

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

CHANGING THEIR COMMUNITIES



OXFAM

in Uganda

ABOUT OXFAM IN UGANDA

Oxfam is a global movement for change that empowers people to create a secure future, just and free from poverty. We believe that everyone has a right to safety, security, a livelihood, and a say in decisions that affect them.

In Uganda, our Vision is to see Uganda Free of Inequality and Injustice: A society where people, particularly women and young people, claim and exercise their rights and responsibilities and influence decisions that affect their lives.

Our work is guided by the Country Strategic Framework (CSF) (2021-2030), organised around four themes:

- **GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**
- **RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS**
- **HUMANITARIAN PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE AND**
- **GENDER JUSTICE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS.**

All the themes work towards influencing policy and practice, youth and women empowerment, inclusive participation in decision-making at various levels, and capacity strengthening of national and local actors.





ADDRESSING GENDER INEQUALITIES

Oxfam in Uganda has positioned the **GENDER JUSTICE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS** theme as the new pillar to address gender inequality. The theme seeks to promote gender equality and transformation. It recognises the persistence of gender inequality as a significant barrier to human development with negative consequences for the individual capabilities and freedoms largely of women and girls. It is purposeful in addressing these challenges through effective participation of women in leadership, and decision-making; enhanced interventions for the elimination of Gender-based Violence and realisation of SRHR; and, strengthened interventions for economic justice for the marginalised.

The theme specifically collaborates with Women's Rights Organisation (WRO) and Civil Society Organisations (CSO's) for the realisation of Gender Equality and Women's empowerment. Under this programme, Oxfam worked with organisations including Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) and Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA).



EMPOWERING WOMEN TO INFLUENCE DECISIONS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

Gender Equality is a human rights and development concern that we continue to address at Oxfam. There are several factors that lead to gender inequality. One of the major factors, is harmful social norms, what society believes should be the role of women and their place and position in society. It impacts all aspects of lives and livelihoods including the ability to live free of violence, effective leadership, SRHR and economic empowerment.

Do women have collateral? Are they able to access loans? Are they able to do business? Are they safe? How are they perceived in the world of work? Are they able to inherit property or own land? All these factors drive gender inequality in leadership.

In leadership, we see inequality through women having insufficient influence in

decision-making. The ability to influence decision making starts right from the home.

There are several barriers that limit the ability of women to attain leadership. Despite the efforts that have been put in place, such as designated seats for women in parliament and the local councils, many times women who want to stand for directly elected seats are discouraged by their communities. There is affirmative action, but there is a perception that women should be limited and restricted to designated seats only.

There are also challenges around the costs of effective participation in elective leadership, the costs of running a campaign. This is linked to women's economic empowerment.

There are issues around women having the freedom or the capacity to leave their homes, go and engage effectively in their leadership roles. And in many instances, this becomes a challenge at the household level and within the community. There is a complexity of always navigating between one's leadership role and the roles in the home and management of the family. It is different from what men experience.

Oxfam is really committed to supporting not just leadership, but transformative leadership for women's rights, the kind of leadership that will bring about change in the position and the condition of women.

Women's leadership is not an end in itself. While in some instances, the numbers have been realised, because many of the targets which were set through international frameworks and enshrined in the Constitution, such as the 30% of women in leadership, have

been met, we want to move beyond these targets. We need to see how these numbers impact the lives of women. How can we bring about change in society? How do we ensure that men are also involved because this is not only about women? Men must understand these issues and that they are part of the process of identifying solutions and driving change.

Partnerships are very important to strengthen, work and bring about change. Oxfam works with women's rights organisations because they're very important in driving the change that we need to see. We also work with various stakeholders including Government MDAs, UN Agencies especially UN-Women, which is critical in driving the gender-specific policy and programme agenda. While we work with various stakeholders we also believe in a number of principles. One of these principles is that we link those in the communities, and the realities of the communities with the discussions and policy engagement at various levels, national, regional and international, ensuring that the discussions are informed by the realities of those who live at the community level.

Male engagement is also very important because in a society women do not work on their own. We have deliberately involved men and boys because it is important.

Across all our programmes, we support gender justice and women's rights interventions, whether from the Humanitarian perspective, for instance encouraging women's leadership in the Refugee Welfare Councils. In Resilient Livelihoods we support women farmers in the

If we empower women to influence decisions at home, then they can also influence decisions at the community and national level. It's very important that women be involved in decision making because these decisions impact their lives.

value chain, or provide them a voice to engage in various spaces. From the perspective of governance and accountability, we mainstream issues of women's leadership in all the work we do.

