

Women in Journalism and Politics:

Countering Gendered Disinformation in Uganda

March, 2025



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List of Acronyms

APC	Association for Progressive Communications
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UN	United Nations
WOUGNET	Women of Uganda Network
FTF	Female Technology Foundation
AI	Artificial Intelligence
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
EU	European Union
AU	African Union
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
KII	Key Informant Interview
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technology for Development

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Executive summary

This documentation report, **Women in Journalism and Politics: Countering Gendered Disinformation in Uganda**, examines the pervasive issue of gendered disinformation and its impacts on female journalists and women in political leadership. Gendered disinformation, often characterised by false narratives, stereotypes, and targeted harassment, undermines women's credibility and discourages their participation in the public and political spheres. This challenge is particularly critical in Uganda, where the rise of online abuse and disinformation targeting women in leadership positions threatens democratic processes and gender equality as Uganda nears the 2026 general and presidential elections.¹

The report adopts a comprehensive approach, documenting gendered disinformation's nature, platforms, and mechanisms. Thematic areas covered include the prevalence of gendered disinformation and its impact on women's political and journalistic participation. Insights are drawn from global and national case studies, highlighting the experiences of women leaders and journalists who have faced targeted disinformation campaigns. The report also lays the groundwork for a needs assessment that informs future interventions, including capacity-building workshops to equip women in leadership and journalism with the skills to navigate online spaces safely and counter disinformation effectively, including an informative education guide on gendered disinformation. Findings reveal that gendered disinformation contributes to diminished political participation, eroded public trust in women leaders, and polarisation of democratic processes. Specific to Uganda, the upcoming 2026 general elections spotlight the urgent need for interventions, as women journalists and politicians face intensified online abuse, false narratives, and manipulated content aimed at discrediting their roles.

Key recommendations from this documentation emphasise the need for gender-sensitive legal frameworks, strengthened digital literacy initiatives, ethical media practices, and greater accountability among digital platforms.

¹ Amplified abuse Kakande, A., Achieng, G., Iyer, N., Nyamwire, B., Nalubega, S., and Mwendwa, I. (2021) *Amplified Abuse: Report on Online Violence Against Women in the 2021 Uganda General Election*. <https://policy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Amplified-Abuse-Report-on-online-violence-Against-women-in-the-2021-general-elections.pdf>

Introduction

Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET), established in 2000, is a leading non-profit organisation in Uganda dedicated to empowering women through the strategic use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). WOUGNET has consistently championed initiatives that bridge the digital gender divide, promote women's rights online, and address critical challenges such as online violence and disinformation targeting women and journalists. Recognising the pressing issue of gendered disinformation, WOUGNET has stepped forward to address this growing challenge under a project funded by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC).

This documentation report is a direct response to the increasing prevalence of gendered disinformation in Uganda, particularly against women politicians and journalists. Such disinformation campaigns exploit societal biases, leveraging false narratives to undermine women's credibility, discourage their participation in public life, and erode trust in democratic processes. Given the rising influence of social media and digital technologies in shaping public discourse, the need to counter these harmful practices has become urgent.²

² Elizka Relief Foundation. *Gender Dimensions of Disinformation and its Effects on African Women's Right to Opinion and Expression*

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/cfis/gender-justice/subm-a78288-gendered-disinformation-cso-elizka-relief-foundation.docx#:~:text=In%20this%20context%2C%20more%20than,poor%20accessibility%20to%20information%20and>

Methodology

The report provides a comprehensive analysis of gendered disinformation affecting women in politics and media in Uganda, synthesising findings from key informant interviews and a needs assessment focus group discussions held on January 31, 2025. This was followed by a roundtable discussion and capacity-building training held with female journalists and politicians on March 6th and 7th, 2025. The report also provides cases from social media platforms, news articles, and reports from advocacy groups. It also involved examining the narratives, language, and imagery used in gendered disinformation and highlighting the lived experiences of women in Uganda's public sphere, focusing on the growing challenge of gendered disinformation, its impact on digital participation, media visibility, and electoral engagement, while using specific examples to illustrate its real-world consequences. The key informant interviews involved 15 participants, including five female journalists and 10 female politicians. The virtual needs assessment was attended by 19 participants, including 10 female journalists, two male journalists, and seven female politicians.

The integration of the findings into actionable recommendations aims to enhance the resilience of women leaders and journalists, amplify their voices in public discourse, and contribute to shaping a more inclusive and equitable digital landscape in Uganda. The report is foundational in addressing gendered disinformation, building on WOUGNET's commitment to empowering women and promoting gender equality through ICTs.

Documentation Objectives

The objectives of the documentation were to:

1. Examine the nature, scope, and key narratives of gendered disinformation targeting women in political leadership and journalism in Uganda.
2. To analyse the primary platforms and mechanisms through which gendered disinformation spreads, assessing their role in shaping public perceptions of women in leadership and media.
3. To assess the impact of gendered disinformation on women's political participation, professional credibility, and personal well-being through surveys and interviews with affected individuals.
4. To identify key challenges, gaps, and legal or institutional barriers in addressing gendered disinformation and propose actionable interventions for policymakers, civil society, and media stakeholders.

Understanding Gendered Disinformation

Gendered disinformation is widespread, with all interviewees acknowledging its impact on journalism and politics. Women face disinformation campaigns designed to undermine their professional capabilities by focusing on their personal lives, gender, and appearance.

- **Politicians:** Women in politics often face sexualised disinformation, fabricated rumours, and smear campaigns, particularly when running against male counterparts or pursuing leadership positions.
- **Journalists:** Female journalists are subjected to gendered stereotypes that question their professional abilities, with their credibility frequently undermined by online harassment and false narratives.

