

Activists fault manifestos for

The National Women's Manifesto (2026-2030), titled "Her Voice," was developed by the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), and advances gender equality and women's empowerment. The manifesto outlines urgent priorities for political parties, government, and stakeholders to address systemic barriers facing women and girls over the next five years. It is a far cry from the manifestos of the different political parties in the presidential race, which show that while women have the vote, they do not have the voice, as **David Walugembe** reports.

The political arena is thick with promises and slogans, as presidential candidates crisscross the country, courting voters with sweeping visions of national progress and socio-economic transformation.

However, women activists argue that the candidate's manifestos fall strikingly short of addressing the realities that shape women's daily lives, from political exclusion to economic inequality and persistent gender-based violence (GBV).

Critics say the documents offer rhetoric without the "true ingredients" needed to elevate the status of women, such as access to quality healthcare, equality in education, economic empowerment, and participation in leadership.

Rita Aciro, the executive director of Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), acknowledges the manifestos of the different political parties on women's land and property rights. However, she calls for more emphasis on safeguarding women's property rights to enable them to secure land titles.

"Unless women's property rights are secured, they will continue to face challenges in accessing finance. Most banks require formal land titles to meet the collateral requirements for loans, credit lines, agricultural financing, or venture capital, yet few women own land," she explains.

Aciro also hints at the need to reduce unpaid care and domestic work for women through measures to improve childcare services, flexible workspaces, and social care infrastructure to free up women's time for business.

"The manifestos of the political parties in the presidential race are almost silent on how unpaid care and childcare affect women's ability to run businesses. Women continue to shoulder 80 percent of unpaid care work, which takes away their productive time to engage in other work," she observes.

Aciro adds that the manifestos do not address women's safety and conducive workspaces, expressing worry at the harsh realities women traders face, such as lack of safety, harassment, insecurity, eviction, and abuse by authorities and landlords.



"The manifestos talk about markets and industrial parks but fail to show how women entrepreneurs can practically access value chains, procurement opportunities, export markets, tourism sectors, and digital trade," she adds.

The feminist calls for tax incentives for newly-formalised women-owned enterprises, clear quotas for public procurement, and extending low-interest loans, grants, and guarantee schemes.

Marriage, succession rights, GBV

Charity Ahimbisibwe, the executive director of Electoral Laws Institute (ELI) Uganda, observes that party manifestos lack clear plans to promote and protect the rights and dignity of women in marriage.

"Several girls are being denied the opportunity to become heirs. This undermines the principles of equity, yet the manifestos are silent on how to avert the trend. In my view, the presidential manifestos did not perform well on tracking the key issues affecting women. They lack an approach to succession issues and estate management," she says.

She acknowledges the efforts of political parties towards appointing and fronting female candidates in different positions, and urges those politicians to push for policies that advance the women's agenda in their party manifestos.

"The National Resistance Movement (NRM) party has tried to put women in key positions of the government, but we have not seen major wins for women in their manifesto. The women look like they are just there to

The National Resistance Movement party Presidential candidate Kaguta Museveni during a campaign rally in Mbale. Mr Museveni says that through women-based support initiatives, poverty has reduced from 56.4 percent in 1992 to 16.1 percent in 2024, and cut the number of households in the subsistence economy by more than half, from 68 percent in 2014 to 33 percent in 2024.

PHOTO/
COURTESY/
OF KAGUTA
MUSEVENI X
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certify male positions, not to advance the women's agenda," she notes.

Joan Byonanebye, a gender activist, stresses the need for presidential manifestos to address the increasing cases of GBV and unequal control over business assets and income.

"There should be tangible efforts by the government to reduce poverty among women. Several women cannot afford to make a living, leading them to prostitution in pursuit of survival. We need manifestos promising funding for free GBV hotlines, survivor shelters, legal aid, and community prevention and awareness programmes," she recommends.

Byonanebye calls for political parties to present manifestos that have solutions on how to end HIV among teenagers because adolescent girls and young women are still the most affected by HIV due to their vulnerability.

"For reasonable women's transformation, we need to legalise gender-inclusive budgeting and embed gender targets into national development plans. We should make the achievements of these targets a condition for ministerial performance reviews," she advises.

Joreen Najjemba, a human rights activist, notes that some presidential manifestos lack focus on how to protect women against political harassment, violation, unlawful arrests, all forms of torture, and imprisonment. She appeals to security operatives to deploy female officers to arrest women during political chaos, as opposed to some male officers

violently arresting women.

"The trail of political violence against women started in the 2021 general elections. We witnessed it in the Kawempe North by-election and in Masaka City during Robert Kyagulanyi's presidential campaign this year. The force applied to civilian women by armed men has left many affected and violated," she says.

Campaign financing

Najjemba urges political parties to make provision in their manifestos to introduce budgets to finance women candidates at all levels to increase their participation in the political sphere.

Dr Madina Guloba, an economist and senior research fellow at the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC),

Issue.

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Rita Aciro, the executive director of Uganda Women's Network (UWONET),

missing gender struggles



WHAT THE MANIFESTOS SAY

Women constitute 51 percent (23,591,128) of the population, compared to men, who are 49 percent (22,314,289). In the same regard, the Electoral Commission (EC) says that out of the 21,681,491 registered voters in 2025, women make up 53 percent compared to men's 47 percent.



