WOMEN EAT BIG IN NEW CABINET

By Nelson Kiva

The composition of the latest Cabinet announced by President Yoweri Museveni on Tuesday shows an almost perfect balance between male and female numbers, with men holding a slight majority.

At closer analysis, the Cabinet list shows there are 11 women in senior positions, with Vice-President Jessica Alupo and Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja leading the charge. According to the list, there are nine full Cabinet ministers: Rebecca Kadaga (1st Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for East African Community Affairs), First Lady Mrs Janet Museveni (education and sports), Hajjat Isanga Nakadama (Third Deputy Prime Minister and Minister without Portfolio), Judith Nabakooba (Lands, Housing and Urban Development), Dr Monica Musenero (Energy and Mineral Development), Hajjat Minsa Kabanda (Kampala Capital City and Metropolitan Affairs), Dr Jane Ruth Aceng (Information, Communications Technology and National Guidance), Milly Babalanda (Office of the President, Presidency) and Government Chief Whip Justine Kasule Lumumba.

An analysis of the new cabinet list shows that men occupy 21 of 32 senior positions, meaning that women now constitute about 34% of the Cabinet. In comparison to the previous (2021-2026) administration, women held 12 out of 31 cabinet positions, approximately 39%.

However, a closer look at the numbers reveals that while women's representation at the top Cabinet level has slightly declined, they have significantly increased at the junior ministerial level.

Activists argue that men continue to dominate ministries associated with state power, such as security, defence, finance, infrastructure and the economy, as most female Cabinet ministers are concentrated in social, administrative and community-oriented portfolios, such as education, presidency, Kampala affairs, ICT and lands.

Although the reduction is numerically small, from just 12 women to 11, according to advocates, it represents a decline in women's share of senior decision-making positions at the highest level of government.

Activists argue that the decline becomes more pronounced when examining the ministries women lead.

According to Ritah Achiro, a women's rights advocate, the new cabinet leaves Uganda balancing between symbolic progress and structural inequality, a trend increasingly visible across African governments attempting to project

while retaining male dominance in the most powerful ministries.

"Women in leadership inspire young girls. However, the quality of women's leadership should equally inspire," Achiro says.

"There are specific women and gender issues better understood by women who are invested in girls and women's issues," Achiro adds.

"Leadership without decision-making powers and resources will not change much. Be it a woman or a man. Leaders should embrace partnerships, humility, consultative leadership and accountability," Achiro says.

However, according to veteran journalist David Mukooli, 'a cabinet minister is a cabinet minister.'

"It does not matter where someone is assigned. But the key thing is that they sit in Cabinet," Mukooli says.

The ministries headed by men include finance, defence, foreign affairs, agriculture, internal affairs, justice and constitutional affairs, works and transport, water and environment, trade and industry, public service and security.

"A ministry is a ministry. If any ministry is just administrative and not substantial, then it is not supposed to be there," Mukooli adds.

MORE WOMEN STATE MINISTERS

In the new cabinet, however, women occupy 30 (almost 59%) of the 51 state minister positions, overtaking men, who hold 21 (41%).

This marks a significant shift from the previous cabinet, where women held 25 state minister positions compared to men's 26.

According to Mukooli, there will be dominant voices of women in Cabinet who are already in charge of many other state structures at the permanent secretary level and as chief executives in state agencies, among others.

"For instance, you cannot argue that a minister of Kampala is just administrative, [because] Minsa Kabanda has turned the city into a real capital city," Mukooli says.

Several new female entrants emerged in the reshuffle, including Lydia Wanyoto (public service), Amina Mukalazi (privatisation and investment), Desire Muhooza (agriculture), Phyllis Chemutai (education), Justine Nameere (local government), Cissy Mulondo (finance, general duties), Mary Kamuli (gender), Harriet Ntabazi (land), Susan Nakawuki (tourism), Joyce Achan Okeny (disability affairs), Shartsi Kutesa Musherure (microfinance) and Jacqueline Mbabazi (elderly affairs).

Others, such as Phiona Nyamutoro, Joyce Ssebugwawo, Diana Mutasingwa and Aisha Sekkindi were reappointed into strategic junior ministerial roles. Ruth Nankabirwa lost the energy ministry slot, while Betty Amongi exited the gender ministry.

At the state minister level, several women were dropped, including Evelyn Anite (privatisation and investment), Peace Mutuuzo, Jenipher Namuyangu (Bunyoro affairs) and Joyce Moriku Kaducu (education).

In total, seven women lost state minister positions compared to men. The larger number [illegible] dropped partly explains the [illegible] women's representation among ministers.

These included long-serving [illegible] minister Matia Kasaija, Muruli Mukasa (public service), Musa Ecweru (state minister), Sam Cheptoris water and environment.

New faces of men also [illegible] to the cabinet list, including [illegible] western Uganda vice chairperson of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) party's central executive committee, Eng. Jonard Asiimwe in the science and technology docket, Sam Engola (relief, disaster preparedness and refugees) and Ambassador Adonia Ayebare, who has been moved to the foreign affairs ministry, among others.

Regional outlook

Compared with its East African neighbours, experts argue that Uganda performs moderately well on female cabinet representation, but still trails countries that have pursued more aggressive gender reforms.

For instance, Rwanda remains Africa's benchmark for gender inclusion. Women hold more than 60% of parliamentary seats, the highest proportion in the world, and have consistently occupied significant cabinet portfolios, including foreign affairs, ICT, trade and health. They argued that Kenya has made slower progress despite constitutional gender requirements. Kenyan women continue to hold influential offices, but cabinet parity remains inconsistent and often dependent on presidential discretion. Tanzania is the first East African country to have a first female head of state, Samia Suluhu Hassan.

PRO-WOMEN COUNTRY

Uganda presented itself as one [illegible] Africa's early adopters of affirmative action policies. The country introduced reserved parliamentary seats for women in the late 1980s, long before many African states embraced institutional gender quotas. Today, Uganda's Constitution recognises affirmative action as a state principle aimed at correcting historical gender imbalances.

STRONG STATEMENT

According to Crispin Kaheru, a commissioner at the Uganda Human Rights Commission, this Cabinet presents yet again one of the strongest female visibility moments in Uganda's political history.

"See, the Vice-President is a woman, the Prime Minister is a woman and many powerful dockets remain under female leadership," Kaheru said.

He added: "It signals that women are no longer being treated merely as political decoration around power, but increasingly as part of the architecture of power itself. In many African countries, women are still struggling to enter the room. Here in Uganda, the women are visibly sitting at the head table." The Cabinet, however, Kaheru says, also reflects an interesting generational and political shift among women leaders themselves.

"We are seeing a coexistence of veteran female political actors alongside newer and younger female entrants. That combination matters because it helps bridge institutional memory with demographic realities in a youthful country like ours,"



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