWONET and the public. During the 1996 Christmas recess Parliament consulted constituents and the clause demanding for proficiency in English and secondary school academic qualifications was dropped for all councillors except for the LC V Chairpersons. It was also decided that the debates at all levels would be conducted in local languages but the minutes would be written in English to ensure wider use.

When the 1997 Local Government Act was enacted it included a one-third requirement membership of women councillors. UWONET was satisfied with these achievements in line with the gender sensitive Constitution, as the Act recognised the critical role of women and marginalised groups such as youth and persons with disabilities (PWD) in development.

1997: **Promoting Women's Election into Local Government**

While the mandatory inclusion of women in the Local Councils under affirmative action brought more women into mainstream politics, it also increased the visibility of women's concerns from districts to national planning level. UWONET celebrated the landmark achievement of women councillors for the first time in Uganda's history despite voices criticising their competencies. Over 10,000 women were elected into the councils, with 6,574 women councillors charged with development and finance related decisions.

While monitoring the 1997 local government elections UWONET observed a number of impediments to sustaining women's effective participation at that level. Among these was the mode of voting, by lining up behind the preferred candidate as opposed to the secret ballot used for the presidential and parliamentary elections. The system had been introduced in 1996 because it was deemed to be a cheap and transparent mechanism in a society that was suspicious of the secret ballot and had high illiteracy rates. Many women voters criticized this type of voting as undemocratic and out dated as they could not freely exercise their right to vote. Apart from being time consuming, since not everybody would turn up to vote at the same time, the mode of voting threatened social cohesion, creating enmity between close friends, relatives, bosses and landlords.

It was also noted that the Electoral Commission had not fulfilled its obligation to impart timely civic and voter education. In addition, the civic educators were not well equipped with the necessary skills and tools. While the Commission had accredited several NGOs to supplement its civic and voters' education programme, the exercise began during the elections and candidates meetings. This compromised the work of the civic and voters educators. The agents of different candidates took advantage of the public rallies organized for civic and voter education to campaign for their candidates or decampaign their opponents.

These and other issues were documented in an UWONET publication, *Women Emerging in Uganda's Democracy: A Documentation of Women's Experiences in Uganda's Local Council and Local Government Elections, 1998* and discussed with the Electoral Commission. The UWONET proposal to amend the Local Government Act and ensure that all Local Councillors are elected by secret ballot was adopted and the system of lining up was abolished in the Ugandan electoral process.

Additionally, the civic education campaign done by UWONET and its members prior to the local government elections in the 1997/98 was supportive to women contestants. Women had demonstrated leadership skills in the previous local councils, in church, in schools, in civil service and in women's local groups. During the campaigns such women displayed good communication skills, knowledge of the constituent's needs and a mastery of community mobilization. Many of these women also had access to information regarding the

rules and procedures of the electoral process and some knowledge about the responsibilities of the new councils as provided for in the Local Government Act.

However for most women venturing into politics for the first time, it was a daunting experience as they lacked the confidence for public speaking. In areas where women dared to stand against the men, many would eventually pull out of the race when they realized that their male opponent was articulate and a good public speaker. Patriarchy and the low economic status of women also worked against women candidates as the LC III and LC IV campaigns were very highly monetized.

UWONET developed an intervention, with support from DFID, to improve the participation and contribution of women at all levels of local government. The project would enhance the leadership skills of women councillors and enable them deliver services to their constituents. It would also enable both women and men in the councils to understand and apply gender-focused methods to planning and decision-making. The project also targeted future women candidates to give them the necessary information and leadership skills in order to remove barriers to their participation.

Although UWONET contributed greatly to the development of this project, DFID eventually located it in the Ministry of Local Government, arguing that the ministry responsible for the local councils needed to own it for its sustainability. UWONET had believed that given its membership it had all the necessary skills and expertise to manage and implement the project. Since UWONET lacked the capacity to monitor and influence the government implemented project, the network eventually developed leadership training programmes for women councillors along the same lines and implemented them throughout the country.

1999: **Women's Participation in the 2000 Referendum**

Since 1986, President Museveni in his speeches repeatedly associated multiparty competition with political violence and entrenched a no-party version of democracy. It was argued that Ugandans were not ready for open multiparty competition given the historical divisions rooted in ethnicity and religion. While political parties were permitted to exist, they were banned from electoral campaigning.

The Democratic Party (DP), the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), the Conservative Party (CP) and other parties resisted the ban and sought to restore multiparty competition through open elections.

Therefore, the June 2000 referendum was a test of the legitimacy of the political regime in power and no-party democracy. Many women were sceptical and ill-informed about the benefits or risks of political parties and the likely impact on lives and security. As a means of enhancing women's knowledge about the referendum on political systems in Uganda, UWONET joined with ACFODE to organise a public dialogue in March 1999 titled 'Women and the Referendum'. The dialogue focused on some of the contentious issues likely to arise out of the referendum and what it would mean for Ugandan women.

The public dialogue specifically focused on Uganda's socio-political context as well as the legal aspects relating to the relevant constitutional provisions and the referendum. The discussion was led by Makerere University's Dr. Dixon Kamukama of the Department of History and Dr. Jean Barya of the Faculty of Law and attracted 80 women and human rights activists, academics, students and policy makers. The two university dons disclosed that the Constituent Assembly had debated a suitable political system for Uganda and it emerged that Ugandans were intensely divided about whether multiple political parties ought to be permitted or not.

UWONET produced booklets for civic education as part of the NGO Civic Education Coordination Committee.

The first booklet titled 'Facts about the Referendum' spelled out the various issues pertaining to the referendum, its processes and implications to voters. It answered the questions of what, why, who, when and how the referendum would be conducted.

The second booklet 'Guidelines for Civic Educators' outlined the code of conduct for civic educators, and the methodology for conducting civic education at formal events and through informal interactions. The guidelines emphasized reaching groups with little information such as women, the youth, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

The third booklet on 'Women and the Referendum' emphasized the idea of women's rights as human rights and the need for the civic educators to target them in order to help them enhance their political participation and address their needs.

The fourth booklet on the 'Challenge for Citizens Before and After the Referendum', explained the democratic principles, duties and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. It expounded the main challenge for Ugandans in creating a democratic society through the available participatory opportunities. It discussed aspects of the 1995 Constitution relating to the referendum, such as the protection and promotion of fundamental and other human rights and freedoms and the representation of the people.

Despite being accredited to carry out civic education, UWONET had to submit the booklets to the Electoral Commission for vetting prior to publication. The first three booklets were approved but the fourth, which defined 'a democracy' and explained the difference between a single-party and multi-party system was rejected for including material the Commission considered offensive (such as what?). UWONET requested the Commission to put their instruction in writing and when they failed the booklet was published as it was originally written. This created some tension between the network and the Electoral Commission, which threatened to deny UWONET future accreditation to participate in civic education.

2000: Gender Monitoring of the Referendum

UWONET introduced the gender-monitoring concept with the aim of observing the election and referendum process through gender lenses. This included looking out for anomalies in the election process as well as the way men and women acted and related during the campaigns, voters' registration, civic education, canvassing of votes and voting. UWONET looked at whether women were targeted to participate in the referendum, the issues that facilitated or hindered their participation, how and what needed to be improved in order to increase their participation in Uganda's democracy.

The gender monitoring exercise was also intended to monitor women's attitude towards the referendum, document their experiences and establish baseline information for women's participation in the 2001 elections. However, funding from the donor basket fund coordinated by the government was terminated in May 2000, a month-and-a-half before the referendum. Price Water House Coopers, the fund manager, stated that gender monitoring did not make sense or add any value to the process.

This affected the ability of the network to analyse the referendum from a gender perspective. Despite this setback UWONET together with her members, FOWODE, ACFODE, NAWOU and UMWAA, continued to use their own resources and national networks to monitor the referendum process. Much as donors eventually agreed to unfreeze funds one month later, UWONET was unable to continue with the exercise as it had previously been planned.

On June 13, 2000, UWONET organised a public dialogue to challenge the two sides of the referendum debate on their commitment to address the concerns of women in Uganda. Beatrice Lagada, the Director of Gender and Mass Mobilisation at the Movement Secretariat represented NRM while Vincent Sekabira, the Chairperson of the Multiparty Referendum Committee represented the multiparty proponents. The dialogue under the theme, 'Women Empowerment: Is it Tokenism or a Reality?' was intended to enable women make an informed decision on the appropriate political system that would have their interests at heart.

While the leaders from the two sides purported to have policies that favoured women's empowerment, they were non-committal on how they planned to incorporate women into either political system. The women activists questioned the government on the delayed enactment of the Domestic Relations Bill (DRB), the failure to establish the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), legally address violence against women, reintroduce the lost clause³ in the Land Act and the appointment of women to non-political positions as such Ambassadors, Permanent Secretaries and Commissioners.

The administration of the referendum by the Electoral Commission posed major challenges to women voters during registration. Despite the Electoral Commission announcing that the registration stations would stay open in the evenings, shortages of personnel and equipment hampered the process. Voters had to travel long distances to verify their registration and this prevented particularly women from participating. In addition, local council officials sometimes used voter registration to identify and arrest graduated tax defaulters, despite a directive from President Museveni and the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission against such actions, which scared off potential voters.

UWONET also noted the political and military insecurity particularly in the districts of Bundibugyo, Katakwi, Kabarole, Kasese, Moroto, Kotido,

3 To provide for co-ownership of land between spouses

Gulu, and Kitgum created more difficulties for women. Sporadic incidents and threats of violence and the forceful disruption by the local police of the gatherings of multiparty supporters kept many women away from the campaign rallies. For instance on 31st March, 2000 a rally in Mbarara organized by Hajji Nasser Sebaggala, the former mayor of Kampala, was violently dispersed by armed police and soldiers from the 34th Army Battalion using live ammunition.

To crown it all the Electoral Commission delayed to release the exact wording of the referendum question until 12th May 2000. As a result, civic educators were unable to discuss the actual referendum question with Ugandans prior to this time hence limiting their ability to comprehend the meaning and relevance of the referendum. UWONET therefore concluded that rather than voting for a political system of their choice, many women voters who turned out to vote on 29 June 2000 may not have been well-informed about the purpose of the referendum.

2000: Amplifying Women's Voice in the 2001 Elections

In 2000 UWONET produced a People's Manifesto presenting the concerns of civil society for the 2001 presidential and candidates to address. In the People's Manifesto, UWONET appealed to government to prioritise people-centred development and centre the interests of women and children in policy development and implementation. The manifesto also urged voters to consider issues that were crucial for their livelihood and important to women and children when selecting their leaders. Women reiterated their demand for land rights and also encouraged voters to actively participate in all process leading to the development of a democratic culture of the country and national development.

The manifesto was launched on December 19th 2000 and circulated to all aspiring candidates as well as the general public. Lydia Rugasira the Chairperson of UWONET at the time, appealed to the candidates to listen to the voices of the people and cautioned that the issues and concerns raised in the manifesto should not simply be embraced for election purposes but implementation mechanism should be created. Speaking at the launch, Janat Mukwaya the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, representing President Museveni praised the manifesto as a positive contribution to Uganda's democratization process.

UWONET participated in conducting countrywide civic education whereby the public and in particular women voters were encouraged to attend the campaign rallies and ask the candidates questions with regard on women's rights and specifically the issue of co-ownership of land. The launch was attended by representatives of presidential candidates and other individuals from government ministries, parliament, diplomatic missions, civil society organisations, regional leadership and members of the public.

In the months preceding the March 2001 elections, UWONET with its members FIDA-U, ACFODE, FOWODE, UMWA and NAWOU, carried out civic education and encouraged women voters to register, attend rallies to vet the different candidates and ultimately participate in the elections. UWONET also played a critical role in encouraging capable women to run for elective office, either on the affirmative action ticket or for the open seats against men.

2001: **Women Demand Political Accountability**

UWONET together with other women activists formed a pressure group, the Coalition for Political Accountability to Women (COPAW), bringing together activists, politicians and academics to enhancing women's participation in politics and decision-making. This followed the realisation that government was paying lip service to women. COPAW was launched in March 2001, just before the elections. It spearheaded the process of setting national priorities for women holding national and local leaders accountable to them.

The forum provided a neutral space for women outside active politics to engage more regularly with politicians and offer technical assistance in areas of expertise, so as to build a cadre of high calibre accountable leaders. COPAW was wrongly perceived as an arm of opposition aimed at campaigning against Museveni's bid for the presidency. As such a women's pressure group, comprised of women NRM politicians called Women Return Kaguta (WORK), was created to counter COPAW efforts and disbanded soon after the 2001 elections. COPAW however worked as a professionally run group, which organised several activities prior to the 2001 elections.

On March 27th 2001, COPAW organised a press conference, addressing the mode of elections for the district Woman MPs. COPAW strongly advocated for universal adult suffrage in response to abuse of the

Electoral College system by the ruling party ensuring that women were being elected to serve party interests instead of women's special interests. There was fear that the use of electoral colleges would lock doors for women seeking to join politics and perpetuated individualistic women leaders abusing the advantage of incumbency to monopolise women's affirmative action seat. This call for universal adult suffrage for election of the district Woman MPs made COPAW very unpopular in Parliament but was eventually adopted in the 2005 constitutional amendment.

COPAW also came out strongly to criticize the violence meted on some of the women parliamentary aspirants such as Cecelia Ogwal, Winnie Byanyima and Winnie Babihuga. This included the post-election state-inspired harassment against Byanyima, who was faced with an election petition in Mbarara Municipality. COPAW pointed out during a press conference that such high-handed intimidation by the state machinery was bound to deter women's participation in politics and in Uganda's democratization process.

As a means of building relationships with the MPs of the 7th Parliament, COPAW organised a series of breakfast meetings with both male and female MPs. COPAW also hosted a cocktail for all women candidates of the 2001 parliamentary elections as a means of healing the campaign wounds and reconciling opponents. While COPAW initiatives sought to lay a foundation for collaboration between women activists and politicians, some women MPs criticised it for demanding accountability in ensuring they address women specific concerns from them yet the coalition did not support them financially or politically during the campaigns. This criticism was taken seriously by both COPAW and UWONET, who then began to consider sponsoring individuals to join politics.

COPAW also organised a training workshop to empower women intending to contest for seats in the East African Legislative Assembly. The workshop provided information about the Treaty that led to the establishment of the EAC, a historical perspective, challenges of the integration and the work that was supposed to be done by the EAC parliamentarians. Following this training COPAW went ahead to identify potential women candidates and lobbied them to participate in the October 2001 elections. The members of both coalitions also

actively campaigned for their candidates and successfully managed to get four women activists elected into the EALA of 2001–2006.

As a result, four women activists out of the nine men were elected into the East African Legislative Assembly. These included Sheila Kawamara–Mishambi, the Chief Executive Officer of UWONET, Irene Ovonji Odida, the Chairperson FIDA–U, Sarah Bagalaaliwo, the Vice Chairperson FIDA–Africa and Lydia Wanyoto Mutende. At the national level, out of 296 elected MPs, 73 women got into the 7th Parliament, comprising 24% of the elected MPs, an increase of 5% from the 6th Parliament, where 52 (19%) were women. The renowned women activists made it to the 7th Parliament including Winnie Byanyima, former chairperson of FOWODE and Mbarara Municipality MP, Miria Matembe former chairperson of ACFODE and Mbarara MP as well as the former chairperson of FIDA–U and the Mpigi Woman MP Geraldine Bitamazire.

Other women included Rebecca Kadaga, Woman MP Kamuli, Victoria Mwaka, the Ex–Chairperson of Isis–WICCE and Luweero Woman MP, Dora Byamukama a former Director of LAW–U and Mwenge South MP along with Margaret Kyomuhangi who was the Coordinator of Women Activities in the Pan African Women’s Liberation Organisation (PAWLO) and Nakasongola Woman MP. In addition Winfred Masiko a previous Director of Rukungiri Gender Development Association, became the Rukungiri Woman MP, Hope Mwesigye the Executive Director of Uganda Gender Resource Centre won the Kabale Woman MP seat and Ruth Nvumetta Kavuma the Chairperson of the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE–U) was Kalangala district Woman MP.

2005: **Women’s Position on the Constitutional Review**

Following the intense electoral contest between President Museveni and retired NRA/M Colonel Kiiza Besigye in 2001, government announced an unexpected review of the Constitution. The review focused on the political rather than the technical aspects of the instrument. During the presidential campaigns, Besigye promised to address issues concerning the flawed provisions on federo (Buganda’s demand for special status) and the banning of political party activity. As such the government set up a Constitutional Review Commission

(CRC) headed by retired law Professor Fredrick Ssempebwa to review some of the provisions on federalism (federo), the type of political system to be followed and unresolved matters related to land.

It was widely feared that opening up debate on a young constitution would lead to the loss of the gains made by the women in terms of recognizing their rights. The commission was mandated to review the entire constitution and the constitution-making process without the broad consultation of Ugandans. This development was criticized by UWONET as a premature amendment of a constitution that had not been tested.

UWONET therefore conducted countrywide consultations amongst women and the views were compiled in a memorandum presented to the commission in February 2003 and to the Jacob Oulanyah who headed the legal and parliamentary committee in 2004. In the memo UWONET pointed out that the gender sensitive and pro-people aspects of the Constitution that were already enshrined must be safeguarded or improved upon in order to address existing gaps. UWONET also called for the enactment or amendment of the existing laws as well as the implementation of appropriate policies and programmes to operationalize the constitutional guarantees.

UWONET also advocated for the opening up of political space and restoration of multi-party politics that had been under suspension since 1986 when the NRM government took power. It was argued that the freedom to belong to a political party could promote democracy and good governance, with the opposition playing an oversight role over government. The network also strongly recommended that this go hand in hand with consistent civic education in order to help ordinary people participate in a multiparty dispensation. UWONET cautioned that there was a need for minimum guarantees to uphold the status and rights of women within the system of decentralisation.



Jackie Asimwe (right) Coordinator UWONET among the panel during an advocacy forum for the implementation of articles 31, 32 and 33 of the Uganda's Constitution.

On the separation of powers among the Executive, Parliament and the Judiciary, UWONET noted that the autonomy of the legislature from the other arms of government was imperative for it to be effective and independent. In order to improve the effectiveness and accountability of the three arms of government, UWONET recommended that MPs once appointed cabinet ministers should relinquish their seats in order to retain the independence of Parliament.

UWONET criticized the bulging Parliament as a result of the creation of new districts and the heavy toll this was having on the already constrained national budget. The network called for the removal of the ten representatives of the army in Parliament, arguing that since the army took orders from the Commander-in-Chief of the Uganda People's Defence Forces, who was also the President, their allegiance was more to the President other than members of the military. The CRC was also called upon to re-affirm in the Constitution that no arm of government should usurp the powers of another. It was specified that the Executive should have no powers to dissolve Parliament. UWONET proposed an independent body to review MPs' salaries and allowances also enforce the leadership code of conduct.

On the election of women MPs, UWONET recommended an exclusively female adult suffrage since their presence in Parliament was provided for by Article 32 (1) on affirmative action and their primary constituency is women to whom they should be accountable. The network also pointed out that in order to strengthen the country's democracy and governance, both the President and the MPs needed to have term limits of five years, and a maximum of two terms. As a means of safeguarding abuse of office there was need to put in place a strict provision to prohibit renewal of office after completion of two terms for these electable positions.

On land ownership, UWONET pointed out that customary land tenure contradicted all the other equality clauses and therefore needed to be reviewed to recognize the ownership rights of women. It was emphasized that since women constituted 51% of Uganda's population and were responsible for the bulk of food and cash crop production, their representation on land management and dispute resolution structures was critical. The network noted that the definition of 'public interest' in Article 237 (2) where government could acquire land for "public use or in the interest of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health" needed to be broadened to also include "sustenance of livelihoods" and such acquisition needed to be done in consultation with the affected community, including the women.

To a large extent, UWONET concurred with the final recommendations that were made by the CRC in its report of December 2003, which included Parliament's need to review all the laws to ensure the political participation of all Ugandans. On lifting the term limits for the President the CRC recommended that Ugandans would decide on the issue through a referendum.

On the election of the District Women Representatives in Parliament, the Commission differed from UWONET's position of only women voting for women and recommended universal adult suffrage.

As the CRC conducted its business the government set up a parallel committee chaired by National Political Commissar, Crispus Kiyonga to consider the issue of a multiparty system. At the end of 2002, the Kiyonga Committee unanimously, with the exception of Local Government Minister Bidandi Ssali, recommended retaining the

Movement system. Museveni ignored this recommendation and the entire report, making a strong case for the return of multiparty politics. The Movement's National Executive Committee met in Kyankwanzi from March 31 to April 2, 2003, and passed a resolution to create the NRM organisation.

In a surprise move, the President suggested lifting presidential term limits. This created a split in the Movement with formerly close confidants breaking rank with Museveni and declaring that their opposition to the amendment. Among these were the First Deputy Prime Minister Eriya Kategaya, former ministers Amanya Mushega, Richard Kaijuka, Bidandi Ssali, Miria Matembe, Sarah Kiyingi and former army commander Mugisha Muntu. In the cabinet reshuffle that followed, President Museveni dropped all ministers who had spoken out against the move. During the same reshuffle the first woman vice president, Dr. Speciosa Kazibwe was removed and Dr. Gilbert Bukenya replaced her. At the time he was considered the best person to popularize the 'third term' campaign was appointed vice president.

As a response to Kiyonga's White Paper, UWONET developed a report entitled 'The Women's position paper on the government White Paper on the report of the Commission of Inquiry (Constitutional Review), The White Paper and Women's participation in the political transition in Uganda: Assessing the implications of the white paper on women's political participation in Uganda'.

This report was presented to the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee. UWONET defended the return to multiparty politics and emphasized the need for women's representation in key leadership positions within political parties and not just women's wings. It also called for parties to address women's special needs as well as upholding and protecting their rights.

