



WOMEN OF UGANDA NETWORK SECOND QUARTER NEWSLETTER 2024

April – June, 2024

Dear WOUGNET Community,

Welcome to the second quarter edition of the Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) Newsletter! We are excited to bring you the latest updates, insights, and stories from our efforts to promote women's rights, digital empowerment, and social justice across Uganda.

As we continue our journey of empowering women and girls across Uganda, this quarter has been full of impactful engagements, collaborations and renewed commitments to advancing women's digital rights.

From advocating for policy changes that safeguard women's digital rights to participating in international dialogues on digital rights and internet freedom, WOUGNET has been at the forefront of ensuring that the voices of women and girls are heard, especially in the digital space. This quarter, we've also focused on building capacities, creating opportunities for dialogue, and strengthening collaborations with civil society organisations, policymakers, and grassroots communities.

In this issue, we share highlights of our key activities, including training sessions on digital security, participation in high-level forums on women's rights, and workshops aimed at addressing the gender digital divide that hinders women's freedom of expression and access to information. We're excited to reflect on these achievements and look forward to continuing to push for an inclusive and just society where women and girls are enabled to use ICTs for sustainable development. We invite you to explore this edition and join us in celebrating the strides we've made while remaining committed to the work that lies ahead.

Join us as we reflect on our journey, celebrate the strides we have made, and look ahead to the challenges and opportunities that lie before us.

Thank you for being part of our community and supporting the mission of WOUGNET!

Warm Regards,

The WOUGNET Team



About WOUNET

WOUNET, a non-governmental organisation in Uganda, was founded in May 2000 as a result of a meeting among several women's organisations. Our core activities include research on the intersection of gender and technology, analysis of internet and ICT policies to ensure gender inclusivity, promotion of equitable access to information, capacity building on emerging tech and online safety, and advocacy to challenge oppressive patriarchal structures both online and offline.

Our Vision: We envision an inclusive and just society where women and girls can utilise ICTs for sustainable development.

Our Mission: WOUNET's mission is to promote the use of ICTs by women and girls for gender equality and sustainable development.

Our Values: Teamwork, Gender sensitivity, Integrity, Excellence, Commitment, Passion, and Inclusiveness.

Strategic Objectives: Our key result areas for the period 2021 – 2025 encompass:

- Integration and enforcement of gender and rights in government ICT policy processes and programs.
- Ensuring women and girls have access to relevant information in urban and rural areas.
- Empowering communities to use ICTs and advocate for their digital rights.
- Establishing WOUNET as a strong, vibrant, and sustainable centre of Gender and ICT excellence in Africa.

Key Highlights of the Third Quarter (April to June) 2024

EVENTS, CONFERENCES AND WEBINAR

Localisation of Content for Effective Advocacy

As part of our efforts to raise awareness of the challenges women face in expressing themselves and accessing information, we successfully broadcasted spot messages highlighting legal challenges faced by women in enjoying their rights of Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in four major regions of Uganda under the Civil Society in Uganda Participation Program. These broadcasts were made accessible in multiple local languages, ensuring that women from different communities could fully engage with the content and understand the impact of these laws on their everyday lives. To ensure these messages reached diverse audiences, we delivered them in a variety of local languages across the four regions of Uganda (Central, Eastern, Northern and Western). The messages were broadcast in English, Luganda, Lusoga, Langi, Acholi, Rutooro and Kiswahili on Capital FM, Radio One FM, NBS Kodeyo, Voice of Lango, Shine FM and Voice of Tooro respectively.



Women's Involvement in Policy Making Processes

In our continued efforts to bridge the gap between grassroots communities and policymakers, we broadcast live legal empowerment talk shows across the four regions of Uganda i.e., Central, Eastern, Western and Northern). Women in many parts of Uganda still face limitations when it comes to freedom of expression, often due to cultural norms, limited access to

education, and inadequate legal protections. Therefore, these discussions underscored the urgency of integrating these concerns into national and local policy frameworks and the inclusion of women's issues in policy formulation. They were delivered in local languages across four regional radio stations i.e., Radio One FM, Voice of Tooro and Shine FM, making

them accessible to communities often left out of national dialogues.

The interactive format allowed the listeners to engage directly with the panellists including, civil society leaders, policymakers and implementers, legal experts, and journalists, fostering the

exchange of ideas on how women's opinions can shape policy formulation and implementation. The panellists highlighted the challenges women face in expressing themselves freely, accessing reliable information, and participating in decision-making processes.



