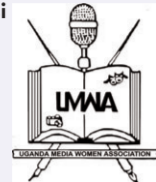


# The Other Voice

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## OPINION

### Why you should support her this election season

THE 2010 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women ended December 10 2010 with the theme: *Structures of Violence: Defining the Intersections of Militarism and Violence Against Women*. Uganda's Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development chose a national theme to be: *Gender-based Violence: The Institutional Response. What is your role?* The national celebrations were held in Mayuge District.

Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA), like any other CSO or group was at liberty to focus on any theme. Individuals too may choose a theme of their choice. This is a period of reflection, make people aware of the impact of violence on women and children and to act against abuse. UMWA's theme was: *Uganda's 2011 General Elections: No Violence Against Women: What is your Role?*

Several activities including production of materials depicting anti-violence messages, radio spots and programs, road shows and community dialogues were conducted in five sub-counties of Masaka, Kampala, Mukono, Wakiso and Kiboga courtesy of the financial support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Solidarity Foundation (ISF).

Drama skits were organized and acted as curtain raisers by Mama FM listeners' clubs in the said districts. Songs and poems were sung or recited and personal testimonies of these women and men who felt free to share experiences were made.

When all was said and done, one message was common: "Cases of violence against women tend to increase during an election period". The abuses range from denial to take up elective positions, beatings or threats to or divorce if the women chose to stand for positions or supported candidates different from those of their husbands. Restriction at home, or denial of access to campaign news/information is rampant. Some men maliciously decampaign their spouses as a sign of control, and others deny their wives access to their hard earned cash the latter could have set aside to finance their campaigns. This is also the time for some men to abdicate their familial responsibilities and in extreme cases men marry other women while others flee their homes for concubines where they feel the 'man in the house'!

**But why is this?**  
 For any progressive mind, the more women get actively involved in the affairs that affect us all, the less the baggage on our male counterparts and most importantly the healthier, prosperous, and more developed our country would become! So do your part! Don't be an obstacle to your own development! Support her! This way you could be playing your rightful role in Activism for No Violence Against Women. You don't have to wait for November 25h – December 10 2011. Violence Stops With You. Take a Step Now!

In this edition victims of rape and defilement are advised to rush to hospital to prevent the likely transmission of STDs, HIV and tetanus. Some views on the ninth month Act on Domestic Violence have also been published.

**We welcome partnership to produce The Other Voice.**

# Why is the Domestic Violence Act only a scare crow?

## Nine months after its enactment, the Act has not brought a single offender to book!

By Anne Kari Garberg

AFTER languishing in parliament for almost a decade, it was a hard-won victory for gender rights in Uganda when the House finally passed the domestic violence bill in November 2009.

In March last year, President Museveni assented to the Act and it was official; Uganda finally had a legislation that specifically handles domestic violence.

The law cast a ray of hope for the thousands of women and children. While earlier, rape within marriage was not even considered a crime, and most domestic violence offenders went unpunished, the new law would make sure that offenders would be prosecuted and convicted in courts of law.

According to the Gender, Labour and Social Development Minister, Gabriel Opiyo, the Act would ensure fairness when dealing with domestic relations between a man and a woman and other people in the domestic setting, including housemaids and children.

### The law is not being enforced!

But ten months after its enactment, the Act is still miles away from making a real difference for the victims of domestic violence. Often times women are let down by the notorious justice system in Uganda, and many still live in agony.

Faridah Nazziwa 27, a resident of Nabweru says that her husband, a one Ronald Katege with whom she has two children beat her up and broke her back as she tried to solicit support for her chil-



A mother and Police spokesperson Judith Nabakooba look at the healing bruises of Nakku Shakira who was burnt by her husband Mustafa Niwamanya. Police should rise above mere sympathy for the victims and help them get justice.

dren from their father who neglected them.

She says she took the case to the police and the man was arrested, but he didn't even spend a night in the cell as his relatives bribed the police and had him released. She says the law on domestic violence sounds a good tool but not to her because nothing seems to be on ground. Faridah thinks that if the law is

already in operation, why has she not seen justice from the case she filed months ago?

### Harriet Nabankema, a legal officer with FIDA-Uganda says:

The law on domestic violence has not once been enforced since it came into place. Why? Victims of domestic violence still face numerous economic and social obstacles

while pursuing justice. In other words, the law is there but the victims can't access it.

A report released by Amnesty International last April shows that Ugandan authorities are not giving victims of domestic violence adequate support when seeking justice.

Most women face inadequate response from the police, often having to pay for the cost of transportation to arrest the

accused and other expenses related to the investigation like paying for photocopies or money for their mobile phone airtime.

### Buying justice

The report titled "I Can't Afford Justice - Violence against women in Uganda" also shows that in cases where domestic violence involves sexual abuse the victims are supposed to report the matter rapidly so that a medical examination can be conducted within 48 hours after the crime.

But as Nabankema also points out, poorer women are unable to afford this medical examination which can cost up to Ug Shs 30,000.

Many victims of domestic violence are economically dependent on their abuser, and might even refrain from reporting the abuse at all, since the man is the main bread winner and him going to jail will imply that she and the children will suffer while he is gone.