In all these spaces, for a discussion to take place, it's important to ensure women's leadership. It's very important to empower women. It's very important to ensure that women are effectively participating in leadership and decision making. This will ensure social change.

**JANE OCAYA-IRAMA, WOMEN'S RIGHTS ADVISOR,
OXFAM IN UGANDA.**



NAMUGAYA DINAH

WOMEN WORKING AS ONE

We have received several trainings such as leadership skills, and lobbying and advocating for the people in the communities we represent.

I started as a district councillor in 2017, but I was lacking a lot. I was afraid of making views and bringing motions in council. It was quite challenging. The leadership trainings have capacitated me. I can now stand and advocate, even lobby for the women in our community, most especially for the girl child and I deliberate without fear in the council.

Being in the caucus has helped me get support from my colleagues, especially my fellow women councillors. We move to schools empowering the students. We talk to them as a caucus. We pick their views and bring them back to council for lobbying. We are role models to the girls. We act as one voice so that the communities can learn from us.

We have lobbied for a lot, but I'll mention just a few. We lobbied for maternity wards in Alwi Health Centre III and Wadelai Health Centre III and others. In Wadelai Health Centre III we also lobbied for the construction of an incinerator because the facility had no proper waste disposal facility.

Booro Health Centre II in Panyimur Subcounty was not doing well, so we got a midwife to help in the deliveries.

Pakwach District also has water issues. Government constructs four boreholes every financial year. In allocating these bore holes, we look at areas in dire need of water. Partners such as Africa Water Solution also came in and constructed a solar powered water system that has helped our mothers.

Before receiving UWONET and Oxfam trainings, it was a challenge to push for ordinances. We were equipped on how to come up with bylaws and ordinances to help us govern and take care of our communities. They gave us some really good books.

As the Pakwach District Local Government Council, we came up with the Education Ordinance. Sections of this ordinance tackles teenage pregnancy, the roles and duties of parents and children. UWONET and Oxfam helped us draft this ordinance and we sent it to the office of the Solicitor General for approval before being implemented. We have carried out various dialogues with the communities, the religious and cultural leaders in order to popularise it. It is helping us keep girls in school and make education a priority.

Accountability is very important. If we don't account for what we do, you may finish your term having accomplished nothing. We encourage and teach each other to account for everything we do, be it advocating or lobbying for something in your community. We go back to the communities and tell them about what we have done, both the good and the bad. When you are accountable people trust you.

**NAMUGAYA DINAH, THE COUNCILLOR ALWI SUBCOUNTY,
SECRETARY OF SOCIAL SERVICES, PAKWACH DISTRICT
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLICITY IN THE WOMEN CAUCUS**



