

Robinah Nabbanja, (C) the first female and current Prime Minister of Uganda has been at the forefront of championing women's rights. PHOTO/DAPHINE NAKABIRI



IWD: Uganda's milestones so far

Women's Day is meant to recognise the achievements of women and girls in all areas of life, including work, education, politics and culture. It is also a time to speak about equal rights and the need for fair opportunities.

BY SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

While challenges persist, Uganda has registered notable progress in advancing women's rights and participation over the years.

In political representation, women's presence in Parliament has steadily grown due to affirmative action policies introduced under the Constitution of Uganda.

The outgoing 11th Parliament has 529 elected MPs, of whom 189 are women (34 percent). This includes the 146 District Woman representatives, 16 directly elected constituency seats, three for the Army, two for Workers, two for Female Youth, three for People Living with Disabilities, and three for the Elderly.

The Parliament has also 14 ex-officio members, who include the Vice President and non-elected min-

isters, without any voting rights in the August House.

However, data from the Electoral Commission (EC) shows that only 128 women competed against men for direct election as Members of Parliament (MPs) out of 353 constituency positions in the recently concluded 2026 General elections.

Women now occupy several influential positions across the arms of government. The country's vice President, Jessica Alupo, is one of the highest-ranking female leaders in government.

In Parliament, the Speaker Annet Anita Among, presided over legislative proceedings, while the Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja, coordinates cabinet implementation of national policies.

Uganda has also strengthened its legal framework to protect women and girls.

HOPE

According to the government these achievements demonstrate that while challenges remain, deliberate policies, legal reforms, and targeted initiatives have steadily expanded opportunities for women to lead, contribute, and shape Uganda's future.

Laws addressing domestic violence, sexual offences, and land rights have been enacted to improve access to justice. Key reforms include the domestic violence act, the prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act and the Succession (Amendment) Act 2023 which improved women's inheritance rights.

Institutional mechanisms have also been introduced to support survivors. These include Family and Children Courts, gender-based violence shelters, and legal aid services run by government and civil society organisations such as FIDA Uganda.

According to the 2024 crime figures, around 12,424 cases were classified as gender-based violence (GBV), and authorities reported 1,607 cases of rape and 12,317 cases of defilement with the overwhelming majority of victims being female.

These figures underscore both the scale of the problem and the need for more effective prevention and justice measures.

In the economic sphere, initiatives such as the Parish Development Model

and women-focused entrepreneurship funds aim to improve women's access to capital and skills development. Financial inclusion has improved over the past decade, with more women accessing and participating in savings groups and small business initiatives.

According to the 2024 National Population Household Census, more women save with micro deposit-taking institutions (13.5 percent) and savings groups (32.8 percent) compared to men (5.4 percent) and (24.1 percent), respectively.

Civil society organisations continue to play a significant role by conducting community sensitisation campaigns, where development partners have invested in programs targeting girls' education, maternal health, and economic empowerment.

Uganda has also made progress in expanding women's access to higher education. In 1990, the government introduced 1.5 additional points for all female students during admission to public universities to bridge gender gaps and ensure a steady rise in

female enrolment over the years.

In a recent address on March 4 ahead of International Women's Day 2026, Peace Mutuuzo, the State Minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development, urged institutions at all levels to work together to remove barriers that hinder women's full participation in society.

"Gender equality must be reflected not just in our policies, but in the way every institution, community and family creates environments where women and girls can exercise their rights fully," she said.

Minister Mutuuzo added, "Our collective efforts must translate into real opportunities in courts, markets, classrooms, and in community spaces so that women's contributions are recognised, protected and valued."

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plementing a number of multilateral projects (World Bank, EU, DFID, ADB) and programmes in Uganda that have increased both social and economic benefits to the private sector.

She is an associate of Uganda's leading poultry enterprise, Biyinzika Poultry International. The company plays a significant role in Uganda's poultry and animal feed industry, hence highlighting women's critical role in large-scale agribusiness management and rural economic transformation.

Proscovia Nabbanja

Proscovia Nabbanja, the CEO of the Uganda National Oil Company (UNOC), has over 23 years of experience, playing pivotal roles in shaping Uganda's petroleum sector and positioning the country as a critical player in the global energy landscape.

She is a geologist by training, holding a Bachelor of Science in Geology and Chemistry from Makerere University, a Master of Science in Petroleum Geoscience, and an MBA from Imperial College London with specialised training in petroleum and energy management.

Nabbanja was named acting UNOC CEO in 2019 and has played an instrumental role in steering UNOC through crucial negotiations of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP),

securing agreements that solidified Uganda's position in the regional energy sector.

Under her guidance, the Upstream and EACOP Projects reached the Final Investment Decision, marking significant milestones in Uganda's petroleum industry, driven by her strategic decisions and ability to secure essential investments and partnerships.

Nabbanja's commitment to exploration and unlocking Uganda's natural resources is evident in her acquisition of an exploration licence over the Kasuruban Contract Area during the second licensing round.

Her unwavering determination to capitalise on Uganda's oil and gas potential contributes to the country's energy security and economic development.

She continues demonstrating her dedication to Uganda's petroleum industry's growth and sustainable development as the visionary leader at the helm of the Uganda National Oil Company. Her strategic decisions and impactful initiatives have positioned her as an influential figure in the country and the broader global energy landscape.

Annet Mulindwa Nakawunde

Ms Nakawunde, the Managing Director of Finance Trust Bank. Under her leadership, the bank has boosted women and

empowering women as well as ensuring best practice in banking and microfinance and creating value for customers. She is result-orientated and an excellent team player with strong leadership qualities.

Dr Maggie Kigozi

Dr Maggie Kigozi is the chairman of Zuri Model Farms, an influential, established business consultant and businesswoman. In 2010, she was recognised by Makerere University with an Honorary Doctorate of Laws.

Dr Kigozi is acknowledged for her 11-year indelible role as Executive Director of the Uganda Investment Authority (UIA), a female inspiration across generations and a trailblazer in commerce and philanthropy who has successfully empowered and inspired many women to rise up.

She has held different leadership roles like Chief Scout of the Uganda Scouts Association; Member of the Global Banking Alliance for Women (GBA) Advisory Board; Director of the Board of the Uganda Export Promotion Board; Member of the Board of Directors, Crown Beverages Limited; Founder of the Uganda Investment Authority Women Entrepreneurs Network; Board Director of Trademark Africa; Board Director of NCBA Bank Uganda and Chancellor of Nkumba University.

PATRICIA OJANGOLE

Dr Patricia Ojangole, the Managing Director of the Uganda Development Bank (UDB) since 2013, is an influential lady shaping the future of sustainable development finance in Uganda and across the African continent for both men and women.

Ms Ojangole's professional experience as an internal auditor has given her an appreciation for internal controls, risk management, and governance practices, which have helped her ensure that these are appreciated at all levels within UDB. She has improved governance, expanded capital lending, and prioritised women-led enterprises, standing as a symbol of female excellence in high-level banking and institutional reform.



Patricia Ojangole