UWONET conducted consultations in 27 of the 56 districts of Uganda and put together a document called 'Women's Demands to Political Parties and Organizations'. The purpose of the document was to highlight the needs and aspirations of Ugandan women and their role in the country's possible transition to pluralism. The document also demanded that Uganda's political leaders consider seriously women's needs and aspirations both in principle and in practice. UWONET hosted a meeting with leaders of the opposition parties

in July 2003 and used the acquired information to challenge them on their gender agendas.

The document addressed areas that included:

- i. True and meaningful democracy
- ii. Integration of the principle of affirmative action,
- iii. People-centred and people-focused development,
- iv. Commitment to international human rights instruments
- v. Peace and security
- vi. The environment
- vii. Land and natural resources
- viii. Law and administration of justice
- ix. Health and reproductive rights.

Following this document UWONET together with a number of stakeholders initiated a platform to support women's inclusion in mainstream political party politics. Working closely with the International Republican Institute (IRI) the network participated in several meetings with each of the major political parties to discuss how parties would address the issues UWONET raised in the document.

These meetings did not yield much but they provided an avenue for dialogue between political parties and organizations and established women as critical stakeholders in the democratization process. Out of this engagement UWONET compiled a report titled 'Gender Balance in Electoral System: The Case for Proportional Representation'. It was argued that women's effective representation under the political party dispensation could best be guaranteed under proportional representation as opposed to the affirmative action that was being blatantly abused through the creation of new districts to increase the number of women. In addition, when the political parties constituted a team to meet the government and discuss the transition, women were absent as crucial decisions for the country's direction were being made.

Unfortunately while UWONET was doing a lot of political work at the national level, the women in the rural areas were not aware of these efforts and the implications for women in Uganda. During the International Women's Day celebration in 2004, women delegates

from more than 10 districts, contrary to the UWONET position, called for lifting of presidential term limits and the 'kisanja'⁴ campaign began to spread countrywide. Hundreds of delegates draped in dry banana leaves (ensanja), the symbol for third term agitators. As they marched past the VIP tent where Museveni sat, local female leaders and women workers gave the thumbs-up and made the three finger salute, another symbol calling for Museveni to rule for a third term.

2006: **Mainstreaming Gender in Multiparty Politics**

In 2006 Uganda held its first multiparty elections since 1980. In this election the NRM–O presented Yoweri Museveni as its presidential candidate; the Uganda People's Congress forwarded Miria Kalule Obote; the Democratic Party selected Ssebaana John Kizito; Dr. Kizza Besigye was the candidate for the Forum for Democratic Change; and Dr. Abed Bwanika stood as an independent candidate.

Prior to the 2006 elections, UWONET conducted an analysis of the manifestos of the political parties to determine their gender compliance and to propose women's minimum demands to them. This required them to ensure that women constituted at least 40 per cent of personnel in political parties and organisations governing structures.

UWONET appreciated the need for having a women's specific space, such as women's leagues as long as they were used by women to address their needs and concerns rather than instruments for top-down manipulation and patronisation. It was noted that while all the major parties had women's leagues, women lacked the necessary political influence and were largely invisible as policy actors. Their leaders also lacked political clout and their presence largely symbolic and irrelevant in advancing the women's agenda.

UWONET worked closely with the International Republican Institute (IRI) to review the policy documents of the political parties in order to ensure that they were gender responsive. Discussions were held concerning party constitutions, manifestos, programme documents and party activity plans. In a memorandum that was agreed upon by the Political Party Gender Mainstreaming Group, parties agreed to include women in their party structures and develop programmes to address their concerns.

⁴ Kisanja—a Luganda word which means 'a term of service'



Solome Nakaweesi (left) Coordinator UWONET handing over women's issues compiled during a workshop to develop the Women's Manifesto 2005.

The NRM–O, which was projected to win the 2006 elections recognized the role of women in development and committed to accord equal opportunities for women. The party also had a specific objective of ensuring gendered structures, programmes, processes and activities including a quota of one–third for women's participation at all party levels. An action plan was developed with the aim of including women in decision–making committees and drafting a gender responsive party manifesto. The women's league would make women's participation in the party programmes and activities more sustainable and there would be clear rules against gender–based discrimination in the NRM–O code of conduct.

The Democratic Party/Uganda Young Democrats (DP/UYD) proposed a 40% representation of women at all levels of leadership in the party and in the youth wing. The party emphasized its resolve to emancipate women, combat sexism and adopt a gender sensitive perspective in its constitution and party documents. Furthermore, the DP Gender Working Group proposed capacity building programmes for the party members and leadership on gender. It would also create a nationwide gender unit to establish a women's wing. The campaign messages and the vision of UYD were also reviewed and re–drafted in a more gender inclusive manner.

The Uganda People's Congress (UPC) also recognized the importance of women in national development along with the need to ensure full participation of women. It proposed the amendment of its constitution to commit to gender equity and equality. UPC further proposed a

goal on gender and a change of language to be gender inclusive. A quota of one third of women at all levels was proposed for the party structure's leadership as well as improved incorporation of women and youth. The memorandum also proposed a review of the party election procedures and resource allocation in a gender responsive manner and for the party code of conduct to prohibition discrimination.

The Conservative Party (CP) proposed amendments to its constitution and added a gender responsive slogan to the party emblem. In the discussions it was highlighted that some traditional practices were discriminatory against women and CP agreed to only promote those that did not perpetuate gender imbalances.

On 23rd February 2006, Ugandans went to the polls to select leaders on the basis of multiparty competition. However, the discussions and proposals made by UWONET and other women's organisations to ensure that women constituted at least 40 per cent of personnel in political parties governing structures were largely ignored. No effort was made to go beyond the special 'add-on' seats in the national Parliament and local government. Thus women continued to be marginalised and disempowered within party leadership structures. Political party leadership remained male-dominated. Apart from the UPC where a woman was elected as party chair following her influential husband's death, all the other parties clearly demonstrated a lack of inclusiveness.

2011: Gender Audit of the General Elections

As Uganda prepared for the 2011 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, UWONET carried out an audit of gender considerations of the political party manifestos.

The gender audit highlighted the opportunities and challenges to women's participation in politics giving a comparative analysis of 2006 and 2011 political party manifestos. It provided an assessment of the party manifestos and used them as a monitoring tool for future engagement with to monitor the gender sensitivity and implementation of women's concerns. UWONET regarded the audit as a tool to hold the political parties accountable with regard to their commitments.

During the second term of multi-party politics, UWONET realized that much as the number of women MPs was growing, their commitment to the women's agenda was

diminishing despite the women's movement push for affirmative action. Most women politicians held the belief that the NRM was the sole promoter of their emancipation and therefore they were beholden to the Movement government. They feared to challenge the status quo, finding it easier to fit into the existing systems, rather than transform them, or challenge the oppressive cultures and structures that marginalised women.

UWONET conducted another analysis of the party manifestos. Enjoying support from women, the NRM continued to make same general statements it had made in 2006 without specific commitments to implementation. Monitoring such sweeping statements was problematic. UWONET found that the FDC and DP had become more specific in their commitments to women since their 2006 manifestos. UPC also made more commitments to women in the 2011 manifesto than it had in the 2006 manifesto that had stated: "Everything in the manifesto shall apply equally to men and women".

UWONET Entrenching Women in Leadership

For most women politicians, participating in the 2011 elections was like venturing into a lion's den. UWONET's documentation of women's experiences in the presidential, parliamentary and local government elections revealed the hurdles women faced. Across the country, women still lacked resources to finance their political campaigns in environments where voter bribery was done openly. Many women candidates were not sponsored by their parties and they resorted to their personal savings and soliciting financial support from family and friends to cover expenses for mobilizing voters, holding public rallies, transporting, and printing campaign material.



Women leaders
(councilors)
from Teso
during a
training.

It was a learning experience for women who realised that one got into politics as an individual and personally planned and financed their campaigns. Women also had to manage their personal life, family duties and handle the political intrigue and infighting among the different interest groups and within the political party ranks. In some instances women candidates were required by the voters to meet them in their respective villages as opposed to holding joint rallies at the parish or sub-county level. This was exhausting and expensive given the remoteness of villages, poor road connectivity and the lack of an effective public transport system in the countryside.

The intrigue within political parties had a significant impact on the female candidates with some politicians using the party structures to harass and eliminate opponents. Women who were not well acquainted with these intricacies were unprepared to deal with the divisive politics of family lineage, ethnicity and religion. According to some women, the future of multi-party politics seemed bleak since the single party or individual merit system was still deeply entrenched. As part of the political gymnastics, new districts were created by the government shortly before the elections in order to deny some women politicians access to their political strongholds, and they were defeated. For many women candidates it was very disappointing that even after successfully winning the primaries, their parties continued to support independent candidates running against them.

Patriarchy was at play throughout the country as men, particularly the elders and clan leaders, maintained the stance that they had to approve the candidates representing women in their districts. A number of powerful women were openly fought by influential ministers and political party chiefs. In several instances the male politicians appealed to patriarchal structures such as the clan leaders, elders and tribal groupings to oust powerful women politicians whom they considered a threat to their own political survival. In most cases such women were supposed to be 'good women', who were legally married, good wives, respectful of tradition and bound by their ethnicity.

On top of the traditional baggage, age was used to undermine some women candidates, with claims that they were either too young or too old to be elected into political office. Unmarried women were openly referred to as prostitutes, who once elected could easily get married to men outside the districts they were representing. Double standards applied to women married to men from different districts with assertions that they no longer belonged to the community where they were born. Some candidates were forced to parade their husbands before the voters as a sign of their competence and arguments were advanced that those women without husbands would not make effective leaders. In some instances spouses denied their wives political support as a means of discouraging them from vying for political

office, some alleging that women in politics had loose morals and were unfaithful to their husbands.

Unlike men, women politicians were still expected to continue fulfilling their gender roles as mothers, wives, in-laws and also meet their responsibilities to the extended family. As women entered into this highly competitive public space, many discovered that politics was taking a toll on their families and were unable to attend to all their family needs. Matters were further complicated when constituents looked up to women politicians as mothers of entire districts expected to attend to their individual welfare.

In some instances voters were told that those powerful women politicians were no longer women and thus not in touch with women's needs. Talking about developmental issues like construction of schools, health centres, roads and supply of electricity to their district was seen by the male politicians as trying to venture into their political space. The men still felt that they had to be dominant in political decision-making while women politicians only attended to women events such as the International Women's Day celebrations.

In November 2011 following open opposition from government, UWONET delivered a press statement defending Hon. Rebecca Kadaga and the integrity of her office as Speaker. In the statement UWONET pointed out that the Parliament of Uganda derived its mandate, functions and rules of procedure from the Constitution. As such, in carrying out their work MPs were expected to exercise their sovereign power on behalf of their constituents by passing people-friendly laws and exercising oversight over government. UWONET further pointed out that MPs were bound to abide by the norms of democratic participation, accountability and transparency in order to attain good governance.

In the statement it was recognised that the 9th Parliament was at the time one of the most visible and people-oriented Parliaments. UWONET expressed support to the MPs, particularly in their stand to fight corruption and uphold the integrity of Parliament. UWONET appealed to the Executive, with majority in Parliament to respect the clear separation of power between the three main arms of government and warned against muzzling the operations of Parliament.

In the same statement UWONET reiterated its support for the Speaker, observing that Hon. Rebecca Kadaga had remained sincere to the commitment she made to women and the general public. UWONET supported Hon Kadaga because she was accomplished leader and also the top woman leader and politician in Uganda. "Hon. Rebecca Kadaga is our heroine and has inspired many Ugandan women from all walks of life. Many of us in the women's movement today learnt a lot from her passionate leadership when she was very active in the Uganda Women Lawyers

Association and the Uganda Law Society. Her style of leadership affirms leadership that is transparent, objective, impartial and geared towards quality service delivery," the statement read. UWONET pledged to stand by her at all times as she upheld the rule of law.

The network appealed to all MPs to back the Speaker to make laws, policies and budgets that were people centred and non-partisan and to prioritize the enactment of Bills that had remained pending in the house for a very long time such as the Marriage and Divorce Bill. On the debate of the Public Order Management Bill the network called upon MPs to engage in discussions with Ugandans to ensure that it was in consonance with Uganda's international and national commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of Uganda where freedom of association, speech, conscience, and the media were guaranteed.

Following the 2011 elections UWONET took on the responsibility of strengthening women's leadership capacity in addition to sensitizing all citizens on their rights, duties and obligations. In 2012, UWONET published a simplified handbook titled 'Citizens Roles and Responsibilities' as the network's contribution to its broader mission of entrenching democratic values and principles among the citizens. The handbook explained the functions of government and the rights, responsibilities and obligations of citizens. In the same year, UWONET published another handbook on 'The Roles and Responsibilities of District and Sub-County Political and Administrative Leaders'. This was aimed at providing citizens with information on the roles and responsibilities of political and administrative leaders in their districts. It sought to enhance awareness about the stages where they could participate in governance.

UWONET organised a series of advocacy and capacity building workshops with women MPs and district councillors to increase their appreciation of gender mainstreaming in policymaking and budgeting. UWONET's resource books were broadly used in several districts to build the capacity of citizens and elected political leaders to understand how to play their roles in delivering services and remaining accountable to the electorate.

UWONET Celebrates Dr. Speciosa Kazibwe, Africa's First Woman Vice President

The appointment of Dr. Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe as Uganda's first woman Vice President in 1994 was a great achievement. She was the first woman to hold such a high office in Uganda and the first woman in Africa to hold this position in government. She made women in power highly visible and reflected their dynamism as a source of new ideas for government on strategic decision-making and the women's agenda.

Dr Kazibwe had started her political career as a young active member of the Democratic Party in the youth and women's wings. When President Museveni took

power in 1986 she was elected a village leader under the NRM. Her involvement at this level propelled her to contest in 1989 for the position of Kampala District Women's Representative under the National Resistance Council.



Uganda's first
Vice President
Dr. Speciosa
Kazibwe

Speciosa proved her competence and thereafter held a number of ministerial positions including Deputy Minister for Industry, Minister for Gender and Community Development as well as Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries. In 1994 was elected as a member of the Constituent Assembly that drafted Uganda's new Constitution. In 1996, she was elected Member of Parliament for Kigulu South in Iganga District, a position she held until 2006. Despite the negative media and the many male enemies she attracted as Vice President, she dedicated her service to advancing the cause of all women, reducing poverty, lowering illiteracy, and promoting social justice. She was a strong advocate for affirmative action, promoting girl-child education and the recognition of the rights of marginalised groups, such as the elderly and disabled. Vice President Kazibwe strongly felt that education was the key to the emancipation of women in Uganda and she served as a role model for young girls.

Despite her very demanding job as Vice President, she remained close to the women's movement and retained her position as chairperson of the Senior Women's Advisory Group on the Environment (SWAG), and a member of Uganda Women Entrepreneurs

Association Limited, as well as Uganda Women Medical Doctors Association which is a member of UWONET.

Uganda's First Woman Speaker

As soon as the ninth Parliament was constituted, members of UWONET worked tirelessly to lobby new legislators to elect Uganda's first female Speaker of Parliament. Within UWONET, Rebecca is a valued resource for women activists. In May 2011, Ugandans from all walks of life celebrated the election of Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga, MP for Kamuli district as the first female Speaker. She beat Nandala Mafabi, MP for Sironko district, who had been nominated by the opposition in Parliament. Rebecca won with 302 votes against Mafabi's 57 votes.



Uganda's first
female Speaker of
Parliament Rt. Hon.
Rebecca Alitwala
Kadaga

In Uganda's history, Rebecca has been a pioneer on three fronts. In 1984, she was the first female Ugandan lawyer to open legal chambers. In 2001 she was the first female Deputy Speaker and later the first female Speaker of Parliament. From 1986 to 1989, Rebecca served as president of FIDA-U following which she joined politics. In 1989 when she became woman MP for Kamuli district under the expanded NRC and also occupied various ministerial posts.

Recollecting her personal experience, as documented by UWONET, Rebecca said, “As soon as the elections were over, I quickly started on the campaigns for the office of the Speaker. I had to get all the telephone numbers of the elected MPs and called each one of them personally, congratulating them, but also requesting them to elect me as the Speaker for the 9th Parliament. I did all this even before they had taken their oath as members of Parliament”.

Not taking any chances, she took the bold step of asking the party chair, President Museveni for his personal support for her candidature as well as the backing of the party. She narrates “I went to my party president and on a very light note told him that the Basoga I represent in Parliament had got problems pronouncing the word ‘deputy’ and had requested me to ask him to graduate me to being a speaker, which was much easier. The president really laughed at that and gave me his word of supporting my bid”.

By the time the 9th Parliament was sworn in and convened for its first sitting to elect the Speaker, Rebecca had spoken to all the parliamentarians and was confident she was Uganda’s next Speaker. “I told the MPs that ‘sincerely you have seen me at work, so why can’t you just have me promoted to the next level’. I was banking on their appreciation of my service as Deputy Speaker”, Rebecca said with her usual charm.

Rebecca’s journey has not been without bumps in the road, “There is a lot of intrigue within our party and it is very unfortunate that the people I trusted and worked closely with ganged up to have me thrown out of parliament. I should have been elected unopposed but some people in my party went out of their way to heavily sponsor candidates against me. They met my opponents every week to evaluate their efforts against me but I knew that I would trounce them. As I campaigned throughout the district, I was focused on the percentage with which I would be returned to Parliament and not on losing. I ended up getting the highest percentage of votes in my party”, Rebecca said just after becoming the Speaker. Realising that her political opponents were bent on destroying her, UWONET decided to offer support to counter the aggression. Members of UWONET regularly called on the Speaker to have sisterly talks and also add light moments to her demanding work schedule.

As the speaker, Rebecca became popular for giving minority opposition voices a platform to speak out. Her public popularity swelled when in 2012, an outspoken Kabale priest Reverend Fr. Gaetano Batanyenda publicly endorsed her to become Uganda’s first woman President. Around the same time, former Church of Uganda Archbishop Henry Luke Orombi said that Uganda would be well served if the next president was a woman. A survey in June 2012 by Research World International showed Kadaga as favourite for Uganda’s next president. Towards the end of 2012, she gained more recognition for her promise to pass the Anti-Homosexuality Bill

as a Christmas gift. This attracted the wrath of the global gay rights movement but also a blessing from Pope Benedict XVI.

The challenges of her new position continued when NRM expelled 'rebel MPs' Barnabas Tinkasimire, Theodore Ssekikuubo, Wilfred Niwagaba and Muhammad Nsereko from the party and expected the Speaker to follow suit and expel them from the Parliament. However, she ruled that the expelled NRM rebel MPs would not lose their seats because the 1995 Constitution did not have such a provision. She declared, "I am not persuaded and I will not direct the Clerk to Parliament to declare the MPs' seats vacant," adding that article 83 of the Constitution which the NRM party had wanted to invoke to cause by-elections could not be applied to eject the MPs.

She received opposition within her party and accusations of collaborating and sympathising with opposition to which she publicly replied, "I am a Speaker of Uganda. I am the speaker for all members of Parliament and the way Parliament operates, you talk to different people on different issues so for the Prime Minister to go and launch an attack on me because I talked to opposition MPs is very wrong." She pointed out that a multiparty system of government meant taking into account the views of many parties.

"When I took the oath to become Speaker, I said I would be Speaker for everyone and I want government to understand that I don't attack the Executive, I don't attack the Judiciary, and I want them to also behave themselves and stop attacking me as a person and the institution I lead," she added. Ms Kadaga says: "Getting onto this seat was not an easy ride and being on it is even tougher." For UWONET and the women of Uganda, she remains a woman many emulate as a leader of integrity.

Eliminating Violence Against Women

When UWONET was formed in 1993, one of the major concerns for women was to combat the evils of domestic violence, rape and defilement. The majority of women in Uganda regardless of their education, class or social status were acquainted with the experience of violence either in the public, professional or domestic arena. The framework for UWONET's engagement was the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women with the definition covering, "Physical violence and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, and other traditional and harmful practices to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation."

The work of UWONET also covers physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and intimidation at work, in education institutions, and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution and also the physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state wherever it occurs. The network affirmed that acts of violence against women violated and suffocated the realization of their human rights and fundamental freedom as well as national peace and development.

Research and Advocacy to End Gender Based Violence

UWONET with a number of women's organisations conducted extensive advocacy and lobbying to unveil the prevalence of violence against women and girls along with its effects on their wellbeing and the country's development. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, different women's organisations such as ACFODE, FIDA-U and NAWOU had attempted to address violence against women in all its manifestations.

They carried out studies and various advocacy activities in respect to domestic violence and sexual offences with the aim of informing and developing position papers as advocacy tools to influence the law and policy reform processes. Despite having a gender sensitive Constitution, it was not until 2010 that domestic violence was regarded as a crime through the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act as opposed to common assault.

Research conducted by the women's movement established that the low social and economic status of women was a major basis and consequence of violence against them. Patriarchy and oppressive traditional or cultural practices made it acceptable in society. Husbands were granted status over their wives perpetuating unequal power relations from the family level to the larger community. Patriarchy thrived on various rules and practices including the culture of silence, which prohibited women from publically discussing domestic problems, including domestic violence which was considered a private matter. Research revealed that women apparently believed that their husbands had a right to beat them. Women cited reasons such as declining sex, neglecting children, leaving home without spousal permission, arguing or burning food. Other reasons included arguments over money or suspected infidelity.

Studies by women's organisations revealed that many women were experiencing violence from a wide range of perpetrators such as close family members, distant relatives, neighbours and in conflict areas at the hands of rebels and government soldiers. Women suffered death, injuries, sprains, fractures, cuts and bruises. They also experienced psychological violence in the form of controlling behaviour from partners who hindered them from fulfilling daily activities, work or social interaction. Partners also denied women access to income, education, food, medical care and property. Rural survivors of sexual assault were more likely to be married to the perpetrators who in most cases were connected to local law enforcement personnel.

The major forms of sexual violence were marital rape, defilement, and incestuous rape, early and forced marriages. Early marriages increased girls' vulnerability to early pregnancies leading to medical and psychological problems. Girls under 15 years of age were five times more likely to die in childbirth and at higher risk for obstetric fistula, resulting from prolonged and obstructed labour. Women's limited decision-making power on matters of sex and reproductive rights made them particularly vulnerable to HIV.

