

It matters too!

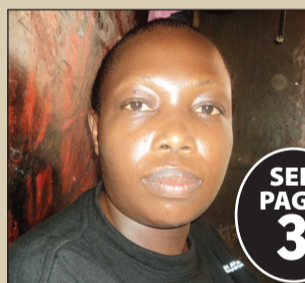
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PWDs: Our silent sufferers

BY LISTA NDUMBA AND
THE OTHER VOICE TEAM

TO what extent are families, human rights activists, government or other stakeholders responsive to the needs of Persons With Disabilities (PWDs)? Are we treating them with scorn, pity or as people who are a burden to society? How much of our actions relate to improving their lives? Read on...

"You are useless, you are a waste, you should die so that others can eat the food!" This is an extract from a study done by Human Rights Watch where a family relative was rebuking one of their own, who is disabled. So if a disabled person can be insulted and abused by their own family members, what about those who are not blood related and isn't this a pointer that people with disability are vulnerable to domestic violence?

Enter Esther Kyozira, the Programs Manager for the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda, NUDIPU. She says: Our studies and experience show that disabled persons are isolated during meals, families keep them in the backyard, under closed doors, away from other people and yet they deserve to be treated like any other family member, with respect and dignity.

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Why are Uganda's human rights defenders battered?



Some of the journalists who were beaten in the Kampala mayoral race elections (l-r) , Jane Anyango of UBC TV, Florence Nabukeera of Bukedde Radio and Brian Nsimbe of Channel 44 TV.

By SARAH MUWANGA AND THE
OTHER VOICE TEAM

THEY work tirelessly to ensure that peoples' human rights are respected but this may be at the expense of their own security. They complement government's efforts to promote and facilitate the teaching of human rights and fundamental freedoms but they may not be acknowledged. Women human rights defenders face gender-specific risks, like domestic violence and their family obligations increase stress on their lives. Hon. Miria Matembe of the Centre for Women in Governance has been attacked several times for denouncing sexual abuses such as rape and defilement.

Journalists as Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) are also targeted for reporting on human rights violations,

unfair trials, bad governance and poor management of resources. During the recently concluded presidential, parliamentary and mayoral elections the harassment and intimidation of HRDs rose tremendously. "We were just doing our job but this annoyed security operatives who decided to beat us. If police want space to do their work, we too as journalists should also be given our space", said a T.V woman journalist who preferred anonymity. The situation was severe and captured the attention of national and international figures.

The National Coordinator, Human Rights Network Uganda (HURINET-U), Mohammed Ndifuna regrets that many HRDs are so obsessed with protecting others and pay less attention to their own security yet they are working under a 'hostile' environment charac-

terized with harassment, intimidation and threats meted out by some security operatives.

Ndifuna says that for example the NGO Act in Uganda is one major obstacle to the HRDs' operations saying it is a bad policy which contravenes the Constitution by restricting the renewal of NGO permits among other things. Regulation 13 of the Act states that in their operations, HRDs must seek permission from the Resident District Commissioners. But activists say this makes it difficult for them to operate and fulfill their lawful mandate and objectives.

But government says that only the HRDs or NGOs with bad motives are complaining against the NGO Act. "If your activities are genuine, why would you want to hide your work", an official from the Ministry of Internal

Affairs wondered.

She says the Act is to harmonize and streamline operations of the NGOs. The problem, she notes, is that "sometimes activists have good causes but use wrong means to push for change and in so doing they collide with security actors.

The recent *Walk to Work Campaign* against increased food prices was for example singled out as a genuine cause but with bad means to achieve the purpose. Margaret Ntakalimaze, Assistant Director, Hope After Rape, says walking to work was not a suitable way of expressing the problem of high taxes and fuel prices. People of bad intentions joined the walk and brought about chaos including loss of lives.

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