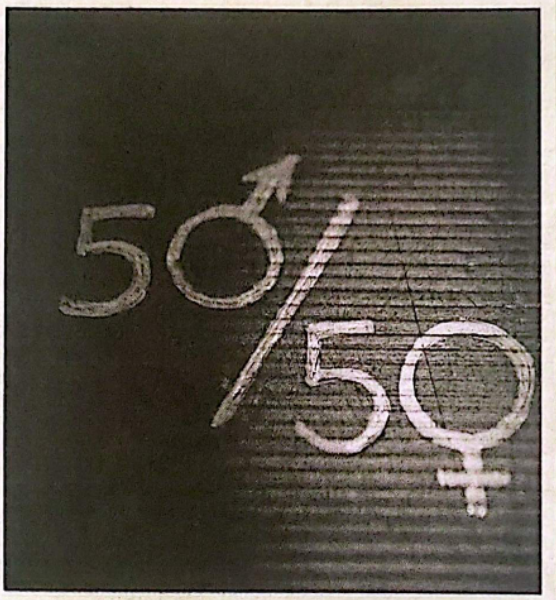
LETTER OF THE DAY

Gender equality is not charity; it is a strategy



The history of women's rights under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) is a story of remarkable transformation. Social reformers over the years have fought against practices like child marriages and advocated for better women's education.

Uganda has made major advancements regarding girls' education. Enrolment rates at the primary level have increased, with more young women entering higher education than ever before. In several disciplines, including medicine and the life sciences, women now constitute a considerable share of graduates.

Nevertheless, access does not always equate to opportunity. Dropout rates continue to rise in secondary education due to early marriage, household responsibilities, or financial constraints.

Despite academic achievements, Uganda's female labour force participation remains lower than average. Cultural expectations, safety concerns, lack of childcare support, and salary disparities continue to restrict women's economic involvement.

I've seen a rise in women leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators. Start-ups led by women are challenging stereotypes and driving growth in technology, sustainability, and social enterprise. Yet, women remain underrepresented in top executive positions and on corporate boards.

The path forward requires structural shifts: flexible work policies, enforcement of employment, mentorship networks, and inclusive hiring practices. It also demands a cultural reset—one that values unpaid care work and recognises that workplace equality begins at home.

Women's health also remains an area of concern, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Maternal mortality rates have improved, but access to quality healthcare, nutrition, and reproductive services is still uneven.

Equally pressing is the issue of safety. Gender-based violence, harassment in public spaces, and cyber-bullying create a climate of insecurity. While stronger laws and helplines exist, implementation and social attitudes often lag.

Changing this reality requires more than enforcement. It calls for education that fosters respect, empathy, and consent from an early age. It demands that bystanders speak up, communities intervene, and institutions respond swiftly and fairly.

As Uganda rapidly digitises, technology offers immense potential for women's empowerment. Digital literacy can unlock access to online education, telemedicine, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion. Self-help groups and micro-entrepreneurs increasingly use social media and e-commerce platforms to expand their reach. However, the gender digital divide persists. Women are less likely to own smartphones, access the internet independently, or possess digital skills. Bridging this divide is crucial to ensuring that women are not left behind in the fourth industrial revolution. Empowering women with technology is not only about devices; it is about confidence and autonomy. It is about ensuring that the digital world is as inclusive and safe as it is innovative.

Visibility also shapes aspiration. When young girls see women in positions such as scientists, pilots, athletes, judges, and political leaders, they begin to envision those roles for themselves. Media plays a powerful role in shaping narratives—either reinforcing stereotypes or dismantling them. More storytelling about successful women has evolved. Female protagonists are no longer confined to sacrificial roles; they are ambitious, flawed, courageous, and complex. This cultural shift is significant because representation influences societal expectations. At the same time, women from rural communities—and persons with disabilities—deserve equal representation in mainstream discourse.

Gender equality is not merely a "women's issue." It is a societal issue. Men must be active participants in the conversation—as allies, advocates, and change-makers. Challenging sexist jokes, sharing domestic responsibilities, supporting female colleagues, and raising sons who value equality are all everyday acts of transformation.

International Women's Day should not be reduced to token gestures—a social media post, a corporate event, or a bouquet. While celebrations are important, they must be accompanied by genuine commitment. (Are we creating safe workplaces? Are we supporting working mothers? Are we encouraging more girls to pursue science fields? Are we examining biases in our thinking?) Equality is not an abstract ideal; it is a daily practice.

The Uganda of tomorrow will be defined by how it treats its women today. A nation aspiring to global leadership roles cannot afford to leave half its population behind. Gender equality is not charity; it is a strategy. It fuels innovation, strengthens democracy, and drives sustainable development.

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COMMENTS FROM OUR READERS >WITH STEPHEN OTAGE

Does your sector/organisation advance gender equality and women emancipation?



Eugene Windt, Tour and



Grace Mayiani,



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