

WOMEN OF UGANDA NETWORK (WOUNET) THIRD QUARTER 2024



July - September, 2024

Dear WOUNET Community,

Welcome to the third quarter edition of the Women of Uganda Network (WOUNET) 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 collaborations, sustained advocacy and renewed commitments to WOUNET's vision of promoting a gender inclusive digital space Women of Uganda. This quarter's activities have focused on advancing women's digital skills and digital well-being across the nation.

This quarter saw diverse multi- stakeholders brought together to reinforce the value of collective action in addressing the shrinking civic space and underscore the urgent need for sustained advocacy to protect women's rights online and counter backlash in the digital spaces strengthened our research efforts on gender-backlash and counter backlash within the Ugandan context.

From advocating for policy changes that safeguard women's digital rights to participating in international dialogues on digital rights and internet freedom, WOUNET 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 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 WOUNET!

Warm Regards,

The WOUNET Team

About us!

WOUGNET is a non-governmental organization in Uganda that resulted from a meeting with several women's organizations held in the year 2000. This meeting led to WOUGNET's establishment in May 2000. WOUGNET conducts research on the intersection of gender and technology, analyzes 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.

Our Vision

We envision an inclusive and just society where women and girls are enabled to use ICTs for sustainable development.

Our Mission

WOUGNET'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.

Our Strategic Objectives

Key result areas for concentration by WOUGNET for the period 2021 – 2025 are:

- Gender and rights are integrated and enforced in government ICT policy processes and programs,
- Women and girls have access to relevant information in urban and rural areas,
- Communities are empowered to use ICTs and demand for their digital rights; and by 2025.
- WOUGNET is a strong, vibrant and sustainable center of Gender and ICT excellence in Africa.

Key Highlights of the Third Quarter (July - September) 2024

EVENTS, WEBINAR AND CONFERENCES

Countering Backlash in the Civic Space and Feminist Organising Online

Under the Countering Backlash Project, we conducted a policy dialogue on shrinking civic space online and feminists organising online. The dialogue brought together civil society actors to discuss and debate the current trend of backlash in the civic space and feminist organising [online] in Uganda, exploring effective resistance strategies and ways to push back. Through this dialogue, we strengthened our research efforts on gender backlash and counter backlash within the Ugandan context. The counter-backlash and gender justice participants included law practitioners, representatives from media organisations, academia, feminist organisations, women Human Rights Defenders, and the wider civil society.

The discussion also focused on how restrictive digital policies impact women-led organisations and their ability to mobilise online. Participants highlighted the importance of fostering safe digital spaces for feminist advocacy and collaboration, in order to counter backlash. Practical solutions were shared, including the need for cyber law reforms, building digital literacy among activists and ensuring access to secure online platforms. This dialogue also reinforced the value of collective action in addressing the shrinking civic space and underscored the urgent need for sustained advocacy to protect women's rights online and counter backlash in the digital spaces.

Find out more in this [blog](#)



Group photo of participants at the WOUGNET – Countering Backlash policy dialogue

Multi-stakeholder convening on Shrinking civic space [online] and feminists organising [online]

Gender backlash persists as a significant issue in hindering the achievement of gender equality.



This backlash encompasses various forms directed at feminist activists and defenders, including the use of language, phrases, and images that objectify women, strict regulation related to gender equality, reproductive rights, media misrepresentation, backlash against women in leadership and censorship of discussions on gender activism.

A group photo of various stakeholders at the WOUGNET Multi-stakeholder convening on Shrinking civic space [online] and feminists organising [online]

In the month of August, we held a multi-stakeholder convening on the shrinking civic space online and feminist online organising in Uganda. The goal of the convening was to discuss evidence on the backlash against feminist organising in digital spaces, as well as the broader issue of shrinking civic space online, while exploring effective mechanisms to counter this backlash. The event brought together a diverse group of participants, including gender justice advocates, policymakers, law enforcers, legal practitioners, women human rights defenders, representatives from media organisations, and feminist groups.