NAMUGOSA JAMILA

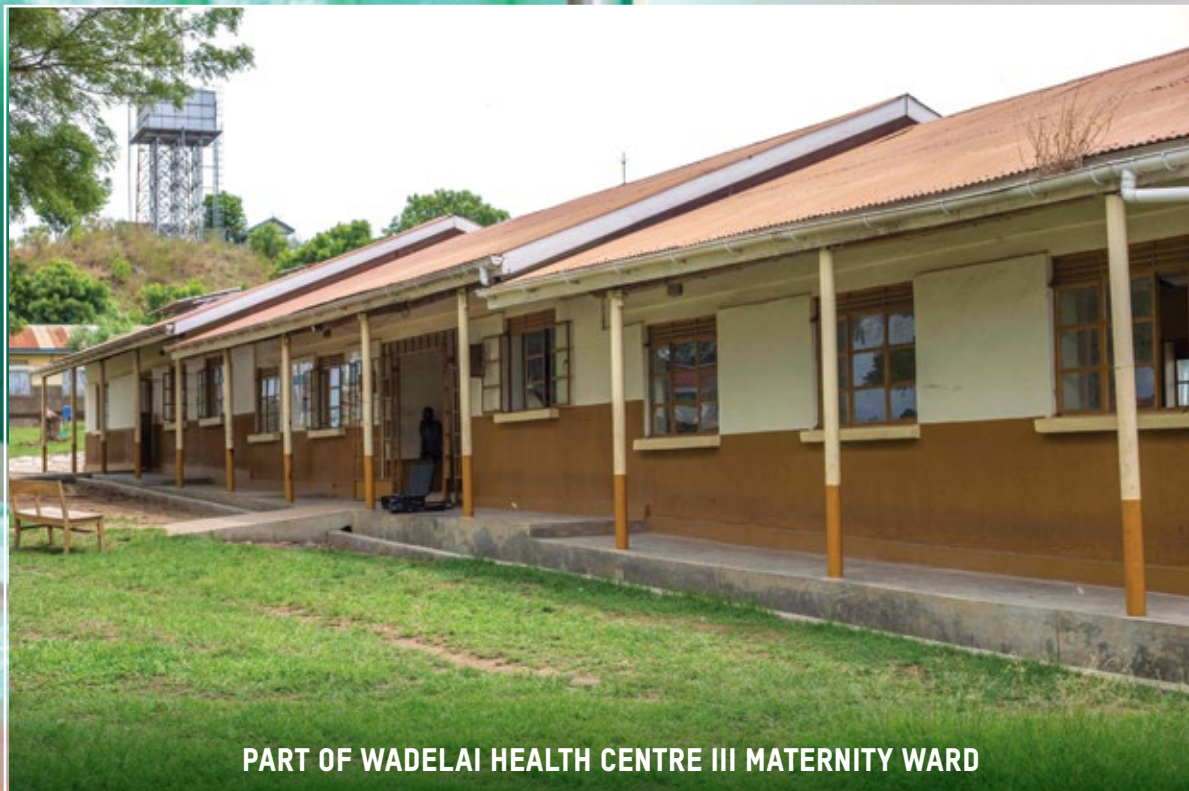
LOBBYING FOR HEALTH CENTRES TO IMPROVE THE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS OF WOMEN

Wadelai HC III is a very high volume facility with a catchment population of about 22,000. We don't only serve Wadelai Subcounty, but Ragem and Pakwinyo Sub counties and districts like Omaro and Madi Okollo.

The women councillors of Pakwach District lobbied for the renovation of our maternity ward. Previously the Wadelai community preferred home deliveries, but with the new renovation, every mother wants to come and deliver here. We now have 16 beds in the maternity ward. We can keep mothers for 24 hours after delivery, as recommended by Ministry of Health, unlike before when we would discharge them after 6 hours. A new placenta pit was also constructed that helps with the proper disposal of placentas and a resting room for the night staff.

We had a poor water supply to the maternity ward, but through the efforts of our women councillors, water was brought closer to the Health Centre.

**NAMUGOSA JAMILA, ACTING MATERNITY IN CHARGE
WADELAI HEALTH CENTRE III NEBBI DISTRICT**



PART OF WADELAI HEALTH CENTRE III MATERNITY WARD

INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES THAT IMPROVE OUR LIVES

The trainings were mainly for the women leaders within the district, which included governance, leadership, capacity building and global development. As an appointed woman leader, I took part in the training. We present the issues of women in council. This is an opportunity for us to take up leadership positions. The trainings have helped us lead various groups better and also access funds to do some income generating activities which has improved our lives.

Women now know their rights. We had issues of land ownership, which was discussed during the trainings. Now some women have acquired land with their husbands and women are now competing with men for positions in the local council. We have two ladies in our council (Vice Speaker and Secretary of Social Services) and they are performing well.

Women used to fear taking on leadership. They could not stand to campaign. The trainings have motivated us. As an appointed leader, I also see that when they advertise for positions in the District Service Commission, more women are applying.

However, one of the biggest challenges that I have seen is that women de-campaign their fellow women who stand for public office. Instead of supporting them, they give their votes to men. Women need to be aware that leadership is for all.

Another challenge is that as women we have many roles. We worry that if we take up leadership positions we will not look after our homes well. This has made women stay behind. Much as the women leaders are coming up, they are still very few. Our girls drop out of school due to teenage pregnancy and early marriages so when an opportunity comes to be leaders the women are few. The rest are men.

**AYIORWOTH YERUSA, SENIOR PROBATION OFFICER
AND GENDER FOCAL PERSON NEBBI DISTRICT**





AYIORWOTH YERUSA



NEMUNGU CLAIRE DOREEN



IMPROVING THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

As people with disabilities, we have been marginalised, but with the opportunities and trainings provided as an elected Councillor, I am able to lobby for the people. I started an organisation, Nebbi Association of Women with Disabilities. I also encouraged people with the disabilities to join different government programmes.