Another challenge is finding witnesses to testify in cases of domestic violence.

Some people may want to witness, but fail to pay for transportation to court. Others still hold the attitude that domestic violence is a "private matter" and something the neighbours should not interfere with. Others are intimidated about people, hence they keep quiet although they may hear the painful cries of the woman next door.

### Discriminatory attitudes in the police

Discriminatory attitudes and behaviour within the police also impede the full

implementation of the law. According to Nabankema, many victims of domestic violence feel that they are being treated dismissively by the police.

Attitudes, such as believing that a woman is to blame if she is subjected to violence and believing that a husband beating his wife once in a while is acceptable, are widespread within the police.

Besides, many police officers find it more important to protect the family unit than to protect the safety and the rights of the woman. This is supported by the findings in Amnesty's report which shows that the Ugandan police often encourage the victims to reconcile with their partners for the sake of preserving the family unit.

### Attitudes must change

Training the police and changing their attitudes on domestic violence is therefore important if the law against domestic violence is to protect sufferers and punish perpetrators. But even more important is changing the attitudes among ordinary people and especially among the victims of domestic violence themselves.

A report from United Nations Children's Fund – UNICEF in 2008 indicated that 77 percent of women between the age of 15 and 49 felt that spousal violence was justified for a variety of reasons such as burning food or refusing sexual relations.

Raising awareness on domestic violence and changing the attitudes and behaviours of men and women in the communities is therefore crucial if people are to make use of the law.

Victims of domestic violence must under-

stand that they are actually victims of a criminal offence, and that domestic abuse is not a private matter that can be justified because you argued with your partner or refused to have sex.

The victims have to stop thinking that reporting domestic abuse is not washing your dirty linen in public, and start believing that reporting a criminal offence such as domestic abuse is actually your right and even your duty as a law abiding citizen. All in all, the law against domestic violence is a victory for gender equality in Uganda as it is a necessary condition for justice. But for the law to be effective, we have to change the cultural attitudes and beliefs in our country.

All organizations, institutions and persons who can, should therefore seek knowledge about the new law and work assiduously to take the law out to communities and inform people about the rights that it provides.

**Because as Nabankema says:** The day a victim walks into a police station and speaks authoritatively about being domestically abused. The day she actually believes that she can take the offender to court and have him punished, and the day she knows that she can make it without him. That is the day when the law against domestic violence can achieve its objectives. We at UMWA are doing our part, are you?

*(Additional reporting by Frank Lukwago). Look out for the next edition when we bring you a critical analysis of this law.*

## How much have you invested in Gender-Based Violence prevention?

Many people working in the field of human rights, women or gender, and more specifically GBV (Gender Based Violence) prevention identify themselves as activists, but what do we really mean when we say we are activists? What is activism? What role do activists have in GBV prevention? THE OTHER VOICE sought to explore the concept and practice of activism and spoke with Jean Kemitanie – Senior Program Officer, Raising Voices in charge of coordinating activities and communication for GBV Prevention Network. She suggests ways in which we can foster activism within ourselves and others.



Some sentiments like: "I really care about equality - it is an injustice for women to experience violence, something must change! Am going to do whatever is in my power to make a difference!" drive activists working to prevent GBV.

Activists are committed to the vision of safety, freedom and autonomy for women. They know that it is only when women are seen as equal to men as having the same value, worth and digni-

ty that will they be able to live free of violence and the fear of violence.

In addition, activism for GBV prevention involves a deeper understanding of the root cause of GBV and a belief in equality and fair treatment of all human beings regardless of their sex, race, ethnicity or religion.

GBV activism involves a passion and commitment to social justice and a belief in an individual's ability to create change. It involves an acceptance of personal responsibility to take action, reaching out to join strength with others, and a life time of taking action, however

small, to reject inequality and work towards women's enjoyment of their right to live free of fear and violence.

### How long would the change take?

Activists recognize that although change takes a long time, it is possible. Activists energize and inspire others around them to take action. They have a lifelong commitment to promoting equality that stretches beyond their professional life.

They do not see GBV prevention activism as a nine-to-five job but as part of actions required to create change in their own life, their community and the world.

Activism takes many forms, it is not only about being radical or rebellious, and it is not a one off event. It involves constantly raising our voices and those of others to challenge and reject injustice in society.

### Is someone born an activist? Go to school and learn how to be an activist?

Activism is more a spirit that emerges in oneself. It is often sparked by a transformative moment or experience in one's life. When growing from a personal experience, activism can emerge as a productive response to the outrage one feels about injustice or as a result of one's reflection and response to injustice. Let's take a look at Grace's life. Grace is an activist working with an NGO that addresses violence against women. While she was growing up, Grace witnessed her mother experiencing violence and saw how it affected her mother, herself, and the rest of the family.

She saw on a daily basis how the injustice and indignity of violence eroded her mother's self-esteem, her opportunities, and her sense of self. She witnessed the suffering and was profoundly moved by it. Grace recognized that her mother's personal experience was sanctioned

by the community and continued because others felt this was an acceptable and normal way to treat a woman.