Caption: A photo of panellists during one of the legal empowerment radio talk shows in Kabarole District at Voice of Tooro

Exploring Policies and Regulations Affecting Women's Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

Freedom of Expression and Access to Information are fundamental human rights for gender inclusivity to exist. However, the efficiency of these rights can be significantly hindered by policies and their implementation. These challenges can be particularly pronounced for women, who already face numerous societal barriers. On 24th May 2024, Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) convened different stakeholders including policymakers, policy implementers, women-led Civil Society organisations (CSOs), journalists, and women human rights defenders during the National Engagement Dialogue under the Civil Society in Uganda Participation Program (CUSP). The dialogue explored how existing laws such as the Computer Misuse Act, 2011 (As amended), Press and Journalist Act Cap 105, and Access to Information Act, 2005 among others impact women's participation in both public and online discourse. Participants highlighted that while there are legal protections in place, the transparent implementation often falls short, leading to a gap between the intended and actual impact of these laws on the experiences of women. A [blog](#) highlighting insights presented during the dialogue was published.



Caption: A photo of participants and consultants during the Bi-annual National Dialogue on Freedom of Expression on 24th May 2024 at Fairway Hotel, Kampala.

Bridging Gaps in Women's Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

In an X(formerly Twitter) chat, "[Bridging Gaps in Women's Freedom of Expression and Access to Information](#)", we brought together gender justice advocates, activists, and digital rights experts to discuss women's challenges in the digital landscape. The chat explored barriers that continue undermining women's access to information and their ability to express themselves freely, particularly online. One of the major challenges highlighted was the increasing gender digital divide, Online Gender-Based Violence, gendered misinformation and disinformation and restrictive laws and restrictions. Participants shared various strategies for addressing these challenges throughout the chat, from increasing digital literacy among women and girls to advocating for stronger legislation against Online Gender-Based Violence. By continuing to have these conversations and advocating for policy changes, we can create a world where women are free to express themselves without fear and have equal access to the information they need to thrive.



Cyber Feminism: Resilience in the Face of Online Gender Backlash and Civic Constrictions

On Thursday, 18th April, under the IDS Countering Backlash project, WOUNET organised a Twitter (X) chat on shrinking civic space and feminist organising online. The participants included representatives from civil society organisations, WHRDs, feminist organisations, human rights organisations, media organisations, academia, and counter-backlash actors. The discussion highlighted the growing challenges faced by feminists and activists in navigating the increasingly restricted digital landscape. Participants shared strategies for maintaining a strong online presence despite the constraints, emphasising the need for solidarity and collaboration across different sectors. The chat also underscored the importance of digital security and the role of technology in empowering feminist movements and gender justice and counter-backlash actors, and the importance of strategizing on effective counter-backlash initiatives.



WOMEN OF UGANDA NETWORK

X Chat!

**Cyber Feminism:
Resilience in the Face of
Online Backlash and
Civic Constrictions**

#CounteringBacklash



18th April, 2024



2:00pm E.A.T.



**COUNTERING
BACKLASH**
DECLAIMING
GENDER JUSTICE



WOMEN OF UGANDA NETWORK

Countering Gender Backlash in the Digital Space

On Thursday, 9th May 2024, WOUGNET organised an X Space under the Countering Backlash project, aiming to engage with gender justice actors, share knowledge, and collect data to track backlash against feminist organising online and the shrinking civic space in Uganda. The event facilitated critical discussions on the current landscape, enabling participants to share experiences and strategies for resilience. Key insights were gathered on the intersection of digital threats and gender-based backlash, which will inform ongoing efforts to support and protect feminist voices in increasingly hostile environments and contribute to the countering backlash research initiative. The session also emphasised the need for collective action to safeguard against online backlash for effective gender justice work to progress smoothly.

Link: <https://x.com/lshmaelthehost/status/1791501960782266380>

https://x.com/LindaEvelyn_N/status/1791500127703617891



Digital Security Training for Gender Justice Actors, Human Rights Defenders and Counter Backlash Actors in Uganda

WOUNET conducted digital security training for Human Rights Defenders, gender justice and counter-backlash actors in Uganda on the 18th of April 2024. The capacity-building training aimed to empower Human Rights Defenders, gender justice advocates and counter-backlash actors to safeguard themselves and their work, while also resisting online gender backlash (related to feminist organising and shrinking civic space). Additionally, this involved identifying the risks and strategies employed by stakeholders to counter backlash within the feminists organising online community, and in the context of shrinking civic space. The participants who were majorly Human Rights Defenders, gender justice advocates and counter-backlash actors were representatives from various feminist organisations, media organisations, women's rights organisations and academia.

