

# THE OTHER VOICE

It Matters too!

## THE KEY ASKS to Presidential Candidates and other Elected Leaders



Media professionals play a critical role in democratic governance, public accountability, social justice and inclusive development. Yet women working in media in Uganda face systemic challenges from safety and discrimination to regulatory and technological barriers, that limit their full participation, voice and influence. We therefore call on all presidential candidates and the next elected government of Uganda to commit to gender-just, inclusive, safe and sustainable media ecosystems, where women in all media roles are supported, protected and empowered.

The Key Asks draw on existing gender-and-media research in Uganda and align with the proposed nine themes:

1. Fair Representation and Portrayal in the Media
2. Safety and Security of Women in Media
3. Equipment / Materials Taxation and Support for Media Production
4. Equal Treatment of Media Houses in Government Advertising / Support
5. Gender-and-Inclusive Media Training Curriculum
6. Regular and Active Interactions between the Fourth Estate and Government
7. Support the Establishment of a Media Think-Tank
8. Technology, Digital Media and Access
9. Regulatory Bodies: Support Not Policing; Engendered Media Laws ...Cont'd on Pg 2

### ALSO INSIDE THIS EDITION

- **Women’s Fears Push Newly Elected Leaders to Embrace Inclusive Governance in Sebei On Pg 8**
- **How Women Rewrote West Nile’s Political Script in the 2026 General Election on Pg 7**
- **Female Polling Officers Recount Coercion, Arrests, and Gendered Risks in 2026 Elections on Pg 6**
- **Rwenzori Voters Call for Improved Health Care Services on Pg 4**



**Life After January 15: How Citizens in Eastern Uganda Are Rebuilding, and Moving On**  
Pg 5

### Deepen Participation of Women and Other Marginalized Groups in Elections - Gov’t Told

By **Arthur Wadero**: Several stakeholders of Uganda’s 2026 general elections have asked government authorities like the Electoral Commission (EC) and other relevant entities to install measures that will deepen the active participation of women, plus other categories that are often marginalized, such as persons with disabilities (PWDs). [Cont'd on Pg 7](#)





## THE KEY ASKS to Presidential Candidates and the 2026-2031 Elected Government

### Why this Matters

- Media freedom and gender equality are mutually reinforcing: when women are equally empowered in media, reporting is more inclusive, diverse and reflective of society's interests.
- As Uganda prepares for the upcoming General elections (Presidential / Parliamentary and Lower Government), safeguarding women's participation in media, both as professionals and as sources, is essential for democratic legitimacy and accountability.
- Addressing taxation, technology, regulatory and structural barriers ensures that women-led and community media thrive, thereby strengthening media pluralism and reducing inequality.
- Supporting women in media contributes to broader societal goals: gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10) and inclusive institutions (SDG 16).
- Unequal representation: Male dominates leads to less diversity in content and perspectives affecting how women's issues are portrayed and discussed.

### Key Thematic Demands

#### 1. Fair Representation and Portrayal in the Media

##### The Issues

- Women and girls in Uganda are not only under/misrepresented, but are accorded minimal space in the media. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) Reports indicate that women as news subjects appear only 23% against men whose views are 77% presented.
- Persistent gender bias in editorial choices further exclude majority voices, affecting policy and development.
- The Responsible Government bodies have not applied the gender policy in the media.
- While only three of over 400 media houses in Uganda have gender policies, it is difficult to confirm that the three regularly apply them.

##### Key Asks

- Develop and implement a gender policy for the media.
- Enforce gender and inclusion in licencing and regulation.
- Integrate gender media monitoring into media oversight, and support similar ongoing initiatives.
- Review and reform media law to promote gender equality.

#### 2. Safety and Security of Women in Media

##### The Issues

- Women journalists and media workers face gender-based violence, including the technologically facilitated abuse, and other forms of threats, especially when covering sensitive issues or exercising public scrutiny, including writing about politicians, political rallies.
- Physical threats, intimidation or censorship create chilling effects on women's voices and limit their participation. Statistics show that a significant majority of women performing public roles like journalism face physical threats and intimidation, leading to high rates of self-censorship and withdrawal from public life. For instance, 73% of women journalists have suffered online violence, with 25% receiving physical threats.
- There is minimal or lack of institutional support (from media houses, regulators or government) for protection, redress or insurance for media-women, in Uganda.