For this project

“Gendered disinformation refers to the spread of deceptive or inaccurate information and images against women political leaders, journalists, and public figures, following storylines that draw on misogyny and stereotypical gender roles. It aims to discredit women's professional achievements and personal character.”³

However, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), **gendered disinformation** refers to the spread of false or misleading information that targets explicitly or affects individuals based on their gender or reinforces harmful gender stereotypes. It involves deliberately disseminating disinformation, misinformation, or deceptive content that aims to manipulate perceptions, beliefs, or behaviours related to gender. For example, it can include false narratives about women's abilities, roles, or experiences, as well as stereotypes or derogatory depictions of marginalised genders to manipulate public opinion, reinforce gender biases, and undermine progress towards gender equality.⁴ Gendered disinformation is a distinct issue that exists at the crossroads of various concepts, and clarifying it is essential for developing more effective responses.⁵

Gendered disinformation is a specific type of online gender-related abuse that uses false or misleading narratives about women to deter their involvement in public life. It features three key elements typical of online disinformation: false information, harmful intent, and organised efforts.⁶

³ Lucina Di Meco & Kristina Wilfore. (March 8, 2021). Gendered disinformation is a national security problem
Wilfore <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/gendered-disinformation-is-a-national-security-problem/>

⁴ Syrian Female Journalists Network. Submission of information for Report on freedom of expression and the gender dimensions of disinformation
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/cfis/gender-justice/subm-a78288-gendered-disinformation-cso-sfjn.docx#>

⁵ Paula Martins. (3 May 2024 | Updated 8 November 2024). Placing "gender" in disinformation <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/placing-gender-disinformation>

⁶ Ibid <https://www.apc.org/en/project/placing-gendered-disinformation>

There is no universally accepted definition of gendered disinformation. The term is frequently used interchangeably with Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence(TFGBV) and is often associated with the gendered aspects of disinformation. Disinformation lacks a single consensus definition and is usually confused with related concepts such as propaganda and advocacy promoting discrimination, violence, and hostility. The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression has raised alarms about the increasing use of manipulation, deception, and misinformation, which aim to create confusion. These conceptual difficulties highlight the fact that disinformation is a complex issue.⁷

Disinformation breeds confusion and stifles freedom of expression, undermining trust in public discourse and civic engagement. Many individuals fear online harassment or becoming targets of disinformation, leading them to withdraw from critical public debates. As a result, the landscape becomes muddled, discouraging open discussion on vital issues.⁸

⁷ <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/placing-gender-disinformation>

⁸ <https://www.apc.org/en/project/placing-gendered-disinformation>

The contextual background of Gendered Disinformation

History of Gendered Disinformation

Gendered disinformation targeting women in journalism has evolved. Beginning in the early 20th century, women journalists faced gendered biases in print media for speaking against traditional roles. As broadcast media emerged, women were targeted through state-run media and disinformation campaigns meant to discredit those reporting on gender and social issues.

The internet and social media rise in the late 20th and early 21st centuries marked a turning point. These platforms allowed political actors and extremist groups to spread disinformation and systematically target women journalists and politicians. Women involved in politics, media, and activism often face unfounded accusations regarding their personal lives, professional abilities, or ethical standards. This issue exploits deep-rooted gender biases to increase hostility, deter participation, and perpetuate systemic inequalities.

Global Impact of Gendered Disinformation

Gendered disinformation has become a critical issue that impacts women's participation in global politics and journalism. This form of disinformation seeks to undermine women's credibility by spreading false or misleading narratives based on gender, often portraying women as unfit for leadership roles. The examples below highlight the far-reaching consequences of gendered disinformation and its role in silencing women's voices globally.⁹

- **Kamala Harris – 2020 U.S. Presidential Election**

During the 2020 U.S. presidential elections, Vice President Kamala Harris was subjected to targeted disinformation campaigns questioning her legitimacy as a potential Democratic Party Presidential Nominee and later as President Joe Biden's running mate, for example, attacks on her criminal justice record, as well as allusions that she got to the top of U.S. politics through favours from powerful men, among the most trite of allegations in the misogyny playbook. These campaigns portrayed her as unqualified for the office, often focusing on personal attacks rather than her capabilities.¹⁰

- **Maria Ressa – Philippines**

Maria Ressa, a journalist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has been one of the most prominent victims of gendered disinformation. Ressa, who has long been an outspoken critic of the Philippine government, faced a concerted disinformation campaign aimed at discrediting her journalistic work.¹¹

⁹ (Ellen Judson, Asli Atay, Alex Krasodonski-Jones, et al). *Engendering Hate: The Countours of State-Aligned Gendered Disinformation Online* <https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/evidence/engendering-hate-the-countours-of-state-aligned-gendered-disinformation-online/>

¹⁰ Lucina Di Meco & Kristina Wilfore. (March 8, 2021). *Gendered disinformation is a national security problem* Wilfore <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/gendered-disinformation-is-a-national-security-problem/>

¹¹ Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Maria Ressa speaks on disinformation and democracy. <https://globalreportingcentre.org/updates/nobel-peace-prize-laureate-maria-ressa-speaks-on-disinformation-and-democracy/>

Gendered Disinformation in Africa

Gendered disinformation (GD) in Africa is uniquely shaped by the continent's complex political, social, and cultural dynamics, mainly targeting political women, female journalists, and activists who challenge entrenched power structures. GD in Africa is frequently tied to ethnic, religious, and political lines, making it more local and specific.¹²

- **Kenya** (2022 Elections): Female political candidates like Martha Karua were targeted with manipulated videos and false narratives to undermine their leadership credibility. Despite her two-decade experience in the political arena, these disinformation campaigns perpetrated against her questioned her competence based on her marital status. These disinformation campaigns reinforced harmful stereotypes, discouraging women from pursuing political careers. Despite introducing the Two-Thirds Gender Rule, only 11% of candidates were women in the 2022 elections.¹³

Gladys Kamuren faced disinformation campaigns that targeted her personal life, including false claims about neglecting her duties as a wife and mother. These narratives undermined her political career and were rooted in cultural norms that discredit women in politics.¹⁴

- **Libya:** Hanan Al Barassi, a female politician and activist, was assassinated after being targeted by gendered disinformation for exposing corruption. Over 70% of Libyan citizens oppose women in top government positions, reflecting deep-seated societal resistance to female leadership and exacerbating gender inequality in the country.¹⁵

