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Advocates of equality and empowerment have warmly welcomed the rise in the number of women, who now make up 49 percent of Cabinet.

An analysis of the list of proposed Cabinet members released by President Museveni on Tuesday shows that women hold 41 seats out of the total Cabinet, an increase from 36 in the 2021-2024 Cabinet. This represents a 6 percent rise. There are 83 members of the Cabinet in total, excluding the President. These include the Vice President, Prime Minister, Cabinet ministers, and ministers of State.

Of the 32 senior positions, including the vice president, prime minister, and Cabinet ministers, women occupy 11 slots, a slight dip from 13 in the 2021-2024 Cabinet. On the flip side, women now outnumber men among the State ministers, taking 30 out of 53 positions, up from 23 in the previous government. These nominees are awaiting vetting by Parliament's Appointments Committee.

Among the senior positions held by women are the vice president, prime minister, first deputy prime minister, and third deputy prime minister. Others have been entrusted with ministries such as Education and Sports, Energy and Mineral Development, ICT and National Guidance, and Lands, Housing and Urban Development. Additional senior female members include the minister for the Presidency, the minister for Kampala Capital City and Metropolitan Affairs, and the Government Chief Whip.

The analysis also reveals that no woman has been posted to the ministries of Trade or Foreign Affairs. However, the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development is entirely in female hands.

In a speech delivered by Vice President Jessica Alupo at this year's Women's Day celebrations, President Museveni declared women to be better leaders and managers.

"What we are celebrating now when I appoint some of the women vice president or prime minister... is an outward sign that women can manage," Mr Museveni said in his speech on Women's Day in March.

Ms Perry Aritua, the executive director of the Women's Democracy Network, emphasised that these appointments reflect trust by the appointing authority, but are not mere favours; they are a fulfilment of constitutional principles.



Lillian Aber, State Minister for Disaster Preparedness and Refugees



Margaret Mugisa Muhanga, State Minister for Urban Development



Rebecca Kadaga, First Deputy Prime Minister and EAC Affairs Minister



Lukia Nakadama, Third Deputy Prime Minister



Rose Lily Akello, State Minister for Ethics and Integrity



Joyce Sebugwawo, State Minister for Information



Diana Mutasingwa Nankunda, State Minister-Office of the Vice President



Huda Abason Oleru, State Minister for Veteran Affairs

Women now make up half of Cabinet

Article 33 of the Constitution mandates equal opportunities for men and women.

"I expect that these women will lead with integrity, that they will be effective in their positions, and not only be in those positions because they are women. They really must show that they have earned these positions," Ms Aritua said, welcoming the increase in the number of women in Cabinet.

Overall, there has been a steady rise in the number of women in leadership under the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party-led government, with Mr Museveni often hailed as a champion of empowerment

and equality. His first Cabinet in 1986 was entirely male, with only two women in deputy roles. But in 1994, he appointed the first-ever female vice president on the continent.

Ms Jessica Alupo, retained as vice president, is the second woman to hold the position in Uganda's history. The first was Ms Wandira Kazi-bwe, who served from 1994 to 2003. In 2021, Mr Museveni appointed the country's first female prime minister, Ms Robinah Nabbanja.

Like Ms Wandira and Ms Alupo began as ministers of State, the trend suggests that junior positions serve as a nursery bed from which some women blossom into higher offices. To further boost women's representa-

tion, laws have been enacted to reserve positions for them. Without such measures, their numbers in leadership would likely be far lower. The Constitution clusters women among marginalised groups due to historical, traditional, and cultural hindrances. Affirmative action seeks to redress these imbalances.

High expectations

Now the women appointed to Cabinet hold the baton, tasked with carrying forward victories won by those before them, while paving a smoother road for those yet to come.

"If they do what is expected of them, understand what the office is about, and deliver on their mandate, it will solidify the advocacy that we have had that women can be good leaders, especially if we put the right women in the

right places. It will also, you know, inspire more young women to know that others have done a good job and that they can also, when in the future they get those positions, they can also perform well," Ms Aritua said.

Ms Betty Od Ocan, the Culu City Women Representative and former Leader of Opposition in the 10th Parliament, said the appointees must focus on serving the country and meeting the needs of the people, rather than chasing self-aggrandisement.