The trend of reported domestic violence cases to legal authorities and legal aid service providers indicated that survivors were mainly married women. Domestic violence greatly contradicted the idea of a family as the safest environment for an individual. Consequently it was hard for women to testify against their husbands or report incidents. Women NGOs like FIDA-U kept records on domestic violence but these were restricted to their areas of operation. In the absence of a balanced

representation of NGOs throughout the country, it was difficult to make a proper analysis of the national prevalence levels of the different of violence

In 1995, UWONET partnered with the recently established Police Child Care and Family Protection Unit (CFPU) at the Uganda Police to equip police to handle such crimes as domestic violence, rape, defilement and child sacrifice. Together they embarked on a pro-active approach to create awareness within the communities and encouraged community policing to avert these crimes. Government also strengthened the local council system by empowering local authorities to develop bylaws that dealt with gender based violence. While this was a remarkable move by the police, the CFPU defined domestic violence narrowly as spousal beating, excluding for of violence such as sexual abuse of girls, dowry related violence, marital rape and female genital mutilation.

UWONET therefore committed to track all offences that constitute violence and move beyond the records that reflected only sexual and physical for of domestic violence and include psychological violence. UWONET thus developed a programme to address sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) by increasing community participation and enhancing knowledge on human rights and freedom, harmful cultural practices as well as issues of women's welfare, health and dignity. Harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation were creatively tackled through constructive dialogue with local leaders like in Kapchorwa district.

On March 5th 1994 as part of the activities leading to the International Women's Day, UWONET launched the Pressure Group on Rape and Defilement, as a means of raising awareness of the prevalence and dangers associated with rape and defilement. The pressure group documented, publicized and followed up cases of sexual abuse to women and children. It also provided counselling to survivors, perpetrators and their families in addition to conducting research into the possible causes, effects along with preventative strategies. This group included FIDA-U, NAWOU, ACFODE, Medical Foundation, Ntinda Progressive Women's Association and Butabika Hospital. It went on to establish a centre where cases of rape and defilement could be reported and a base for advocacy for legal reform and enforcement of laws against SGBV.

In 1996, the Pressure Group compiled an index of all reported cases within Kampala district, between June 1994 and June 1996. This included cases reported in the local newspapers as well as those reported at police stations and tried at Magistrate's Courts and the Kampala High Court. The 'Index of Reported Cases of Rape and Defilement in Kampala District, 1996' was submitted to the Uganda Law Reform Commission, a government body charged with drafting the Sexual Offences Bill. This documentation served as a reference for future research and provided data to inform the drafting of a Sexual Offences Bill. The pressure group noted the need to sensitise

and partner with the local council officials to encourage reporting. The group also worked closely with the Police Training School to ensure that the various aspects of rape and defilement are documented during reporting. This pressure group later became 'Hope After Rape' Organization.

Activism to Denounce Violence against Women

In a bid to raise public awareness on violence against women and girls, UWONET organised various events including a comprehensive media campaign. As a result of the increased publicity there was widespread condemnation of the perpetrators of horrendous crimes of violence against women from members of the public.



Speaker of Parliament
Rt. Hon. Edward
Ssekandi receiving a
petition to End Violence
Against Women and
Girls from Rita Aciro
Lakor Executive Director
UWONET.

Public March against Domestic Violence

In December 1996 the UWONET Pressure Group organised a peaceful six-kilometre march and inter-faith service in memory of women who were killed by their husbands during the Christmas season. The walk started in Nakulabye, where Robinah Luwedde was killed on Christmas Eve. Other women whose memory was honoured included Fina Nalubale of Kyogobye, Mbale, Joyce Nakanwagi of Kasenge village Mpigi as well as Phina Nabutsale and her baby Kadogo who died on Phina's back in Mbarara. The chief walker was the Minister of State for Regional Cooperation Rebecca Kadaga. UWONET presented a petition for women's protection and justice to the Minister of Justice, the Attorney General, the Uganda Law Reform Commission, the Inspector General of Police, the Minister of Local Government and the Director for Public Prosecution (DPP). The participants in the march included FOWODE, FIDA-U, ACFODE, NAWOU, UMWA, Isis-WICCE, AUWMD, Hope after Rape, Uganda Women Judges Association, Environment Alert, Disabled Women's Network and

Resource Organisation, Buso Foundation, VEDCO, Uganda Law Reform Commission, and religious leaders.

Campaign for Justice against Celebrity Rapist

UWONET together with a number of women activists put up a spirited fight against a renowned soccer star, Majid Musisi who had allegedly defiled a 16-year-old girl on July 4th 1997. One day after the news of Musisi's detention was reported, women activists kept camp at the Central Police Station, where he was held and also paid a solidarity visit to the mother and girl to ensure that they pressed charges. The professional footballer was held in police custody for four days without appearing in court following which the defilement charges dropped. The DPP told UWONET that the principal witness, the defiled girl, and her mother had refused to proceed with the case recording a statement that they had lost interest in the case. Upon interrogation by UWONET, the mother revealed that the family had decided to drop charges due to the negative press reports and the public ridicule that further traumatized the girl. The family was also heavily intimidated by the soccer fans and his club in Turkey demanded his release at whatever cost since his incarceration would greatly affect the club's performance in the league that was due to begin. A day after his release Musisi flew back to Turkey.

Infuriated with the acquittal, UWONET held a press conference, calling for justice and the re-instating of the case against Musisi. UWONET hired a private investigator to independently establish the facts around the case. The investigator visited the scene of the crime and interviewed the mother, the maid who was an eyewitness, the police investigating officers, the DPP and various officials in the Ministry of Justice. The investigator was unable to interact with the victim who had been relocated by the family and the mother disclosed that her daughter deserved protection against the insensitive and hostile public that was bent on protecting the perpetrator.

According to the report presented to UWONET, Musisi was a boyfriend to the girl's sister whom he had taken to town after which he returned to the girl's room. Musisi locked the room and defiled her following which he fell asleep and the girl ran out of the room calling for help. Together with the maid she reported to the police and notified her mother. Musisi was found deep asleep in the blood-soaked bed sheets, under the influence of drugs, and was arrested.

He was not produced in court as expected on Monday 7th prompting suspicion of foul play. The public accused the girl and her mother of using the case for financial gain. To compound the situation, the police shared all their confidential statements to be published in the media. As a result they lost confidence in the judicial system and requested for the withdrawal of the case. The mother however expressed her willingness to proceed with the case if her and daughter's privacy could be guaranteed.

Upon receiving the investigator's report, UWONET sought a meeting with the DPP, Richard Buteera, on October 29th 1997, who acknowledged the facts of the case as reported. The DPP agreed to recall the case, but told UWONET that he could not guarantee the private hearing of the case. He added that while the laws against rape and defilement were reasonably good, the attitude of the judiciary was still wanting as they put the burden of proof on the victim.

As a result of the Majid Musisi case, UWONET learnt that the major issues of concern for justice in respect to rape and defilement largely lay with how the police handled such cases and the judiciary's sensitivity. It was noted that the 'Majid Musisi case' took the trend it did because the assailant was a 'high profile' personality and the safety of the police files were compromised. Through the Pressure Group, UWONET began searching for better avenues of ensuring that such cases were prosecuted even when the principal witness lost interest in the case and opted to withdraw.

UWONET and FIDA-U also handled a case where Rev. Livingstone Bawonga a pastor in Luwero defiled a 10-year-old infecting her with gonorrhoea. The pastor was charged and remanded to Luzira maximum security prison. Since the girl's mother could not afford medical services, the doctors revealed that the medical attention sought by FIDA-U and UWONET was too late and her chances of reproducing were minimal. This information was shared with ULRC to contribute to its study on rape and defilement.

Combating Harmful Cultural Practices

Prior to the wedding of the Kabaka (King) of Buganda His Majesty Ronald Muwenda Mutebi to the Nabagereka (Queen) Sylvia Nagginda Luswata, in August 1999, Uganda's local media broke the news that the Kabaka was traditionally expected to have a mock marriage with a 13-year old virgin Sarah Nakku. She had been identified in March 1999 by clan leaders to perform an outdated cultural ritual of cleansing the King before his official marriage. In essence the Kabaka was supposed to have sexual intercourse with a virgin, who would then be regarded as one of his wives.

After this, Nakku would be expected to live in perpetual seclusion until death, sacrificing her right to sex and reproduction. As one of the recognised wives of the king, Nakku would be given land and her family would be held in high esteem within Buganda kingdom. On learning of these plans, UWONET together with Isis-WICCE, ACFODE, WILDAF and Action Aid Uganda initiated an email discussion to devise strategies to condemn and block the mock marriage. This discussion attracted women and human rights activists across the globe to get involved in the debate and gave their support and ideas. On April 21, 1999 the women's lobby group against the 'Nakku' tradition published a press statement in The New Vision newspaper.

As the pressure by activists mounted, there was increased animosity against the women leaders from strong traditionalists who believed that this was an attack on the Baganda as a people and against their cultural practices. UWONET sought a meeting with the leaders and in particular the Prime Minister of Buganda Joseph Mulwanyamuli Ssemwogerere but he declined the request. Upon being rebuffed UWONET engaged more publicly and towards the end of April 1999, the Kattikiro invited the UWONET Coordinator, Sheila Kawamara Mishambi for a discussion. Realising that this could be a ploy to intimidate women activists, 15 women quickly came together within an hour of the invitation. At his office in Bulange, Mengo women activists were met by a group of hecklers who insulted them, accusing them of being frustrated, angry women who did not wish the Kabaka well.

Upon realising that the UWONET Coordinator was not alone, the Prime Minister summoned the Kingdom's legal team and some Buganda Kingdom ministers who met with the women activists. In a meeting which lasted over two hours, the Kattikiro dismissed the press reports as false and laboured to explain that Nakku was a harmless symbolic 800-year-old tradition among the Baganda royalty. He argued that Nakku's rights were not being violated because the whole cultural practice was based on succession and that she was simply a successor to her grandparents who held similar 'offices'. He told the women activists that Sarah Nakku would lead a normal life and while she would be expected to perform certain rituals the Kabaka would never have sex with her.

Unconvinced with the explanation, the women activists continued with their campaign drumming up local and international support to abolish any cultural practices and rituals that involved children and undermined their dignity and development. Suspecting that the ritual could be stealthily performed, UWONET organised a team of women activists and international journalists to camp in Sarah Nakku's village of Bakka and monitor her movements at home and at school waiting to raise the alarm in case the ritual was performed. The women's protest was publicized in the Newsweek Magazine, CNN, BBC and this local and international publicity caused the much-treasured oppressive cultural practice against girls to be abolished. UWONET joined the celebration of Kabaka Mutebi and his queen Sylvia Nagginda on August 27th 1999, and welcomed him as a modern king who was not to be enslaved by harmful custom.

Tackling Patriarchal Abuse of Women in Leadership

On June 27th 2000, Dr. Stephen Chebrot a former Minister of Local Government and a Member of Parliament for Tingey County in Kapchorwa District physically assaulted Hon. Jane Francis Kuka, the Minister of State for Disaster Preparedness.

He alleged that she had campaigned against him in his constituency. Kuka, who was also the woman MP for Kapchorwa district, was slapped in front of her constituents. As soon as the story was reported in the media, UWONET took up the case as part of its campaign on violence against women. The network looked at the Chebrot–Kuka case as an incident of patriarchal influenced abuse against emerging women leaders. UWONET demanded a public apology from Chebrot to all Ugandan women who were abused in a similar manner by men in authority. Chebrot arrogantly responded that he could not apologise for slapping a “stupid and useless woman” and this action was not addressed to all Ugandan women but an individual.

UWONET together with several activists from the women’s movement sought audience with Ms Kuka, who confirmed the assault and disclosed that ever since Chebrot had lost his ministerial appointment he had made it a habit of publicly humiliating her, referring to her as “a stupid woman, useless and not fit to be a minister”. This abuse had gone on for over ten years and despite numerous protests to the appointing authority, Chebrot had received no reprimand. The women activists advised Kuka to institute legal criminal charges and offered to stand by her in solidarity.

Alongside the legal proceedings, UWONET petitioned President Yoweri Museveni to denounce the conduct of the former Minister and desist from ever appointing him in any form of public service. Over 1000 signatures were collected from the members of the public condemning the continued violence against women. UWONET also petitioned several international embassies with offices in Kampala and major donors calling upon them to urge the Uganda government to address the prevalent abuse of Ugandan women.

As a result, Chebrot sought an appointment with the UWONET Coordinator, Sheila Kawamara–Mishambi to explain his case. Kawamara, who delayed the meeting for a day mobilised several women activists and the media, who all met Chebrot at the UWONET Secretariat on August 1, 2000. On camera, he explained his grievances against Kuka and publicly apologised to Ugandan women as demanded by UWONET for not using more civil means to solve their differences.

A day after meeting with UWONET, the Director for Public Prosecution (DPP) charged Chebrot for being idle and disorderly, which women activists protested against as too lenient. The women sought a meeting with the DPP, Mr. Richard Buteera and he explained that according to the criminal laws of Uganda, Chebrot could only be prosecuted under that charge since he had not physically harmed Kuka. Buteera urged women to advocate for legal reform particularly in cases of violence against women, which were very often trivialized.

UWONET received several phone calls from prominent personalities who claimed that the matter was a simple one and did not deserve the publicity it was getting. On

August 7, 2000, a group of 16 elders from Kapchorwa visited UWONET's secretariat to request the withdrawal of the case. They argued that the conflict between Kuka and Chebrot was a local one that could be solved by the elders rather than the courts of law. UWONET maintained that since the two people involved were national leaders the case had assumed a national character and was a representation of abuse to all Ugandan women. Having failed to influence UWONET, the elders sought meetings with several national leaders, including the Minister in charge of the Presidency and National Security alleging that their 'son' was being unfairly persecuted.

Undeterred by the pressure, UWONET continued supporting Kuka and on August 28, 2000, Dr. Stephen Chebrot was criminally charged for being idle and disorderly. Although he was given a meagre penalty of 2000 Uganda shillings, equivalent to one US dollar at the time, this conviction was a victory against a prominent person who was a perpetrator of violence against women. The ridiculous fine that Chebrot paid for his crime against Kuka pushed UWONET to continue with its demand for stiffer penalties against perpetrators of gender based violence.

Protesting Victim–Blaming at the Italian Embassy–Any abuse of Women anywhere is abuse on all women

On March 12, 1999 UWONET mobilised women activists to surround the Italian Embassy in Kampala and handed over signed pairs of jeans to an Italian diplomat to protest the ruling of the Italian High Court on a rape case. Donning black t-shirts and tight blue jeans, the women activists amplified the international slogan that, "No still means no. Whatever the circumstances, a woman must not be raped." The Italian court had overturned a rape conviction, saying there was no way a woman would have been raped since she had been wearing jeans. Thirty-five women activists braved the morning rain and converged outside the Italian Embassy and handed over the four pairs of jeans to the embassy's Secretary for Press and Cultural Affairs, Pietro Averono. The inscriptions on the jeans read "Shame upon the Italian Supreme Court!"

In solidarity with the international women's movement, UWONET together with WILDAF–Uganda called upon the judiciary to be sensitive to women's feelings in passing their judgments in instances where women were abused. Women legislators in Italy pointed out that "the judges obviously have no sensitivity to the psychology of rape, no understanding of how victims think or how real life works."

Fighting Impunity of Intimate Partner Violence

On the night of December 23, 1997 Sharma Kooky an Indian businessman in Kampala, together with his brother Davinder Kumar, tortured and electrocuted his wife Renu Joshi to death. Sharma committed these acts of violence in response to accusations

that his wife was having an affair with the houseboy. The Indian community came to his defence but pressure from women activists led to the arrest of Sharma and his brother.

The gruesome murder shocked the county and galvanised the women's rights movement call for justice against the two brothers. UWONET together with several women activists followed up the case. Together with FIDA-U the network compelled the authorities to perform an autopsy that proved instrumental in convicting Kooky. High Court Judge Moses Mukiibi, on January 17, 2000, convicted and sentenced Kooky and his brother Davinder Kumar to death after finding them guilty of killing Joshi. Delivering his verdict, Mukiibi noted that Joshi had been electrocuted. Earlier, two conflicting pathological medical reports had indicated three possible causes of Joshi's death: battering, poisoning and electric shock. With these conflicting reports, Kooky and his brother contested the verdict but on September 1, 2000, the Court of Appeal upheld the sentence of murder. The conviction was seen as a victory for the women activists who had been struggling to have a law against domestic violence enacted.

In March 2012, Sharma Kooky, walked out of prison as a free man on a presidential prerogative of mercy, having spent 12 years in jail for the murder of his wife. In spite of the Domestic Violence Act having been enacted in 2010, the release of Kooky was seen as a slap in the face of Ugandan women who, through their advocacy led by FIDA-Uganda, had succeeded in getting Kooky convicted.

Women MPs under their umbrella body Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA), together with UWONET condemned the release of Sharma Kooky, as an injustice to the women of Uganda. This was interpreted as a lack of commitment by government to fight domestic violence and protect the lives of Ugandan women.

Women and Peace Building

“Sitting comfortably in the newly established UWONET office at Buganda Road in Kampala in 1996; I pondered over the top stories published in the national dailies about the civil war in northern Uganda. The mayhem unleashed on defenceless civilians by Joseph Kony’s rebels was by then commonplace and stories of hundreds of women, children and men killed; kidnapped, maimed and raped by the rebels had for close to a decade made the headlines. Some of the things reported about were too bizarre. In Kampala where there was relative peace it was business as usual as we continued to live in denial, dismissing the stories as mere fiction or a creation of the government to maintain the high military expenditure in the national budget” (Solome Nakawesi– Coordinator UWONET).

For majority of Ugandans they could not make much out of all this melodrama and as gunfire rocked the north and civilians scampered helplessly for safety, the people in the southern parts of the country slept on peacefully, oblivious of what was happening 300km away. Uganda was literary divided into two countries, one in the North and the other in the South, with Karuma falls being the border crossing point. The North extended from West Nile, Acholi, Teso and Karamoja regions, an area that is more than half of Uganda’s land area.

The divide between the North and South had been extended into personal acquaintances and into all private spheres. There were times when friends opened up and narrated horror stories of how their siblings or parents had brutally been murdered, some kidnapped and others forced to live in internally displaced persons’ camps. Those that were killed were never given decent burials. Their own homes in Kampala were

equally “un gazetted IDP camps”, with no more privacy and their children were deprived of the simple niceties the rest of Ugandans offered their own.

The soldiers had taken over their lives and ripped them apart. According to the Ugandans who were suffering the brunt of the conflict and being alienated from the rest of the country, they could not differentiate between the government soldiers and the rebels. The men that attacked their homes in the middle of the night all had guns and they pounced on them when they least expected. The women were raped in the presence of their children and husbands, possibly as a means of humiliating them or subduing the rebellious, proud Acholi women. Their crime was for either being supporters of the government forces or accomplices to the Kony rebels. Children were forced to kill fellow children or even their parents and girls at 12 forcibly became wives and mothers.

Villages were abandoned and schools deserted, as government rounded up citizens, purportedly for safety into IDPs, a replica of concentration camps in the Second World War, the IDP camps had limited water and food supply, there was uncontrolled disease transmission, rampant rape and defilement of women and girls and often attacks from the marauding rebels who had to abduct more civilians in order to swell their numbers. Northern Uganda was declared internationally a dangerous war zone. You had to be heartless not to think about the agony the people in northern Uganda were facing. The rest of us watched on powerlessly wondering what we could do as an unarmed citizen to help our brothers and sisters to abet the unjustified situation.

Many people were convinced that the Acholis were simply fighting the ruling NRM government in order to regain the political power they had lost in 1986 and were not ready to accept President Yoweri Museveni as their leader. The government spokespersons on the contrary sustained a stance that this was a “senseless war”, “a rebellion against government”, by a band of weak, defeated soldiers of the deposed President Milton Obote regime who had been ousted after a five year guerrilla struggle led by Museveni. On the part of the local politicians from the war affected areas, they hyped a uniform chorus that this was a “tribal conflict” and some form of “ethnic cleansing” targeting the northerners that had held state power since 1962 when Uganda obtained its independence from the British until 1986.

At UWONET, it was resolved that something had to be done, either at a personal level or with other women activists. The protagonists in the conflict had decided to ignore the political and military causes of the war and instead militarized and ethicized it. Politicians from the war ravaged areas had given it a brand of ‘Westerners’ against ‘Northerners, and a war they claimed was engineered by Yoweri Museveni from Mbarara in South Western Uganda to wipe out the people of the North. The government on their part referred to the war as an Acholi rebellion and reports by

the military spokespersons were outrageous, with claim of having killed hundreds of enemies, bandits, thugs, or rebels. To them the more 'rebels' they killed, the more they celebrated their victory over Joseph Kony.

Little thought was given to the fact that most of those killed as 'rebels' were originally law abiding civilians. Peace loving Ugandan peasants whom the government had failed to protect and were abducted and conscripted into rebellion. Those brutally slain innocent Ugandans were some of the abducted children and husbands, whom their mothers and wives were still praying and anxiously waiting for their return someday. Caught in the midst of crossfire between two power hungry lions, they were slaughtered like the biblical sheep and sacrificed for a cause they did not actually comprehend. The majority had lived peacefully in their villages, tilling the land for a living and not even bothered to know who Museveni or Kony was, until their villages were attacked, their homesteads set ablaze and their lives devastated forever.

Ugandan mothers could no longer sit and watch helplessly as lives were shattered and generations completely destroyed. Braced with one of UWONET's objectives which is to "eliminate defilement, rape and all other form of abuse and violence against women and children" a war for peace for northern Uganda was set. The Coordinator of the Women's Network had a conversation with the Vice Chairperson, Jane Ocaya Irama on the need for women to take the lead in finding a peaceful resolution of the armed conflict and tyranny Ugandans were being subjected to. Being from Gulu, Ocaya was not only passionate about the conflict but an authority on the subject. "Together we were able to convince the governing body of UWONET to pronounce itself on the matter since the organisation had the mandate, credibility and potential to mobilize women across the country to end the senseless war without firing a single shot". The process of having civil society collectively engage the State and rebels in the negotiation for peace in northern Uganda had begun.

