

More women facing violence,

In the developed world, a man's support has been replaced with social benefits provided by the State. Unfortunately, in several developing countries, women still rely on men to provide for them because there are no social support systems. This has left women in a vulnerable state, subject to the harsh realities of life, as **Christopher Bendana** reports.

Pamela Kirabo's fortunes have changed for the better now that she earns a few hundred dollars as a domestic worker in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"Life is good," she said in a WhatsApp message to a friend in Kampala City. The photo accompanying the message tells it all - she stands between tall buildings, wearing sunglasses. She has noticeably put on weight.

This is a far cry from what the life Kirabo lived in Kyaliwajala, a city suburb, a few months ago. Then, she lived a life of survival, selling chips on the street and entering into a marriage that can best be described as hell on earth.

At 18, she had met a young man who convinced her that life would be better if they were married. However, a few months into the marriage, the young man asked her to become a housewife. At first, he would leave some money for the family's upkeep, but over time he abandoned her, coming home only to sleep.

"I had just given birth, and I was starving. I ran away, leaving the baby behind. However, my husband used to leave the child with the

neighbours. I had to return to pick up my baby," she says.

To survive, Kirabo first worked in a bar, then in a restaurant - any job that would put food on her table. Her plan was to find another man with a stable income.

"Everything in this world needs money. A woman's success needs a man's support," she says.

Pamela is among the millions of Ugandan women who have experienced poverty, hunger, and domestic violence. A report, Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025, published by the United Nations Program for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), reveals that there are more women facing poverty and hunger than men across the globe.

The report, launched in September, reveals that 822.3 million female adults were moderately or severely food-insecure compared to 758.8 million men. Anaemia among women of 15-49 years was projected to rise from 31.1 percent in 2025 to 33

Meal time at a rural Ugandan home. Poverty levels are still high. PHOTO/FILE

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percent in 2030.

The report also highlights Mozambique and Uganda, where women eat food with sufficient nutrients at 20.8 percent and 12.7 percent, respectively. Women spend more years in poor health (10.0 percent) compared to eight percent from chronic conditions, back and neck pain, gynecological diseases, migraines, and depressive disorders.

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renewable energy, and only five percent are on the utility boards. If things remain the same, 321 million women would still lack electricity by 2030, and another 896 million would lack access to clean cooking fuels and technologies.

Additionally, 9.2 percent (376 million) of women and girls live in extreme poverty compared to 8.6 percent (355 million) for men. In terms of employment, only 46.4 percent of working age women were employed in 2024 compared to 69.5 percent for men, the gap narrowing a minimal four percent in the last 30 years.



poverty and hunger

FREEDOM FROM POVERTY

Persistent poverty among women and girls directly stems from pervasive exclusion and discrimination in labour markets; a lack of choice and autonomy in how they spend their time; insufficient economic resources, including credit and land; and inadequate access to quality public services and social protection. Missed or delayed entry into the labour market has lasting consequences for women and girls, perpetuating gender inequalities across their lifetimes.

Zero violence

Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive – and preventable – human rights violations in the world. The past three decades have seen substantial progress on legislation to address this issue, with most measures enacted since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 and the Beijing

Platform for Action in 1995. Policies, laws and budgets are essential to end violence against women and girls. Success is closely tied to rigorous implementation as well as alignment with international standards and recommendations.

Full and equal decision-making power

Decision-making remains in men's hands, in all walks of life, everywhere in the world. As of January 1, 2025, women held only 27.2 percent of seats in national parliaments. Their representation in local governments stagnated at 35.5 percent in 2023 and 2024, after an average annual increase of 0.5 percentage points since 2020. Inclusive representation in the public service and judiciary is fundamental for fair, just and effective governance.

Peace and security

Innocent civilians, including women and children, contribute least but bear the brunt of active conflicts and wars. Despite

these impacts, women's participation in peace processes leads to better and more sustainable outcomes.