My main achievement has been lobbying for the ramps you see at the district headquarter and other public places.

In the past, women would not talk the way they talk these days. When you come to Council, you will admire the way they talk. Our male counterparts used to dominate us. Leadership was designated to them. When women would try to say anything our male counterparts would make funny noises and our women councillors would shy away. But these days they compete with the men.

Individually the challenges I face are with the podium, which is raised. I sit in a wheelchair, and when I have to present I have nowhere to put my documents. Secondly, I can't move around freely. The environment and infrastructure is not friendly for people with disabilities.

The community and even our spouses may not support us when we stand for leadership positions because we are women. We are also not adequately funded as women councillors. You may find a woman councillor represents two constituencies but is not adequately funded.

In the near future, my plan is to grow my organisation so that I can employ other women.

**NEMUNGU CLAIRE DOREEN,
REPRESENTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES,
NEBBI DISTRICT LOCAL GOVERNMENT**



WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT BEGINS AT HOME TAKING ON ROLES TRADITIONALLY LEFT TO WOMEN

I have witnessed a very big change after the UWONET women leadership training in Lamwo. Women were not involved in leadership, but the female participation has greatly increased lately, especially in elections. If you compare the chairpersons in Lamwo with other neighbouring districts in the region, we have the highest number of female LC I chairpersons. We used not to have directly elected female councillors. Right now, Abera sub county, is represented by a female councillor. We actually call her the only "man" among women. With the knowledge that we have gained, in the coming election in 2026, we are most likely to have more women in leadership.

From the start of their programmes I have been fully involved in all UWONET engagements. It is important to have more women leaders. As the saying goes, 'When you educate a girl, you educate a nation'. When you empower a woman, you empower the family and the entire community. Women are developmental. The issues women discuss at the council meetings are about improving the household and the community. Unfortunately, based on statistics, in a village of about 80 administrative units, 14 of them are women. This is an average of one administrative unit in a town council.

Much as we are advocating for women to be



OCHANAN GEOFFREY

actively involved in leadership, some men discourage them from participating. We need to change their attitude.

Our women need to have some resources to effectively participate in elections.

Our women lack assertiveness, some are shy, and cannot talk in public. Even those who are elected, lack debating skills in terms of data and statistics.

Women also suffer an inferiority complex brought about by their fellow women. When they stand for leadership, the fellow women bring them down. If we didn't have this, women would have been President by now.

My hope for the future is to have balanced

leadership at all administrative levels. Women are known to be sincere, hardworking and less corrupt. We need more women in leadership and that is what we have been deliberately advocating for.

This is something I learned during the trainings that have become a part of my life. If you visited my home, I help to do all the work. There is no work for a woman and I even cook when I need to. I nurture the children and wash clothes for them. I fetch water from a nearby bore hole using a wheelbarrow when there is no water. I would consider myself a role model to other men in the community.

OCHANAN GEOFFREY
DISTRICT GENDER OFFICER
LAMWO DISTRICT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

EMPOWERING WOMEN AT THE GRASSROOTS

Women are not empowered to do what they are supposed to do. They are taken as the ones who are supposed to only cook food for families. They face domestic violence and this affects the development of the family and communities. People consider women as less superior. They undermine what women can do and yet women too have ideas. Women are able to apportion their time appropriately. That is why I implore that women should be given equal opportunities in leadership positions.

Women should be given the necessary support, especially financial support. This will help them do the activities very well, especially agricultural activities. There is very little water for production due to climate change. If these women were to have projects such as the valley dams, they would be able to cultivate vegetables, keep animals like goats, sheep, and cows to generate household income.

The number of women in leadership has increased. For example, in the local council leadership, there is one designated position to be held by a woman, but in my sub county, and some of the others, the chairperson, LC I is a woman. I can witness that in the past 10 years, the number of women in these positions has increased and I am very confident that in the next five to 10 years, the level will be balanced.

I would like to highlight the problem of domestic violence. The government should work very hard to sensitise the public about the causes and the dangers of domestic violence such as the increased consumption of alcohol in our societies.

The skilling programmes found in the urban centres such as hairdressing, tailoring, cooking, making soap should also be rolled out in our local communities to help eradicate poverty.

**KOLUO JOSEPH ANDREW,
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, TOROMA COUNTY
KATAKWI DISTRICT IN TESO REGION.**







THE FIGHT TO EMPOWER THE WOMAN

I have been a Member of Parliament since 2011. I'm also the Chairperson of the Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association. This is an association that brings together Members of Parliament, including male members who believe in the women's agenda.