During the discussions, participants emphasised the growing threat of online harassment against women that is causing backlash in the digital spaces, which further stifles women's efforts to mobilise and advocate for gender justice. The convening also highlighted the need for stronger legal frameworks that protect activists' digital rights. Additionally, practical strategies were proposed to build resilience within feminist movements, including capacity-building workshops and digital security training. The convening also provided a platform for participants to discuss policy mapping questions that were documented into reports.

[Find out more insights from the convening here.](#)

WOUGNET-Counter Backlash Second Observatory Meetings

In August and September, we held observatory meetings with a panel of WOUGNET observatory members to discuss the evolving dynamics of counter backlash and gender backlash within Uganda. Guided by a standard set of questions, the meetings focused on the theme of shrinking civic space [online] in Uganda, exploring how counter-backlash efforts are unfolding across different spaces, examining the roles of various actors involved in both backlash and counter-backlash. The meetings also highlighted the opportunities and challenges for building cross-movement coalitions. Additionally, observatory members analysed how practices within these spaces are evolving over time, providing insights into the shifting dynamics.



A group photo of observatory members during one of the observatory meetings

Explore more in this [blog](#).

Enhancing Civil Society Participation in Uganda

In our continued efforts to promote the use of ICTs by women and girls for gender equality and sustainable development, we organised the National Legal Empowerment Hackathon under the theme, “Innovate for Freedom of Expression”. The hackathon was a dynamic, solutions-driven event that brought together innovators, legal experts, technologists, and activists to address challenges related to freedom of expression and access to information. Under the Civil Society in Uganda Participation program, *the event* aimed at fostering digital innovation for social change. With a primary focus on freedom of expression, the hackathon brought together young innovators, activists, and tech enthusiasts from across Uganda to create tools that champion safe, open, and inclusive online spaces for all, especially women.

The hackathon focused on addressing the barriers that limit the rights of Freedom of and Expression and Access to Information, highlighted the urgency of these issues and the potential of Ugandan youths to be agents of change in their communities and tackle real-world issues through technology, teamwork, and community-based solutions, particularly for women and marginalized groups.

Contestants collaborated in teams to ideate, prototype, and present solutions that promote open dialogue, counteract online harassment, and improve access to credible information. Ideas ranged from apps designed to combat misinformation to platforms that empower women to share their stories without fear of repercussions. Many of these projects are set to receive continued support from WOUGNET, with the goal of bringing these concepts to a broader audience and integrating them into ongoing advocacy efforts.



The hackathon reflects WOUGNET's broader mission to leverage digital technologies to advance women's rights, address gender-based violence online, and foster an inclusive digital environment for all.

A photo of one of the hackathon winners with the judges

EDUCATION AND COLLABORATION

Fostering Inclusive Digital Environments for Women and Girls in the 21st Century

While the internet continues to serve as a vital tool for feminist organisations to counter backlash, there has been insufficient effort to ensure that communication platforms protect the freedom of speech, expression and organising online.

On 14th August, we hosted a radio talk show on Radio One FM 90, one of the most widely listened-to stations in Kampala, Uganda. The talk show centred on the dynamics of counter-backlash and gender backlash in the country, engaging listeners in discussions about how gender backlash manifests in online spaces and strategies to counter it within civic, policy, and popular arenas. The show also provided an excellent platform for WOUGNET to raise awareness about the Countering Backlash project, broadening its reach to a larger and more diverse audience.



A Photo of speakers at the WOUGNET-Countering Backlash radio talk show at Radio One studios

During the talk show, we emphasised the importance of fostering inclusive digital environments that empower women to freely express their views and participate in civic discourse without fear of backlash. We also highlighted the need for policy reforms that protect women's rights online and promote gender equality in digital spaces. Listeners shared their own experiences and perspectives through the station's digital platforms, creating an interactive dialogue that further strengthened public understanding of the issue. By utilising the airwaves, we were able to engage new audiences, and spark critical conversations around Countering Backlash.