##### Key Asks to Candidates / Government

- Establish a national mechanism (within e.g. the Uganda Media Council, Uganda Communications Commission, UCC or other oversight body) to monitor, record, respond to and sanction threats/violence against women media professionals.
- Ensure that media houses (public and private) adopt gender-safe workplace policies (including harassment codes, reporting lines, psychosocial support) as part of licensing / association compliance.
- Guarantee that digital safety (against online abuse, gendered disinformation and deep-fake attacks) is recognized, with training and legal protections made available to women in media.
- Guarantee: "no intimidation for doing their job"; ensure full investigative freedom regardless of gender.

#### 3. Equipment / Materials Taxation and Support for Media Production

##### The Issues

- Media production, especially by smaller or not-for-profit outlets (including those run by women) is hampered by high import duties / taxes on equipment, materials, consumables and technologies, as well as requirements by the Regulators.
- Women-led or community-based media often operate on tighter budgets. Such barriers and costs can widen gender disparities.

- Over-taxing or making the operating environment tough for media production, etc, is making it difficult for the population to access information, and engage in public discourse. Since information is a public good, it should not be made difficult to access. While the minimum amount broadcast licence fees for radio station is close to Ugx 10 million, all broadcast equipment are 45% taxable.

##### Key Asks

- Introduce tax relief, duty waivers and reduced tariffs for media production equipment and materials (with special carve-out for women-led and community media outlets).
- Relax some of the requirements to operate a radio station e.g. automated doors should not be regarded as a major requirement for any station.
- Create a fund / grant scheme for women media professionals and women-led media enterprises to access equipment, training and production resources.
- Ensure transparent and equitable access to government advertising and funding (not to disadvantage smaller / women-led outlets).

#### 4. Equal Treatment of Media Houses in Government Advertising / Support

##### The Issues

- Government advertising and public-sector media contracts / disbursements often favour larger, established media houses, with fewer opportunities for smaller or women-led outlets. Yet the latter outlets, more than the commercial stations, are more likely anchored within the country's development agenda, serving larger communities often sidelined by commercial media.
- Unequal treatment reduces pluralism, reinforces gender biases in media ownership, and limits the diversification of perspectives.

##### Key Asks

- Adopt a transparent, criteria-based framework for allocation of government/public sector advertising, media subsidies or sponsorships, ensuring fair access to all media houses, including those that are women-owned / led or not-for-profit.
- Mandate the Uganda Communications Commission, UCC to publish periodic audits of government advertising spent by media house, disaggregated by ownership and gender where possible.
- Encourage affirmative support: e.g., require a minimum percentage of government media-advertising to go to women-owned / led media outlets.



**5. Gender-and-Inclusive Media Training Curriculum**

**The Issues**

- Media professionals often lack training in gender-sensitive reporting, inclusive language, diversity and intersectionality. This perpetuates stereotypes, and under / misrepresentation compounded into biases and inequalities, further contributing to underdevelopment.
- Majority women media workers do not receive equal access to professional development and leadership / management training.

**Commitments**

- Work with media associations (including Uganda Media Women’s Association, UMWA) to develop and roll-out a national training curriculum on gender-inclusive media, covering: gender equality in reporting, editorial processes, leadership, digital safety, inclusive language, disability-sensitive coverage, etc.
- Ensure that all media training institutions integrate this curriculum into their programs.
- Create and support mentorship and leadership-pathway support for women in media, ensuring that women are prepared for senior editorial, managerial, and ownership roles.

**6. Regular and Active Interactions between the Fourth Estate and Government**

**The Issues**

- A more collaborative, accountable and transparent relationship between government / officials and media is essential, but this is often missing.
- Women in media are often excluded from key briefings, press opportunities, or decision-making spaces.

**Key Asks**

- Establish a formal platform (e.g., quarterly “Media-Government Roundtable”) where media practitioners, with gender-balanced representation engage with high-level government officials and regulators to discuss media policy, regulation, access, safety, technology and inclusive development.
- Government ministries, agencies and parastatals to provide equal access to press briefings, data and information to all accredited media houses, including women-led / community media.
- Ensure that government communications units have designated and provided adequate and timely support to gender-focal persons to ensure inclusive engagement with women journalists and media outlets.

**7. Support the Establishment of a Media Think-Tank**

**The Issues**

- The media ecosystem in Uganda lacks a dedicated, independent think-tank focused on media policy, gender in media, emerging technologies (AI, digital media), pluralism, media sustainability and development.
- Without this, policy gaps remain unaddressed and women’s media interests may not be effectively researched or advocated for.