- **South Africa (2024 Elections):** Gendered disinformation was used to challenge the integrity of women leaders during the elections. Political parties and influencers spread disinformation aimed at discrediting female politicians, polarising political discourse, and undermining the inclusion of women in political decision-making.¹⁶
- **Togo:** According to Nadège Boumogue's report, Trends in Gendered Disinformation, during Togo Elections, 36.5% of political claims in Togo were categorised as gendered disinformation, including sexist remarks like;¹⁷
 - "Since when do women give orders?"
 - "A woman at the head of a country can never manage all situations alone."
 - "It's a crime against humanity, I think. What exactly do women want to achieve in politics?" (Boumogue, n.d. 2024, p. 28)
- **In Nigeria:** Natasha Akpoti, a Senator representing Kogi Central in the National Assembly, has faced coordinated online attacks, including false claims linking her to terrorism, which are strategically spread to undermine her political career. These fabricated accusations often lead to offline consequences, including physical threats and attacks. Such disinformation campaigns not only damage the reputations of women like Akpoti but also deter other women from engaging in active politics.¹⁸

¹² African centre for strategic studies. (March 13, 2024). Mapping a Surge of Disinformation in Africa <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mapping-a-surge-of-disinformation-in-africa/>

¹³ An article published by the Institute of Development Studies on Weaponizing gendered disinformation across Africa <https://www.ids.ac.uk/news/weaponising-gendered-disinformation-across-africa/>

¹⁴ Florence Chepkorir. (October 28, 2024). Gendered disinformation: An enemy to the Kenyan women in politics <https://missingperspectives.com/posts/gendered-disinformation-an-enemy-to-the-kenyan-women-in-politics/>

¹⁵ Elizka Relief Foundation; Gender dimensions of Disinformation and its effects on African women's rights to opinion

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/cfis/gender-justice/subm-a78288-gendered-disinformation-cso-elizka-relief-foundation.docx#:~:text=In%20this%20context%2C%20more%20than,poor%20accessibility%20to%20information%20and>

¹⁶ Campaign on digital ethics: subverting the truth for power <https://www.code-sa.org/post/new-report-subverting-truth-for-power>

¹⁷ Trends of gendered disinformation during Togo elections

<https://theaajp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/AWJP.-Trends-in-Gendered-Disinformation-During-Togo-Elections.pdf>

¹⁸ FactsMatterNG. (Dec 3, 2024). Online attacks against women like Natasha Akpoti

<https://x.com/FactsMatterNg/status/1863964098708258935>

Gendered Disinformation in Uganda

In Uganda, gendered disinformation remains one of the weapons used by the state and non-state actors to pose a significant barrier to women's participation in journalism and politics, as well as gender-diverse groups and activists. With a rise in access to the internet and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, women in journalism and politics have experienced a surge in targeted gendered disinformation. Even with the existence of some laws like the Computer Misuse Act of 2011 (as amended), these have not been enough to protect women politicians and journalists from disinformation, which exploits gender-based narratives to harm and discredit women. The growing influence of misogynistic and conservative perspectives started to impact the political and social landscape, intensifying the difficulties encountered by activists, especially women, who challenged the existing norms.¹⁹ Misogynistic rhetoric, driven by patriarchal beliefs, has elevated figures such as Godfrey Kuteesa, known for disseminating hate and false information about women in Uganda. Daily, you might come across posts such as "Your husband shall rule over you!"²⁰

Gendered Disinformation During Elections

In Uganda, gendered disinformation has particularly intensified during election periods, when political competition is at its peak. Female politicians are often the targets of organised disinformation campaigns designed to undermine their leadership capabilities and damage their public reputations. For instance, in the 2021 general elections, prominent female politicians such as Rebecca Kadaga faced targeted attacks through disinformation, questioning their competence and integrity, and even attacking their personal lives. In the 2024 Kisoro Woman Member of Parliament by-elections, an online news tabloid known as "The Explorer" published an ungrounded story titled "Bobi Wine fronts girlfriend Sultana Tana for Kisoro by-election", which was crafted to make the public question candidate Sultana Tana's oral stand in society. Such tactics were aimed not only at discrediting their political ideologies but also at reinforcing traditional gender roles, where women are often seen as incapable of holding leadership positions. These campaigns discourage other women from pursuing political careers, as the public attacks create a hostile environment, leading to self-censorship and, thus, a reduction in women's participation in active politics.²¹ However, girls are targeted online simply for being young and female, and this targeting intensifies if they are politically outspoken, disabled, black, or identify as LGBTIQ+.²²

¹⁹ Prudence Nyamishana. (19 January 2025). Women's rights under threat in Uganda as conservative groups push disinformation campaign <https://globalvoices.org/2025/01/19/ugandas-feminist-movement-under-threat-as-foreign-donors-back-conservative-groups/>

²⁰ Ibid <https://globalvoices.org/2025/01/19/ugandas-feminist-movement-under-threat-as-foreign-donors-back-conservative-groups/>

²¹ Muhamadi Matovu. (WED 10 JUL, 2024) How gendered focused misinformation impacts women in uganda <https://nilepost.co.ug/politics/206987/how-gender-focused-misinformation-impacts-women-in-ugandan-politics>

²² Paula Martins. (3 May 2024 | Updated 8 November 2024). Placing "gender" in disinformation <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/placing-gender-disinformation>

The Perpetrators of Gendered Disinformation

Enduring campaigns focused on specific issues are especially effective in addressing gendered disinformation and hostility toward minorities and vulnerable groups and supporting human rights and environmental activists. The reason and means by which individuals are targeted are significantly influenced by their identities, as shown by recent evidence.²³

Research into these narratives has uncovered a recurring trend in which offenders challenge the legitimacy of their victims, dismissing them as unworthy voices. Instead of engaging with the arguments of their targets, they focus on the individual's social status and perceived capability to contribute meaningful thoughts and ideas. Often, this aggression is sexualised or aimed at disrupting the personal lives of the victims.