A number of challenges surfaced since UWONET was only in its formative stages none of its members had ever been involved in peace negotiations. Secondly, the majority of women activists viewed the war as a political and military subject and they felt their involvement would be construed as political activism and opposition to government. More so, being dependent on external donors, UWONET at the time did not have a budget line to participate in a meaningful peace building process. Engaging in resolving an armed conflict that was broadly considered a military affair by the key actors, without any experience in conflict resolution on UWONET's part was going to be risky to the organisation but also to its membership. There was a lot of ignorance and misinformation about the war and not many women activists were willing to be labelled by government as 'rebel collaborators' or sympathizers.

However bearing this in mind, UWONET soldiered on getting the warring factions onto the negotiating table to discuss peace and end the impunity against the women and children in the war ravaged areas. As a starting point UWONET called the first meeting of women in key decision-making positions at Kampala City Council Hall, for a public debate on October 7th, 1996 to discuss how as women we could contribute to ending the armed conflict. The meeting which was well attended, with over 80 women and quite a number of men resolved to work together to restore peace and the dignity of all Ugandans as defined in the national Constitution. They were able to agree upon the root causes of the conflict and also identify a number of initiatives that could lead to the attainment of peace and also contribute to the welfare of the affected women and children. These included mobilizing funds, lobbying the warring factions to end the war, offering counselling services and sensitizing all Ugandans about the visible and invisible evils of the civil conflict.

A subsequent meeting was called by UWONET in November where a Pressure Group against Violence to Women was formed. Several women leaders and activists were part of this initiative that included Winnie Byanyima, Mbarara Municipality MP, Zoe Bakoko Bakoro, Arua MP, and Rosette Alleluya Ikote, Pallisa MP. Horrifying stories were told of what was happening to women in Arua, Koboko, Gulu, Kitgum and parts of Teso region by different women leaders that attended the meeting. Ikote warned the women against falling into the trap of spreading the propaganda that the war in Northern Uganda was by and against the Acholis. “The more we think that way, the more we isolate the Acholis and give room to the rebels to kill more people every day”, Ikote warned. The women agreed that since one of UWONET’s member organisation, the Uganda Media Women’s Associations (UMWA) had the technical skills for communication, they would pave way for the war victim to give their testimonies through the media and appeal to the conscience of Ugandans on the suffering of the people in northern Uganda.”

Broadening the Civil Society Search for Peace

In 1996, UWONET facilitated the formation of the NGO Advocacy and Lobby Coalition for Peace in Northern Uganda including Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), the Development Network for Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA), Oxfam, Action Aid–Uganda, CARE International in Uganda, SNV–Netherlands Development Organisation, World Vision, Church of Uganda, the National NGO Forum and Jamii Ya Kupatanisha. This was in line with UWONET’s belief that the search for peace in northern Uganda had to be a collective effort. Most of the international organisations and the Church of Uganda were already offering relief services. By allying with the local NGO networks they were convinced that the measures to address the conflict would be broadened and given credence internationally.

From 26th to 27th February 1997 UWONET together with the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD) organized a three day peace conference at the Kampala International Conference Centre under the theme, “The Challenge for Peace in Northern Uganda: A Search for Solutions”. The conference attracted over 400 participants including members of Parliament, government officials, soldiers from the NRA, local and traditional leaders, representatives from international and local NGOs, donor agencies, religious leaders, students from higher institutions of learning, researchers, academicians and ordinary men and women who wished to share and volunteer their personal experiences as a means of providing a lasting solution to the conflict. At the conference, a study on the impact of war in Northern Uganda that had been commissioned by the NGO advocacy coalition was presented. It highlighted the impact of the war on agriculture, education, food security, health, sanitation, communications, infrastructure and social relations since 1986.

There were heated exchanges and tension in the room and allegations from some senior local politicians who maintained that the solution for the conflict was their responsibility as the elected leaders of the people. “The war in northern Uganda is our war and we shall fight it to the end. All along you NGOs have silently watched the NRA soldiers killing and displacing our people and now you want to use the blood of our people to raise more money for your organisations” one politician asserted. None of the MPs from the Acholi sub-region appreciated the NGO initiative as a vehicle that could deliver peace to the region.

The presentations and deliberations at the conference addressed the human, social and economic conditions, international conflict resolution perspectives, challenges and experiences of NGOs in conflict resolution and the Great Lakes region community initiatives. At the end of the conference it was resolved that a National Committee involving NGOs be formed to follow up the recommendations, including a sustained campaign for dissemination of information on peace and influencing attitudes of all Ugandan. on the war in the north. The conference noted the need to build trust between the different people affected by the conflict and also make contact with the rebels to lobby for peace. Districts affected by the war were encouraged to form peace committees and NGOs were to organize trips to visit the conflict affected areas to appreciate the situation on the ground.

The NGOs agreed to partner with the army in mobilizing communities for peace. They were tasked with forwarding the concerns shared to government as well as the Northern Uganda Development Programmeme in order to ensure they targeted the army veterans and the resettled combatants.

Setting Women's Advocacy Agenda for Peace

In 1998 UWONET sought funding and a credible local women's organisation to work with to address the concerns of women affected by the conflict. The People's Voice for Peace (PVP), a local initiative based in Gulu was identified as having worked on several peace projects that included documenting women's experiences in the war and translating these experiences into Luo for broader dissemination. Both NOVIB and Action Aid-Uganda agreed to fund the network's activities as a follow-up to the Kampala National Peace Conference. At the conference it had been agreed that UWONET would link up with the women's groups in northern Uganda in order to set up a pressure group and an advocacy agenda to promote peace and development.

As part of the activities to commemorate the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence (November 25th to December 10th) and the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UWONET travelled to Gulu, and interacted with women affected by land mines, rape and those maimed by the LRA. In conjunction with PVP a three-day workshop was held under the theme: "Setting the Women's Advocacy Agenda for Peace" from 2nd to 4th December 1998, bringing together over 60 participants from Gulu, Kitgum, Apac and Lira. The women sought to forge a common agenda and also identify key advocacy issues that would culminate into a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The challenge UWONET faced at the time was that northern Uganda was still declared danger zone and the network could not guarantee the security of its members so many women activists opted out of the dangerous encounter at the last minute. Of the 12 women that were expected to travel to Gulu, only five made it, including Lydia Rugasira from the UWFT, Mary Ssonko from Action Aid, Jessica Nkuuhe from Isis-WICCE, Jane Ocaya Irama from the Women Engineers, Scientists and Technicians of Uganda and Sheila Kawamara Mishambi the UWONET Coordinator.

The participants included leaders from the local councils, civil society, women's organisations involved in conflict resolution, legal aid and micro-credit services, as well as those with expertise in advocacy and coalition building. The discussion concentrated on the women's experiences of the 12 year conflict and mapping strategies for the peace advocacy. UWONET also initiated a campaign to involve women in development initiatives undertaken by both Government and the NGOs by establishing a networking system.

Appreciating Women's Experiences of Conflict

UWONET listened to the narrations of women's experiences of the conflict. The network continued to work closely with the women in northern Uganda until the Juba Peace talks between July 2006 and March 2008 brought an end to the armed conflict.

It all happened in “1991. The rebels came to my home at around 9.00pm and they asked for my son who was in the NRA working as a government soldier. I did not know where he was. They grabbed my daughter who was a woman leader and beat her to death. When I saw the gruesome murder of my daughter I started crying. I was told not to cry because I was a mother and a father to government. A knife was brought in from the house and my lips were cut off. I became unconscious. I was hospitalized in Lacor Hospital in Gulu for six months. My son in the NRA was later killed leaving behind seven orphans that I have to single-handedly look after. I live in great pain and nobody can even understand my experience.”

UWONET discovered that much as the whole community in northern Uganda was affected, the women bore the worst brunt of instability that left the entire society brutalized and dehumanized. UWONET learnt that continuing to live with the hope that one day the government would reunite them with their abducted children. They shared that while both the boys and girls were made to kill and fight in the war, the girls, no matter how young, had to take on an additional role as sex objects and ‘wives’ for the rebel commanders.

Additionally, many of the returning child mothers were being rejected by their families or being forced to abandon their babies born to unknown fathers. Children were trained to kill using pangas, axes, sticks, stones and fire. At the Gulu Support the Children’s Organisation (GUSCO) women activists were told of an incident where three girls aged between 12 and 13 were forced to kill seven people in a sick bay, open their stomachs and tie the intestines around their bodies. The children were then told to smear the blood of their victim on their bodies to become more brutal and immune to killing.

On March 17th 1990, I returned home from Gulu at around 6.00pm and prepared the evening meal for my three children before retiring to bed. At around midnight some people came and knocked at my door. I delayed in opening and they tried to force the door open. When I eventually opened they complained that I delayed because I was hiding something. They searched my house and when they recovered nothing they demanded money from me. I pleaded with them saying I did not have any money but they insisted saying that since my husband, who was not at home at the time, was a bursar at a nearby school I must be having the money.

I was told that I was going to be punished to serve as an example to all those people opposed to rebel activities. They poured paraffin on top of my head and set me ablaze. As I burnt and screamed in pain, everybody in the homestead

was taken away so that nobody could help me. My tormentors stood by and watched. I grabbed a pot of water but that I was not enough. I removed my clothes but the fire on my plaited hair persisted. I rolled myself in the sand and eventually the fire went off. The rebels took me back in the house and asked me whether I had learnt my lesson. The rebels said I would be a lesson to others. I begun singing a Christian song "Jesus hold me firm, it is Satan which will burn".

I was taken out of the house and displayed to all the people they had gathered from the neighbourhood and they could not stand the sight. I pleaded with the rebels to shoot me dead because of the excruciating pain but they refused. I was taken to Lacor hospital on a bicycle where I stayed for two months, losing and regaining my consciousness on several occasions. When I was eventually discharged my head was attached to my shoulder. I later had an operation by the Interplast, a Dutch medical team through the support of the Rotary Club of Gulu. My son who was in a technical school was killed by the rebels.

b) I was abducted from Acholi Bol in Kitgum in June 1998. I was in primary six in a boarding school. My parents could not afford the school fees so I was forced to drop out of school. On the day I was abducted I was hiding with a group of ten girls but the rebels took away three of us. I was taken to Atany Hills where the rebel group was camping and we waited for the rest of the rebels to converge. While we travelled to the Sudan I was charged with carrying a five-litre jerrican of sim sim oil. On reaching the Sudan, I was allocated to a 22-year-old man, who had also been abducted, as my husband. I had no feelings for this man at all and despite my protests, he insisted I would eventually fall in love with him.

He continuously raped me and beat me for refusing to respond to his advances. I eventually consented to having sex with him to avoid his wrath. My opportunity to escape from this abuse came in November 1998 when this man insisted on coming with me during the rebel attack on Uganda so that I could eventually introduce him to my parents and we get customarily married. When the rebels were attacked by the UPDF soldiers I was rescued together with some other girls and we were brought to the army headquarters. I'm safe with the UPDF but I fear that I could be abducted by the rebels again.

In all the districts affected by the conflict, there were increased levels of domestic violence against women by men who had been traumatised by the war. As a result of the many humiliations the men had undergone at the hands of the combatants and the widespread unemployment, many men resorted to heavy drinking and subsequently

took out their anger onto their spouses. Much as UWONET had anticipated targeting solely women's concerns, this particular visit uncovered the men's vulnerability in coping with the effects of the war and hence the need to devise gender oriented initiatives to help rebuild their confidence and reintegrate them into society.

Women who were rape survivors along with their children were often rejected and abandoned by their husbands with no child support. Legal aid and counselling services were highly demanded to initiate dialogue with spouses and in-laws and promote understanding of the trauma experienced by both women and men.

UWONET observed that women who were physically affected by the war were sidelined in the designing, planning and implementation of rehabilitation and development programmes in the areas affected by the war. These women could not access the seed funding (entandikwa) provided by the government or other similar micro-credit facilities. Thus UWONET and PVP decided to network with various women's groups and government departments working on peace, security and development in order to design an advocacy strategy to promote women's participation.

Engaging the Military

While in Gulu, the UWONET team held a meeting with the overall commanding officer of the government military activities in northern Uganda, Brigadier Edward Katumba Wamala, who was later promoted to a Lieutenant Colonel and Chief of Defence Forces of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF). Katumba Wamala gave UWONET a synopsis of the situation from a military perspective. He acknowledged the complexity of the situation adding that it was not solely the role of the army to promote peace. "This is a war of the mind rather than a war of bullets. A lot of work has got to be done to change the attitudes of all Ugandans to end the war and rebuild people's morals thereafter", he said emphasizing the role of women's groups in building peace. He noted that the most vulnerable groups of females were girls aged between the ages of 13 and 17, who were abducted, physically abused and mentally tortured.

In his opinion, peace talks had failed in the past and would not be an ideal strategy since the rebels had committed many atrocities and government was not willing to sit at the same table to discuss peace. Katumba noted that much as there were many disadvantages to life in IDP camps, the civilian population needed to be protected in a secure environment given the widespread insecurity in the isolated villages.

UWONET also held a meeting with the assistant Resident District Commissioner Okello Olanya, who stated that government was open to reconciliation with rebel forces. He noted that the participation of the people from Acholi in the Kachoke Madit (Big Acholi Meeting) in London in 1998 had demonstrated the dire need for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. He also clarified that the rebels had no

local support within the communities and parents were imploring their children to denounce rebel activities and return home. Many returnees who confessed that they had stayed with the rebel group for fear of reprisals from the government and their affected communities.

Documenting Women's Experiences of Armed Conflict

Between 1998 and 1999, UWONET, Isis–WICCE and Action–Aid Uganda documented women's experiences in situations of armed conflict particularly in Arua, Bundibugyo, Gulu, Apac and Kitgum. Isis–WICCE also documented women's experiences and violations of women's in Luwero, Kasese and Soroti. Under the leadership of Isis–WICCE, the documentation served as a healing process for women and to ensure that women's experiences became part of Uganda's historical records.

Recognising the strength and impact of sharing women's experiences of armed conflict, the three organisations, produced a documentary film titled "What About Us?" The film demonstrated that women bore the brunt of conflict despite the wars being staged between men. The film highlighted testimonies from the war torn areas of Bundibugyo in western Uganda, Kitgum in the north and Arua in the north–west and called upon all organisations and governments to seek peaceful resolutions to armed conflict. It was echoed that women continued to suffer silently and their voices needed to be heard. Their involvement in decision–making and recognition of their rights in such situations, to enable them contribute to peaceful resolutions of conflicts was largely under looked. As a result of these efforts, UWONET implemented an international campaign to ensure the recognition of the impact of armed conflict on Ugandan women's lives and the need for their involvement in peace negotiations and peace building.

Joining the International UNSCR 1325 Campaign

The documentary that was produced by UWONET, Isis–WICCE and Action Aid–Uganda became a formidable lobbying tool for the UN Security Council to pass a resolution on women, peace and security. Consequently, on October 31st, 2000 the UN Security Council unanimously passed a Resolution seeking to ensure that such barbaric acts against women would not reoccur and survivors of violence would obtain redress. UNSCR 1325 was as a result of a strong lobby from the women's movement which mobilised across the globe UNSCR 1325 addressed the impact of war on women and their effectiveness as peace agents. It also recognised that peace building required inclusiveness in respect to addressing women's needs and involving them in decision making on peace and security.

Women's Peace Coalition Influences the Juba Peace Talks

In 2006, almost a decade after UWONET began engaging in the peace building process in northern Uganda, a civil society Women's Peace Coalition was formed. UWONET coordinated the coalition campaign to lobby for the inclusion of women's priority concerns in the peace process between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army rebels held in Juba, South Sudan.

Under the leadership of UWONET, the coalition was guided by UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security along with the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004). The group of five women's organizations with the support of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) conducted consultations in northern Uganda from 10th to 14th October 2006 to gather the views of conflict-affected on the peace negotiations. Over 200 women from Gulu, Pader, Amuru, Kitgum and Lira, representing over 25 organizations and larger constituencies uniformly called for the restoration of peace.

District officials, religious leaders, civil society representatives and IDPs all appealed to the parties to commit fully to the peace talks. UWONET and members of the Women's Peace Coalition strongly supported these voices and presented them to the government representatives, highlighting the urgency to rehabilitate the lives of the affected people. The women of northern Uganda urged the government and the LRA to include them in the peace negotiations so as "to speak the language of peace, with one voice, to the people of Uganda and to each other, and to ensure that their actions reaffirm their commitment to peace".

Women stressed that the parties should not return without a peace agreement. and implored them to consider the impact of the conflict had had on women. "[Women] have borne the burden of conflict and know the sorrow of loss and pain of violence, which no justice mechanism, including the International Criminal Court can repair. They stand ready to nurture peace in their homes and communities and support all parties to do the same. Those that have been displaced and disenfranchised are hungry to go home to their lands, to reap the fruits of Uganda's soil and to build homes for future generations", the women stated.

The Women's Peace Coalition appealed to consider the needs of the women and girls associated with fighting forces and protect them from further abuse. They also called upon the Office of the Mediator and the parties to the negotiations to have sufficient gender and women's rights expertise so that the perspectives and rights of women and girls would be incorporated and their participation guaranteed as provided for in UNSCR 1325. The Coalition members with the support from UNIFEM called upon the international community to express its commitment to the process and bring to an end the gruesome conflict that had claimed thousands of lives.

As a result, the Initiative for Gender Justice and UNIFEM supported two women's coalitions to participate in the Juba peace talks as observers. The inclusion of civil society and church leaders at the Juba talks created an opportunity for more women to participate in the peace process. These coalitions drafted gender sensitive protocols for inclusion in the final agreement. The Uganda Women's Peace Coalition, coordinated by UWONET, was perceived by some women from northern Uganda as illegitimate and dominated by elite women from the south not directly affected by the conflict. This perception perpetuated negative stereotypes of 'Acoli women', 'northern women' and 'southern women', and created pressure on the civil society group that was supposed to advocate for women's interests in the peace talks.

Women activists nevertheless employed various strategies to express solidarity with women directly affected by the conflict and share messages of peace. On October 27 2006, the African Women's Peace Torch arrived in Kampala, accompanied by women leaders from Kenya to commence on its journey through the areas affected by conflict. Since 1995, the African Women's Peace Torch has been moving across the continent through South Africa, Angola, Kenya, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Mali, Liberia and Ethiopia as a symbol of African women's quest for peace, freedom and development.

The Peace Torch which was received by women and women's rights activists at the Kampala City Square, taken to the Parliament where it was lit and handed over to the Speaker of Parliament Hon. Edward Ssekandi. Women also handed over a statement calling for peace in the northern parts of the country. The torch remained lit overnight in the Parliament lobby before embarking on its 5-day long 600km journey, through northern Uganda to Southern Sudan.

UWONET also used a peace caravan to Juba bearing the slogan, "Women of Uganda Want Peace and Peace Needs Women", to express solidarity and share women's messages for peace. Women activists were encouraged to hand over the Peace Torch to both the government of Uganda and the LRA peace negotiators allowing them to also hand over their list of priority issues for the peace process to address. Following the efforts by the different stakeholders including UWONET, both parties agreed to resolving the conflicts in Northern Uganda through peaceful means.

Women's Land Rights and The Domestic Relations Bill

Land ownership for women was a critical area of discussion for women during the constitution-making process between 1989 and 1995. Women can access land through marriage, through inheritance, being allocated plots for use by clan elders or by direct purchase. However, customary laws and the entrenched patriarchal traditions and values continued to undermine the status of women and the right to own land. These out dated beliefs and attitudes denied widows, unmarried and divorced women any right to own land or real estate property. Women who dared to separate from their husbands and return to their parents' home lost all rights of ownership or access to marital property, irrespective of any contribution they might have made. In terms of user rights, women generally had limited access to use the land or control over crops they produced.

The Campaign for Women's Land Rights

While the law did not prevent women from purchasing land and owning property, most of them could not afford it because of their economically disadvantaged position and lack of vital information. Without collateral, women's access to credit or bank loans was almost impossible since the majority of them had no permanent employment or title deeds to land or real estate.

In 1995 the Constitution for the first time recognized and secured the tenure of occupants of mailo land, freehold and leasehold. To ease access to land ownership, the land management functions that were originally managed centrally were decentralized to the districts. With these land reforms the Constitution stipulated that a new land

law be tabled and passed by Parliament within two years of the first session of parliament, i.e. by July 2nd 1998.

UWONET became actively involved in the land debates after the opening of the secretariat in 1996. Members of UWONET like ACFODE and FIDA-U were already part of a large CSO coalition, the Uganda Land Alliance (ULA), advocating for a just land law. The ULA had developed proposals to protect the interests of the poor and contribute to poverty eradication. Generally ULA advocated for the proposed land law to address gaps relating to the rights of various groups on customary land, including communal rights, and the rights of landless groups in urban and rural areas. While ULA raised a number of concerns highlighted by women's organisations concerning the impact of the proposed Bill on women, UWONET felt that issues specific to women were often side lined and generalized under the concerns of the poor.

In July 1997, women's organisations under UWONET opted to develop a separate campaign focusing on women's land rights while continuing to participate under the ULA. Both lobby groups supported each other on the campaign issues raised. One of the key issues of the women's land campaign was the 'consent clause' through which UWONET sought to limit a landholder's ability to alienate family members. With this clause, the landowner was required to seek family consent before conducting any transaction on family land.

UWONET proposed the removal of the requirement for written consent because of the high illiteracy rates of women and proposed public verbal consent to the land committee for approval of land transactions. UWONET recommended that the land committee had to satisfy itself beyond reasonable doubt that the consent was freely given. UWONET proposed the strengthening of provisions to eliminate discrimination based on custom by prohibiting all customs and traditions that undermined the status of women

Research and Documentation on Women's Land Rights

UWONET found the process of drafting the land Bill non-inclusive and ill informed. While the Ministry of Lands had carried out consultations, it was not clear whether or not women who are key stakeholders were consulted and their interests taken into account. UWONET therefore decided to conduct research to document and amplify women's voices and their contribution to the national economy. The women's research on land managed to put them at the centre of thinking and debate of land issues in Uganda.