**Commitments**

- The Government should support (financially and institutionally) the establishment of an independent Uganda Media & Gender Policy Institute/Think-Tank (with multi-stakeholder governance).
- This institute should regularly conduct research on women in media, media ownership, digital safety, media economics, taxation impact, regulation, and provide policy briefs, data and advocacy.
- Ensure women’s representation in the governance and staffing of the think-tank, and fund fellowships/grants for women researchers in media.

**8. Technology, Digital Media and Access**

**The Issues**

- Rapid media technology change (digital platforms, mobile, AI, deep-fakes) presents opportunities, but also gendered risks (exclusion, harassment, lack of training) for women in media.
- Rural or under-resourced women-led media outlets struggle to access new technologies, broadband, digital literacy, or mobile infrastructure.

**Key Asks**

- The Government should ensure universal access to affordable, high-quality digital connectivity (including in rural areas), with media houses (especially women-led/community ones) included in the roll-out.
- Provide targeted tech-training programs for women media professionals in digital media production, data journalism, online safety, AI tools, etc.
- Encourage adoption of digital platforms by women in media, and create incentives (grants, tax rebates, public procurement preferences) for women-led media to adopt new technologies.
- Encourage open data policies and access to government information to support data-driven journalism (and women’s participation in it).

**9. Regulatory Bodies: Support Not Policing; Engendered Media Laws**

**The Issues**

- Regulatory institutions (UCC, Uganda Media Council etc) have sometimes been perceived as policing rather than enabling media freedom, which can disproportionately affect women journalists and smaller outlets.
- Existing media laws and policies often lack gender-sensitive provisions (ensuring women’s rights, inclusive language, anti-harassment, digital safety etc).
- The media landscape in Uganda is largely male-controlled, with women owning very few media houses and holding minimal leadership positions, a trend that has persisted despite growth in media outlets. Even in major media houses, female leadership is rare, with early reports showing few women heading large companies like NTV, Monitor, or Vision Group.

**Key Asks**

- Reform media regulation such that regulatory bodies act primarily as facilitators, supporting media pluralism, inclusion, sustainability and professionalism, rather than purely enforcement-driven.
- Conduct a full review and gender audit of existing media laws, regulations, licensing frameworks and institutional mandates; then amend to integrate gender-responsiveness, digital rights, women’s safety, inclusive ownership and access.
- Mandate gender-disaggregated data collection within media regulation (i.e., track number of women in media roles, women-led media outlets, gendered distribution of advertising).
- Require media houses (as part of regulation/licensing) to demonstrate gender-equality in staffing, content, leadership and policy.

**Implementation and Accountability**

Candidates and elected government should commit to time-bound targets (e.g., within 12 months: set up the national mechanism on safety; within 24 months: media training curriculum rolled out; within 36 months: technology access interventions completed).

Annual public reporting by the relevant ministries/regulators on progress against these commitments, tracked and published by the media think-tank proposed above.

Civil society (including UMWA and other women-media associations) to be included as observers and accountability partners.

Budget lines in the national budget dedicated to supporting these interventions (equipment grants, training, research institute, connectivity access).

**Reach out to Us**

Plot 226 Block 214 Bukoto – Kisaasi, P.O Box 7263 Kampala(U)

<https://theothervoice.umwamamafm.co.ug>

[info@umwamamafm.co.ug](mailto:info@umwamamafm.co.ug)

[@UMWAandMamaFM](https://www.instagram.com/UMWAandMamaFM)

## Rwenzori Voters Call for Improved Health Care Services

**By Iddi Basaijja:** Mothers and young women in Rwenzori are calling on elected leaders to advocate for improved health care services in their communities.

Despite actively participating in elections, women say, communities, especially those in hard-to-reach areas, continue to struggle with accessing essential health services.

In Kasese, women are demanding the establishment of a referral hospital, emphasizing that it is justifiable for a district with a population of over one million to have a larger, better-equipped hospital.

Joselyne Masika, a resident of Umoja Cell in Nyakasanga Ward, Kasese Municipality, urges that the uptake of services such as family planning remains low, and attributes this to the absence of enough government-aided health centers.

According to her, this situation, coupled with a lack of information, contributes to the high rates of pregnancies among young girls in the district.



“Here, we have Kasese Municipal HCIII, but the numbers there are overwhelming, and so some young people shy away from seeking services there, and in the end turn to these clinics or, at worst, abandon seeking health services.” She noted

In Mbunga sub county, women say they face significant challenges in accessing healthcare due to poor road infrastructure. Traditional stretchers are often used to transport patients to health centers in the lowlands.