We have been working with Oxfam's partner Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) which has mentorship and capacity building programmes for MPs. They also support us with some legislative processes, such as private member's bill.

Women face a lot of challenges, ranging from violence in their households, to various economic disadvantages. Women do not own land and women who want to do business but cannot do it without collateral, so it becomes a bit of a challenge accessing loans from the banks.

Parliament, has pushed for legislation to end violence, mainly against women and girls. We have in place the Domestic Violence Act, with penalties against those who violate the rights of others, specifically the women in the home. Domestic violence has drastically reduced in certain communities as a result. Women now

know the law exists to protect them and they know where to report. If you go to the police stations countrywide, you will find reports of domestic violence. That to me is a plus.

We have also tackled other social norms such as genital mutilation. It has negative effects on the health of the women. Therefore, Parliament enacted the "Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act" that prohibits the mutilation of women. It has drastically helped reduce this vice against women, and we continue to speak to them. In regions such as Sebei and Karamoja where it is practiced, the Government has set up boarding facilities that help to keep the girls away from the communities. Annually the government also marks the anti FGM day and uses the day to further enlighten the people on the dangers of female genital mutilation.

We also have the Anti-Trafficking Persons Act, because trafficking is real, the most vulnerable being mainly girls and young women.

There are other legislations that we have worked on, i.e. The Market Act, 2023. Close to 75% of the people in the markets are women. We want to ensure that as they come to the market, they have a safe place, to breastfeed their babies or even just a play area for their children as they work. It is all intended to economically empower the women, because if you don't have time to do business then you will remain in poverty. We want women to work and also take care of their children.

We also have the Marriage Bill. The act that exists was left by the colonial masters in 1905 and is no longer relevant. Most of the provisions have been outlawed, or even overtaken by events. So, we should have a bill that regulates marriages. It will go a long way in resolving some of the challenges faced especially at the community level. Unfortunately, 65% of the women in long term relationships in this country think they are married legally when actually they are not, they

are cohabiting. This Bill will go a long way in defining their rights.

The succession Amendment Act has gone a long way, in resolving some of the challenges that the widows in Uganda have been facing. The family members were chasing them away from the home after the passing of their husbands, but with this law in place, this will not happen. All biological children are also properly catered for, not only those produced in wedlock.

We are aware of the economic challenges that women are facing and it is partially due to our social norms. Because of this, women have come out and are trying to engage in business so that they can support their husbands and their families. We also have many single and widowed mothers. Government tried putting in place programmes like the Uganda Women's Entrepreneurship Programme where women could apply for credit. Unfortunately, it was so meagre that the impact of that funding was not felt at the grassroots level. For that reason, we came up with the Parish Development Model. This takes money closer to the women. We hope the women will access credit and also buy their own property.

Politics previously was the preserve of men and very few women were involved, even as we speak, 33% of women constitute the numbers in the Parliament of Uganda, but even if you look at these that contest for the direct seats, we only have 14 women out of the 296 or more constituencies. Most women have gone into politics, partly because of the various programmes. The civil society, the NGOs, the government itself, is encouraging women to join politics.

The level of women's education has improved. Previously, the girl child was the most disadvantaged, however, we need to appreciate government for Universal Primary and Secondary Education because now the

Let's get away from this 30% positions reserved for women when it comes to constituting boards.

Women are educated, women can do what men can do. We want to see more women in the boardroom and in decision making positions.

literacy rate has gone up by about 71%, even amongst the women. So, with the improved level of literacy coupled with sensitisation and various radio programmes in the district, women have woken up and taken an interest in politics.

We hope to see more women vying for other political offices such as the presidency. Hopefully, when President Museveni retires a woman will be elected as the first female president of Uganda and the majority of the women will be out of poverty.

I want to thank Oxfam, through UWONET for the support that it has given us as the Parliament of Uganda. We hope that Oxfam can find more resources to complement government efforts in eradicating poverty in this country.

**SARAH OPENDI, TORORO DISTRICT
WOMAN MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT**



We believe that if women participate, their voices are heard in different decision spaces, if they can effectively engage and challenge the status quo, that we shall start seeing the change in gender equality and women's rights.

**HOPE RITA ACIRO - LAKOR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
UWONET, UGANDA**



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OXFAM IN UGANDA

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