Empower women, girls to end gender-based violence



Every March 8, Uganda joins the rest of the world to celebrate International Women's Day.

This day marks a call to action for accelerating gender equality, highlighting the ongoing efforts for continued advocacy and action worldwide, and celebrating the cultural, political, and socio-economic achievements of women and girls.

International Women's Day has been observed since the early 1900s, at the time, when many women were working for long hours for low pay, and in poor conditions.

Adopted in 1975, the day was recognised to promote women's rights and international peace.

Additionally, this day was also recognised to raise awareness about issues such as equal pay, access to education, safety, reproductive rights and ending violence against women.

The theme for International Women's Day for this year, 'Give to Gain', highlights the power of reciprocity, collaboration, and generosity to advance gender equality. It also calls on individuals, organisations, and communities to move beyond conversation, to tangible measurable progress.

Thanks to the government of Uganda which has come up with crucial legislations pertaining to the rights of women, which includes Equal Opportunities Commission Act (2007), Domestic Violence Act (2010), Amendment to the Penal Code Act Prohibiting Defilement of Girls and Boys (2007), and Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (2010).

However, while significant strides have been made toward empowering women and girls, persistent challenges remain from employment opportunities to gender-based violence and underrepresentation in leadership.

It is noted that approximately 56 percent of married women aged 15 to 49 experience physical/sexual violence, driven by harmful social norms and socio-economic pressures. About 25 percent of women aged 15 years' experience violence in their lifetime. Women and young girls in refugee settlements are particularly vulnerable due to conflicts, insecurity, violence, and poverty.

Climate change in Uganda disproportionately affects women, who constitute 80 percent of agricultural workers and bear the burden of household resource collection. Rising droughts and floods exacerbate food insecurity, increase time spent fetching water/firewood, and heighten risks of gender-based violence.

The crisis also triggers displacement, educational disruption for girls, and increased mental health strain.

Despite improvements in school enrollment, many girls still struggle to complete their education. Due to poverty, cultural expectations, and early marriages which have forced many girls to drop out of school.

The government should take an opportunity to strengthen policies and programs that empower women and girls. By improving access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and protection from violence, Uganda can create a more inclusive and equitable society.

Lastly, when women and girls are empowered, they contribute significantly to economic development, social stability, and sustainable development in Uganda.

I call on the government of Uganda to advance women's rights and gender equality as a cornerstone of Uganda's development, and also acknowledging both progress and ongoing challenges in areas such as political participation, economic empowerment, and addressing violence against women and girls.

Mercy Nuwamanya,
nuwamanyamercy94@gmail.com

CamScanner