The sub-county, which was carved out of Kilembe and Rukoki sub-counties in 2020, has a population of over 10,000 people and has one health Centre II located in Mbunga parish.

Gladys Kabugho, a resident, noted that they trek more than 10 kilometres to Kilembe sub-county to access improved health services. Others have to incur transport cost of not less than 20,000 Ugandan Shillings to reach medical facilities in Kasese town, posing a significant barrier to accessing timely health services.

“Some women are still using traditional birth attendants and herbs to deal with healthcare service gaps and absolutely this is risky, so we demand our leaders to prioritise health care services.” She noted

Joselyne Mbambu, the chairperson of the women council for Namugha North-west, says that pregnant mothers and families with children toil to access health services when the need arises.

Additionally, she pointed out that most households are unable to afford ambulance services, and to address these challenges, she and the community are calling for the establishment of more facilities in the area.



“This is the biggest government facility in the district, but when you look at the service being offered inside, its poor, there no drugs available most of the time.” Masika noted

Sarah Kabagenyi, working with Bundibugyo District Women with Disabilities Living with HIV Association says the lack of healthcare services hits hard, PWD’s notably the female.

She says most PWD’s notably those with mobility challenges cannot trek for long distances and thus suffer to their medical conditions. She demands leaders to prioritise improved healthcare notably for mothers and PWD’s.

“Access to family planning services remains a priority but in absence of such health services nearer to our young people, then they are at risk of being pregnant at tender ages or being infected with HIV” Kabagenyi noted

The Bundibugyo District chairperson, Robert Tibakunirwa, recently expressed concern over the delayed renovation of the general hospital despite the government’s pledge made in 2021.

Sarah Ithungu Baleke, who woman the Kasese Woman MP seat in the recently concluded election says improving access to health services will be her priority once she takes on parliamentary duties.

Biira Joy, a resident of Katoke 1 Village in Bugoye sub-county is calling on elected leaders to prioritise the elevation of Katoke HC II to better meet the growing health demands in the area.

The mother of two highlights that residents currently have to trek more than 5 kilometres to Bugoye HCIII for improved health services. The situation is particularly dire for pregnant mothers, especially in emergencies during night hours, when access to immediate medical care becomes even more challenging.

“We are now asking our leaders to prioritise health, we need better facilities in this area, especially upgrading of our health centres, so that we can have better services” Biira noted

In Bundibugyo, residents decry the poor state of the Bundibugyo General Hospital and absence of better health centres notably in the mountainous Bughendera County.

Bundibugyo General Hospital was built in the late 1960’s, designed to accommodate about 26 in-patients but this number has more than doubled.

Administrators at the facility says the hospital serves more than 40,000 people per month.

Daphine Masika, a resident Hakitengya Town Council, say they have to travel to Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospital to access specialized services such as X-Ray. She says this situation makes obtaining these services expensive for community members.

As a result, many women and families are unable to afford the costs associated with traveling and accessing specialized healthcare, which hampers their ability to receive comprehensive medical care when needed.



All the stories are available on our website. Click on the story title to access it online

## Life After January 15: How Citizens in Eastern Uganda Are Rebuilding, and Moving On

**By Reacheal Wambuzi:** Over 10 million voters out of the 21.6 million registered with the Electoral Commission participated in the January 15<sup>th</sup> general election to elect their preferred leaders at both presidential and parliamentary levels.

The presidential election was won by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) candidate, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who scored 71.65 percent of the vote with 7,946,772 votes, whereas his main challenger, the National Unity Platform's (NUP) candidate, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, garnered 24.72 percent of the total number of votes cast, with 2,741,238 votes.

The other presidential candidates were James Nathan Nandala Mafabi of Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) who received 209,039 votes (1.88 percent), Gregory Mugisha Muntu of Alliance for National Transformation (ANT) with 59,276 votes (0.53 percent), Franck Bulira Kabinga from the Revolutionary People's Party (RPP), 45,959 votes (0.41 percent), Robert Kasibante of the National Peasants Party (NPP), 33,440 votes (0.30 percent), Mubarak Munyagwa of Common Man's Party (CMP), 31,666 votes (0.29 percent), and Joseph Mabirizi of the Conservative Party (CP), 23,458 votes (0.21 percent).