A crucial aspect of gendered disinformation campaigns is their intent to attack particular individuals and undermine broader ideologies and movements. Feminism, gender rights, and LGBTQI+ advocacy are frequently targeted as these campaigns attempt to deconstruct and delegitimise these concepts. The perpetrators view these ideas as “less,” “crude,” “baseless,” or “corrupting” and therefore deem the advocates of such ideas as equally unworthy. The material used in these disinformation efforts may originate directly from the aggressors or involve cleverly manipulated content from others. This often includes information that, while not entirely false, aligns with the misleading narrative being promoted.

Those behind gendered disinformation are typically motivated by ideological aims or a desire to disrupt social cohesion. In extreme cases, these campaigns can incite violence. Their objectives extend beyond merely jeopardising democracy or influencing electoral outcomes; they aim to foster distrust in information concerning gender issues. While seeking financial or political gains is common, pursuing ideological control is also a long-term goal.

The network these individuals create usually consists of a complex web of proxies, fake accounts, and various intermediaries designed to conceal their identities for ideological or financial purposes. Groups of pages or individuals often collaborate to mislead others about their true identities or objectives. An examination of these narratives has uncovered a pattern where perpetrators attempt to assess whether the victims of their violence are credible figures deserving of acknowledgement.²⁴ Instead of scrutinising the reasoning behind their targets’ viewpoints, most offenders focus on the individual’s social status and whether they can articulate meaningful perspectives and ideas. Frequently, this violence takes on a sexual nature or aims to disrupt the personal lives of its victims.²⁵

²³ Ibid <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/placing-gender-disinformation>

²⁴ Ibid <https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/genderDisinformation.pdf>

²⁵ Ibid <https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/genderDisinformation.pdf>

The Impact of Social Media and Emerging Technologies

The rise of social media and emerging technologies has further exacerbated the spread and impact of gendered disinformation in Uganda. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and WhatsApp have become key tools for disseminating false and damaging narratives about women in leadership, particularly during election cycles. The anonymity and speed offered by these platforms allow disinformation to spread rapidly, often without accountability, making it harder for women leaders to counter false narratives in real time. With the rise of misogynistic sentiments further fueled by algorithm shifts following Elon Musk's acquisition and rebranding of Twitter to X, numerous women found themselves stepping back.²⁶ Many chose to delete their accounts and focus on other things.

Gendered disinformation on social media often includes hyper-sexualized attacks, fabricated images, and coordinated online harassment campaigns. Despite existing laws like the Computer Misuse Act (Amendment) 2022, Uganda has struggled to implement comprehensive strategies to address the emerging issue of gendered disinformation in the digital space.²⁷ In many respects, the algorithms utilised by social media platforms have exacerbated the dissemination of post-truth content. They create information cocoons that reinforce existing beliefs and perspectives among audiences. This situation can lead to cognitive biases and irrational thinking, which may further entrench the effects of gendered disinformation.²⁸ Hence, social media amplifies gendered disinformation but improved political literacy and access to fact-checking can counteract its effects. Women's mobilisation and counter-narratives effectively challenge its harmful impact. Ironically, efforts to limit women's political involvement often strengthen support and unity among female voters and activists, who use digital platforms to amplify their voices.²⁹ Despite progress, the political landscape remains rife with gendered disinformation, as those upholding traditional power dynamics undermine feminist and gender equality agendas. However, the rise of political literacy, fact-checking, and women's mobilisation offers hope for addressing the challenges posed by gendered disinformation.³⁰

Existing Cases of Gendered Disinformation in Uganda

The rise of the hashtag **#FearWomen** in Uganda highlights the weaponisation of gendered disinformation through social media.³¹ Following a paternity Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) testing case, the hashtag reinforced harmful stereotypes about women's roles in relationships, amplifying patriarchal norms. For women in politics and journalism, such disinformation undermines their credibility, often questioning their competence and morality. This leads to self-censorship and discourages women from pursuing leadership roles, contributing to their underrepresentation in both fields. The hashtag is a clear example of how gendered disinformation silences women's voices and perpetuates gender inequality.³²

ii) In 2018, Sylvia Rwabwogo, the former Kabarole Woman Member of Parliament, sought legal action against cyberstalking by Brian Isiko, a male student from the YMCA Institute. Her experience was distorted online, with falsified information and manipulated facts designed to shame, silence, and discredit her political career. The disinformation painted her as weak and extreme while minimising the severity of her abuser's actions. This case highlights how gendered disinformation can be used to undermine women in leadership, erode their credibility, and hinder their participation in public life.³³

²⁶ Prudence Nyamishana. (19 January 2025). Women's rights under threat in Uganda as conservative groups push disinformation campaign <https://globalvoices.org/2025/01/19/ugandas-feminist-movement-under-threat-as-foreign-donors-back-conservative-groups/>

²⁷ Simone Toussi. (June 22, 2022). Disinformation Pathways and Effects on Democracy and Human Rights in Africa <https://cipesa.org/2022/06/new-report-disinformation-pathways-and-effects-on-democracy-and-human-rights-in-africa/>

²⁸ Mytha Eliva Veritasia, Amalia Nurul Muthmainnah & Mathias-Felipe de-Lima-Santos. (28 June 2024). Gendered disinformation: a pernicious threat to equality in the Asia Pacific <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01296612.2024.2367859#d1e214>

²⁹ Mytha Eliva Veritasia, Amalia Nurul Muthmainnah & Mathias-Felipe de-Lima-Santos. (28 June 2024). Politics as the battlefield for gendered disinformation <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01296612.2024.2367859#d1e258>

³⁰ Ibid <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01296612.2024.2367859#d1e258>

³¹ Fear women videos and posts on x <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMk8GuXrx/>

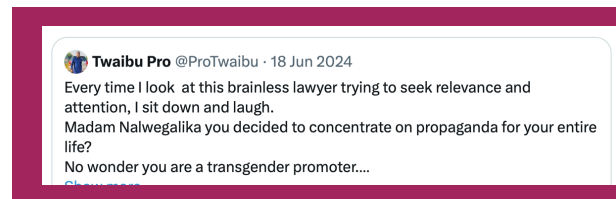
³² ACT Alliance's Input for the report on gendered disinformation <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/cfis/gender-justice/subm-a78288-gendered-disinformation-cso-act-alliance.pdf>