Validating Gender and Equity Priorities in the National Development Plan IV



A photo of the session during the validation meeting

Our staff participated in a validation meeting of the NDP4 Gender and Equity Issues Paper organised by Uganda Women's Network (UWONET).

This event was attended by key stakeholders and experts who reviewed the draft to ensure it accurately reflects the gender and equity priorities critical to national progress. The meeting also provided space for civil society, government officials, and gender specialists to recommend actionable strategies for an inclusive national plan.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Building Local Capacity in Digital Literacy

Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) in collaboration with Kubere Information Centre hosted a series of engagements leading up to the Sustainable Technical Community event on 30th August. This initiative aimed to foster the growth and sustainability of the emerging technical community in Apac District, Northern Uganda.

These engagements also focused on building local capacity in digital literacy, ensuring that community members can fully utilise the internet for education, business, and civic participation. Participants discussed innovative solutions to enhance digital infrastructure in the region and shared best practices for maintaining sustainable connectivity.

The WOUGNET technical community is dedicated to promoting inclusive and comprehensive internet accessibility in Northern Uganda, leveraging WOUGNET's established Rural Connectivity Broadband Network sites and digital hubs.

Together, we are bridging the digital divide and empowering underserved communities with vital digital tools.



A group photo of participants after a capacity building workshop in Apac district

Strengthening Civil Societies Freedom of Expression and Access to Information



With the increasing technological advancements, digital platforms offer a powerful tool for amplifying women's voices and ensuring their participation in policy-making. However, access to these platforms can be limited by factors such as digital illiteracy, affordability, and internet connectivity. In light of this, we held an X(formerly Twitter) chat, "Her Right to Know: Strategies for Inclusive Policy-Making Processes", as part of the Civil Society

in Uganda Participation program, focused on strategies to make policymaking processes more inclusive. Participants engaged in discussions aimed at providing strategies for gender inclusive policy-making processes. This Twitter chat also underscored the importance of digital platforms in driving advocacy, ensuring transparency, and creating avenues for public participation.

Following the Twitter Chat, we authored a blog exploring the various strategies highlighted for making policy formulation more inclusive and responsive to the needs of diverse communities. The blog explores the importance of inclusivity in governance and offers practical steps to improve stakeholder engagement. Visit our website to read [blog](#).

Exploring the Intersection of Data, Social Justice and Technology in Uganda



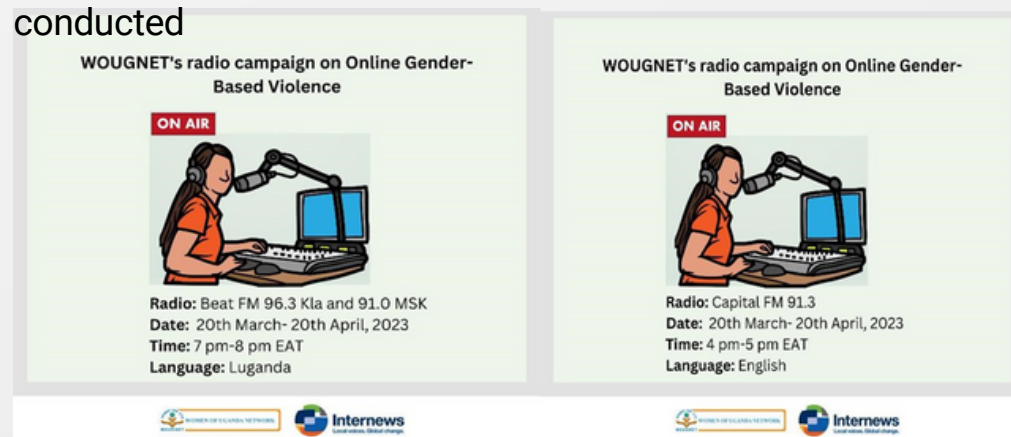
Women of Uganda Network(WOUGNET) together with the Data Protection and Privacy Office (DPPPO), Pollicy, Association for Progressive Communications(APC) and other practitioners gathered at the Protea Hotel in Kampala to engage in the Uganda Internet Governance Forum 2024 and specifically participated in a compelling

panel session titled “One Step Further: Data Justice Insights and Lessons from Uganda and Beyond”. The session aimed to dissect the emerging field of data justice by examining how data governance intersects with social justice and the broader implications for the community, policymakers and developers. The discussions also underscored the importance of community involvement in the data lifecycle, the challenges of implementing data protection laws, and the need for continued advocacy to address power imbalances.