"I congratulate them. Ministers should focus on addressing the needs of our people. There are many issues in our constituencies. Above all, they should maintain integrity and a good name," she said.

Even further, the new Cabinet members face the uphill task of scrubbing away the stains of corruption left by the previous government. For instance, multiple Cabinet members - both men and women - were implicated in the Karamoja iron sheets scandal, with some retained in the new line-up.

Ongoing investigations into illicit wealth accumulation and abuse of office against former Speaker of Parliament Anita Among have also cast a shadow over the women's movement.

Activists, however, caution against holding women to higher standards



Alice Kaboyo, State Minister for Luvuvu Triangle-Rwenzori Region



Justine Kasule Lumumba, Minister of ICT and National Guidance



Dr Monica Musenero, Minister of Energy and Mineral Development

KEY FIGURES	
Total: 83 ministers and State ministers	
Men: 42	
Women: 41	
Women Cabinet ministers: 11	
Women State ministers: 30	

than their male counterparts.

Ms Sarah Bireete, the executive director of the Centre for Constitutional Governance, said that these failures should not be used to tar an entire gender. She insists the Cabinet must be judged by one yardstick: how it delivers on its mandate.

"We are going to be looking at how this Cabinet implements that dream of *kisajja* (term of office) no corruption, and *kisajja* no sleep to make sure Uganda wins at the end of the five years," she said. Ms Bireete added: "We invite this Cabinet to have respect for the Constitution and the role of Uganda and avoid any acts that would violate the fundamental rights and freedoms of Ugandans," she said.

While analysts argue that the appointments serve political purposes, including appealing to the women's constituency, one cannot overlook the wealth of

experience and professional qualifications the women bring to the table.

Ms Alupo, for example, has served across sectors, including the army and education, giving her a comprehensive grasp of the nation's needs. Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, appointed Government Chief Whip, is a public health specialist with proven excellence, having led the country through outbreaks such as Ebola and Covid-19.

Among the youngest ministers, Dr Mercy Lakisa will serve in the Youth and Children's docket under the Ministry of Gender Others, like Ms Lillian Aber and Ms Phiona Nyamutoro - both former vice guild presidents at Makerere University before becoming MPs in 2021 - are credited with valuable political experience.

In their reactions to the appointments, several women pledged to fulfil their mandates in their assigned ministries.

Ms Rebecca Kadaga, reappointed first deputy prime minister and minister for East African Community Affairs, said she would fast-track the East African integration agenda.

Ms Mary Mugasa, posted as minister for Bunyoro Affairs, promised to put her best foot forward, just as she did in her previous posting as State Minister for Public Service.

"At the Ministry of Public Service... we advanced the digitisation agenda in public service, strengthened performance management systems, promoted innovation and institutional efficiency, and supported reforms geared towards a more responsive and citizen-centred public service. I remain grateful for the trust and confidence the President continues to place in me as we collectively work towards transforming lives," Ms Mugasa said.

Gaps

Ms Bireete argued that equal representation - especially in senior and influential positions - should cut across all arms of government and institutions.

"Women make up 51.4 percent of the population, are given this percentage in one arm of government and excluded in the two others, that is the leadership of Judiciary and Parliament, what does this mean for Uganda's commitment to sustain a good government to qualify to aspiration 6 of the African Union Agenda 2030, but also to our own constitution in terms of gender commitments," she said.

Last week, activists mounted a spirited fight against an all-male leadership in the Legislature. For three decades, it had been tradition to balance the Speaker and Deputy Speaker with one male and one female. This changed when Mr Jacob Mwangi Othob, alias Othob Othob, was elected Speaker on Monday and he will be deputised by Mr Thomas Tayebwa.

"Right from the Eighth Parliament, one was always a woman. The 12th Parliament without a woman is going to have problems. We talk about equal opportunities, but where is it if we only see men?" Ms Bireete said on May 25, after the Speaker and Deputy Speaker elections.

But the Women's National Council, responding to the debate sparked by the all-male speakership, argued that appointments should be based on capacity and competence, not gender alone.

The women in Cabinet have also been drawn from all sub-regions of the country. Buganda leads with 12. All five ministers from Busoga are female, while Acholi has four. Three hail from Lango, while Anzole, Bunyoro, Karamoja, Kigezi, Tooro, and West Nile each have two. Rwenzori, Sebei, Bukedi, Bugisu, and Teso each have one.