Digital security training is indispensable for gender justice actors, counter-backlash activists, and women human rights defenders, as it equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the increasingly complex digital landscape safely and this plays a crucial role in countering gender backlash online. The participants were equipped with knowledge of digital security, which is important in their efforts to counter the countering of backlash in relation to feminists organising online and shrinking civic space. The participants were 32 in number and comprised 72% female participants and 28% male. [Read more in our blog](#)



Caption: Digital security training in session at Fairway Hotel, Kampala

WOUGNET – IDS Countering Backlash Training Workshop on Feminists Organising [online] and Shrinking Civic Space [online]

On 23rd May 2024, WOUGNET conducted a training workshop on feminists organising online and shrinking civic space. The purpose of the training workshop was to facilitate discussions and knowledge-sharing concerning the prevailing erosion of gender equality agendas, particularly focusing on online feminist organising and the shrinking civic space. The workshop also aimed to document policies, events, and incidents related to online backlash, enhancing awareness and comprehension of the contemporary forms of backlash. The insights contributed to the WOUGNET ongoing countering-backlash research on the contextual features of backlash and bolstered local initiatives to counter backlash in Uganda's public, civic, and policy spaces. In attendance were counter-backlash actors, gender justice actors and representatives from civil society.

During the workshop, participants also engaged in group discussion sessions exploring the challenges and opportunities for feminist movements in the digital age in the face of the increasing gender backlash in cyberspaces. They also discussed strategies for resilience and solidarity in the face of backlash, highlighting the importance of digital security and collaborations.

Link: <https://x.com/wougnnet/status/1793651419922280872>



Caption: WOUGNET Training workshop on feminist organising and shrinking civic space in session at Fairway Hotel, Kampala

Artificial Intelligence and Emerging and Emerging Technologies and Their Impact on Civic Space in Africa

According to the Carnegie AI Global Surveillance Index, there is a growing trend among African states to deploy advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) surveillance tools, including smart policing and facial recognition systems, to monitor and track citizens under the guise of addressing security risks. Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) participated in the Digital Rights and Inclusion Forum hosted by Paradigm Initiative in Accra, Ghana, from April 23-25, 2024. At this influential event, the [International Center for Not-for-Profit Law \(ICNL\)](https://www.icnl.org/) organised a compelling panel discussion titled “Artificial Intelligence and Other Emerging Technologies and Their Impact on Civil Society.” Moderated by ICNL’s Senior Legal Advisor for Africa, Florence Nakazibwe, the panel featured four distinguished speakers including Sandra Aceng, our Executive Director, a representative from UN Human Rights Kenya, African Commission on Human and People’s Rights and Paradigm Initiative. The panel discussed the profound impact of these technologies on civic space in Africa, balancing the opportunities they present against the significant challenges and threats they pose to civil society.

Read more on our website: <https://wougnet.org/artificial-intelligence-and-emerging-technologies-and-their-impact-on-civic-space-in-africa/>



Caption: Our Executive Director during a panel discussion at Digital Rights and Inclusion Forum

Urban-rural Digital Divide: Connecting the Unconnected

Uganda presents a stark example of the rural-urban digital divide in terms of Internet usage. In 2019, Research ICT Africa [reported](#) that Uganda has a huge urban-rural gap in Internet use of 70 per cent, where only nine percent of Ugandans living in rural areas have access to the Internet and about a third (30%) of urban area dwellers use it. Only two countries – Rwanda (77%) and Mozambique (87%) – have greater urban-rural Internet access gaps. Multiple factors, including the lack of electrical and ICT infrastructure in rural areas, economic disparities, digital literacy gaps, geographical challenges, policy and regulatory issues, socio-cultural factors, and the unavailability of technology often exacerbate this digital divide. Addressing these issues is vital for achieving digital inclusivity. During the Digital Rights and

Inclusion Forum in Accra, Ghana, Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) organised a panel discussion titled *"Connect the Unconnected: Strengthening Women's Access to Rural Broadband Connectivity in Africa"*. The panel featured distinguished speakers such as Josephine Miliza from the Association for Progressive Communications, Iribagiza David from WOUGNET, Eugene Masiku from Open Foundation West Africa and Stephen Fosu from Step Network.

The discussions highlighted the importance of continuous efforts and collaborative strategies to bridge the digital divide. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the lessons learned, stakeholders can make significant progress toward inclusive digital access for all.

Find more insights shared during the panel discussion on our website: <https://wougnet.org/two-months-after-drif-2024-a-reminder-of-our-commitment-to-connect-the-unconnected/>



Education and Collaboration

WOUGNET was honoured to participate in a half-day stakeholders consultative meeting on the National Development Plan Four (NDP IV) held on Friday 21st June 2024 at Hilton Garden Inn, which was organised by UWONET. The purpose of the meeting was to create a platform for stakeholders to contribute and provide input to the Gender and Equity issues paper

that informed the NDPIV with the overarching goal of advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowering (GEWE). The engagement enhanced collaboration and built synergies for women's rights and Gender Equality in national policy development, implementation and monitoring.



