

By Owen Wagabaza

Basing on the Constitution and commitments to other international obligations, Uganda has one of the best legislative and policy frameworks against gender-based violence (GBV), yet the vice still remains high.

According to the Demographic Health Survey of 2011, 56% of women in Uganda have experienced physical violence at some point since the age of 15 years. Twenty eight percent of women aged 15-49 have experienced sexual violence and 16% have experienced violence during pregnancy.

The 2011 Uganda Police Force report put gender-based violence statistics at 58% in northern Uganda, 60% in Karamoja, 56% in western Uganda, 24% in central Uganda, 54% among internally displaced people, 41% in Kampala and 74% in eastern Uganda.

Little impact

A number of specific laws have been enacted with the aim of eliminating gender-based violence, unfortunately many of these have not been put in practice and remain just on paper.

These laws include Domestic Violence Act 2010 and its regulations 2011, the prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation 2010 and its Regulations 2013, the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act 2009, the Penal Code Act, Cap 120, The Children Act Cap 59 and the International Criminal Court Act 2010. Other laws include the Land Act, cap 227, the Employment Act (sexual Harassment Regulations 2012).

The Government has also developed policies and frameworks to prevent and respond to gender-based violence among which include; The Uganda Gender Policy 2007, the National Action Plan on Women 2008, the National Development Plan 2010/11-2014/15, as well as the National Referral Pathway for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence Cases in Uganda 2013.

Other policies and frameworks include the National Guidelines on establishment and management of GBV Shelters in Uganda, the National Action Plan on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, 1820, as well as the Goma Declaration 2008.

National database

Besides the laws, the Government developed the National Gender-Based Violence Database that enables actors in Uganda who are responding to gender-based violence to safely collect, store and generate analysed reports in real time. The National Gender-Based Violence Database is a tool for monitoring and evaluating interventions that involve

Gender-based violence: So many laws, little impact



In many of the cases of domestic violence reported, women are the victims and sensitisation makes a difference

A STUDY SHOWS THAT 56% OF WOMEN IN UGANDA HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE AT SOME POINT SINCE THE AGE OF 15 YEARS

compiling and monitoring : in the social development sector :
reported incidents. : is not just routine collection of :
The purpose of the database : GBV incident data, but facilitate

evidence-based decision : cases related to GBV.
making. The underlying :
rationale for the database :
effort is to encourage victims :
to report incidents.

In 2008, the Government, :
through the Uganda Police :
Force, elevated the Children :
and Women's Protection :
Unit to full department with :
structures up to district level. :
The department handles all

Why GBV persists

Alice Komuhangi Khauka, :
the head of gender, child and :
sexual offences department :
in the office of the Director :
of Public Prosecutions, says :
lack of witness protection :
legislation, inadequate :
forensic and scientific facilities :
for gathering and analysing

evidence and limited co-operation from the victims and witnesses, limited number of prosecutors among others are some of the challenges encountered in the prosecution of GBV in Uganda.

The implementation of the laws has also been hampered by inadequate finances and survivors often fail to access the services available due to lack of transportation to health facilities and other service points. In addition, the prosecution is often slow and is hampered by inadequate evidence presented by the survivors.

Christine Alaro, a commissioner in the Uganda Police Force, says many times people report cases, but later get afraid and are not willing to continue with the cases.

"Attitude is also a major concern. For example, Karamoja region has the highest number of rape and defilement cases, but girls only report such cases if they are forced to marry an old man they do not like," Alaro says.

Alaro also talks of the lack of countrywide shelters or social centres where victims can camp, explaining that it becomes hard for the Police to protect the victims yet their lives are in danger when they are left to continue staying in the homes where the crime took place.

The Ugandan society is also characterised by strong patriarchal beliefs that value male supremacy and women's subordination, as such, communities have inadequate information concerning civic education and human rights which calls for more sensitisation campaigns.

In a recent stakeholder meeting on GBV organised by the Uganda Human Rights Commission, participants called for urgent need for Uganda to pass the Witness Protection legislation and networking with non-governmental organisations that offer psychosocial support services in order to address some of the challenges.

The participants also called for strategies to facilitate victims of sexual GBV to access courts of law and other redress mechanisms offered by independent bodies or institutions.

Mercy Nanyonga, a women's rights activist, calls for more public sensitisation campaigns about GBV, community mobilisation and empowerment, establishment of one-stop centres, and the strengthening of the referral system. An equipped and strong referral is vital handling the survivors of violence.



A woman from eastern Uganda whose husband battered and chopped off some of her fingers



Gender based-violence may live the victim with physical wounds, but it also affects them emotionally