³³ Nile Post. (12 July 2024). UGANDA: How Gender Focused Misinformation Impacts Women in Ugandan Politics <https://www.mewc.org/index.php/blog-main/political-participation-a-leadership/12375-uganda-how-gender-focused-misinformation-impacts-women-in-ugandan-politics>

iii) In 2022, Dr Miria Matembe, a prominent politician and women's rights advocate, filed a defamation suit against Ofwono Opondo, the Government spokesperson, over false and defamatory statements against her on national television. Opondo falsely claimed that Matembe's husband had left her for house managers, a clear example of how gendered disinformation targets and distorts the public image of women in politics. These attacks, both personal and politically strategic, aim to delegitimise women's participation in the public sphere and discourage other women from engaging in politics.³⁴

iv) In 2016, NTV journalist Faridah Nakazibwe was awarded Uganda shillings 45 million, which is approximately \$12,291 United States Dollars in damages, by the Uganda Media Council after Hello newspaper, published by Pepper Publications, ran 38 defamatory articles over a year about her private life. The articles, which included fabricated claims about her relationship with Hajji Musa Kigongo, misrepresented and degraded her character, causing significant stress and public humiliation.³⁵ The council ruled that these persistent publications constituted an invasion of privacy and highlighted how disinformation targeting women journalists could undermine their credibility, perpetuate gender stereotypes, and deter their participation in public discourse.³⁶

v) Labeling women as promoters of homosexuality: In Uganda, the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act has exacerbated an already hostile environment for women journalists and politicians, with state-sponsored agents and social media platforms weaponising disinformation to label them as promoters of homosexuality. This label often targets women who advocate for human rights or speak on contentious societal issues, such as access to healthcare or gender equity.³⁷



vi) Labeling women journalists as foreign agents: Women journalists like Atuhaire Agather and Remmy Bahati have been targeted with disinformation campaigns labelling them as foreign agents, particularly for their vocal stance against corruption and social injustices in Uganda. Such narratives are often state-sponsored and aim to delegitimise their work by portraying them as tools of external forces, discrediting their credibility among the public. These disinformation campaigns not only erode trust in women journalists but also expose them and their families to threats of violence and intimidation, which discourages others from pursuing similar advocacy roles.



Global Voices spoke with Atuhaire Agather and later connected with Aloikin Praise Opoloje in January 2025, a young woman who, together with two colleagues, organised a nude protest to draw attention to corruption within the Ugandan parliament.³⁸ They discussed the online backlash they have faced since their campaign began to gain traction.

³⁴ How gendered focused misinformation impacts women in uganda <https://nilepost.co.ug/politics/206987/how-gender-focused-misinformation-impacts-women-in-ugandan-politics>

³⁵ Observer. (May 16, 2018). Red Pepper ordered to pay Shs 45m to NTV's Faridah Nakazibwe <https://observer.ug/news/red-pepper-ordered-to-pay-shs-45m-to-ntv-s-nakazibwe/>

³⁶ Ibid <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/57699-red-pepper-ordered-to-pay-shs-45m-to-ntv-s-nakazibwe>

³⁷ Muthoki Mumo. (July 20, 2023 2:14 PM EDT). Uganda's anti homosexuality law poses free speech fears for journalists <https://cpj.org/2023/07/ugandas-anti-homosexuality-law-poses-free-speech-fears-for-journalists/>

³⁸ Prudence Nyamishana. (19 January 2025). Women's rights under threat in Uganda as conservative groups push disinformation campaign <https://globalvoices.org/2025/01/19/ugandas-feminist-movement-under-threat-as-foreign-donors-back-conservative-groups/>

“ They claim that I have four children by four different men. I find it ridiculous for two reasons; how they think that is supposed to be something outrageous and of concern to Ugandans at the same level with their criminality, but also how they can't even establish facts as basic as the number of children a woman has. If I was a man it would be understandable.

Most of the attacks on Atuhaire are gendered, vilifying her choices and negating her agency. She shared her opinion on what is behind this phenomenon.

“ It is so because of the patriarchal, archaic society we still live in where people think that a woman not being married is some sort of failure, that a woman shouldn't have free will to choose a sexual partner or partners, and that a woman having sex is some abominable, shameful act whereas for a man, having many sexual partners is commendable and demonstrates sexual prowess! I saw some ridiculous comments about how my colleague Spire is sleeping with three women. the comments from men were that it would enhance his 'market value.

But what is the aim of those who are spreading this misinformation?

“ They aim to discredit me. Either because someone is paying them to do so — our good reputations give us credibility, and people we have exposed need to undermine that to turn people against us — or because they think discrediting me will give them the limelight that I have.

These comments have sometimes left Atuhaire feeling discouraged.

“ Many times, I wonder how people I have never even met hate me so much as to write outrageous and false things about me, without concern for the consequences on my reputation or on my loved ones.

Along the way, she has developed a thick skin and learned to ignore online hate and focus on what's important.

vii) On September 12, 2024, three young women—Norah Kobusingye, Praise Aloikin, and Kemitoma Kyenzibo—protested against corruption in Uganda, leading to their arrest and later release from Luzira Prison. They used nude protests as resistance, sparking widespread misinformation aimed at discrediting them through gender-based attacks.³⁹

“ They said that my choice of protest, being a nude protest, was because I wanted a visa out of the country. They claimed we were paid by foreign agents to stage the protests. They also called us prostitutes. They pointed at my armpits and said I have black armpits for a woman, to which I laughed and asked, 'Which Black woman doesn't have black armpits?' They also said we hadn't had sex in a long time, so men were offering to give me sex because I was obviously sexually starved.

viii) Lydia Namayengo and other women advocating for LGBTQ+ rights have been targeted with false accusations, including claims that they are "recruiting" children into homosexuality and "spreading homosexuality in schools." These attacks, which are often amplified during debates on anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, are accompanied by gendered narratives that portray these women as anti-family and anti-culture. Lydia, in particular, has been vilified in mainstream and social media.