Caption: Participants pose for a photo at the stakeholders' consultative meeting on the National Development Plan Four (NDP IV)

14th Consumer Parliament: Addressing ICT Challenges and Enhancing Communication Services in Uganda

WOUNET was delighted to attend the 14th Consumer Parliament, an annual event organised by the Uganda Communications Commission, in the Kabale and Kisoro districts respectively. Under the theme "Promoting Impactful use of ICTs", participants had a platform to engage with communication service providers and regulators on the quality of communication services and products being provided in the country. Some communication challenges raised included: high prices for data and other communication products, poor signal, weather challenges, need for technology upgrades. From the consumer point of view, challenges included:

- Fast data depletion
- Unsolicited messages
- Online Fraudulent
- Issue of Conmen
- Paying money to track stolen phones
- Police letter needed for SIM card Communication registration

Participants included Internet Service Providers, consumer organisations, local government leaders, private businesses and the public at large. The main purpose of the event is to provide a forum for consumers to engage with communication service providers and regulators on the quality of communication services and products being provided.



Caption: WOUNET at the 14th Communications Consumer Parliament in Kabale District

Gender Digital Divide: Empowering Women in The Digital Space

Globally, 70% of men use the internet, compared with 65% of women. The gender gap is highest in Africa, where 40% of men and 30% of women use the internet. A survey by the [World Wide Web](#) found that only 19% of women in Uganda are online, compared to 27% of men. This gender digital gap is due to factors like low income for women to buy data compared to men, limited access to digital literacy, domestic roles and responsibilities for women, and low access to the internet and technology due to high costs, among others.

These statistics clearly show the urgency to bridge the gap in women's access to digital tools and the internet. Read more in our blog session: <https://wougnet.org/gender-digital-divide-empowering-women-in-the-digital-space/>



Community Capacity Building

WOUNET-NetLabsUG! Capacity building training in Apac district

In June, under the Rural Voices project supported by WACC - Global and APC, WOUNET conducted a community capacity-building workshop and digital literacy training in Apac District. This initiative aimed to strengthen women's access to enhanced rural broadband connectivity in Northern Uganda. The local community capacity-building workshop on basic networking and troubleshooting aimed to equip participants with the skills needed to identify, plan, and resolve network issues independently, reducing the need for secretarial support. The digital literacy training aimed to enhance the local community's skills in gender awareness, content curation, entrepreneurship, and financial management. This effort was intended to ensure the network's sustainability and promote long-term connectivity for the rural communities hence enhancing digital inclusion in Apac district.

Women of Uganda Network and netLabs Uganda Rural Community Broadband Network project is dedicated to delivering meaningful and inclusive internet access to rural communities, with a special focus on women and girls.

Social media links: <https://www.radiocomnetu.org/radioapac/2024/06/09/wougnet-trains-community-internet-project-partners-on-digital-literacy/>

<https://wougnet.org/projects/strengthening-womens-access-to-enhanced-rural-broadband-connectivity-in-uganda/>



Caption: A facilitator during the community capacity-building workshop and digital literacy training in Apac District.

Strengthening Research on Telecommunication and Networking Technologies

Due to increased internet engagement, usage, and demand from targeted rural communities in Apac, WOUNET received support from the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and WACC to strengthen the Rural Community Broadband Network (RCBN) and expand the network from 10 to 12 sites. The main objective of the project is to pilot a Rural Broadband Connectivity Model that supports the community based on their involvement in socio-economic activities and service delivery, such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, health, education, women, and youth.

Supported by the Government of Uganda through the Research and Innovation Fund at Makerere University, [APC](#) and [WACC](#), this project has enabled the implementation of Rural Voices Project activities in Apac District, Northern Uganda.

Find out more in this [blog](#).



Caption: Network sites being installed at Atopi Market and the Kubere Information Centre, supported by APC and WACC.

Upholding Our Core Values

As we conclude the second quarter, Women of Uganda Network (WOUNET) celebrates the impactful strides made towards advancing women's digital rights and inclusion. From capacity-building workshops to policy advocacy and collaborative discussions, we have seen sustainable growth in our collective effort to promote the use of ICTs by women and girls for gender equality and sustainable development. This quarter's achievements highlight the power of collaboration, knowledge sharing, and amplifying women's voices in the digital space.

We remain committed to driving this change forward, ensuring that women and girls across Uganda not only have access to information but can thrive in the digital world. Let's continue to inspire, innovate, and lead as we move toward a more inclusive future. Stay tuned for more exciting initiatives in the months ahead!

Sincerely,



Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) Team

Women of Uganda Network

Plot 67, Bukasa Road, Namuwongo
P.O. Box 138387, Kampala (Uganda)
+256 394823109

info@wougnet.org

<https://www.wougnet.org>