Thus, Grace made the connection between her personal experience and social injustice and saw all its linkages. Her experience compelled her to be an activist.

She has a fierce belief in the rights of women and now, in her personal and professional life, is working toward this.

Activism is triggered when we link our own personal experiences to broader injustice. We recognize that violence happens to women not because of what women as individuals do or do not do – but because collectively women are considered less as human beings than men. Therefore GBV, prevention activists work to change systems and structures that perpetuate inequality.

### Who can be an Activist for GBV prevention?

You and I – and everyone can and should be activists! Activism does not require specialist knowledge or skills, it only requires the courage and commitment to become aware and take action. Activism lives in one's heart and comes in many forms. We all have the potential and power to be activist in our own way – every day. We can challenge injustice in and bring an activist spirit to our families, places of work, and communities. Take action today!

## 'Without trust, Domestic Violence is hard to avoid'

Feibe Meme 42, Kalagala village:

WE need to trust each other if we're to stop domestic violence. Men get very uncomfortable when women get money and 'hide' it from them.

If you have sold a goat or cassava, let him know and discuss what you should do with the money. It is bad when a woman gets money and refuses to contribute to school fees or books for her children. Some can even eat food in darkness and fail to buy paraffin because the husband has no



A child baby-sitting! Spousal trust can stop such crude treatment of children.

money for that item.

If the woman's money is saved for a worthy cause that could be justifiable but most women buy clothes and wear better hair styles to compete with neighbours or co-wives even when their children have dropped out of school.

In my village the most common business is selling alcohol which has contributed a lot to domestic violence. The children suffer a lot. A man decides to go for booze with his wife leaving the children on their own at night. By the time they come back they are drunk and will not be able to tell whether the children have bathed, eaten or had any problem.

Such children will not grow as responsible parents because they don't have better examples from home. I wonder why such a couple would not buy the drinks and enjoy from home while watching over their children!

And when children's rights are violated by such parents it takes long for neighbors to be notified. Such children will fail to go to school even after the introduction of UPE. Whenever they are sent back home for just a book or pencil the mother will claim not to have money while the husband will be too busy in a bar to take note of such needs.

from YOU



Esther Ameso of Soroti was disfigured by her husband.

## Strengthen radio signal

Dear Editor and UMWA supporters,

I was pleasantly made aware recently after attending your activity on 16 Days of Activism on Domestic Violence in Masaka supported by UNFPA that your organization Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA) operates a radio station, Mama FM, and also publishes this newsletter about domestic violence. My question is: Why don't you strengthen your radio signal so that the crusade against women abuse and the fight for their rights is widened all over Uganda? We should also work hard so that this publication comes out at least once a month and also done in local languages.

Joseph Nantamegwa Kajansi  
 Anthony Namugera Kiteredde – Masaka

## Thank you for your insight

Dear Editor,

AFTER reading *The Other Voice* my eyes were opened and got the other side of Domestic Violence that I have been ignoring or taking lightly.

The issues I have read in *The Other Voice* are not new because I have grown up seeing them. They are in all families that are considered normal.

I commend you for dealing with issues that directly help people. This helps us learn how to handle our relationships and restore broken ones.

I was impressed by the women and men's testimonies. This is a positive sign that Domestic Violence and its dangers are known by most people but this violence is an assurance to victims and their families that there is life after Domestic Violence!

I like your style; simple language and direct speech used. The characters seemed to be speaking to me and I should do something! Addressing all age groups and both sexes will help families live in harmony with their spouses and I am sure husbands will treat their wives as equals.

Your outreach program where you turn local people into human rights activists will go along way in building peaceful and prosperous families.

I appeal to the government and other Non Government Organizations to join hands with UMWA and ISF in the struggle to fight this disease and lastly I request an edition in Luganda and other local languages.

## Settle your differences for a better marriage

Retired Teacher Patrick Kasozi 65yrs of Kafatagala village

Many reasons have contributed to domestic violence in our homes; drug abuse, witchcraft, alcohol, unfaithfulness, and unforgiving hearts. Men have a big problem when the first marriage does not work out and are forced to take a second wife.

She comes well aware that you have children but we get surprised when she starts mistreating them. Some women even go to the extent of demanding from the man to choose between her or the children.

Unfortunately today's women are so 'sharp' that within a short time she would have made up her mind about what she wants. She will then start making outrageous demands and the husband won't object leaving the relatives confused!

After my retirement from teaching I enrolled for a counseling course at

Kiboga hospital. Recently a client approached me. His new wife had demanded that he takes away the children of the first marriage 'because' they abuse her lest she quits.

I advised him to call the parents of the wife to his home so that this issue is solved. Her parents talked some sense into their daughter and she was asked to imagine what if they were her children being sent away from their father's place.

It is very bad that people don't know their rights because such a case can easily be settled at the Police's Family & Children Protection Unit.

Men/women who get tormented by their spouses will end up killing themselves and their children because the partner is being difficult. Nowadays it is no longer possible to have more than one woman as it means bringing HIV/AIDS into the family. The only alternative is to settle your differences for a better home.