Out of the total 11,366,201 number of votes cast, accounting for 52.50 percent of the registered voters, 275,353 of them, accounting for 2.42 percent were invalid votes.

Now, elections are known for brewing excitement and emotional piles among supporters, with some resorting to physical violence against each other over ideological differences.

There are no conclusive statistics detailing the exact number of different cases of election-related violence; however, several social and mainstream media reports have continued to highlight the plight of the victims of politically related face-offs.



Reports of election-related violence stem from the intensive political campaign period, all through to the post-election era, where individuals accuse either their fellow community members or security forces of escalating violence, which creates more hostility among neighbors, rather than resolving for sustainable peace.

Some of these election violence-related incidents escalate into extensive chaotic face-offs, prompting the intervention of security forces, whose action is blamed for causing permanent disabilities to the victims involved. These face-offs are known for stirring long-term hatred among the victims involved, with some harboring intentions of revenge even after the polling days.

Eseza Tibendha, a resident of Nawaikoke town council, in Kaliro district, said that the scars of election violence are hard to live with, but she intends to move on nonetheless.

Tibendha said that rowdy youths beat them up during a campaign meeting in the first week of December 2025, causing her to miscarry at three months.

Tibendha said that some of the perpetrators are suspected to be residents in the area, which creates a sense of panic; however, she has since opted to move on. "Losing that pregnancy cost me so much emotionally; however, I chose forgiveness as my easiest way to heal from this pain of suffering loss," she said.

Tibendha noted that, she has resolved to preach peace and in turn use her story to warn neighboring communities against involvement in election related violence, but rather coexistence in harmony.

As a young woman, Tibendha said that lessons of focusing on the future prospects of life should formulate the post-election period for all progressive citizens, rather than confinement in the shadows of past pains, which instead ignite continuous hatred within communities.

Ramula Kibwika, a resident of Iganga municipality, said that the campaign season had become part of her everyday life for the past three months.

Kibwika intimates how she participated in endless debates with neighbors on the qualities of the different candidates, who were fit enough to lead them, nonetheless. These debates, she said, consumed most of her time, with little left to tend to the family of three children, since her husband passed away one year ago.

With the general election done, Kibwika has refocused on devoting more time to her retail shop from where she hopes to derive a sustainable livelihood for her family. Kibwika, who boasts of exercising her civic duty in electing political leaders, noted that her main focus is working hard to secure a bright future for her children.

"I am a widow, and my children need school fees to study in credible schools; therefore, with the active political cloud off, I will dedicate more energy to work hard rather than rant about the past campaign experiences," she said.

Grace Musubika, the Secretary of Women Affairs in the Jinja City Youth Council, noted that the realm of politics in the country has evolved, where some things that were unheard of in the past seem to be politically right today. "I am a young person myself, but I have read about the politics of reason, which dominated the leadership spaces about 20 years ago; a realm of egoism and hooliganism seems to be gaining ground nowadays," she said.

...Cont'd on Pg 7

## How Women Rewrote West Nile's Political Script in the 2026 General Election



**By Sabir Musa:** For decades, the political landscape of the West Nile has been dominated by men. Parliamentary seats, especially in open constituencies, were seen as almost untouchable for women. But the 2026 general elections have changed that narrative.

This year, four women defied expectations and won seats in male-dominated constituencies, doubling the number from the previous 2021 elections. Onzima Phiona (Ayivu West), Lenia Charity Kevin (Vurra County-Arua district), Oleru Huda Abason (Aringa East-Yumbe district), and Kwiycwiny Freedom Grace (Ora County-Zombo district) have now etched their names into the political history of West Nile.

Lenia Charity Kevin won the election with 20,708 votes, defeating Aridru Gabriel Ajedra (12,926) and incumbent Member of Parliament Yovan Adriko (3,089) in a highly competitive race. Oleru Huda Abason secured Aringa East with 8,793 votes, narrowly surpassing Omia Zuberi Juvenile (7,286) and the National Unity Platform (NUP) candidate Olega Isaq (254).

Meanwhile, Kwiycwiny Freedom Grace won Ora County with 15,999 votes, beating the incumbent, Biyika Lawrence Songa, who had 14,559 votes and Jakonymungu Collins, who garnered 1,776 votes.

