



Kyateeka listening to Wamara during the launch of the initiative. The project is expected to directly benefit 800-1,000 girls

Graca Machel partners with govt to empower girls

By Rhyman Agaba

According to official reports, roughly 24%–25% of girls aged 15–19 in Uganda are having or pregnant. As a result, many adolescents drop out of school, ending up in early marriages and deprived of opportunities.

As part of the effort to reverse this trend, the Government has partnered with the Graça Machel Trust, a non-governmental organisation run by former South African first lady Graça Machel to empower adolescent girls in Uganda with life skills to enable them to make informed choices under a programme named Pan-African Adolescent Girls' Movement.

Speaking during the launch held in Namugongo, Wakiso district, Juliet Kimotho, the project manager, described the movement as one that intends to enable African girls maximise their potential.

"This is a leadership programme born out of the need to ensure that adolescent girls grow into a new generation of leaders who can make informed decisions about their lives," Kimotho said.

She said the movement started in 2021 in South Africa and has since expanded to 10 countries. The movement is already in South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia and Nigeria.

"Uganda is the 11th country. By

the end of 2026, we aim to reach 16 countries and impact 10 million girls across Africa by 2030 and 20 million by 2035," she said.

Kimotho said so far, the programme has directly reached about 9,000 girls on the continent, with an additional 145,000 engaged through digital platforms.

"In Uganda, the programme is expected to directly benefit between 800 and 1,000 girls in its first year, which commenced this month," she said. Among the areas targeted for training is leadership, mentorship, entrepreneurship, climate action, education, health, food security and peacebuilding.

Mondo Kyateeka, the assistant commissioner for youth and children's affairs who represented the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, welcomed the development, saying investing in girls is critical for development.

"Whenever we see partners coming in to support empowerment initiatives, we are ready to collaborate because investment in girls is investment in the future," Kyateeka said. He noted that the biggest chunk of Uganda's population is made up of young people yet many are dropping out of school due to early pregnancies.

"With 73% of Uganda's population below the age of 30, targeted interventions like this are essential," he added.

THE JOURNEY TO UGANDA

The movement's journey to Uganda followed a request from one girl. Damon Wamara, the executive director of Uganda Child Rights NGO Network, who also chairs the Eastern Africa Child Rights Network, said the movement was initiated following a request from a Ugandan girl who attended the African Climate Summit in Nairobi in 2023.

"One of our girls met Graça Machel and asked her to bring this movement to Uganda. As a network, we followed up to ensure that this request became a reality," Wamara said.

"This movement will enable girls to become leaders and problem-solvers. It will also create a platform for networking, learning and sharing experiences across countries," he noted.



Graca Machel