

CHANGE AGENT

PHOTO BY OLIVIA NAKATE

CHEPKWURUI LEADS THE FIGHT AGAINST FEMALE ABUSE IN ATHLETICS

By Olivia Nakate

In an era marked by rising cases of early pregnancies, financial manipulation and sexual exploitation, female athletes continue to face challenges that threaten their careers and personal futures. Many young sportswomen enter competitive sport with dreams of success, only to encounter pressure and temptation that can easily derail their progress. Those already trapped in such situations need rescue and guidance, while others still standing firm need advice and encouragement to stay focused.

It is against this background that a young Ugandan athlete has emerged as a voice of courage and change. At just 18 years, Nancy Chepkwurui has taken on a role that many older athletes and officials have struggled to assume by speaking openly against financial and sexual exploitation while inspiring fellow athletes to protect their dreams.

Chepkwurui has already demonstrated leadership qualities that have earned her trust and recognition by local athletics governing body, Uganda Athletics (UA). She currently serves as an athlete representative on the UA executive committee and has captained Team Uganda at international competitions. Her most recent leadership role came at the World Athletics Cross Country Championships in Tallahassee, USA, in January, where she led the national team with distinction.

Besides the need to performances on the track, Chepkwurui understands the unique pressures that come with being a young female athlete. Fame, attention and financial promises often come with hidden dangers, particularly for athletes who lack guidance and protection. She believes that discipline and focus are key to overcoming these challenges.

"With the rise in early pregnancies, I encourage my fellow female athletes to first focus on our goals; other things will come later. Those things will still be there for us after athletics when we are ready. As a

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girl child, I urge them to stay focused, work on their goals and become better women in the future," Chepkwurui said.

Her message is simple but powerful: success in sport begins with self-control and long-term vision. By prioritizing training, education and personal development, young athletes can

avoid distractions that lead to early pregnancies, exploitation and broken careers.



Nancy Chepkwurui

Chepkwurui also believes silence is one of the greatest enemies of young athletes. She encourages her peers to speak up, support one another and seek help whenever they feel threatened. According to her, when athletes recognize their value and future potential, it becomes harder for exploiters to take advantage of them.

"An athlete who has courage and a voice has a bright future not only in athletics, but also in life after athletics," she added.

As an athlete representative on the UA executive committee, Chepkwurui has called for practical measures to protect young female athletes.

She urges athletes to focus on long-term goals and set clear sporting ambitions.

"When young people have a clear vision for their future, they are more motivated to avoid actions like unintended pregnancies which can derail such bad plans," she said.

Financial manipulation

Chepkwurui believes Uganda Athletics should make financial education compulsory for female athletes. She advocates for training in budgeting, saving and investment to reduce financial illiteracy and limit dependence on individuals who may exploit them.

She calls for girls to be taught how to set personal boundaries and feel confident rejecting unwanted advances.

"Every girl has a right to say no. No man should force you to have sex," she stressed.

A Call to Action

Chepkwurui urged Uganda Athletics to strengthen mentorship and open communication by creating safe spaces where athletes can speak freely with parents, teachers and coaches. She believes coaches, in particular, can play a key role in d sexual education because they are the people athletes already trust.

Through her actions and words, Nancy Chepkwurui has proved that leadership in sport is not only about winning races, but also protecting lives and shaping better futures for the next generation of female athletes.