UWONET conducted a research study titled 'Women and Land Rights in Uganda' in Kampala, Kibale, Lira, Luwero, Mpigi and Mbale, with the aim of highlighting women's situation under different land tenure systems. It also captured the opportunities and constraints faced by peasant women farmers in these areas. Much as this research

was very pertinent in informing the proposed land law, donors like DFID, which was also a major funder of the land reform process in Uganda, hesitated to fund UWONET demanding written authorization from the Ministry of Lands. The Ministry did not provide the clearance on the grounds that it was neither a government policy nor practice to clear NGOs for funding by foreign donors. The UWONET research was eventually funded by the German foundation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung which supported the land campaign through Parliament.

The UWONET research underlined the link between women's limited control over land and their unwillingness to make long term investments such as construction and growing of cash crops. It was highlighted that traditionally, men owned the land, determined land use patterns and controlled the proceeds from the sale of any cultivated crops.

The research also released that most societies still regarded women as dependants who could not own land but periodically access land through male relatives. Even where women had the capacity to purchase the land, the title deed was often registered in the names of a male relative. The patriarchal system of inheritance also hindered women's rights to own customary land in their birth places or marital homes. Women's land user rights that were traditionally protected under customary tenure were no longer respected in the changing patterns of access rights and the increasing individualization, fragmentation and commercialization of land. The research also produced evidence that widows were often evicted by their in-laws or their own sons.

Advocacy for a Gender Sensitive Land Law

In October 1997, UWONET published a booklet, titled 'Women and Land Rights in Uganda: A Documentation of Women's Views and Suggestions on Land Issues in Uganda and the Proposed Land Bill'. It provided new information and increased the awareness of policy makers and the general public on the need to protect women's land rights within the context of the proposed Land Bill and the 1995 Uganda Constitution. The booklet was shared with the Minister of Lands and Physical Planning, the technical committee of the ministry responsible for originating and drafting the Bill, the Cabinet Committee constituted to scrutinize the Bill and all Members of Parliament. The study was also distributed to all members of the ULA, UWONET collaborators and the media for broader circulation. The network was however faced with the challenge of a tight deadline and the need to generate support for its position and implement its strategy in a span of half a year.

The issues raised by the network were at times trivialized or completely ignored by the Cabinet, technical committees, and the parliamentary committee on land. Women activists were portrayed as elitist and not representative of other women.

Animosity grew between the lobby group and the technical committee at the Ministry of Lands as they were blamed for derailing and delaying the enactment of the Bill. The committees were male dominated and reluctant to acknowledge the numerous customs and traditional impediments that needed to be addressed by the new land law. They insisted that there were no legal barriers preventing women from owning land in their own right.

While officiating at the opening of an UWONET workshop on Women and Land Rights on October 7th, 1997, the Minister of Lands, Mr. Francis Ayume, made it clear that legislating on women's property rights could best be considered under family law through the Domestic Relations Bill (DRB) which had stalled for over three decades. With Ayume's statement, women's property rights were rebranded and relegated from the economic arena and turned into a private household matter. This eventually became the official position of government, the President and Parliament as women activists desperately tried to fight for women's land rights.

The Minister of Lands' concluding remarks inspired a new strategy by the women's coalition. He stated, "I wish to urge you that we should not allow ourselves to be driven by emotion at the expense of reason as we crusade for more property rights. Study the Constitution well and do not propose things which are unconstitutional." FIDA-U prepared briefs to counter the legal arguments raised and highlighted the need to fulfil the human rights provisions and commitments to gender equity that the government had made. These arguments were referred to in the Constitution, the National Gender Policy and international instruments like CEDAW.

Women's ownership of land was also viewed as a development concern whereby it was argued that the lack of control over resources of production like land inhibited women's ability to take decisions at the household level and hence kept women in the poverty cycle. The struggle for women's land rights was therefore closely linked to human rights, development, good governance and equity, thus going beyond economic and welfare issues. In its campaign messages, UWONET referred to macroeconomic policies such as the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) and the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) which had highlighted women's rights and the value of gender equality for national economic growth.

UWONET organised several meetings and workshops with key decision makers, including MPs and policy makers. These included the Cabinet Committee on land matters, the technical committee drafting the Land Bill and women MPs of UWOPA. Since the country had just held presidential and parliamentary elections in 1996, UWONET appealed to political sentiments, arguing that the government and the NRM MPs needed to support women's concerns as a sign of appreciation for the enormous political support given to them in the 1996 elections.

In April 1998, UWONET together with ULA organized a workshop hosted by FOWODE, where the proposal for women co-owning land with their husbands was raised. At this meeting, which was attended by MPs and donor agency representatives, President Museveni publicly made his objection to women's co-ownership of land. In his statement, which became the official stand of all the opponents of the women's land campaign, he depicted women advocating for co-owning land with their husbands as land grabbers who wanted to encourage others to get married to gain access to 'men's property'. He stressed that in order for women to have an entitlement to family land they had to undergo a probation period of a number of years to prove that they were truly committed to the relationship. He added that their share of family land would be gradually increased with the number of years they had spent in a marriage.

Museveni portrayed himself as a custodian of the marriage institution, which had to be safeguarded from 'pirates'. He maintained that instead of women pushing for co-owning land with their spouses they should instead demand land from their parents, a position he knew was untenable in a highly patriarchal Uganda. The detractors of the campaign were quick to pick up these unfortunate statements and use them to fight the co-ownership amendment clause, insisting that property rights would be best served in family law and not land law.

Opposition to the Women's Lobby

In the months preceding the tabling of the Land Bill for debate in Parliament, UWONET faced strong resistance from men who disagreed with the notion of women co-owning 'their property'. Some rural women also thought the campaign demands were elitist and would threaten their user rights. Certain church leaders believed the campaign had a foreign ideology that would destabilize marriage. Women who owned property were afraid that men would grab their property and second wives thought the clause would give an advantage to first wives. Lastly women in cohabitation felt completely left out since their informal unions were not recognized while government and some donors viewed the women's campaign as a stumbling block in the quick enacting of the land law.

According to the Ministry's Technical Committee, the research undertaken by UWONET in 1997 was 'driven by emotions' and poorly timed since they had finalized consultations and were ready to submit the draft Bill to Cabinet for scrutiny.

However the same Committee was welcoming and received views from other groups like the Buganda Kingdom and the Tenants' Association much later in 1998. Through UWONET's insistence and highlighting gaps in information on which the Bill was premised, the ministry was persuaded to carry out further consultations specifically targeting women. In their findings it was clearly proven that women and children

were critical players in land management and crop production, but were inhibited by discriminatory customs and patriarchal practices. Despite this realization, both the ministry and parliamentary committee on land maintained that it was premature to address the constitutional rights of women and children.

On February 9th 1998, UWONET met with the Cabinet Committee set up by the President to consult on specific aspects of the draft bill. The all-man committee was gender insensitive, referred to UWONET members as 'elitist women', and dismissed most of the proposals as 'ridiculous and unrealistic' in Uganda's context. UWONET was not allowed to present its own findings or make further proposals as the Cabinet Committee preferred to use an aide-memoire prepared by the Ministry of Lands to dictate the meeting's agenda. In this engagement it was very evident that the members had preconceived conclusion and were only holding the discussion for formality's sake.

The Cabinet Committee maintained that instead of legislating on spousal co-ownership of land, individual men and women should be left to negotiate their rights in their relationship and that the network should concentrate on sensitizing women. UWONET however argued that given the power relations between men and women in Uganda, wives were unable to negotiate for equivalent ownership rights to land without supporting legislation.

Following the meeting with the ministers, UWONET organized a public hearing where rural women who were evicted from their homes after divorce or widowhood shared testimonies as evidence of the need to consider women's specific situation. Opponents who had previously labelled the campaign as elitist changed their stance saying that UWONET was using rural women for emotional blackmail by publicising a few isolated cases of dysfunctional families.

In an effort to sway Parliament to its side, UWONET organised a meeting with the Parliamentary Committee on Lands. Together with UWOPA, UWONET compiled a booklet on its proposed recommendations and presented on April 29th 1998. Although a lot of lobbying behind the scenes had been done prior to the meeting, not much was achieved in this encounter. Some representatives of FIDA-U, who had not been part of the campaign, openly disagreed with some of UWONET's proposals.

The opponents argued that more research was needed in order to analyse the legal implications of co-owning property that belonged to another person, who in this case was a spouse, and also raised issues of the practicability of enforcing such a law. They also argued that legally, there was no law that prevented women from owning land and property in their own right. The Parliamentary Committee which was male-dominated and chaired by a lawyer was very eager to exploit the apparent differences within the women's network and therefore dismissed the UWONET position as a minority stance that did not represent the views of the majority of Ugandan women.

Publicizing Women's Campaign for Land Rights

Given the uphill task faced by UWONET a countrywide media campaign was developed to make women's concerns in the proposed Bill public and also expose the policy makers, particularly the MPs opposed to addressing the concerns. A number of feature stories on women's situation in relation to land were published in all the leading newspapers and discussed on various radio and television talk shows. The media campaign attracted resistance from many other interest groups, but also acted as a sensitisation drive to educate women on their constitutional rights. This effort led to a number of women realising that they could actually purchase and own land in their own right.

During the two weeks of June 1998 when the Bill was tabled and debated on the floor of Parliament, the UWONET media campaign was intensified. Using contacts within the media, UWONET approached the Monitor, a daily newspaper that had popularized itself for being independent and critical of government policies, and requested free space to report daily on issues relating to women and land. The network hired a journalist who sat in Parliament to monitor the debate and report on the positions and statements, in particular those against the women's campaign. The journalist highlighted the positive and negative elements of the debate in relation to the women's campaign; the different speakers would be branded Losers or Winners. Active players in the media campaign included Akina Mama wa Afrika, WILDAF, UMWA, FIDA-U and Irene Ovonji Odida who was working with the Uganda Law Reform Commission but participated in her own right.

This team also drafted the co-ownership clause, which was later branded the 'Matembe Clause'. It was premised on the principle that co-owned land would be defined as a place of residence or matrimonial home or it would be the principle source of income or sustenance for the family, or land voluntarily designated as fitting by the parties to a marriage. The spouses would be owners in common, both in monogamous and polygamous marriages and in the event of a transaction, restrictions were to be imposed so that either party or parties had to sign all the documents or, in order to provide for flexibility, a spouse could assign the duty to the other spouse in writing, indicating that they understood the nature of the transaction. The co-ownership clause which was to apply to only customary tenure would also have an irrefutable presumption that the spouses held land in common. This therefore cast the burden on the person or persons acquiring an interest in the land to determine whether the land was subject to the provision.

As Parliament discussed the land Bill, UWONET on its part held daily meetings with women lobbyists to analyse the on-going debate and prepare appropriate responses to be passed on to MPs supporting the campaign. This strategy was very effective in limiting adverse rebuttals from MPs opposed to the amendment on spousal co-

ownership of land when it was moved by Miria Matembe on June 22, 1998. Very few MPs had the courage to publicly express their anti-women views in Parliament with a public gallery filled with women activists and journalists eagerly waiting to expose them to their voters. As a result, the amendment was finally adopted on June 25, 1998 and the story 'Spouses to Co-own Land', made headlines in the government-owned daily newspaper, The New Vision.

Celebration by UWONET was short-lived, however, when the Land Act was published a few weeks later without the historical clause on women's co-ownership of land. Immediately women activists reconvened and embarked on the search for the 'Lost Clause'. The Land Act 1998 had eventually become law as of July 2, 1998. Nobody in Parliament could give a straight answer on how the women's co-ownership clause had gone missing. In Parliament some sources claimed that there was an error in publishing the Act, while the Minister of Lands maintained that he could not recall any debate on the clause and therefore the clause could not have got into the law. Frantically UWONET demanded Hansard and the audio recording of the debate on June 25 in order to scrutinize the record and provide evidence.

This information was withheld for some days and finally when the Hansard record was published, the Clerk to Parliament said the 'lost clause' was as a result of a procedural error, faulting the mover of the motion, Miria Matembe for failing to re-introduce it at the third reading. The principles of the amendment had been adopted and referred to the first parliamentary counsel for refinement. Since proper parliamentary procedure was not followed to bring back the refined text onto the floor of parliament for adoption, the clause could not be part of the law. President Museveni eventually admitted to having personally intervened to transfer the issue of spousal co-ownership of land to the Domestic Relations Bill.

Much as UWONET tried to maintain the pressure on government to re-introduce the amendment, ULA was of the view that re-opening the discussion on the Land Act of 1998 would revive the sentiments that had almost halted the debate. UWONET conceded and to date, 15 years after the land law came into force, women are still waiting for the family law that was supposed to consider their right to own land in their country.

A number of proposals made by the women's lobby group eventually made it to the Land Act resulting into Section 39 that requires prior written consent of both spouse in transactions involving family holdings, which are defined as land on which the family ordinarily resides and from which they derive sustenance. The provision imposes restrictions on sale, mortgage, or transfer of land by spouses and other transactions with respect to family land. The problem, however, is that it is not always possible to identify all the people who need to consent, especially in cases of polygamy, and even in instances of unregistered customary marriages.

Patriarchal practices were addressed by Section 28 which prohibits all decisions affecting customary land that deny women access to ownership or occupation or use of land as well as conditions that violate the constitutional provisions protecting women. In respect to land management, the Land Act requires all land management bodies and institutions to have female representation. The Uganda Land Commission should have one female out of its five members and one third of the District Land Boards should be female. At the parish level the land committees should have at least one female out of four members. The communal land management associations, which are corporate bodies that may be formed under the Land Act by any group of persons on any land for any purpose connected with communal land ownership and management of the land, must at least have a third of female members.

The women's campaign prompted increased media and public interest in the debate on land. On several occasions, public figures, including the president, made reference to the women's demands, insisting that the demands were a destabilizing factor of society's traditions and practices. In recognition UWONET's work and issues had raised during the campaign, the network was nominated as a member on the Land Act Implementation Committee under the Ministry of lands, Water and Environment. The Ministry on recognized the expertise UWONET had built around women's land rights and invited the network to participate in panel discussions and other activities relating to the implementation of the Act.

Following the enactment of the Land Act, UWONET published an educational tool for women at the national and districts levels to understand the provisions in the Act and get knowledge about their land rights. The simplified Land Act was published in English, Luganda, Luo, Lugbara and Runyakitara (Runyoro/Rutooro/Runyankole/Rukiga). This initiative also gave women's organisations and NGOs information on the Land Act and how they could help women make use of it or monitor its implementation.

UWONET, together with The Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), thereafter conducted research to gather new information on women's land ownership rights in order to reintroduce the co-ownership clause and sustain public discussion on women's land rights. The research which was supported by the African Development Bank was part of a broader initiative on women and land rights in six African countries, including Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda. The 2001 study was done by Evelyn Nyakoojo and Catherine Mugisha in the districts of Kabale and Hoima as case studies documenting women's experiences and evaluating the law.

The EASSI study also sought to bring include more voices of rural women and men into the discourse on women and land rights in addition to identifying the linkages with food insecurity and poverty levels. It was confirmed that while government had policies and a legal framework that favoured women's ownership of land, the

situation on the ground did not reflect this. The political and socio-cultural structures that were supposed to implement these policies and enforce the land law were still dominated by men with no regard for gender balance. The research also established that many rural women were keen to own and control land in order to control the proceeds of their labour. With clear ownership and control of land, women would be in a better position to contribute to food security and poverty alleviation.

The lobby for women's land ownership rights continued into the 2004 Land (Amendment) Act with attempts to provide for 'veiled co-ownership'. The amendment focused on security of family land occupancy, which entails access and right to live on and use family land as well as give or withhold consent to transactions that affect the spouse's rights to the land. The scope of land would also cover land treated as family land based on customs, traditions or religious beliefs. The rights accorded were only limited to occupying the land and not ownership.

UWONET continued to point out that the provisions were inept since any other land acquired by the couple during the marriage was not protected and the husband could dispose of it so long as it was registered in his names. It was also noted in section 38A sub-section (5) that the security of occupancy is conditional on an existing marriage and therefore a woman could be rendered landless upon separation or divorce. Whereas in law there is a judicial separation by court and separation by agreement, under customary law, different cultural communities have different ways of ending marriages. It was feared that a spouse could decide to end a marriage where consent to sell land was denied.

Advocacy after the Enactment of the 1998 Land Act

After enacting the Land Act, 1998, UWONET held a number of meetings with key policy makers, and organized public forum to further galvanise the advocacy efforts of Ugandan women. On January 20th 2000 UWONET and ULA held a meeting with a high powered delegation from the Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment, led by the Minister of State Baguma Isoke. At the meeting hosted by the Minister of Ethics and Integrity, Miria Matembe, Baguma Isoke conceded to most of the proposals made by the two lobby groups and promised that the Ministry would draft a new provision with appropriate justification and present it to Cabinet in February 2000. There was constant grouping, re-grouping, strategizing, and sharing of information in preparation for this.

On February 16th 2000, UWONET organised a DRB Coalition meeting at ACFODE House to reflect on the way forward. A letter to the Minister of Water, Lands and Environment, was drafted by the Coalition members and each member organisation sent a copy reminding him of his earlier promise and demanding for the lost co-ownership clause to be reinstated in the Land Act and not the DRB. A press conference

was also held on February 21st, 2000 at the Kampala International Conference Centre to emphasize the women's demands.

As an advocacy tool, UWONET and ULA produced a film documentary on land co-ownership by spouses, highlighting the problems caused by lack of ownership rights. The documentary focused on districts women's voices, explaining the correlation between lack of security of tenure and productive capacity. It exposed the impact on the national economy. This initiative also addressed the misconception that the campaign was an issue only for elite women.

Throughout 2000, the two lobby groups held meetings with different interest groups in Parliament including women MPs, the Young Parliamentarian Caucus (UYP), MPs from Eastern and Northern Uganda as well as the Buganda Parliamentary Caucus. The lobbyists gave out information but also received new insights on how to improve advocacy on land. From the meetings, it was noted that while most women MPs were committed to the amendment being brought back to Parliament, the UYP caucus and regional caucuses were still struggling with the concept of co-ownership. The lobbyists laboured to explain that the campaign was not only about women owning land but would benefit the entire family, including children, and contribute to social justice and economic development.

Since Uganda was to hold a referendum on political systems in 2000, women activists under UWONET threatened to boycott the exercise and persuade women in the rural areas to follow suit. This was to pressurize government to take the co-ownership clause more seriously. Since the government had a large stake in the referendum and wanted it to be successful, it was compelled to meet the activists, but the meeting was used to warn them against threatening or blackmailing the government. Women activists were told to be grateful for what the government had done for them, particularly granting them the space to speak about their rights. The threat to boycott the referendum was one of the most radical and overtly political tactics that the women's movement had ever used and it opened doors for UWONET and ULA to meet with the Vice President, Dr. Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development and the Minister of Lands.

A Radical Approach to Demand for Land Rights

In a bid to advance demands for women's right to own property UWONET declared the 2000 International Women's Day a day of national mourning for the loss of the co-ownership clause. On the same day President Museveni was the guest of honour at a national event in Rukungiri district under the theme 'Celebrating Women's

Empowerment'. Several women's groups were expected to participate in activities to mark the day. Seeing this as an opportunity to push for the restoration of the lost clause in the Land Act, through the Woman MP, Winnie Babihuga, UWONET mobilized women in Rukungiri and from across the country to attend the celebrations and protest against women's marginalisation.

With support from the Netherlands Development Cooperation (SNV-U), UWONET quickly produced posters and t-shirts with messages calling for government commitment to women's issues. The slogans included 'Land is an Economic Issue, it is not a Domestic Issue' 'A Stable Family is a Stable Nation: This is guaranteed in the Domestic Relations Bill' and 'where is the Equal Opportunities Commission: It is a Right in the Constitution'.

On learning about the impending demonstration, the Minister of Gender, Hajati Janat Mukwaya summoned the leaders of UWONET and warned them against the move, which she claimed was sabotaging government programmes. In Rukungiri, the security was intensified to ensure that these leaders were intercepted but UWONET had sent all the campaign materials well in advance and transported them as provisions for display during the national celebrations. Thousands of women were in attendance and UWONET distributed the black T-shirts. They were encouraged to wear them as they marched past the President with big bold placards and banners demanding women's right to own land.

UWONET's action was another big score for the network as President Museveni dedicated a considerable amount of time in his speech to addressing the issue of women and land. He appreciated the demands put before him by the women activists as pertinent and committed to invite their leaders to discuss with him the 'controversial' issue of spousal co-ownership of property. The President however accused women activists of adopting an unrealistic advocacy approach that would affect the economy. He stated that women should not rush to pressurize the government into owning their husbands' property adding that they were being manipulated by unscrupulous people.

Museveni who was at the time using the celebration to campaign for the movement system of government prior to the national referendum insisted that the women's problem of land ownership was not a political but a social one. He attempted to draw attention away from women's land demands by highlighting his government's strategy of empowering women through Universal Primary Education (UPE) for the girl child. He argued that they would broadly benefit from other investment opportunities and the modernisation of agriculture, which was being promoted by the Movement. UWONET pointed out to the President that women's problems were highly political and they required political solutions. The network also emphasized

that much as women and girls need education they also need control over the resources of production such as land.

Following the women's day celebrations and protest in Rukungiri, UWONET was informed that the President summoned the women cabinet ministers and rebuked them, for failure to avert the crisis in Rukungiri and fuelling discontent among women. As a result of this encounter the strong proponents of the advocacy campaign withdrew from discussions with UWONET on the issues. This also put a wedge between women in government and women involved in gender activism.