Climate justice

Climate change exacerbates crises, amplifies existing inequalities and poses the greatest risks to those who are already the most marginalised. By 2050, under a worst-case climate scenario, up to 158.3 million more women and girls may live in extreme poverty (under \$2.15 per day) globally as a result of climate change. Nearly half could reside in sub-Saharan Africa. Feminist climate justice offers a powerful path marked by human rights, fair resource distribution, inclusive decision-making, and accountability for past and future harms.

Source: National Progress Report on Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30) in Uganda (2020-2025)

In 80 percent of the countries with data, fewer than half of the women have ownership or secure rights to agricultural land. Of note is that 676 million women and girls lived within 50 kilometres of a deadly conflict in 2024, the highest since the 1990s.

Generally, only 26 percent of the 121 countries and regions had comprehensive systems to track resource allocations for gender equality.

Uganda's situation

A report, National Progress Report on Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30) in Uganda (2020-2025), prepared by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) in August 2024, reveals higher rates of multidimensional poverty among female-headed households of about 50 percent both in 2016/17 and 2019/20 compared to 42 percent and 39 percent for male-headed households, in the same period.

Girls were also underrepresented in accessing education loans provided under the Higher Education Students Financing Fund. Eighty-five percent of women in the country were involved in unpaid care and household work, compared to 42 percent of men.

Another area where women are more affected in the Aids/HIV sphere. The evidence shows that HIV and AIDS prevalence is four times higher among adolescents, with infection rates among older adolescent girls four times higher than young men of the same age.

However, despite the challenges, more girls are graduating from universities at undergraduate level, though the situation changes at higher levels. Women are at the top echelons in the banking world, the business world, government enterprises, and political leadership.

More legislation to promote women's empowerment has been enacted.

Eunice Musiime, the executive director of Akina Mama wa Afrika, an organisation founded on women's empowerment, is happy with the progress the country has made, although she says there are some gender gaps that are taking too long to close.



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Ruth Nsibirano, an associate professor of Gender in the School of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University, says the gender gap is influenced by social, economic, and intellectual factors.

"I appreciate the education reforms, including the 1.5 allowance that has enabled more girls to access higher education. Education is key, it gives you a pathway in life," she argues.

Musiime, though happy with multiple legislations promoting gender equity, is equally bothered by some setbacks, such as the shelving of the Marriage Bill, 2024.

"Marital rape is a crime, and some countries like Kenya have included it in their Marriage Bills. Gender-based violence (GBV) is still a challenge because although we have made huge strides in legislation, implementation is weak," she explains.

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Progress made

Prof Nsibirano calls for more equitable access to opportunities and resources, including land for women, as it is a key factor of production. She argues that there is also a need to address sexual harassment

Women carrying jerrycans of water in Busoga County South, Kasese District. A systematic and coordinated technical and financial support is needed for citizens to achieve the economic stability. PHOTO/FILE

in the workplace.

Women need a supportive work environment, and some of the strategies to improve conditions could involve setting up daycare centres in the workplace," she adds.

Dr Margaret Kigozi, a former executive director at Uganda Investment Authority, believes there is no turning back when it comes to the fight against gender inequality.

"We were heard in Beijing (China) and in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and we have continued to be heard. A long time ago, we were only ten girls when I went to medical school, yet the boys were over 100. How many girls are attending medical school today?" she asks.

Dr Kigozi emphasises that women have supported fellow women, and they continue to lead the drive.

"When I was at Uganda Investment Authority, I started a women entrepreneurs network that has since grown to 500 members. They are trained in leadership skills," she says.

Way forward

A report by the MGLSD argues that the country requires systematic and coordinated technical and financial support for its citizens to achieve the economic stability that can allow them to surmount climatic, health, and social shocks.

It suggests two options: provide grants and low interest loans to support women's businesses and capitalise financial institutions with loans designed for women enterprises.

Training programs in leadership skills and confidence building, like those provided by women entrepreneurs' member networks, should be promoted.

The Presidential Initiative on Skilling the Girl/Boy Child Project is providing employment to young women with limited formal education, and is a step in the right direction.

The US\$217 Generating Growth Opportunities and Productivity for Women Enterprises (GROW) Project by the government, and funded by the World Bank, intended to provide loans to women enterprises, will go a long way in solving the challenge of limited access to finance to women-led enterprises.

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