For Lenia, the victory was a testament to resilience. "I want young girls ... Cont'd on Pg 6



Three presiding officers were arrested after they were allegedly found pre-ticking ballot papers

## Female Polling Officers Recount Coercion, Arrests, and Gendered Risks in 2026 Elections

**By Christopher Kisekka:** In the aftermath of the January 2026 general elections, which were marked by widespread allegations of irregularities, violence, and manipulation, female polling officers from Wakiso district give disturbing accounts of intimidation, forced complicity, and personal endangerment.

Wakiso district, particularly Nansana Municipality, recorded tense and chaotic scenes during voting and counting. Opposition candidates protested discrepancies on declaration forms, citing altered figures and missing results. Across the country, election observers and media reports documented arrests of polling staff, heavy security deployments, and an atmosphere of fear surrounding the process.

Veteran polling officer Lilian Ndagire, who has worked in elections since 2011, described the 2026 process as the most chaotic and least transparent of her observations.

Stationed in Kazo, Nansana Municipality, she said polling staff were coerced into participating in ballot stuffing, an act she had never before witnessed.

“This election was the worst I have seen in terms of transparency and order,” Ndagire told *The Other Voice*. “Officers were forced to take part in ballot stuffing and other manipulations I never imagined. I feel deeply ashamed.”

The danger intensified during vote counting. “As we tallied votes in the evening, bullets were flying overhead,” she recalled. “Everyone was focused on survival rather than the work itself. Armed security and groups of unknown men from all political divides created panic.”

She said most officers at the centre were women, many of whom struggled to withstand the tension. Despite fear and pressure, many stayed because the Electoral Commission (EC) promised about 400,000 shillings pay, an amount some had never earned in a single payment.

Laula Nakabuye, another female polling officer spoke with *The Other Voice* reporter from Nabweru Police Station on the local council three polling day. Nakabuye, had been arrested alongside two colleagues. Police detained the group following the discovery of allegedly pre-ticked ballot papers in the possession of one officer.

“I had never been arrested in my life,” Nakabuye said. “I did nothing wrong, yet I have been treated like a criminal.” She alleged that police paraded the three before the media before any formal investigation, exposing their names and faces to public condemnation. “No one has listened to our side of the story,” she added as tears rolled down her cheeks.

According to police reports and information from the Resident District Commissioner’s office, one officer reportedly confessed to being instructed by colleagues to mark ballots in favour of a National Unity Platform candidate. However, Nakabuye strongly denied involvement, insisting the incident was fabricated.

Such arrests, several officers said, often stemmed from suspicion rather than solid evidence...

READ MORE



## How Women Rewrote West Nile’s Political Script in the 2026 General Election

*Cont’d from Page 5*

For Lenia, the victory was a testament to resilience. “I want young girls to see that nothing is impossible. With determination, guidance, and hard work, women can hold their own in politics,” she said.

Onzima Phiona faced a similar challenge, overcoming five male contenders, including John Lematia, the incumbent Member of Parliament for Ayivu County in Arua City.

“This victory is not just mine; it belongs to every woman in West Nile who has dreamed of serving her people. We have shown that leadership is not about gender, it’s about commitment and service,” Onzima noted.

The progress of women in the West Nile can be traced over the past two decades. In 2001, Zoe Bakoko Bakoru became one of the first women to break into politics in the region. In 2016, Anite Evelyn became the first woman to win an open parliamentary seat, representing Koboko Municipality. In 2021, only two women, Ruth Molly Lematia (Maracha East County) and Oleru Huda Abason (Aringa East, Yumbe district), managed to secure similar seats in West Nile.

Feni Twaib, the Executive Director of West Nile Regional Civil Society Network (WECISNET), described this change as progress in the region, noting that the key change has been awareness and knowledge.

“Those days, women did not even have the interest to contest for directly elected parliamentary seats because they believed people didn’t know they could also be elected. Now, there is a realization that these positions are for everyone, not just men,” he said.

Feni added that while some community members and even candidates still believe ‘certain seats are for men’, the women who have come forward are challenging these perceptions. “We are now seeing civic education and awareness programs helping communities choose candidates regardless of sex. Affirmative action does not limit women; it opens the door, but women can contest for all positions,” he explained.

He also noted that local government remains male-dominated. Still, he encouraged women to apply the same courage and determination to local council positions, such as those of councillor or chairperson, thereby creating a broader pipeline of leadership.

The 2026 victories signal a broader transformation in the region’s political landscape, where women are increasingly breaking long-standing barriers and inspiring the next generation of leaders. Analysts say these wins not only reflect the growing confidence of voters in women’s leadership but also set the stage for more women to shape policy and community development in West Nile.