On March 29th, 2000, the Speaker of Parliament, Francis Ayume met members of the DRB Coalition and ULA and encouraged them to continue lobbying MPs as well as the head of ULRC on the status of the DRB report. According to Ayume once the position was ascertained then the Coalition on the DRB could plan a way forward regarding land ownership. Although the meeting with Justice Minister Mayanja Nkangi, a few days later was not very fruitful, activists proceeded with their advocacy campaign. Finally in December 2000, the government, represented by the Vice President, Dr. Kazibwe, issued its long-held position on land co-ownership, saying that women in Uganda simply needed access rights to use the land but not to co-own it with the spouses. This however did not deter UWONET, which continued its campaign to restore the lost clause in 2001.

At the peak of the 2001 election campaigns, the president announced that once elected, he would address co-ownership of land by spouses and that he was aware of the women activists' demands to amend the 1998 Land Act. However, this promise was never fulfilled and despite numerous efforts to get audience with him to discuss the matter.

On November 8th, 2001, UWONET once again petitioned government through the Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment to reintroduce the Amendment Bill to the 1998 Land Act and including spousal co-ownership of land and also the expedited development of a comprehensive land policy. Among other demands in the petition, UWONET called upon government to address the socially constructed causes of poverty in relation to women and also ensure that the Certificate of Customary Tenure provided for under the 1998 Land Act was issued in the names of all the family members with an interest in the land.

Lessons Learnt

A number of lessons were learnt from the campaign on women's land rights. For the first time, UWONET came to the grim realization that the government was not fully committed to its rhetoric of emancipating women from the clutches of patriarchy and poverty as repeatedly publicized in its manifesto and policy documents. The

women's movement at this stage decided to critically analyse its relationships and identify its allies within government and civil society.

It was noted that much as the government was willing to include the principles on human rights and gender equality in the 1995 Constitution, many top policy makers, including the President, legislators and technocrats were not yet prepared to take that critical step and grant these rights. It was very clear that the demand for women to co-own land with their husbands was perceived as a direct infringement on men's property rights, with some terming it as 'theft of men's land'. They argued that the demands made by the women activists were aimed at commercializing marriages and destroying the traditions of clan heritage. In its subsequent campaigns for women's rights, UWONET would strive to tailor its messages towards the attainment of broader development goals and political interests of the government, and not exclusively focus on equity issues, which were seen as a socially destabilizing factor.

Reflecting on the accusation that the women's lobby group was elitist and not representative of the majority of Ugandan women, UWONET decided to expand its group of allies. At the time of the land reform debate in 1997 and 1998, the majority of advocates for co-ownership were young, educated and working women activists, some of whom were unmarried and therefore viewed as inappropriate messengers. More so, the women's organisations at the forefront of the campaign were urban based and with few rural women directly involved in the campaign.

Given that the land debate was rushed, it was very difficult for UWONET to incorporate their rural based counterparts. For future campaigns however, the network learnt that it was very important to rethink the efforts of Uganda's women's movement and build stronger linkages with other stakeholders in donor agencies, government and religious institutions, on critical socio-economic issues like poverty eradication, education, health, religion, conflict resolution and environmental conservation.

Women MPs and those in Cabinet did not all come out fully to support the land lobbyists or publicly defend the women's position. It became clear that having women in Parliament did not necessarily translate into their support for women's concerns. Apart from those who were already activists like Miria Matembe and Winnie Byanyima, who publicly showed their support for women's land reform, the majority were either lukewarm or privately opposed to the changes, reflecting a lack of grounding in gender equity issues. Women ministers disassociated themselves from the campaign saying that they were bound by the collective responsibility.

The campaign taught UWONET to realise that women are not a homogeneous group; they are bound to have conflicting interests and positions depending on their class, marital status religion and ethnicity. It was acknowledged that the choice of the co-ownership clause as the main focus of the women's advocacy could have been a reflection of a class and marital status bias amongst the campaigners and not a vital

concern for all Ugandan women. Future consultations with women's groups indicated that advocacy campaigns needed to target a cross-section of women, particularly rural women. Their absence from the campaigns provided opponents with ample ammunition to discredit the concerns raised as elitist.

Case Study of Activism and Advocacy for Marriage Law

Historical records indicate that the government of Uganda has laboured to enact a family law since the 1940s. For almost 70 years different governments have failed to put in place a law that would secure the lives of all members of the Ugandan family. The 2009 Marriage and Divorce (MAD) Bill, brings to life the constitutional guarantee under Article 33 that promotes the observance of equality within marriage. It aims at protecting and promoting the rights of women that have been grossly abused under the guise of culture and customs governing the institution of marriage.

The bill also seeks to address the discrimination against women in the legal system, which still recognizes the family law of different ethnic groups that is centred on customs or religions that undermine women's rights in the family. The bill highlights and prohibits oppressive customary and religious practices and spells out the rights and duties of spouses within a marriage, which were previously not prescribed in marriage laws. Much as there have been different family laws since 1904, the MAD Bill is the first attempt by government to provide guidelines for marriage outside the domain of religion and culture.

UWONET together with other women activists under the Domestic Relations Bill Coalition have for over 20 years been active in lobbying for its enactment. This is especially because it pays special attention to women's property rights in marriage and their right to negotiate sex on the grounds of health. It also sets the minimum age of marriage at eighteen, and criminalizes widow inheritance. As a compromise between the women activists and traditionalists, the bill does not prohibit payment of bride price but instead stipulates that it will no longer be essential for the formalization of customary marriages. Since bride price is now known as marriage gifts, any demands for their return will be an offence once the Bill is passed into law.

The bill provides for equal sexual rights and establishes more equitable grounds for divorce to both spouses including provisions on alimony. While the bill continues to exclude cohabitation as a presumed marriage, it provides parties with certain rights, including the right to register the fact of cohabitation and particulars of any monetary or non-monetary contributions. A competent court may then distribute the property equitably in accordance with those

contributions, and may do so even when registration has not taken place once the couple separates. Polygamy is also strictly regulated by guidelines that provide for the economic support of all wives.

The History of the Marriage and Divorce Bill

In her book *Women & Politics in Uganda, 2000*, Mari Aili Tripp gives a chronology of the legislative foundation on which UWONET and other women's organisations have built upon to advocate for a just family law in Uganda. The movement to promote women's rights effectively started in 1946 with the formation of the Uganda Council for Women (UCW). European and African women sought to create an organisation made up of women of all races, religious backgrounds, and political affiliations to address issues of mutual concern. In the 1950s and 1960s, the women's organisations often led by the UCW launched a campaign to reform the laws pertaining to marriage, divorce and inheritance.

Under British colonial rule, marriage was governed by two systems of law: the law the protectorate established in 1902 to bring uniformity to the legal system and the customary law that left each ethnic group to its own customary practices. Under customary law, polygamy was condoned and the use of bride price was highly treasured. In many parts of the country widows were liable to lose all their property, including their children, to the husband's family and in some cultures widow inheritance by a brother or male relative was regarded as acceptable.

The Marriage of Africans Ordinance of 1904 was a replica of British marriage law and it provided for the registration of a marriage following a civil or Christian ceremony. The couple had to be monogamous, at least 21 years old and mutually consenting. Another ordinance provided for the legalization of marriages between Muslims.

To encourage Africans to adopt monogamy, the Church pushed for the abolition of polygamy, which it considered immoral. As such in 1953, the UCW took on the government to make the registration of all marriages obligatory to end the view that customary marriages were inferior, and possibly limit polygamy. As a result of the pressure from women, in 1955 the District Administration Ordinance gave district councils the right to pass bylaws regulating matters of marriage and divorce. Taking their advocacy further, women, largely from the Mothers' Union, launched a district movement in 1956 to reform family law to address issues of marriage, divorce and inheritance rights. In the same year, a group of Acholi UCW women sent the British Governor a strongly worded memorandum attacking the practice of polygamy, saying: "We do not want to be treated like a goat whose master treats it as he likes. A man cannot support his family properly if he has many wives. Women in Acholi are treated like slaves who cannot complain even if they are being treated unkindly or cruelly."

The women activists implemented a publicity campaign, publishing booklets and holding conferences to inform the public about the status of women in relation to marriage laws, raising questions about bride price, property and inheritance. In 1960 a national UCW conference resolved that the issue of abolishing bride price was premature and required further public awareness. However out of this conference a resolution was passed on inheritance stating that the eldest son of the first wife should be the principal heir, and widows and children should receive the primary share of the inheritance. Another resolution was that all marriages should be registered and that there should be one law for marriage, divorce and inheritance. It was also resolved that a woman should be able to divorce her husband on grounds of cruelty and that a widow should not be compelled to marry a member of her deceased husband's clan.

The resolutions by the UCW were passed on to the Attorney General's office, but were ignored despite the pressure exerted by Barbara Saben and Sarah Ntiro who were in the Legislative Council (Legco). Just as it was later argued in March 2013, the Attorney General stated that the time was not right for such legal reforms. This however did not deter the National Council for Women (NCW) which formed a Committee on the Status of Women and continued to lobby and exert pressure on church leaders, district administrators, key policymakers and opinion leaders.

In 1964, the newly independent government set up a Commission on Marriage and Divorce and the Status of Women, led by Hon. William Wilberforce Kalema as a direct response to the pressure from the NCW. It was charged with the duty "To consider the laws and customs regulating marriage, divorce and the status of women in Uganda bearing in mind the need to ensure that those laws and customs, while preserving existing traditions and practices as far as possible, should be consistent with justice and morality and appropriate to the position of Uganda as an independent nation; and to make recommendations."

The Kalema Commission carried out extensive consultations all over Uganda, and compiled a comprehensive report with recommendations on matters concerning marriage, divorce and succession. Due to the political upheavals of 1966 and the subsequent military coup of 1971, no action was taken on the recommendations of the Commission until the early Seventies. Among the reform made included the amendment of the Succession Act to provide a formula for intestate succession and the enactment of the Customary Marriage Registration decree to provide for registration of customary marriages and a minimum marriage age of 16 for females and 18 for males.

The Advent of the Domestic Relations Bill (DRB)

In 1974, the Marriage and Divorce Laws Reform project under the Department of Law Reform in the Ministry of Justice was set up. This produced a working document that is commonly referred to as the Draft Domestic Relations Bill of 1980. This process was interrupted due to political turmoil and civil strife that ensued in Uganda. Recent advocacy on the Domestic Relations Bill (DRB) was initiated by various advocacy groups such as FIDA-U, the Ministry of Women in Development, and ACFODE that reviewed the report of the Kalema Commission, the report of workshops held by FIDA-U to establish the position of women in Uganda under Domestic Relations in 1990.

The Concise Report on the DRB was thereafter produced by the Ministry of Gender and Community Development highlighting glaring gaps on crucial issues relating to marriage, divorce and inheritance in the recommendations of the three reports. In a response the Attorney General and Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs in 1994 requested the Uganda Law Reform Commission (ULRC) to embark on the Domestic Relations project and develop a new family Law. It was agreed that based on the 1995 Constitution, Uganda's international obligations and gender and socio-economic trends on domestic relations had been overtaken by events. Given the conflicting positions highlighted in the concise report, the ULRC instead decided to conduct research in 18 districts to formulate its own recommendations.

As soon as the ULRC was constituted, UWONET under the leadership of FIDA-U began a parallel consultation and sensitization process across the country. This was to create awareness on the legal status of women and men in the family and promote mechanisms for enhancing family stability. In July 1999, the network organised a three-day training session for its members and allies in order to enhance their understanding on the proposed DRB and identify issues of common concern for advocacy. The training produced a common advocacy and lobbying strategy that was circulated to over 4000 stakeholders and a coalition to campaign for the enactment of the DRB was formed with a secretariat run by UWONET. Through the activities of the DRB coalition, more organisations beyond the women's movement began advocating for passing the family law as part of their agenda.

On October 29th 1999, as part of the coalition activities, Akina Mama wa Afrika organised a workshop under the theme 'Reaching a consensus on the draft Domestic Relations Bill'. The workshop was attended by prominent religious leaders and aimed to generate debate on the DRB from a religious point of view. Among those who presented papers were Cardinal Emmanuel Wamala, the Archbishop of Kampala Archdiocese, and the leader of the Catholic Church in Uganda; Monsignor John Baptist Ssebayinga; Rev. Fr. Lawrence Kanyike; and the Secretary General of the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, Haji Edris Kasenene.

As a means of addressing all the issues contained in the proposed family laws, UWONET organised the DRB Coalition into working committees. These constituted different professions to address religious aspects, health and the economy, legal and statutory affairs, sociological elements, human rights and the international laws, democracy and governance, media, publicity, fundraising and lobbying. Position papers were developed on each subject and fact sheets were used by the activists to lobby MPs, the ULRC, Ministry of Justice and other decision makers. The Media Task Force, headed by the Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA) under UWONET, developed and implemented a media strategy monitoring all media reports and participating in discussions to ensure that the Bill remained a priority on the government's agenda.

In its advocacy UWONET sought to maintain all the positive aspects of the Bill including retaining the age of consent at 18 years; abolition of widow inheritance; definition of adultery in gender neutral language; prohibiting the demand for the return of the marriage gifts upon breakdown of a marriage and allowing women in polygamous unions the right to divorce when their husbands took on other wives against their consent. The network in particular wanted the DRB to be based on the principle of non-discrimination and gender equality while conforming to internationally recognized human rights codes and Uganda's Constitution which recognizes equality and freedom from all forms of discrimination. More so, the Bill needed to consider women's health concerns and reproductive rights. It proposed the shared responsibility of both spouses to sustain the family. The DRB would be gender sensitive, rooted in a non-discriminatory socio-economic and cultural context, negating all oppressive religious and traditional beliefs.

Advocacy for Tabling of the Domestic Relations Bill in Parliament

Following the ULRC Study, the Commission synthesized the available reports and made its own recommendations, which were handed over to the Ministry of Justice to compile a draft Bill. The members of the DRB Coalition and the Uganda Land Alliance met the Minister of Justice, Jehoash Mayanja Nkangi, who promised that the DRB memorandum would be prepared and the Bill tabled in Parliament by the end of March 2000. However, he said he found the demands made by the coalition, "somehow ridiculous", citing the proposal of criminalizing marital rape. In his opinion no woman could claim to have been raped by her husband since he had rights to her body within a marriage.

The coalition had mistakenly thought that as one of the initiators of the DRB the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Community Development, could champion its tabling in Parliament. However, when members of the Coalition met the minister, Hajat Janat Mukwaya, she advised them to meet the President, whom she said had his own

personal reservations about both the DRB and the co-ownership clause. She also disclosed that as a Muslim woman, the DRB was contrary to her religious teachings and she could not promote it since it would antagonize her Muslim constituents. One of the areas of contention for her was the clause on polygamy.

Much as the Bill had taken into consideration the Islam and cultural observances of the practice of polygamy, the Christian lobby group advanced the argument that polygamy was discriminatory and unacceptable in Christianity and needed to be abolished. They maintained that women in polygamous unions were held in an unfair marital relationship where equal treatment of family members could never be achieved. On the other hand, the Muslims argued that polygamy was an integral part of their religious way of life according to the Koran. Both lobby groups failed to realize the original intent of the Bill was to ensure that those contracting polygamous marriages would have the capacity to maintain their families.

The DRB Coalition tried to reach out to the Vice President, Dr. Speciosa Kazibwe, with a brief on the DRB, the lost co-ownership clause and an appeal to support the its work but received no response was from her. The DRB Coalition members particularly UWONET, HURINET-U, ACFODE, DENIVA, Action Aid, Akina Mama wa Afrika, FIDA-U, and SNV-U, intensified individual and collective lobbying of the government to table the DRB.

A public dialogue was organised by UWONET on March 1st, 2000 in Kampala, under the theme “The Agony of the Ugandan Family: Will the Domestic Relations Bill ever be Tabled in Parliament?” The keynote speaker, Dr. Rev. Fr. John Mary Waliggo, a Commissioner with the Uganda Human Rights Commission, explained the reasons for the delayed tabling of the Bill. Dr. Sylvia Tamale, a senior law lecturer at Makerere University, gave a justification for having a just family law as a means of attaining social justice. As a means of sensitizing the public, the DRB Coalition members published a special International Women’s Day supplement to commemorate the day in the New Vision and Monitor newspapers.

Throughout the month of September 2000, the DRB Coalition organised seven regional workshops targeting districts leaders to sensitise them on the DRB and identify local issues. The workshops were also intended to broaden the DRB advocacy by mobilizing wider support from the districts. The effort targeted 35 districts and meetings were held in Kampala, Mityana, Gulu, Arua, Fort Portal, Iganga and Soroti. Some of the views gathered from the regional consultative meetings were incorporated in the People’s Manifesto used to influence the election agenda. By going down to the districts, the DRB Coalition intensified pressure on the MPs and President Museveni prior to the 2001 elections. A commitment was made by MPs to table and pass the Bill before the end of the 6th Parliament: this was never fulfilled.

After the swearing in of the 7th Parliament, the DRB Coalition, worked closely with the Coalition for Political Accountability to Women. Many new MPs admitted being ignorant of the Bill, while others resisted provisions against ‘treasured cultural practices’ and male supremacy. UWOPA, also a founder member of UWONET, promised to prioritise the tabling of the DRB in the 7th Parliament. Following this, the coalition intensified its engagements with MPs, technocrats in the Ministry of Justice, the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, and the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

To address the limited knowledge on the DRB, UWONET developed user-friendly information packs for MPs. The packs gave the facts about the DRB, explained the contentious issues, the arguments for and against the Bill. Among the contentious issues was the age of consent to marriage, which some wanted to be reduced from 18 years to 16 years. Another was bride price, which the coalition wanted to be referred to as marriage gifts, criminalising demand for their refund. The Bill required polygamous husbands to provide for all wives equally and seek consent from the first wife before taking on another. It also pushed for recognition of cohabitation as a form of marriage if the couple had been living together for two years or more. The DRB criminalized marital rape in instances of ill health of a spouse, outlawed widow inheritance and introduced a clause on equal ownership of matrimonial property.

Finally on December 9th 2003 the Bill was presented to the 7th Parliament for the first reading and referred to the committee on Legal and Parliamentary Affairs for scrutiny. A detailed report was compiled with amendments and the DRB was brought back on May 2nd 2005 for debate. At this point there was a demonstration by Muslim men and women led by Mufti Sheikh Shaban Ramadhan Mubajje stating that the Muslim community was unanimously opposed to the Bill.

In response to the demonstration, on May 9th, 2005, the Attorney General on behalf of government presented the objections of the Muslim community and requested Parliament to postpone the general debate on the DRB on the basis that further consultations needed to be made with some key interest groups to ensure that the law incorporated their views. The Attorney General also noted that other interest groups including indigenous communities, the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC), and the DRB Coalition had also raised concerns about the Bill. The second reading of the Bill was thus deferred to enable another round of long and exhaustive consultations with all those parties opposed to the Bill.

At the time there were several political events at national level including the Referendum on political systems and upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections of March 2006. Moving the second reading of the DRB to May 2005 was viewed by the coalition as a strategic move to derail the process while maintaining voter support.

Opposition to the DRB

After the DRB was presented to Parliament in December 2003, the leaders of the Muslim community were invited by the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs and exhaustively consulted. Their major objections were to the requirement for a husband to receive permission from his first wife before taking other wives. They also objected to women being given an equal share of a husband's wealth following divorce or death. The Muslims also did not want the law to recognize cohabitation with respect to sharing property.

On February 1st 2004, during the celebration of Eid al-Adha the Muslim leaders gathered at the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council to reject the DRB, which they said contradicted the marital practices of Islam. They also maintained that in case of death the distribution of a husband's wealth in respect to his wife or wives was clearly outlined in the Koran and women did not share equal inheritance with men in the family. The Muslim leaders therefore called for defiance and prayer with Sheikh Rajab Kakooza emphasizing that "In Islam we are taught to obey our leaders, but when they are diverting us from the Koran, we have to oppose them and obey Allah." He also stressed the importance of politicians consulting religious leaders "before making laws that could spark off chaos in the country."

The Secretary General, for the Uganda Muslim Women's Association for Daa'wa and Development, Faridah Kakaire, stated that "the law should not deny our men from marrying the number of women they want. A man marries to please Allah (God) and not to please people.. The Chairperson of the same association, Fatuma Kamulali, said: "Very many women are looking for husbands. There are many widows. If the law prohibits men from marrying more than one woman, who will marry the widows?" They maintained that the DRB was against their faith and undermining the interests of Muslim women.

On March 29th 2005, just as Parliament was about to debate the DRB thousands of Muslims mobilized from different parts of Uganda took to the streets of Kampala, led by the Mufti Sheikh Mubajje, who called upon all Muslim in Uganda to stick to the Islamic rules as written in the Koran. The Muslim leader maintained, "The Koran caters for every aspect of marriage, children and relationships. There is no need for making another law for Muslims. A man can marry depending on his ability to maintain and sustain the relationship." Together with their leaders, the Muslim women of all ages dressed in hijab and veils, covering their heads and the men in traditional white tunics demonstrated through the streets of Kampala chanting "Allah Akbar" (God is Great) and some men shouting: "Twagala kuwaasa banna", meaning "We want to marry four wives." In unison the women affirmed this by saying "Mutuleke batuwasse", meaning "Leave us to get married." They carried placards and banners with messages like "Dare not tamper with our Constitution, The Quran"; "Leave

Islam alone or we declare a Jihad against you.”; “Ugandan women condemn the Domestic Relations Bill”; and “Don’t force us to become terrorists”.

On getting to Parliament, a 10–person delegation led by the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Islamic caucus and Butambala county MP, Ibrahim Lubega Kaddunabbi, presented a memorandum to the Deputy Speaker Rebecca Kadaga. The memorandum completely rejected the Bill stating that “It is neither possible nor necessary to improve the DRB to the Muslims’ satisfaction. Therefore, we pray that we be excluded from the application of this law.” According to the memo the Muslims demanded the title of the Bill be changed, and that a woman’s ‘age of puberty’ should dictate the age of marriage. They also maintained that the law would defile the sanctity of marriage as envisioned in Islam and consequently cause religious disharmony, stressing that Muslims rights needed to be respected.