Forum for Democratic Change (FDC)

Under the agenda, 'Fixing the economy; money in the pockets,' the mission is to transform Uganda's social, economic, and political landscape to favour all citizens to live a life of dignity, have access to equal opportunity, and become masters of their own destiny.

The FDC pledges to credit 10,000 women coffee farmers, fund 2,000 women and youth groups for aquaculture and fish farming, offer free education up to university-level for children of men and women in uniform, and provide free medical care for citizens in public hospitals.

"Women are the backbone of the economy; they provide over 75 percent of the labour in agriculture, the bulk of the labour downtown, roadside markets and lower-level jobs in public service, but there is feminisation of poverty, with 84 percent of women in vulnerable employment," the manifesto reads in part.

To reduce the number of school dropouts, especially among girls, due to menstrual health, the FDC promises to waive ten percent of taxes on women's products such as sanitary pads, increase budget allocation to women's health, and enforce existing laws against violence against women (VAW).



National Resistance Movement (NRM)

Under the slogan, 'Protecting the gains,' the party will continue with the legacy of promoting women's growth and development politically, socially and economically in all sectors of education, health, governance, public service, and social life.

The manifesto states that in the past ten years, the government has invested Shs11 trillion for wealth creation initiatives, through the Uganda Development Bank (Shs 1.9 trillion), the Parish Development Model (Shs 4.4 trillion by the end of FY 2025/26), Emoya (Shs760 billion), the Small Business Recovery Fund (Shs 100 billion), and the Agricultural Credit Facility (Shs463 billion), among others.

The presidential candidate recounts that through women-based support initiatives, poverty has reduced from 56.4 percent in 1992 to 16.1 percent in 2024, and cut the number of households in the subsistence economy by more than half, from 68 percent in 2014 to 33 percent in 2024.

"NRM will continue to fund and implement special programs targeting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and women-owned businesses engaged in wealth creation to ensure that the funds reach all women and other wealth creators," the manifesto states.



Alliance for National Transformation (ANT)

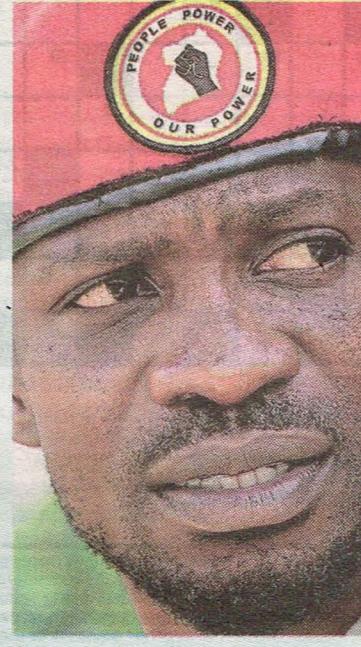
The party's manifesto, under the slogan, 'Change you can trust,' emphasises the need to transform women, orphans, the elderly, pensioners and veterans in the social, cultural, economic, and political arenas to continue to sustain their livelihoods.

Women have been denied the opportunity to develop themselves, to transcend out of poverty and into sustained prosperity, whereas many orphans still live in marginalised and vulnerable or unfavourable conditions that, if not changed, will keep them and their own children in perpetual servitude.

"Affirmative measures for women in small businesses and political spaces will be upheld and reviewed; we will work towards gender parity in political spaces for gender mainstreaming, budgeting as a core to our decision-making and programming for women's success," the manifesto reads.

The party pledges to provide comprehensive support to women and all categories of people with low-productive ventures to start enterprises that generate adequate income for a dignified life, as opposed to providing money through handouts.

ANT aims to ease access of pensions and elderly support for old people who have not worked in the government for 60 years and increase the monthly stipend to benefit women and all Ugandan citizens.



National Unity Platform (NUP)

In the NUP manifesto, dubbed 'A New Uganda Now,' the party aims to restore the freedom, constitutionalism, and human rights (including gender equity), and to fight corruption and wasteful government expenditure to save the future of women and children who are vulnerable to the shortfalls in health, security, and education.

The party aims to create ten million new jobs by 2032, stating that women are always the victims of extortion, exploitation, and sexual abuse in seeking employment, many ending up in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, where they are lured into modern slavery.

To boost nutrition, the party president pledged to establish a public-school feeding program to transform agriculture, ensure food security, enhance education outcomes, and support a healthy population. He promised to put an end to land grabbing and guarantee secure land rights for all, for inclusiveness.

"We will provide free sanitary pads to all girls in schools, run nationwide retention campaigns, and offer free education from primary, including free meals, scholastic materials, and uniforms. We will embed market-oriented technical and vocational skills in secondary education to prepare learners for real jobs to solve the challenge of unemployment," the manifesto reads.

calls for mentorship and mindset change if women are to benefit from government programs such as Emoya, the Youth Livelihood Program (YLP), and Glow Uganda.

"Several manifestos mention women in politics, but few talk about women's digital innovations and putting women's business associations or cooperatives at the centre of policy design and implementation. We need to see formal structures where women entrepreneurs sit at the table when tax policy, trade rules, and funding criteria are set, not just as beneficiaries, but as decision-makers," she notes.

Dr Guloba says some manifestos talk about training, but with no clear plan to equip women entrepreneurs with modern skills such as digital marketing, e-commerce, bookkeeping, export standards, climate-smart production, and technology adoption.

While the eight presidential candidates gesture towards women's empowerment in their manifestos, the activists argue that the pledges lack the depth, clarity, and transformative ambition needed to address the country's entrenched gender inequalities.