X) Stella Nyanzi, an academic, feminist, and human rights activist, has been subjected to persistent gendered disinformation, particularly during her political activism and campaigns. This has included:

- Mischaracterisation as mentally unstable
- Being targeted with doctored images and videos
- Being framed as immoral or "unfit" for public leadership due to her outspoken feminist views
- Being regularly subjected to sexualised online abuse, including false rumours about her private life

Furthermore, her outspokenness on taboo topics like sexuality has often made her a target of moral panic, which is frequently used to distract from her political or academic arguments. These stories illustrate how gender-based misinformation is employed to silence women and promote patriarchal narratives in Uganda.

³⁹ Ibid <https://globalvoices.org/2025/01/19/ugandas-feminist-movement-under-threat-as-foreign-donors-back-conservative-groups/>

Nature, Scope, Key Themes, Mechanisms and Platforms

Nature and Scope of Gendered Disinformation

In Uganda, prevalent forms of gender-based disinformation involve manipulating information through Artificial Intelligence and similar tools, undermining progressive ideals like gender equality, and exhibiting various types of abuse, including trolling, insults, body shaming, sexualised remarks, and gender-targeted attacks. However, women in political or leadership positions commonly face offensive name-calling, sexual harassment, stalking, threats of violence, non-consensual intimate image sharing, hate speech, and misrepresented information aimed at undermining their credibility and public image.⁴⁰

Gendered disinformation in Uganda has been primarily initiated with a significant focus on targeting women in politics and positions of authority. It has expanded over time to target women in journalism as they continue to use journalism to defend and stand up against authority. However, this does not mean a woman of any background strongly expressing her views can not be subject to disinformation. The defining trait of a possible disinformation victim is any woman who strongly expresses their opinions regarding issues relating to women's rights, sexual and reproductive issues, the violence against LGBTQI+ persons and other gender-related themes.⁴¹ The growth of online communities and individuals opposing feminist ideas challenges what they see as the extremes or overreach of fourth-wave feminism. This includes critiques of intersectionality, trigger warnings, and political correctness.⁴²

Gendered disinformation in Uganda is spread by state and non-state actors targeting strong and politically active women, women-led organisations, journalists and beyond. This is fueled by the growing use and access to digital tools such as the internet and social media, which act as enablers to silencing women's voices in politics and journalism. The 2017 Troll Patrol project, conducted by Amnesty International and Element AI, examined journalists and politicians in the UK and the US, revealing that women of colour (including Black, Asian, Latinx, and mixed-race women) were 34% more likely to be targeted in abusive or problematic tweets compared to their white counterparts women.⁴³ With the absence of direct clauses to address gendered disinformation in the Computer Misuse Act 2022 Amendment, the legal efforts to curb the growing and revolving vice continue to escalate in Uganda.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ How gender focused misinformation impacts women in Ugandan politics <https://nilepost.co.ug/politics/206987/how-gender-focused-misinformation-impacts-women-in-ugandan-politics>

⁴¹ <https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/genderDisinformation.pdf>

⁴² <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01296612.2024.2367859#d1e214>

⁴³ <https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/genderDisinformation.pdf>

⁴⁴ Loyce Kyogabirwe. (February 6, 2023). Pushing back against gendered disinformation in Uganda <https://cipesa.org/2023/02/pushing-back-against-gendered-disinformation-in-uganda/>

Key Themes

Sexualisation and Objectification. Disinformation often targets women's sexuality, portraying them as morally compromised or undeserving of leadership roles. For example, a Woman Member of Parliament aspirant in Uganda was falsely accused of sleeping with a party leader for her position. A female politician, during the interviews, mentioned that,

“Sexualization and character attacks are designed to erase our voices from public discourse.” – Female Politician.

Character Assassination and Domestic Framing. Disinformation narratives exploit women's personal lives to discredit their professional capabilities, often portraying them as incapable of maintaining marriages or family roles.

“People look at them as women without responsibilities... and base on that to silence them.” – Female Politician.

Fabrication, Impersonation, and Misrepresentation are used to confuse audiences and undermine legitimacy. Fake affiliations, altered visuals, and manipulated quotes are also used.

“Photoshopping political images like putting a red beret on an NRM candidate – it's image sabotage.” – Female Journalist.

Motivations and Mechanisms of Gendered Disinformation

The motivations behind gendered disinformation are rooted in societal and political dynamics:

- a) **Sexist and Misogynistic Content:** This form of disinformation exploits existing gender stereotypes and cultural norms, portraying leadership as a masculine trait, and women are often depicted as unfit for leadership due to their personal lives or physical attributes. This aims to reinforce male dominance in politics and media. Women who challenge the status quo are often silenced through disinformation tactics designed to question their legitimacy and undermine their authority. It seeks to depict women as untrustworthy, unintelligent, or weak, frequently using statements like, "Women belong in the kitchen" or "Women are too emotional for leadership." An aspiring member of parliament highlighted this during a one-on-one interview by Women of Uganda Network.
- b) **Political Competition:** Male competitors use gendered disinformation as a strategy to weaken and discredit female political opponents. This is particularly common during election cycles.
- c) **Pseudoscience to Discredit Women:** Gendered disinformation may rely on pseudoscientific claims to undermine women's capabilities, such as asserting that women are less intelligent or less competent than men. These baseless assertions are used to justify women's exclusion from leadership roles.⁴⁵
- d) **Sexualised Distortion:** This tactic includes the use of fabricated images, deepfake videos, and unfounded accusations of illicit affairs to harm women's reputations. By leveraging socio-cultural norms around women's sexuality, these attacks aim to shame and discredit women in public life.
- e) **Demonising Feminism:** Women advocating for gender equality are often accused of promoting foreign agendas or being funded by external entities to oppose the state. This narrative seeks to delegitimise women's rights advocacy and paint it as dangerous or unsuited for local contexts.⁴⁶
- f) **Economic and Social Gain:** Some social media influencers and bloggers may spread disinformation to gain engagement, profit, or political favour.

