

WHY WOMEN'S DAY STILL MATTERS



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Minister of state for gender and culture Regis Mutuuzo making her remarks during a sitting of women leaders who gathered at Parliament to discuss pertinent women-related issues on March 3, 2025, a sign that women have been empowered

Recently, my two sons, aged eight and 18, asked me a question that made me pause. "What exactly is Women's Day about?" they asked. And then quickly followed it with another: "And when is Men's Day?". I found myself pausing for a bit; not because I did not know the answers, but because explaining the day's deeper meaning to the young men required more than a quick response.

Their questions were genuine, and in many ways, understandable. They are growing up in a world where women lead organisations, teach in universities, manage businesses and sit in government. In their daily lives, they interact with confident and capable women, and to them, the idea that women still require special attention or affirmative action can feel puzzling. To them, it sometimes appears like "favouritism".

SOCIAL JUSTICE

But their questions reminded me of something important: perhaps we have not done enough to help the younger generation understand the deeper story behind social justice and gender equality, and why women need the extra attention. Additionally, understanding gender inequality for the two young men of different ages differs. In my experience, gender disparities become more prominent as we get older, they are more blurred when we are younger.

PROGRESS

International Women's Day, celebrated globally on March 8, is not simply a celebration of women. It is a reflection on history, a recognition of progress and a call to address the inequalities that still exist. The global theme for 2026; *Rights. Justice. Action. For All Women and Girls*, calls

for concrete steps to ensure that women's rights are not merely promised but realised in everyday life. In Uganda, the national theme, *Scaling up investment to accelerate access for all women and girls*, emphasises the need for deliberate investment in women's opportunities and empowerment.

GENDER DISPARITIES

At the heart of the gender equality discussion are five key areas where disparities have historically existed: welfare, access, participation, conscientisation and control. These dimensions help us understand why affirmative action and targeted investments for women remain necessary.

Welfare refers to the basic conditions of life; health, nutrition, education and safety. Across the world, women often carry a disproportionate burden in ensuring family welfare. They provide care for children, manage households and support communities, yet their own well-being is frequently overlooked. In many contexts, women still face higher levels of poverty, limited access to healthcare and unequal workloads in unpaid domestic labour.

Access concerns the ability to use resources and opportunities such as education, employment, land ownership, finance and technology. While significant progress has been made, women in many societies, including

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parts of Uganda, still have less access to productive resources than men. For instance, land ownership remains predominantly male, access to credit is often limited for women entrepreneurs and technological spaces are still male dominated.

Participation refers to women's involvement in decision-making processes – whether in households, communities, workplaces, or political institutions. While women have increasingly entered leadership positions, their representation in many decision-making spaces is still lower than that of men. Participation ensures that women's voices and experiences shape policies and solutions that affect society as a whole.

Conscientisation is perhaps less discussed but equally important. It refers to awareness, understanding the social structures and cultural

norms that shape inequality. Many gender disparities persist because societies have normalised them over generations. When women and men begin to question why certain roles are assigned to one gender or another, they begin the process of transformation. Awareness creates the possibility of change.

Finally, control relates to the power to influence how resources are used and how decisions are implemented.

Even when women participate in economic activities or community work, they may not always have control over the benefits or outcomes. Control represents the highest level of empowerment because it ensures that women can influence both processes and results.

These five areas illustrate why gender equality remains a work in progress. They also highlight why Women's Day is not about elevating women above men, but about correcting historical imbalances so that society can function more fairly.

Importantly, gender equality is not a women-only conversation. Women do not live on a female-only island.

The spaces we navigate are relational; we interact with fathers, brothers, colleagues, husbands and sons. Social justice therefore requires partnership between women and men.

Engaging men and boys

is essential for sustainable progress. When young men understand the structural realities behind gender inequality, they are less likely to interpret women's empowerment as competition. Instead, they begin to see it as a pathway toward stronger families, healthier communities, and more inclusive economies.

The question then becomes: how do we teach these ideas to the next generation?

First, through education. Schools should integrate discussions about equality, rights and respect into civic education. Young people should learn not only historical achievements but also the social dynamics that shape opportunities for different groups.

Second, through conversation within families. Parents play a crucial role in shaping attitudes. When boys and girls share responsibilities at home, when daughters are encouraged to pursue careers in science or leadership and when sons are taught respect and partnership, the seeds of equality are planted early.

Third, through visible role models. When young people see women leading in fields such as science, engineering, politics, or entrepreneurship, they begin to understand that leadership has no gender. Representation helps normalise equality.

Fourth, through policy and investment. Governments and institutions must continue to invest in programs that expand women's access to education, finance, technology and leadership opportunities. Uganda's theme this year rightly emphasises scaling up investment because empowerment requires resources, not just rhetoric.

As we mark International Women's Day this year, perhaps the most important task is not only to celebrate achievements but also to educate and inspire the next generation.

If my sons continue asking these questions, I will welcome them. Because a society that encourages curiosity about justice is one that is still learning how to build a more equitable future. Women's Day, ultimately, is about that future, one where fairness is not debated, but lived unapologetically.