



WOMEN OF UGANDA NETWORK



Internews
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Strengthening Digital Resilience: Women of Uganda Network (WOUNGNET)'s efforts in countering Online Gender Based Violence.

Online gender-based violence refers to any act that uses technology, primarily the internet, to perpetrate harm, harassment, or discrimination against individuals based on their gender. It manifests in various forms, including but not limited to cyberbullying, revenge porn, doxing, stalking, trolling, hate speech, and threats. With the rise of digital connectivity across Africa, the internet has opened up a world of opportunities for information sharing, economic growth, and social interaction. However, this newfound digital realm has also exposed individuals, particularly women, to a distressing phenomenon known as online gender-based violence (OGBV). Digital technologies have acted as a medium for cultivating detrimental stereotypes and suppressing women's voices. As a result of online abuse and harassment, women and girls are discouraged from online spaces and hence deprived of the opportunities and advantages brought about by digital technologies. OGBV has got many negative impacts on the victims as it normally extends in to the offline spaces further obstructing progress towards gender equality. In some cases, it further leads to depression, psychological distress, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, loss of jobs and physical acts of violence.

Women Of Uganda Network (WOUNGNET) in collaboration with Internews and partner organizations in Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Cameroon and Senegal are running advocacy and awareness raising initiatives on Online Gender Based Violence with a main aim of empowering women Human Right Defenders (HRDs) and journalists in those countries to fully and safely participate, survive and thrive in increasingly digital spaces.

In February 2023, WOUNGNET conducted a training workshop for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), seeking to strengthen advocacy strategies for women's rights and privacy online and ensure that women and girls are able to take legal action against perpetrators of online violence. In the same month, WOUNGNET held a multistakeholder engagement workshop for policymakers, government agencies, CSO's and lawmakers to better understand how women are affected by the cybercrime legislation, focusing on freedom of expression, access to information, women safety online, privacy, and data protection. Additionally, WOUNGNET has also conducted awareness raising activities with a main objective of shifting perception among both women and men and the general public on women's rights online and the impact online violence can have on them and provide women with guidance to help protect themselves online. This has been mainly done by conducting Twitter space discussions,

Radio campaigns on local radio stations, publishing newspaper articles in the local newspapers, videography, and dissemination of public awareness resources on digital platforms.

"We encourage all women and girls to take digital safety into their own hands and keep themselves and their communities safe online, change starts with you. We also request the Government to enact effective cyber laws that protect women and girls online and bring perpetrators of online gender-based violence to book, and further encourage proper and effective implementation of these laws".

Additionally, the Parliament of Uganda should enact a law or introduce a part in the Penal Code Act or the Computer Misuse Act seeking to particularly and precisely criminalize the various forms of online gender-based violence. This is important in ensuring the ingredients of the offense are accurate to what we need to criminalize. Police officers and prosecutors should be sensitized, trained and closely supervised to ensure human rights-centered and gender-sensitive handling of online gender-based violence cases. The police and prosecutors should use the available laws on online abuse, for example offenses of cyber harassment and cyber stalking under the Computer Misuse Act, to prosecute perpetrators of online gender-based violence. The courts of law should normalize suing under pseudonyms for victims and survivors of online gender-based violence to limit further abuse by the media and members of the public.

About WOUNGNET

Women of Uganda Network (WOUNGNET) is a non-governmental organisation initiated in May 2000 by several women's organizations in Uganda to develop the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) among women as tools to share information and address issues collectively. WOUNGNET conducts research on the intersection of gender and technology, analyses internet and ICT policies to ensure that they are gender inclusive; promotes equitable access to information; conducts capacity building on emerging tech and online safety; and uses advocacy as a tool to challenge and shift oppressive patriarchal structures perpetuated online and offline.

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