⁴⁵ *Tactics of spreading gendered disinformation*
https://x.com/witness_africa/status/1863555731250716767

⁴⁶ Nkemakonam Agunwa. (2022). *Understanding the Dangers of Gendered Disinformation in African Elections*
<https://blog.witness.org/2022/08/dangers-of-gendered-disinformation-in-african-elections/>

Platforms Aiding Gendered Disinformation

Gendered disinformation campaigns are launched both online and offline using various mechanisms at different times using both a combination of human engagement and automation.

Social Media Platforms: Social media platforms such as X, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, and TikTok are the primary vehicles for the spread of gendered disinformation.⁴⁷ These platforms have enabled the quick sharing of disinformation in memes, graphic comments, explicit images, videos, manipulated texts or contexts and posts that target women, commonly referred to as attention hacking. However, search engines and messaging services are also used.⁴⁸ Based on the interviews, female politicians and journalists confirmed that X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, WhatsApp, and Facebook were the most frequently cited platforms. These platforms enable anonymous trolling and the rapid spread of false narratives.

AI-Generated Content and Deepfakes: AI and deepfake technology are increasingly used to create manipulated content that targets women with gendered disinformation. These tools can produce realistic but false images, videos, and audio, often sexualising or distorting a woman's appearance or words to damage her reputation.⁴⁹ This can also include the use of bots, cyborgs, or fake accounts to boost the reach and popularity of specific content artificially, creating a more significant perceived impact.⁵⁰ Deepfake technology is primarily employed to produce non-consensual sexual videos featuring women. Bots target journalists, bloggers, and influencers to spread content. Based on the interviews, most respondents confirmed that emerging technologies like deepfakes are increasingly used to manipulate content, such as creating false images or videos of female politicians.

A journalist noted that platforms like Facebook and X often serve as spaces where female journalists face disinformation focused on their appearance and personal lives.

"AI-generated disinformation is the new weapon against women's leadership." – Female Journalist.

⁴⁷ Mercy corps. (2019). The weaponisation of social media
https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Weaponization_Social_Media_FINAL_Nov2019.pdf

⁴⁸ <https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/genderDisinformation.pdf>

⁴⁹ Control Risks. (30 Oct 2024). How deep fakes threaten organisational security
https://www.controlrisks.com/our-thinking/insights/how-deepfakes-threaten-organisational-security?utm_referrer=https://www.google.com

⁵⁰ Ibid <https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/genderDisinformation.pdf>

Messaging Apps and Private Groups: Disinformation is spread through private messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram. These platforms often facilitate more intimate yet widespread sharing of disinformation.

Traditional Media: In some cases, gendered disinformation is propagated through traditional media, such as TV and radio, where gender stereotypes can be reinforced through biased reporting. Even when not overtly false, the portrayal of women in leadership in the media can be skewed to focus on their appearance, personal lives, or emotional responses rather than their competence or political positions.⁵¹ However, most respondents during the interviews also cited that some influencers and bloggers deliberately spread misleading narratives for engagement, profit, or political favour. Additionally, they noted that while traditional media outlets are less involved in spreading disinformation, they sometimes amplify online narratives through biased reporting. Radio and TV programs have been used to sexualise and discredit female journalists.

Offline Informal Networks: Informal spaces like **markets, community meetings, churches, boreholes, and savings groups (VSLAs)** serve as echo chambers for spreading unverified rumours.

The Impacts of Gendered Disinformation

Gendered disinformation has created several effects, ranging from personal harm to societal and institutional damage. Below is an analysis of its impacts:

Psychological and Emotional Harm: Gendered disinformation subjects women to relentless online abuse, leading to significant psychological and emotional distress. The repeated exposure to hate speech, harassment, and false narratives affects victims' mental health, causing anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem.⁵² For example, a journalist during the needs assessment shared that this harm lowers the self-esteem of journalists.

“Lynda Ddane had to do a live HIV test—this is how far disinformation can force a woman to go.” – Journalist.

Limiting women's participation in politics: The persistent targeting of women leaders and political figures through disinformation campaigns discourages new women from participating in political processes due to fear of similar attacks. By portraying them as untrustworthy, incompetent, or morally flawed, gendered disinformation fosters a hostile environment that prevents women from seeking or maintaining leadership positions. This limits women's representation in governance and decision-making processes. The interviewed participants confirmed that many women avoid public participation due to fear of backlash, leading to underrepresentation in politics and media.

“Gendered disinformation has been used as a tool to silence more women from engaging in politics.” – Female Politician.

⁵¹ Addressing Gendered Disinformation Review and Analysis <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/node/resource/Addressing%20Gendered%20Disinformation%20Review%20and%20Analysis.pdf>

⁵² UNESCO Online Violence Against Women Journalists

<https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/UNESCO%20Online%20Violence%20Against%20Women%20Journalists%20-%20A%20Global%20Snapshot%20Dec9pm.pdf>

Undermining Public Trust and Credibility:

Gendered disinformation erodes the credibility of women in leadership by circulating false narratives and manipulated content. These attacks aim to delegitimise women's contributions and diminish public trust in their abilities, weakening their influence and effectiveness in their roles.⁵³

Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes: The use of gendered narratives in disinformation perpetuates harmful stereotypes that portray women as emotional, weak, or incapable of leadership. This reinforcement of traditional gender roles deepens existing social inequalities and undermines efforts to achieve gender parity in various sectors.⁵⁴

Impact on Media Integrity: Gendered disinformation targeting women journalists threatens the integrity of media institutions by silencing critical voices and discouraging women from participating in public debates. This undermines the media's role in fostering accountability and transparency, weakening the overall quality of journalism.

Economic and Professional Setbacks: The reputational damage caused by gendered disinformation can have long-term financial and professional consequences for women. False narratives and public shaming limit their career prospects, reduce their professional opportunities, and hinder their economic empowerment.⁵⁵

Social Isolation and Fear: Gendered disinformation's pervasive nature fosters fear and isolation among its targets. Women subjected to such campaigns may withdraw from social interactions, public platforms, and professional engagements to avoid further attacks, contributing to their marginalisation.⁵⁶

Erosion of Gender Equality Progress: By targeting women specifically, gendered disinformation undermines decades of progress toward gender equality. It creates barriers for women to access leadership, economic opportunities, and participation in public life, perpetuating systemic inequalities.