Back to the Drawing Board

In May 2005 consultations were reopened with all the different stakeholders who had reservations or opposed the Bill outright. The ULRC held a full day meeting with the UJCC and consensus was reached on a number of contentious issues. In June 2005, the ULRC attempted to hold consultations with the leadership of the Muslim community but no consensus was reached on any of the contentious clauses. The Muslim leadership declared that it was not willing to proceed with any discussions on the Bill without getting a response from the Speaker of Parliament to their written memoranda of February 2004 and March 2005.

The consultations and reintroduction of the Bill in Parliament were regrettably overtaken by the change in political dispensation, moving from the movement system to multiparty politics. For the rest of its term, the 7th Parliament spent its time debating and passing laws to facilitate the transition. According to the rules of parliamentary procedure, even though the DRB had been tabled for the second reading, it had lapsed with the 7th Parliament and would have to be reintroduced in the 8th Parliament.

Much as the Bill provided for polygamy, because Islam and cultural practices recognised it, the Christian and Baha’i advocates maintained that it was discriminatory unacceptable and contrary to their religious doctrines and therefore needed to be abolished. The DRB had also attempted to have a uniform system of divorce, providing for irretrievable breakdown of marriage as the sole ground for divorce. Under the DRB divorce proposal, a couple would only need to prove to court that they were incompatible and that their marriage had broken down because of irreconcilable differences.

According to the Christians, the proposal on divorce was likely to promote the practice, and consequently ruin marriages. They argued that divorce was not ‘African’

but imported from the West. In their opinion, Ugandan marriages were not faced by a divorce crisis since marriages were supposed to last for life. Such legislation would be an attack on Christian beliefs and the freedoms of religion guaranteed by the Constitution. The Muslims stated that Sharia law had clear principles on divorce which could not be questioned or altered in any way.

Both the Christians and Muslims agreed that cohabitation should be deleted from the Bill because it contradicted all the doctrines of the different faiths. A report by the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee said that the DRB proposal on cohabitation was an affront on moral values and undermined the institution of marriage. "The concept of cohabitation should be deleted wherever it appears in the Bill. Our society should seek a moral code that encourages people to become decently married rather than condone and engage in such relationships. The presumption of marriage should be a discretionary power left to court to handle the rights of affected persons at either separation or succession matters or upon the death of a partner. Otherwise we would be forcing legal protection on those who by choice desire no protection."

On the co-ownership of matrimonial property, the Christians said there was no need to legislate on the matter because the Christian marriage vows already provided for it. "In Christian marriage, property, belongings, money are declared debts owned by those getting married and are to be jointly accrued from the date of the wedding. Therefore the provisions that prescribed how property was to be shared would not apply to Christian marriages. The Muslims, on their part, felt that the provisions on common ownership of matrimonial property breached the fundamental matrimonial rights of a wife to property because according to them, Muslim women assumed absolute rights over their husband and their properties upon marriage. They maintained therefore that Islam gave women absolute rights to own, sell, receive gift or manage property in a marriage.

Within the DRB the provision on marital rape was considered the most unpopular and offensive to the UJCC, EFU and the Directorate of the Sharia. They all agreed that violence and fear in marriage was unacceptable and that marriage should be enjoyed by all partners, but they advanced the argument that criminalization of marital rape was not a solution. They proposed that the courts should be empowered to issue injunctions and counselling over punishment in cases where it was proved that there was forceful sexual intercourse. In their report the Legal and Parliamentary Committee recommended that the whole idea of marital rape be deleted from the Bill wherever it appeared.

According to the coalition members, the issue of marital rape could not be dismissed without proper consideration of some issues such as AIDS and increased brutal sexual abuse. The ULRC also held the view that there should be reasonable grounds for denying a spouse sex, like after childbirth, poor health condition after surgery, monthly periods or anything that made it unhealthy to have sex.

The issue of bride price was seen by the DRB Coalition as an economic and political transaction that perpetuated unequal power relations of women's subordination and men's domination. They argued that it was wrong to put a price on any human being and the practice of bride price promoted abuse in marital relationships and women's powerlessness in a marriage. The coalition further argued that the DRB proposal of marriage gifts should not be an essential requirement for a marriage. By defining marriage gifts as a token of appreciation to the parents for bringing up a girl well, the demand for their return would thus become an offence.

Birth of the Marriage and Divorce Bill

Following the public hearing by the Parliamentary Committee and renewed consultations by the ULRC, the amalgamation of all marriage laws in Uganda under the DRB was abandoned. The ULRC decided to split the Bill into two, the Marriage and Divorce Bill (MAD Bill) for non-Muslims and the Administration of Muslim Personal Law for Muslims. In their memorandum to the ULRC the Baha'i community agreed with the Christian principles both on marriage and divorce and they did not accept polygamy, just like the Hindu. However the new MAD Bill maintained the sections that said the Baha'i and Hindu "shall enter into marriage according to their particular religious principles". The new Bill also provided for customary marriages so long as the customs did not offend the Constitution.

The ULRC advanced that since the Constitution, under article 129, provides that Parliament may, by law establish subordinate courts or lower courts under the High Court, the Qadhi courts would therefore be formed to deal with marriage, divorce, guardianship and inheritance of property, hence giving the Muslims the constitutional right to have their own law. These courts would be administered by Qadhis (Muslim men qualified in Islamic law). The Qadhis at the lower level would need a certificate in law but the Chief Qadhi needed two degrees, one in secular law to enable him to be at the same level as a Chief Magistrate and another in Sharia law.

The Chief Qadhi would be a judicial officer and not a religious leader. The Qadhis would be appointed by the Judicial Service Commission, in consultation with the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council. There would be one Chief Qadhi in each region and not at every chief magisterial level. Appeals to the High Court could be heard by non-Muslim judges since matters that go to the High Court are not full case hearings but only points of law. However, High Court judges would have to apply Islamic law and not secular law and the advocates appearing before them had to be able to present Islamic law.

The coalition felt the new Bill was watered down and the title given by the ULRC, Marriage and Divorce Bill was inappropriate and potentially controversial given that the Christian leaders had already expressive their objection to any aspects of divorce.

UWONET Working at District Level

In 2009, UWONET developed a strategy that included working with national, district and lower level women's organisations (CBOs and NGOs). This was to build a critical mass of women and men at the district and lower levels for sustained activism and advocacy for gender equality and women's rights. UWONET facilitated organizing and mobilization of women and men across the country. The move was to strengthen and build cohesion in the women's movement which has been accused of being an elitists club based in urban areas. This led to the creation of district women's rights and advocacy networks. The efforts, experience and issues continuously informed UWONET's advocacy at national level.

District networks were formed in close to 30 districts over a period of five years including; Abim, Pader, Kitgum, Gulu, Katakwi, Soroti, Amuria, Moroto, Agago, Lamwo, Kaabong, Kotido, Pallisa, Mayuge, Kamuli, Bugiri, Iganga, Jinja, Oyam, Masaka, Mbarara, Kanungu, Mubende, Napak, Nakapiripirit, and Nwoya among others. UWONET worked on specific projects in close to 70 districts out of 112. In key areas of women's rights and access to justice, women's leadership and democratic governance, women's economic empowerment and justice and institutional development.

In order to strengthen the networks, UWONET enhanced capacities in advocacy, gender, women's rights, movement building, networking, organizational development and social accountability to create a culture of collective action to address local challenges.



Rita Aciro Lakor
Executive Director
UWONET (middle
right) and Jessica Ataa
Coordinator Kotido
Women's Network
(middle left) during a
procession in Romrom
Village in Kotido district.

Examples of local initiatives to address gender discrimination and poor service delivery through advocacy by district level women's organisations.

Case stories of activism for gender equality and women's rights;

In 2011, in Pader district, the women activist of Lira Palwo Sub County marched in protest to the district headquarters over the closure of a health centre. The health centre was closed due to no latrine; the old latrine was filled to capacity. On that fateful night, a mother who was in labor was rushed to the Health Centre and it was found closed, she nearly died but was rushed to Kalongo hospital. The following morning the women activists mobilized and marched to the district expressing their concern. This attracted the attention of the district leadership who managed to mobilize funds and a latrine with three stances was constructed and the health centre began to offer services again.

In 2013, in Pader district a peaceful demonstration was led to the Police station by the district women's activists in Pader town council, in response to a case of a young woman who was brutally murdered by her boyfriend who was still at large. With this action, the Police intensified their investigations and arrested him. This set a record in the district and the community became aware that violence against women and girls was unacceptable and any perpetrator would be brought to book.

Unifying women in political leadership to address Gender Equality

From its inception, UWONET has worked to promote women including for elective positions through advocacy for the enactment and implementation of relevant laws, policies, civic and voter education and capacity development. In 2009, UWONET brought together some member organisations Action for Development–ACFODE and Forum for Women in democracy–FOWODE and sister organisations like Centre for Women in Governance–CEWIGO and Women Democracy Network Uganda) (WDN–Uganda Chapter) who were all individually working on enhancing women’s leadership and decision making to form Women Democracy Group (WDG). Under the leadership of UWONET and through individual organisational intervention, over 70 districts have been reached to increase women’s influence especially at local governance level.

Training sessions for women in local councils have led to the formation of womens’ caucuses in over 50 districts. They have continued to advance gender and women’s rights issues; they have been instrumental in influencing gender budgeting, gender responsive oversight monitoring of service delivery; women councillors have gained confidence to chair committees; and above all caucusing has united the women councillors across different political parties and provided a common voice on gender equality and women’s rights issues in district council meetings. Women councillors have demonstrated good debating skills and moving motions, and more have attained leadership positions as committee chairpersons.



Members of Katakwi women’s caucus



Members of Amuria women’s caucus

In Busia district, a caucus successfully moved a motion for Health Centre IIs to provide delivery services. This was adopted and all Health Centre IIs are providing delivery services.



In Wakiso district, 50 percent of the budget is allocated to health and education which are priority issues for women and girls. The allocation was achieved as a result of lobbying by the women's caucus.

In Katakwi district all the committees in council are chaired by women councillors. This reshuffle happened after the women returned from a training organized by UWONET which empowered them to question various processes in council. They moved a motion to reshuffle the committees and unanimously the caucus gave one vote to those women who were nominated. To date Katakwi district council and caucus is model in Uganda.

The Katakwi women's caucus successfully lobbied for the allocation of funds for transport for emergency referrals during delivery. The funding has increased from 800,000/= in 2012 to 1,500,000/=.

Giving hope to women in post conflict recovery in northern Uganda

The armed conflict in Northern Uganda led to breakdown of systems, institutions and infrastructure and created poverty, abuse of human rights and land conflicts. UWONET set out to restore hope and rehabilitate the lives of women through implementation of various interventions. UWONET sought to ensure women's

involvement in governance aspects in the recovery and development programmes in Acholi, Karamoja and West Nile. To empower them with knowledge and skills, UWONET rolled out capacity development on aspects of gender, social accountability and knowledge on government recovery programmes such as the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP), local government development processes, advocacy, roles and responsibilities of duty bearers and rights holders, networking, legal and policy framework and other civic competence aspects.

In addition to capacity building sessions, UWONET provided platform at the district level to evaluate service delivery. Through these dialogue platforms citizens raised their challenges to local authorities and were able to agree on solutions.



Capacity building sessions by UWONET in the post conflict and recovery northern region for communities, CSOs and duty bearers.

Case stories

“A monitoring visit to Kotido Health Centre IV established that a scanning machine was purchased and not in use because of lack qualified staff to operate it. The findings were shared with district officials who seemed not to be aware of the situation. A directive was given to recruit a stenographer and the machine was put to full use. The machine has led to a reduction in expenditure by women for antenatal in Kotido District”. Lokiru Ann (not real names).

“In Agago District cows were supplied to selected members of Lira Palwo sub-county under the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) programme, but the animals supplied were very poor quality heifers. On learning of this, women activists and community monitors of service delivery collected the animals and returned them to the sub-county. The contractor was recalled by the sub county leadership and ordered to supply better quality animals.”
Adong Jennifer (not real names)

Efforts towards ending Gender Based Violence (GBV)

In 2011, UWONET in collaboration with its members ACFODE and FOWODE under the 7th GOU/UNFPA country programme undertook a study to assess whether budgets in Kanungu, Katakwi, Oyam, Mubende, Moroto, Kabong, Kotido, and Yumbe had responded to gender based violence. A key finding was that government implementation of laws and policies against violence was still lacking at district level. For example, much as the Domestic Violence Act was passed in November 2009 and assented to in March 2010, by 2011, there were still no guidelines for its operationalization. In Kanungu District, defilement was the most common case reported at one police station, followed by child neglect. Most of the defilement and rape cases were not handled because there was one doctor in the whole of district who was overwhelmed by the incidents.

An initiative known as the Small Men’s Action Groups (SMAGs) was started in Kanungu District in partnership with the Community Development Officer (CDO) to build local capacity in understanding GBV. The SMAGs are a group of male models who mobilize fellow men and sensitize them on issues of GBV through radio talk shows in addition to mediating GBV cases where applicable. These groups were accepted by the communities as a cheaper means of handling GBV and as local courts for settling domestic disputes.



In its work to end GBV, UWONET has worked very closely with religious and traditional leaders who are very influential in most rural communities and play a critical role in championing social mobilisation initiatives that address HIV/AIDS and SGBV. Traditional leaders also preside over customary law courts that exercise power and maintain order in district communities.

Through these initiatives, local governments, CSOs and communities have become more responsive to the cases of GBV in a collaborative action programme implemented by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), district local governments, CEDOVIP, UWONET and a private sector multimedia firm. The joint programme was implemented in eight districts of Busoga region (including Jinja, Iganga, Kamuli, Mayuge, Buyende, Kaliro, Namutumba and Bugiri) contributed to the achievement of the NDP goals and provided data for reporting on the UNSCR 1325 and 1820 and the Goma Declaration. The programme strengthened the coordination mechanism on GBV through the national GBV reference group.

Following community interactions by UWONET in over 21 districts where programmes on GBV and violence against women were implemented, there was an outcry by the community on the fee of between UGX 5,000 to 30,000 charged by some health personnel during the examination of SGBV cases. This fee hindered access to justice for women and girls especially in rural areas. In 2013, through advocacy with support from UNFPA and engagement with the Ministry of Health, the Director General of Health Services issued a directive to all government health facilities to provide free examination for all survivors of SGBV.



The continuous advocacy by UWONET and other stakeholders to improve the protection and case management of GBV survivors, the 12th Police council passed a resolution that the department of child and family protection be upgraded to a full directorate and the name be changed from child and family protection to Gender based Violence Directorate. Although the directorate is yet to be fully functional, upgrading will mean that the directorate will have budget allocation to comprehensively address GBV.

The launch of Police form 3 and 3A



Hon. Rukia Nakadama
(left) Minister of Gender
Labour and Social
Development and Hon.
Hilary Oniek (middle)
Minister for Internal Affairs
during the national launch
of Police Form 3 and 3A
(PF3 and 3A).

In the course of reporting a crime involving sexual violence as provided for under the Penal Code Act of Uganda Cap 120 Laws of Uganda, survivors must obtain a medical examination form from the police, also known as a Police Form 3 (PF3) in order to be examined by a health practitioner. The PF3 is used to document physical or other injury and is divided into two sections to be completed by a police officer and a health practitioner. While under Ugandan law, proof of any crime does not exclusively rely on medical evidence, the PF3 is often critical to the successful prosecution of cases involving sexual violence. Indeed, police usually do not pursue further investigation of cases without the PF3 form. The Police Form 3 is a document given to a victim or survivor of a crime after an assessment by the police officer that there is reasonable basis to believe that an offence has been committed against the victim or survivor. It is made under the Police Act of 2006 as amended.

To accelerate access to justice by survivors of GBV, UWONET and the GBV coalition at national and district levels lobbied for the amendment of the Police form 3 and 3A. The amendment allows other medical officers including doctors, clinical officers and

registered midwives to examine survivors of SGBV and provide evidence as opposed to the earlier provision of only a police surgeon who are less than 5 in Uganda. This earlier provision had led to delayed justice to the survivors of SGBV.

The launch was at national and regional levels to disseminate a process that will lead to improve access to justice by the survivors of GBV, popularize and call for implementation of the amended Police form 3 and 3A. At national level it was launched by the Minister of Internal Affairs Hon. Hilary Oniek, who emphasised strengthening implementation and popularization of amended Police form 3 and 3A.



Members of Kotido Women's Network during the launch of Police Form 3 and 3A in Kotido District.

UWONET Members combat sexual and Gender Based Violence

In the following years, UWONET and its members intensified pressure on government to enact relevant laws to combat SGBV and carried out various activities to combat all forms of SGBV.

The Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA-U)



Media advocacy at FIDA offices (Arthur Larok—Country Director Action Aid—Uganda, Irene Ovonji—Odida E.D FIDA Uganda)

FIDA-U is focused on ensuring that the government effectively implements the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). As a human rights and feminist organization, FIDA-U mainly works with the poor who are not in position to engage the services of lawyers to represent and defend their rights and interests. FIDA-U's main role has been to increase access to justice by providing free legal services to poor and vulnerable communities. FIDA-U also enables people whose rights have been violated or threatened to talk about their experiences and seek redress. The organization also carries out extensive research and rapid appraisals on topical legal issues for developing position papers to influence legal and policy reform. Most of the cases handled by FIDA-U arise from marital disputes, paternity cases, child neglect, land disputes, claims for increasing access to productive resources and contractual employer disputes.

Action for Development (ACFODE)

Action for Development is working to defend the rights of poor women. The organization supplements government's effort in implementing CEDAW. For over 20 years, ACFODE has been involved in gender advocacy work to end of discrimination against women. The organization targets sub-county local councillors, women LC III chairpersons, female and male youth, sub-county chiefs, local government technical staff, opinion leaders and traditional birth attendants.

ISIS-WICCE

Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange exists to promote the rights of women through networking, action oriented documentation of women's experiences and cross-cultural exchange of skills. The organization aims at contributing to the empowerment of women by documenting and providing gender disaggregated data on the prevalence and consequences of different forms of violence against women. As a result, Isis-WICCE has established a one-stop centre for information and knowledge, especially on gender based violence in conflict situations including Northern Uganda.



An advocacy meeting at ISIS-WICCE offices.

Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP)

The Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention works at the districts, with civil society and government to build an environment supportive of women's rights to safety and equality in Uganda. Through creative training activities of their project, 'SASA!, Mobilizing Communities to Prevent Violence Against Women and HIV', CEDOVIP works to mobilize and engage community members, local institutions and policy makers to re-think their use of power, particularly in intimate relationships, in order

to create safer relationships. The organisation also builds the capacity of national NGOs on violence against women and HIV vulnerability.

CEDOVIP's National Advocacy for Violence against Women Prevention work uses media campaigns and policy advocacy to create supportive environments for women's rights and safety by encouraging a change in attitudes, behaviour, policy and practice in the country. Over the past eight years, CEDOVIP's structured approach to preventing violence against women, protecting women's health and strengthening HIV prevention has ensured that these issues became national concerns that government and civil society have paid attention to, culminating in parliament's passing of the Domestic Violence Act in 2009. In collaboration with the Uganda Police Force, CEDOVIP developed "Responding to Domestic Violence: A Handbook for the Police Force" and together with the Kawempe community and leadership structures, CEDOVIP created the first ever domestic violence bylaw in Uganda.



UWONET Staff at 20 years

Replenishing the faces in the women's movement



UWONET interns.



Hon. Margaret Ziwa
(middle in yellow)
Speaker of EALA,
the Chief Guest at
the opening of the
first ever National
Women's Week.

Movement building and continued learning

The first ever national women's week

Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) held the first ever national Women's Week (1st – 7th October 2012). The week was dedicated to celebrating women's contributions to Uganda's development since independence under the theme, 'United Women Can'. The week aimed to encourage reaching out to communities, different stakeholders, share ideas and aspirations, and catalyze a cohesive united women's movement. The event also intended to bridge the gap in a cross-section of women in the country. The theme was intended to serve as an identity and mobilizing force for the women's movement and be a possible slogan for the women's movement. The women's week brought together over 10,000 women and men in a seven days of events including a charity drive and support to the children affected by nodding disease in Northern Uganda.

There was a visit to the Uganda Cancer Institute; showcasing women's contribution to national development through exhibitions; pro bono services including legal aid and health clinics; over 30 parallel sessions including debates, presentations, drama, case studies and testimonies; ending with an awards ceremony for women achievers presided over by President Museveni.

The national Women's Week is planned for every other year. It builds on UWONET's efforts of networking and building linkages with women in different spheres to

sustain a strong women's movement. UWONET is committed to pursuing strategies to build a cohesive women's movement based on the issues that arose during the women's week.

Cross boarder peer learning

In 2010, UWONET partnered with Care International in Uganda and organized a peer learning visit to Kenya which coincided with the end of the UN Women's Decade which was launched in Nairobi in 1985. Selected women from the post conflict districts of northern Uganda were part of the exchange learning. The objective of the learning visit was to give an for sharing experiences, networking and synergy building within the EAC on issues relating to women peace and security, experiences were shared on management of post-election violence with WA Mama Kibera women's organisation.

In 2011, UWONET partnered with EASSI and Conflict des Association et ONGs Femmes du Burundi (CAFOB) and organized another learning visit to Burundi. Burundi and Uganda have experienced armed conflict where women have suffered but been able to rebuild their lives. Through the exchange, women shared and learnt from each other's experiences. This offered an opportunity for them to identify areas for collaboration with regional partners to share best practices and strengthen networking among women peace activists.

UWONET has continued advocacy on peace and security at national and regional levels.

UWONET in the media

The media has been a partner for UWONET and given visibility to our work. The media has fronted gender equality and women's rights concerns in social, economic and political spheres in Uganda.



The Tabling and Demonization of the MAD Bill

On March 12th 2013, the refined Marriage and Divorce Bill was tabled by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Kahinda Otaffire and strongly defended by the Minister of State, Hon. Fredrick Ruhindi. A number of MPs who contributed to the debate spoke in its favour saying it had been long overdue. Despite a few dissenting voices, on the first day 23 clauses were passed out of the 178. All indications were that this time the MAD Bill that had been debated for over half a century would at last be enacted into law.

