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THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION: CELEBRATING STRENGTH AND DEMANDING JUSTICE FOR UGANDA'S YOUNG WOMEN

As the world marks International Women's Day under the global theme "Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls," Uganda stands at a crossroads. Today, we celebrate the resilient spirit of the Ugandan woman—the backbone of our economy and the heartbeat of our communities. We celebrate the 34% of women who hold seats in our Parliament and the millions of female entrepreneurs driving our grassroots markets. Nevertheless, as we look at the faces of our adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), the celebration must be met with a sobering reality: the revolution for gender equality is far from finished.

The Factual Reality: Why We Still Need Women's Day

While policies exist on paper, the data from the 2024 National Population and Housing Census and early 2026 reports reveal that young women are bearing the brunt of Uganda's current socio-political challenges.

The Participation Gap: Despite making up 53% of the electorate, young women (aged 18–30) remain significantly underrepresented in direct elective positions. The 2026 election cycle has highlighted that the political arena remains marred by "securitization" and intimidation, often pushing young female voices to the margins.

The Health Crisis: In 2024, a staggering 78% of all new HIV infections in Uganda occurred among AGYW aged 15–24. Furthermore, the teenage pregnancy rate remains the highest in East Africa at 25%, a figure that directly correlates with school dropouts and lifelong economic vulnerability.

Economic Inequality: Youth unemployment in Uganda stands at 16.1%, but for young women, that figure jumps to 18.7%. Over 57% of young women are currently not in employment, education, or training (NEET), compared to 42% of young men.

Beyond the Flowers: A Call to Action

International Women's Day is more than a day for appreciation; it is a day for Accountability. In the current political climate, we cannot afford to treat women's rights as an "afterthought."

To champion the Ugandan girl, we must move from rhetoric to Action:

Dismantle the Barriers to Leadership: We must support the National Women's Manifesto 2026–2030 by advocating for gender-parity in political parties and ensuring zero tolerance for electoral violence against female aspirants.

Protect Bodily Autonomy: Health justice is social justice. We must integrate Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) into all youth programs, ensuring that a medical diagnosis or a pregnancy does not end a girl's right to an education.

Invest in Digital Inclusion: Currently, less than one-third of Uganda's female population uses the internet compared to nearly 70% of men. We must bridge this digital divide to give young women access to the 21st-century economy.

The VISTA Commitment

At VISTA Foundation Uganda, our mission is rooted in Feminist Leadership. We don't just work for young women; we work with them. We believe that when a girl is capacitated with legal awareness and a platform to speak, she becomes the architect of her own destiny.

This Women's Day, we dedicate our work to the young woman in the refugee camp demanding safety, the student in Karamoja fighting for her degree, and the female activist in Kampala standing for justice.

Uganda thrives when her daughters thrive. Today, let us give our support to gain a future where every young woman has a seat at the table—not by invitation, but by right.

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