The advice follows a series of concerns that some persons, such as women, were heavily marginalized in the just concluded Parliamentary and Presidential elections conducted on January 15, 2026.

For instance, the former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, noted that women and persons with disabilities were largely impeded by financial constraints as pre-condition for them to be nominated.

The concerns were stated as the Head of the African Union (AU), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) observation mission.

“Stakeholders raised concerns that the effective participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in open seats is also hindered by high nomination fees (20 million Ugandan shillings for a presidential candidate and three million shillings for constituency parliamentary candidates),” H.E Jonathan said.

“The mission noted concerns from organizations for persons with disabilities that voter education was inadequate and most voting stations were inaccessible,” Jonathan said.

He also decried the struggles encountered in aggregating voter data compiled by the Electoral Commission.

“Overall, the mission could not obtain official election data disaggregated by gender, age, and disability status from the Electoral Commission,” he said.

Similar observations were made by the Head of East African Community (EAC) election observer mission, Ambassador Edda Mukabagwiza, who noted that many women did not

## Deepen Participation of Women and Other Marginalized Groups in Elections

*Cont'd from Page 1*

participate in the slots for directly elected Members of Parliament (MPs), and also the reason for no female candidate in the Presidential elections held on January 15.

“The mission noted that although there was no female presidential candidate or disaggregated data on female candidates,” Ambassador Mukabagwiza said.

She also disclosed that many women registered as voters, saying “The mission noted that 53 per cent of the registered voters are female, which demonstrates commendable women's participation in the country's election process.”

Major concerns were equally noted, including the shutdown of the Internet services in the country, something that could have impeded service provision and access to information. This equally resonates with fears that were raised in a policy brief published by the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in July 2023.

“Equality of participation by women and men in elections as voters has been globally acknowledged as a vital contributor to women's full and effective participation in political decision-making. Uganda made significant progress in having more women engage in electoral processes as voters,” the policy brief reads in part.

For this reason, government entities like the Electoral Commission and the Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) to avail requisite services and supporting conditions to allow full participation of other stakeholders in the electoral process.

“There is a need to ensure that public access to information through ICT, such as internet services are available and accessible to all

persons during the electoral process,” Ambassador Mukabagwiza said.

She added, “Measures should be put in place to balance security concerns with the benefits of public access to internet services.”

To ease access to statistical data breakdown on female and male in the electoral process, the Ambassador advised the Electoral Commission to “endeavour to publish disaggregated data indicating the number of female and youth candidates in each election to inform public policy and advocacy.”

The observations and recommendations from regional and international election observer missions underscore the urgent need for Uganda's electoral authorities to adopt more inclusive, transparent, and enabling measures ahead of future electoral cycles. While the high registration of women voters reflects notable progress, persistent barriers, such as prohibitive nomination fees, inadequate voter education, inaccessible polling stations, limited access to information, and the absence of disaggregated electoral data, continue to constrain meaningful participation by women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.

Addressing these gaps will require deliberate policy reforms, improved data management, enhanced civic education, and the balancing of security concerns with fundamental democratic freedoms. As Uganda prepares for its next elections, strengthening inclusive participation will be critical not only to improving electoral credibility but also to advancing equitable representation and democratic governance.

## Life After January 15: How Citizens in Eastern Uganda Are Rebuilding, and Moving On

*Cont'd from Pg 5*

"This sidelines qualified leaders from standing out for fear of not fitting within the political gymnastics at play and at times breeds ground for mediocre politics to thrive," she added.

With her observation, Musubika hopes to spend the better part of the post-election period tracking down the political lines of most newly elected leaders, with hopes of assessing reason from mediocrity.

As a youth leader in Jinja city, Musubika plans to spend most of her time mentoring young leaders in institutions of higher learning to embrace leadership above self, rather than giving way to what she termed as "political dwarfism," which disregards key elements like servanthood and instead opts for other issues like voter bribery and tribalism, among others.

On his part, Joel Kafuko, a political analyst based in Jinja city, pointed out that, much as politics governs all aspects of life, which warrants citizens to track down on all undertakings, whether advantageous to them or not, there ought to be time for personal reflection on future aspects.

These future aspects, he argued, ranged from sustainable work plans to maneuver through both the positives and negatives of a political decision considered to be made by the majority.

Understanding such notions, Kafuko believes, is key in steering peace amongst neighbors even when they seemed disagreeable to each other during the intense campaign periods.