Anticipating no haggling, women MPs kept UWONET informed of all the progress. On the second day of the debate, Parliament was told that they could not continue with the debate of the Bill as the President wished to meet with the executive of UWOPA to discuss its content. Immediately UWONET learnt of this request, the coalition members met and braced for a spirited battle to save the Bill.

The President summoned UWOPA under the pretext that he wanted to consult with them and the NRM Parliamentary caucus in order to have a harmonized position. Given that the women MPs who were very instrumental had to travel over 300 kilometres to meet the President, debate of the Bill was postponed. According to those who met the President, he was very receptive and eager to listen to the women MPs' views, which he said were very pertinent, although he said he wanted them to move cautiously and not provoke social instability in homes. As the women returned, the president flew back to Kampala and urgently called the NRM Caucus meeting.

President Museveni has had a public history of bashing the Bill from his first elected term (1996–2001), second term (2001–2006), third term (2006–2011) and now fourth term 2011–2016. In the NRM caucus meeting he claimed that those pushing for the Bill were trying to “impose middle class values on a traditional society”. In his speech to the MPs President Museveni advocated for the inclusion of a clause which denied matrimonial property to women who were unable to have children in their marriages. He argued: “The church saying ‘that is what God decided’ is not acceptable to many Africans certainly not to Banyankore. It should be addressed. Customary marriages address barrenness and childlessness but not civil registration or Christian marriages”. These sexist and out dated sentiments from an educated and highly exposed persona like President Museveni infuriated women activists who openly denounced them in the media and at public meetings.

After his address, the President advised the MPs to go back to their constituencies for at least two weeks and consult about the Bill that had already been extensively discussed by the public. He gave the NRM MPs guidelines to follow in a 21–page document, where he personally disagreed with the provisions on divorce, bride price, property sharing in case of divorce, marital rape and cohabitation.

At this point government made the Bill seem as if it was by women activists or NGOs. In its defence, UWONET through public media educated the public that this was a government and denying its own Bill. UWONET explained its role in advocacy including the resources spent on the advocacy on educating every circle of members of Parliament. “This has been one of the most trying times in the advocacy for the Bill,” said Rita Aciro UWONET’s Executive Director. We have had to explain the intention of the Bill to counter the misinformation put out there, including by Members of Parliament.

For the MAD Bill	
Kahinda Otafiire, Justice Minister	I support the Bill. We have kept it for a very long time and most of the things being contested, like cohabitation, are a reality. We cannot bury our heads in the sand. Let the Bill be passed once and for all.
Margret Komuhangi (Nakasongola woman MP)	I had a radio programme for three hours during which I explained the clauses in the Bill to my people and all the comments I got were positive in support of the Bill. I explained to them that the existing laws are colonial laws which we need to repeal.
Sarah Kayaga (Manafwa woman MP)	They have mixed views about the Bill. Many believe it is an importation of western culture. I told them customary and Christian marriages are catered for in the Bill. Many want cohabitation out of the Bill but it was realized that it is the most prevalent in the society. My position is that we pass the Bill with some amendments taking into account religious and cultural concerns.
Sanjay Tanna (Tororo Municipality)	It is a good Bill. We need it for society for now and for future generations. We should pass it with amendments. We should reconcile the views of the churches and that of the common man, which is not easy. The churches don’t want divorce and don’t want cohabitation to be recognized at the time of divorce. In my constituency the men are opposed to it. But when you explain they are convinced that the Bill is necessary. The women are happy with the Bill. The churches are against it and say canon law does not permit divorce or separation. The church says married people are only separated by death and giving women cohabiting rights is encouraging polygamy. The time given for consultation is very short. When we educate people they appreciate many sections of the Bill. We are trying to do is refine and put them together.

For the MAD Bill	
Mujuni Vincent Kyamadidi (Rwampara MP)	This bill has some good clauses, which I support. But there are also controversial ones which even my electorate want deleted. For instance, the one on conjugal rights is so controversial. Cohabitation should only provide legal mechanisms in case of a disagreement between the couple but not be treated as if it is a form of marriage. Bride Price should only be left as one's culture demands.
Baba Diri Margaret (Woman MP Koboko district)	I support the Bill 100%. We have come a long way. The laws we have are of decades ago. Women have suffered too much. Look at dowry: men think because they have purchased you, they will treat you the way they want as you work like a donkey. For cohabiting, we have agreed that the clause will be scrapped and be harmonized separately. For property sharing, I do not see why men are worried. If you have acquired property before marriage, it is yours. We are talking about property that is acquired when you are married. Marital rape is a big issue. Some men's private parts have been chopped off, when chaos ensues. So let us support this bill.
Betty Amongi (Oyam South), Chairperson UWOPA	I support the Bill; it is in line with the emerging challenges in the country. People think it's a new law but this is not the case. The Bill is reforming the current laws on marriage and divorce which were adopted way back in 1904. In fact some provisions of in the current Divorce Act and the Marriage Act were nullified by the Constitutional Court ruling petition because they were inconsistent. For instance in Section 4(1) of the current Divorce Act (Cap 249) is inconsistent with articles 21(1) and 2 and 31(1) and 6 of the 1995 Constitution which are necessary reform in the current law. So the law will help us to move forward.

In the President's opinion the MAD Bill was "potentially dangerous and divisive to Ugandans who were apparently happy with the status quo and it therefore needed the input from everybody." Many MPs, particularly the liberal ones in the NRM, and those in opposition objected to this stand saying that many important Bills were still pending. The MPs maintained that the MAD Bill had already been subjected to broad, all-inclusive national consultations by government ministries, departments and CSOs. President Museveni detecting open defiance quickly proposed that he would sponsor the consultations and each MP would be given five million Uganda shillings for the exercise. This was being paid on top of the already generous MPs' package. It was

criticised across the country and unfortunately changed the trend of the MAD Bill debate thereafter.

Misinformation on the MAD Bill

As the MPs went out purportedly to consult on the Bill, its opponents used television, radio and newspapers, claiming that extreme feminists had drafted the Marriage and Divorce Bill. They wanted to force the government to pass it and make marriage so unbearable that Ugandans would become gays and lesbians. They further claimed that the women activists behind the Bill were 'divorced', 'unmarried', 'miserable men haters' and 'very angry women' who detested marriage and never wished other women to enjoy it.

They further claimed that the Bill contained outrageous clauses such as 'marital rape', which would in future be used against men by their wives to get them arrested and eventually divorce them. On the issue of property rights, the MPs misinformed the public that women were bent on grabbing property from different men by marrying and seeking immediate divorce and gaining property they had not contributed to. With such a provision, women would make marriage a commercial venture and impoverish men.

The Sunday Vision newspaper selected the views of MPs from all the regions of the country and reported that the majority of the citizens had rejected the Marriage and Divorce Bill.

Against the MAD Bill

Mohammed Nsereko, Kampala central MP	From the start, my main contention of this Bill is that the grounds for dissolution of marriage might deter people from getting married. The Bill focuses on sharing assets but forgets that people have huge liabilities (debts) as well. What happens to the liabilities? If a man has a liability of billions of money, they should share it with the woman.
Jesca Abiku (Adjuman woman MP)	People in my constituency have rejected the Bill because they think the contentious issues do not tally with our cultural values. We need to educate our children to understand our cultural values, nor and traditions. They think this Bill is one of those laws imported from the western countries.

Against the MAD Bill

Phyllis Chemutai (Kapchorwa woman MP)	They are very negative about the Bill. They don't want to even hear about it. They want us to stick to the traditional way of resolving marriage issues. My position is that I will go with what my people are saying because I am in parliament to represent their views.
Victoria Businge (Kabalore woman MP)	People have not yet understood the Bill. The majority were not in for the Bill. Many of them said the Bill is not more important than their needs of services by government. They want respect for culture. My position is that we don't need to rush the Bill. We need deeper consultations and deeper sensitization so that our people make informed positions. There are so many priorities which people want government to give priority.
Robinah Nabbanja (Kibaale woman MP)	Majority are opposed to it. In fact there is a meeting I convened where I was seriously blasted. They wondered why Parliament and government should waste time on this Bill when there are more urgent services affecting their lives which are not available. Their view is that the Bill should be shelved and priority be given to public services. My view is the same as that of my constituency.
Patrick Nsanja (Ntenjeru county South MP)	Majority of the women support the Bill while the men are opposed to it. I have been troubled with explaining it to the people but in totality they are opposed to the Bill. As a lawyer, I have to promote human rights. The Bill should therefore be put aside for further consultations. Even some MPs don't know what is in the Bill.
Wafula Oguttu (Bukhooli Central)	I had 31 rallies and in all of them they rejected the Bill. They don't want it. They think it is for the educated women in Kampala. They think it violates their culture; it will commercialize marriage and cause instability in marriages. They think we should have separate laws for Christian and customary marriages. Personally, I think the Bill is for the educated women and can create problems. They want government to give priority to roads, providing drugs in hospitals, and improve their welfare.

Against the MAD Bill

Milton Muwuma (Kigulu South)	In all the four sub-counties in my constituency, the Bill is unpopular and they are challenged the timing. They said among the things they sent us do, that Bill is not a priority. They want us to improve their household income, fix roads, provide affordable electricity and water. They said marriage issues should be left to the religious leaders to handle. They voted in unison saying the Bill should be shelved until further notice.
Gen. Elly Tumwine (UPDF MP)	I am glad that this matter is being debated countrywide involving both men and women. It touches the family which is the most important unit of any society. I have been in the countryside and I realized people are scared about the Bill. Therefore, where there is a big number of people who are not sure of where the law will take them, we need to go slow. Even without that law, we have registered so many achievements in women's emancipation. Women have been gaining their rights. It is not good to legislate for change. Positive change is good but you cannot force it.
Stephen Tashobya (Kajara County)	Some support the Bill while others are opposed to it. They think we are imposing Western culture on them. Some think if it is to continue, issues to do with sharing property, cohabitation, religion (divorce) and customs (bride price) should be removed from the Bill.
Felix Okot Ogong (Dokolo County)	They don't want it at all. They think it is introducing Western culture and commercializing marriage. It is against our cultural and religious values. Christians should be allowed to make their own law just as government has allowed Muslims to have their own law.
Beatrice Anywar (Kitgum woman MP)	Men have rejected the Bill but women want it amended to cater for traditional values. Generally, Acholi people want to retain customary marriage. They want the law to reinforce customary laws.

Against the MAD Bill

Rosemary Seninde
Nansubuga (Wakiso)

I find it difficult to support the Bill. Some sections are controversial. In my culture we say we don't bring bedroom matters into the public. The section of marital rape requires women to bring the matter to court but how can this be discussed in public. Who are the witnesses? I think it might be hard to implement this law. I am a Christian and I don't support cohabitation. We might encourage people to cohabit. It is difficult to ignore cohabitation because many people are cohabiting. My constituents have questioned sections of the Bill. First of all they ask whether the Bill is a priority. They say they have pressing problems and the Bill is not an urgent problem. Some women say we are planning to break their marriages. Some men say we are stopping them from marrying because marriage is going to become difficult. Some women fear if we recognize cohabitation some men who have cohabitated with them for long may abandon them and wed other women in church.

Against the MAD Bill

Rita Ronah Ninsiima (Kabale)	I have withdrawn my support for the Bill since my constituents do not support it. Originally I was supporting it because I thought it would help unemployed graduates get married especially when the bride price is not in place. Some of my colleagues in Parliament are not supporting it and they criticize those who are not married from talking about the Bill. Some of us who are not married have left it to the married people. My constituents do not support the Bill. They are not happy with the title of the Bill they say it makes it look like marriage has to end in divorce which they say is not right. My constituents say if we bring in the issue of sharing property equally between men and women, then some women are likely to marry for property. People say women will get multiple partners for the sake of property. People say bride price should not be removed because if it is removed girls will not be respected in marriage.
Benson Obua–Ogwal (Moroto County)	I don't support some aspects of the Bill like cohabitation. The Bill seems to make marriage mechanical. You have to enter it as if it is a contract beforehand. The Bill should not create a window for people to do away with age-old traditions. It creates leverage for a person to leave a marriage whenever they feel like. Some of my constituents have rejected the Bill. The way it was introduced has raised a lot of tempers and emotions. They feel the Bill is going to make marriage cheap and make breaking up easy. The Bill has become political. There are religious and cultural norms which people are against. There are traditions you can't just throw away.
Jacqueline Amongin (Woman representative for Ngora district)	I do not support the cohabitation clause. Our view as women is that we should have a separate clause on it, because it is not a form of marriage. My worry is that if we legalise it, what we are advocating for? If a man can pick you today, he will move on and pick another woman the next day.

Against the MAD Bill

John Amos Okot (Agago country)

My major problem with this bill is cohabitating. It is as if we are equating cohabiting to a marriage, yet it is illegal under the Penal Code. Besides, in Christianity, cohabiting is a sin. It is fornication; we should not promote sinful acts. Those cohabiting should be encouraged to formalise their relationships.

Male Champions of the MAD Bill Speak Out

Upon realising that most Ugandans were debating the Marriage and Divorce Bill from a point of ignorance and reducing it to a women's issue, a group of men from civil society read and understood the Bill in order to debate from an informed point of view. The men champions coordinated by Action Aid Uganda included Arthur Larok, Nickson Ogwal, Paul Ojumani, Warren Nyamugasira, Richard Ssewakiryanga and Edward Iruura. They launched a campaign to support the Bill and to "restore dignity, equality and justice to both parties in the marriage".



The Men at a press conference

Addressing a press conference on April 4th 2013, the men champions pointed out that the biggest challenge for gender equality, particularly in marriage and family matters was deeply rooted patriarchy in cultures that subordinated women to men.

“We are very disappointed with the quality of current debate and the media’s engagement in deliberate misinformation of the masses. The majority of the MPs have trivialised this Bill but we recognize the efforts of those who have gallantly supported it. We are also saddened that the government’s behaviour is completely contradictory to its earlier position”, the men champions stated. They gave compelling reasons for urgent reforms in the Ugandan family law to reflect present-day realities.

They observed that the family laws needed to be regularly reviewed to conform to modern social, economic and cultural trends. “It is these challenges that demand a responsive adjustment in the responsibility of marriage and family. Within the political context, one of the factors that underpin family law is gender inequality, which reforms in marriage laws aim at addressing to create equality including for children. Ugandan laws on family are out dated and represent the thinking of a bygone era,” the men champions emphasised.

They also pointed out that some cultural practices and customs contradicted the Constitution and undermined the rights of both women and men in marriage and upon dissolution of marriage. “The reform of marriage laws is thus aimed at ensuring equality, non-discrimination, justice and rights in marriage and upon dissolution of marriage. Society has moved ahead of these laws, even as they desperately, and in futility, try to hold it back. The proposed Marriage and Divorce Bill is an attempt to capture the foregoing concerns,” the men argued.

Conclusion

UWONET's experience in advocacy and its influence can be described as a journey of passion. Despite the numerous legal and policy frameworks at national and international levels, government, leaders and the people continue to turn a deaf ear to inequality in our societies. The silence and pretence can easily be seen from this report. Our leaders continue to play double standards while many times the role of CSOs and NGOs are challenged especially when they carry out advocacy and speak against human rights abuse and discrimination. Their contribution to social, economic and political agenda cannot be under rated.

In order for change to happen, there must be political goodwill and a combination of factors such as the presence of active CSOs, and informed citizenry and a strong support base for issues for advocacy.

THE FUTURE OF UWONET: Innovating for Collective Influence

In its 20-year journey, UWONET like any other organization has had ups and downs. The challenges UWONET has faced have been managed and opportunities exploited to bring the network to its current level of growth. UWONET's contribution to good governance and gender equality is widely acknowledged by government, citizens, women, and the media and development partners.

In a country where women continue to be constrained by marginalization and violation of their rights in the name of religion and culture, UWONET emerged to challenge the status quo and give hope to millions of Ugandan women who were suffering in silence. The vibrancy of women's organizations in Uganda inspired not only women in Uganda, but also in the East African region and across Africa.

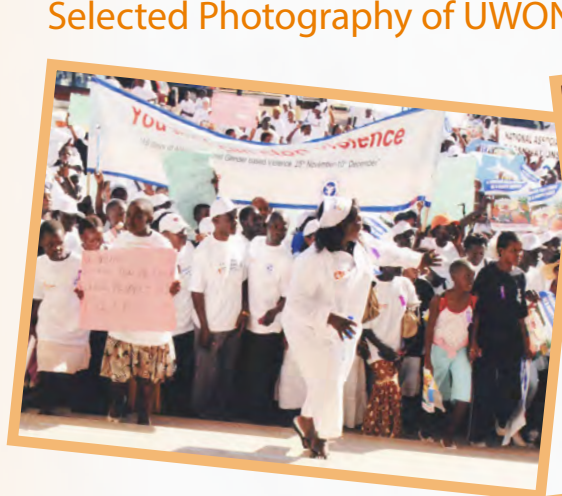
UWONET has recently embarked on a new strategic direction to assess its niche and contribution towards strengthening the women's movement. Policy advocacy and building networks are at the centre of UWONET's new direction.

More than ever before, UWONET is a space for all women to organize and amplify their voices. The environment for women's organising has changed and become more challenging and hostile. The retrogressive laws that have recently been enacted are clear evidence of this. To tackle these challenges UWONET is becoming increasingly essential as a women's space where the movement in all its diversity can mobilize a collective voice on a wide range of issues. As UWONET embarks on a new direction, the steps taken to extend and embrace women's networks countrywide have been commended for development.

It is clear that policy advocacy alone cannot shift, let alone transform, unequal gender power relations. Women must organize themselves to bring about transformation outside individual initiatives and through a growing social movement. Gender activism at all levels will continue to be essential. However, the new threshold for policy advocacy must emphasise women's organizing and mobilizing their collective voice at all levels. All this must be backed by consistently engaging governance systems to recognize and address the needs of women.

Twenty years since UWONET was formed, the network continues to plan for the transformation foreseen over years.

Selected Photography of UWONET over the years









Two Decades of Advocacy for Gender Equality and Women's Rights



Annex 1:

List of UWONET's Coordinators and Board Members 1993 to 2013

UWONET Chief Accounting Officers 1993 to 2013

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Maude Mugisha | 3. Jacqueline Asiimwe–Mwesige |
| 2. Hon. Sheila Kawamara
Mishambi | 4. Solome Nakaweesi Kimbugwe |
| | 5. Rita Aciro Lakor |

Members who served on UWONET's board over the years (1993 to 2013)

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Lydia Rugasira | 7. Veronica Namagembe |
| 2. Judy Kamanyi | 8. Lydia Rugasira |
| 3. Christine Mugerwa | 9. Judy Kamanyi |
| 4. Grace Bantebya | 10. Patricia Munabi Babiiha |
| 5. Hon. Sheila Kawamara
Mishambi Treasurer | 11. Anne Margaret Adhier |
| 6. Prof. Maria Musoke | 12. Hadija Kisembo |
| | 13. Rosemary Lukholo |

Committee members

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Debbie K. Serwadda | 8. Dr. Edith Okiria |
| 2. Lorna Juliet Amutojo | 9. Anita Mago Sempa |
| 3. Jane Ocaya Irama | 10. Dr. Patricia Litho |
| 4. Catherine Ndekera | 11. Jane Musoke |
| 5. Hon. Monicah Amoding | 12. Dr. Patricia Litho |
| 6. Susanne Possing | 13. Patricia Munabi Babiiha |
| 7. Hajati Safiya Nalule | 14. Beatrice Mukasa |

Secretaries

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Ruth Muwanga | 5. Linda Nambuya |
| 2. Clare Nkirehe | 6. Ruth Muwanga |
| 3. Dr. Catherine Odenyo | 7. Dr. Catherine Odenyo Ndekera |
| 4. Salume Ofwono | 8. Josephine Katende Kalule |

Initial staff

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Busingye Eunice | 3. Hon. Sheila Kawamara Mishambi |
| 2. Margaret Mugenyi | |

List of the initial Young Professionals

1. Rita Aciro Lakor
2. Julius Mukunda
3. Julius Kapwepwe
4. Susan Kirungi

About UWONET

Uganda Women's Network–UWONET, is an advocacy and lobby network comprising of 16 national women's organizations, institutions and 9 individuals. It was established in 1993 to provide space for collective engagement of organizations advocating for women's rights especially the eradication of gender based discrimination.

Vision

A Ugandan society free of all forms of gender based discrimination

Mission

To coordinate collective action among members and other stakeholders through networking, capacity building, resource mobilization, policy research and advocacy for the attainment of gender equality in Uganda

Member Organizations

Action for Development (ACFODE); Association of Uganda Women Medical Doctors (AUWMD); Association of Women Lawyers in Uganda (FIDA–U); Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP); Community Development Resource Network (CDRN); Department of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University; Disabled Women's Network and Resource Organization (DWNRO); Empower Children and Community Against Abuse (ECCA); Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE); Isis Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (Isis–WICCE); National Bahai Committee for the Advancement of Women; Send a Cow; Slum Aid Project (SAP); Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA); Uganda Women Finance Trust; and Women Engineers Technicians and Scientists in Uganda (WETSU).

Individual members:

Dr. Alice Kagoda, Hon. Sheila Kawamara Mishambi, Hope Kabuchu, Debbie K. Serwadda, Annet Tumwijukye, Mary Ssonko, Maude Mugisha, Veronica Namagembe, Judy Kamanyi.

Notes

With support from: **African Women's Development Fund**



Contact

Executive Director

Uganda Women's Network (UWONET),
Plot 710, Block 216, Mirembe Close, Buuye Kigowa,
Ntinda–Kampala, Uganda

Phone: +256 414 286 539,

Email: info@uwonet.or.ug

Website: www.uwonet.or.ug

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/uwonet>

Twitter: [@uwonet](https://twitter.com/uwonet)

ISBN:978-9970-509-06-5

