



# THE AIDS SUPPORT ORGANISATION (TASO)



## Can Uganda achieve 50:50 by 2030 as the globe pledges gender equality?

Uganda has taken recognizable strides in the struggle to have more women come from the domestic space to the public arena. While this is commendable from our efforts in affirmative action, there are still many disturbing questions; how many more women in the political space have competed favourably with their male counterparts; how many women entrepreneurs are highly recognized?; how many women innovators in Uganda are in the field of Science and technology and are recognized?

This list of such intriguing questions is almost endless and it affirms that gender equality is way beyond just getting the numbers of women to the boardrooms, public spaces, politics and economy. We have fared well with these numbers, but the fact is we are still a long way in addressing the critical issues to achieve 50-50 gender equality by 2030.

The most seemingly obvious but a very touching issue in gender equality is that of health. Questions linger a lot on women's access to mere basic medical care in their communities and health facilities, let alone the desired minimum package of medical care services. At this point of our age, 16 mothers of this great nation die every day in child birth related causes! While that pain rages, there is the issue of HIV and AIDS, where Uganda is hailed for successfully reducing HIV prevalence rates, but HIV continues to disproportionately affect women. Recent statistics show that HIV prevalence among young people aged 15-24 in Uganda was estimated at 4.2% for women and 2.4% for men. The majority of 95,000 new HIV infections in 2014 occurred among young women and adolescent girls. The issues faced by this category include gender-based violence (including sexual abuse and defilement) and a lack of access to education, health services, productive resources, social protection and information, skills and knowledge about how they cope with these inequities and injustices.

HIV and AIDS is devastating, especially in increasing poverty, reversing human development gains, creating child headed families and intensifying child labour, increasing gender based violence, undercutting food production, undermining human dignity and violation of fundamental human rights among

many others. Its effects strain the economy and further dent the already overstretched health services and resources.

As we celebrate International Women's Day 2016, Uganda needs to get back to the drawing board to appreciate the journey we are yet to cover to realize 50:50 gender equality. There are a number of critical areas of unmet need of services to improve the quality of lives and livelihoods of women and girls. Recent HIV and AIDS reports indicate that about 28% of women and girls are not accessing HIV Testing and Counseling services and 35% of those living with HIV are not accessing life saving Anti-Retroviral (ARVs) Drugs. These and many related injustices cannot continue if we are to make meaningful progress in our human and development agenda.

As TASO, we have over the years developed and implemented interventions aimed at improving the quality of life of women and girls under care. These include among others; HIV testing and counseling, sexual reproductive health and family planning, referrals and linkages for legal services, education sponsorship for girls, sustainable livelihood training, mentorship and grants and Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV. Good ground has been gained in these areas and we commit to continue doing more and exploring new areas of improving the quality of life of women in this country .

The challenge we have is not an individual fight. Together as citizens, politicians, religious and cultural leaders, men and women we must take a bold step than ever before and do a reasonable act to accelerate gender parity. Today, the world over celebrates women, you and I can assist women and girls increase their numbers and quality of engagement and we will awaken the limitless potential in women to fundamentally transform Uganda's economy in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

TASO invites all Ugandans to do something towards "Planet 50-50 by 2030 and Step up for Gender Equality". When each of us does their role very well while also living positively with HIV, we can achieve that target as well as live to see a world without HIV.

**TASO Management, 8th March 2016**



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