In the aftermath of a fiercely contested election, the experiences of ordinary citizens reveal that the true test of democracy extends beyond the ballot box.

For many Ugandans, the post-election period is a moment of reckoning, one that calls for healing, reflection, and a deliberate return to peaceful coexistence. As political passions subside, attention is gradually shifting from rivalry to responsibility, from confrontation to productivity, and from personal loss to collective growth. This transition is critical for sustaining peace, nurturing accountable leadership, and restoring trust among citizens.



# Women's Fears Push Newly Elected Leaders to Embrace Inclusive Governance in Sebei



**By William Cheptoek:** As Uganda concludes the electoral cycle, the outcomes have once again reflected a political landscape dominated by men, with women securing few key leadership positions.

In the Sebei sub-region comprising Bukwo, Kween, and Kapchorwa districts, women continue to play an active role in community mobilization and development discussions, yet their participation in electoral decision-making remains constrained by fear, cultural pressure, and insecurity.

Many women in Sebei say that although their voices are often vibrant, informed, and rooted in lived community experience, leaders are hesitant to associate with them due to their firm positions on human rights, gender equity, and accountability.

Benna Chelangat, a resident of Kwonu Cell in East Division, Kapchorwa Municipality, describes herself as a passionate advocate for leadership and women's rights. She says the recent elections saw many women refrain from active participation due to threats and fear of reprisals. Despite this, the same women are now calling on leaders who were elected to embrace equitable leadership that reflects the needs of both men and women.

Chelangat explains that inclusive leadership is critical for better service delivery, as women understand issues affecting girls and women from multiple angles, including health, education, water access, and household livelihoods.

Meanwhile, Chebet, another resident, says many women who stayed home during the elections depended heavily on local radio stations for election-related information.

"We didn't receive first-hand information from our electoral areas because of fear and paying allegiance to our spouses. So, the radio played a big role in feeding us with the information," Chebet says.

Her experience highlights the central role of community radio in reaching women who cannot attend rallies or political meetings due to domestic and cultural constraints.

Agnes Kiprop, a resident of Burkoyen in the West division, says leaders entrusted with public offices have an obligation to ensure that every citizen is brought on board to benefit from leadership outcomes. She urges those in leadership to take advantage of free and constructive advice from influential women who work closely with communities on a daily basis.

"We are the ones who use the streams that need to be improved. We are the same women who sell produce in the markets. We are the same women who first detect sickness in a child. If women are empowered, Sebei can become a great center of prosperity guided by women," Kiprop notes.

Beatrice Chelangat, the Executive Director of Reproductive, Educative and Community Health (REACH), a non-governmental organization championing girls' rights and the fight against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), says empowering women with leadership information enables them to distinguish between good and harmful practices and inspires them to take action.

Chelangat recalls her own bold decision to lobby Parliament, which contributed to the passing of laws that

helped bring an end to FGM.

"Sabiny culture, especially around harmful practices like FGM, is very rigid. But it can come to an end with the help of female advocates who are bold and ready to face off with men," Chelangat says.

She adds that although men understand that voting is a right for women, some still insist on restricting their participation due to self-proclaimed superiority.

Chelangat emphasizes the need for continuous voter education to help women fully understand and exercise their electoral rights.

Merisa Cheptegei, the LC V Chairperson of Bukwo District, says gender inequity in electoral decision-making and voting remains prevalent in rural areas of Sebei, including Kapsarur in Bukwo District, Benet in Kween District, and Teryet in Kapchorwa District.

She agrees that newly elected leaders, particularly Members of Parliament and district chairpersons, must take women's concerns seriously to find lasting solutions.

"We are all citizens, whether men or women, and we have equal rights in a democracy," Cheptegei says.

Alfred Bosco Chericha, an opinion leader in Sebei, calls for the inclusion of cultural institutions in civic education efforts to ensure democratic and gender-sensitive information reaches rural communities.

Chericha argues that culturally respectful approaches, such as proper greetings and dialogue-based communication, can help women understand their political rights without creating conflict within households.



In  
Partnership  
with



ROYAL DANISH EMBASSY  
Kampala



Ambasáid na hÉireann  
Embassy of Ireland



Sweden  
Sverige



Kingdom of the Netherlands



The project is being implemented under the M-SPACE (Media Support for Public Accountability and Civic Engagement) project, implemented by 4 media focused organizations namely: ACME, URN, UMWA and Editors Guild.

The Newsletter is available via  
<https://theothervoice.umwamamafm.co.ug/>