Find out more insights from the discussion in this [blog](#).

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Violence has flourished to the point where for many girls, abuse is a day-to-day reality, and many of them are subjected to abuse every time they participate in online discussions, which leads to mental health problems. We believe the more we raise awareness, the faster we shall eliminate violence against women and girls online. Under the FEMTECH project, conducted



awareness raising campaigns in both English and the local language (Luagnda) in order to create awareness about online gender-based violence, causes and protection mechanisms.

The campaigns were run on two local radio stations (Capital FM and Beat FM) from March to April 2023. The listeners were able to understand the impacts and protection mechanisms against online gender-based violence. [More info!](#)

The Impact of Spyware on Civic Space and Feminist Organizing in Uganda

Uganda traces the infiltration of Spyware back to 2011 following the presidential elections, and the proliferation of this technology poses a significant threat to civic space and feminist organising in Uganda.

On July 17, 2024, during DataFest Africa in Nairobi, WOUGNET held a workshop titled “The impact of spyware on civic space and feminist organising in Uganda.” The panel featured prominent voices from across East Africa and beyond, including Angela Minayo, an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya who also serves as the Digital Rights and Policy Programs Officer at Article19 Eastern Africa; Esther Nyapendi, a Technical Support Officer at Women Of Uganda Network (WOUGNET); Tabitha Wangechi, the Founder of Digital Rurals; and David Iribagiza, a Programme Manager at WOUGNET.

The discussion highlighted the role of spyware manufacturers and the need for greater accountability in the surveillance technology industry. Minayo argued that companies selling these tools should be held to higher human rights standards, especially when selling to countries with poor human rights records and urged the need for more research, better legal frameworks, and stronger digital security practices.

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



Gender Digital Divide: Empowering Women in the Digital Space

Globally, 70% of men use the internet, compared to 65% of women. The gender gap is highest in Africa, where 40% of men and 30% of women use the internet. A survey by 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, low access to the internet and technology due to high costs, among others.

In a blog titled “Gender Digital Divide: Empowering Women in the Digital Space”, it was highlighted that many women do not know their digital rights which has lead to online harassment is lack of knowledge about cyberbullying laws and online safety resources makes individuals more vulnerable to harassment and abuse, increases the risk of hacking, identity theft, and other cyber threats, which forces some women to run away from social media thus increasing gender digital divide.



Upholding our core values

As we conclude the third quarter of the year, we reflect on the strides we have made together with our partners, members and allies in advancing digital rights and gender equity in Uganda. This quarter has been marked by remarkable achievements, from amplifying the voices of women in technology to addressing the challenges they face in accessing and utilizing ICTs effectively.

Our resilience and collaboration have remained at the core of our success. Through capacity-building workshops, advocacy campaigns, and the implementation of digital solutions tailored for women, we have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of technology in bridging gender gaps and driving sustainable development.

We are especially inspired by the stories of women who, despite systemic challenges, have embraced digital tools to enrich their livelihoods, advocate for their rights, and uplift their communities. These stories remind us that our mission is not just about technology but also about building a more inclusive and equitable society.

As we prepare to enter the final quarter of the year, we encourage you—our partners, supporters, and stakeholders—to continue walking this journey with us. Together, we can shape a future where every woman and girl in Uganda has the opportunity to thrive in the digital age.

Thank you for your unwavering support, and we look forward to even greater collaborations in the months to come.

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