Threats to Physical Safety: The spread of gender-based disinformation in various situations has led to physical assaults and attacks on the victims, as well as on their families, whereby harassment spills into private life, affecting spouses and children and individuals who believe this misinformation or even the state. Such cases have been reported in Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda.

"This has gone physical, involving families... Magogo has been bullied due to the Speaker's position." – Female Politician.

⁵³ Gender in Geopolitics institute: Gendered Disinformation Against Women in Politics: A Factor Weakening Democratic Systems <https://igg-geo.org/en/2023/12/08/gendered-disinformation-against-women-in-politics-a-factor-weakening-democratic-systems/>

⁵⁴ Gender based disinformation advancing our understanding and response <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/gender-based-disinformation-advancing-our-understanding-and-response/>

⁵⁵ Disinformation pathways and its effects on democracy and human rights in Africa <https://cipesa.org/2022/06/new-report-disinformation-pathways-and-effects-on-democracy-and-human-rights-in-africa/>

⁵⁶ Kakande, A., Achieng, G., Iyer, N., Nyamwire, B., Nalubega, S., and Mwendwa, I. (2021) Amplified Abuse: Report on Online Violence Against Women in the 2021 Uganda General Election. <https://pollicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Amplified-Abuse-Report-on-online-violence-Against-women-in-the-2021-general-elections.pdf>

Existing Challenges Enabling Gendered Disinformation

The battle against gendered disinformation is a matter of mitigating its immediate effects and addressing the underlying structural issues that enable it to increase. Below are some key challenges and emerging trends in the fight against gendered disinformation;

Gender-specific - Gaps within the existing Legal Frameworks

Existing laws, such as the Computer Misuse Act, are too broad and lack provisions to address gendered disinformation directly, leaving women disproportionately vulnerable. At some points, laws are selectively enforced, often prioritising cases involving influential figures within politics while ignoring systemic abuse against ordinary women politicians and journalists.

“When gendered disinformation targets prominent people, they act. Otherwise, it silences the non-prominent people.” – Female Journalist.

Weak Implementation and Regulatory Barriers

Even where laws exist, enforcement is slow, and the duration of legal action is inconsistent or even, at times, politically influenced, discouraging victims, especially economically disadvantaged women in politics and journalism, from seeking justice. Regulatory bodies such as the Uganda Communications Commission lack clear mandates or tools to proactively combat gendered disinformation on digital platforms even when it's noticed.

“We have the best laws; the only problem is implementation.” –Female Politician.

Gender Bias in Disinformation Campaigns

Gendered disinformation is often driven by deep-seated societal biases that portray women as unfit for leadership, weaker, or morally corrupt. These stereotypes are weaponised in disinformation campaigns to perpetuate the marginalisation of women. The pervasive nature of these biases in both digital and traditional media further entrenches gender inequality, making it harder to combat the root causes of the problem. This bias, particularly in political contexts, discourages women from engaging in leadership or public life, as they are often unfairly depicted in negative and exaggerated ways.

Inadequate Content Moderation by Social Media Platforms

The role of social media platforms in amplifying gendered disinformation remains a significant challenge. Despite platforms' efforts to curb harmful content, many still lack effective and context-sensitive content moderation systems, particularly when it comes to gendered narratives. Algorithms used by these platforms often prioritise sensationalist or divisive content, which may include gendered attacks, because such content generates higher user engagement. This results in the amplification of harmful stereotypes and disinformation, further perpetuating a hostile environment for women in politics and journalism.

Pervasive Online Harassment and its Impact on Women

Online harassment, including trolling, body shaming, and sexualised violence, is a significant form of gendered disinformation. Women, particularly those in high-profile roles such as politicians and journalists, are disproportionately targeted by online abuse. This harassment can increase their willingness to engage in public discourse or political activities. The severity and scale of online abuse make it challenging for women to reclaim their digital spaces, contributing to their eventual withdrawal from the political and public spheres.⁵⁷

Cross-Border Nature of Disinformation Campaigns

Gendered disinformation often transcends national borders, as it is increasingly driven by foreign state actors, political groups, and other non-state actors. These campaigns are usually coordinated across multiple platforms and can be challenging to trace and counter. For example, reports from global organisations such as the Campaign On Digital Ethics (CODE) highlight how disinformation is weaponised globally by state actors like Russia to destabilise democratic processes, including gendered disinformation targeting women leaders. In Africa and other regions, the global scale of such disinformation makes local efforts to address it even more challenging.⁵⁸

Evolving Tactics and Technology

As disinformation becomes more sophisticated, the tactics and technologies used to spread it evolve. Deep Fakes, AI-generated content, and manipulated images are increasingly used to attack women, especially those in public office. These advanced technologies make disinformation more persuasive and difficult to debunk, as they can create highly realistic and convincing fabricated narratives. The emergence of these technologies presents new challenges in identifying and countering harmful content, as traditional fact-checking methods may not be sufficient.

Intersectionality and Amplified Vulnerabilities

The effects of gendered disinformation are not uniform across all women. Women with intersecting identities, such as women of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and women from marginalised communities, face amplified risks. Disinformation targeting these women is often compounded by other forms of discrimination, including racism, classism, and homophobia. For example, women in Uganda, Kenya, and other parts of Africa, who also contend with social and political exclusion, are particularly vulnerable to gendered disinformation campaigns that exploit cultural biases and stereotypes.⁵⁹

Resistance to Digital Literacy and Gendered Awareness

In many regions, especially in rural or underdeveloped areas, there is limited digital literacy, particularly among women. Many women lack the skills to identify, report, or resist disinformation online. This digital divide exacerbates the challenge, as women in marginalised communities are particularly at risk of falling victim to harmful narratives. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness regarding the specific impacts of gendered disinformation, which hampers efforts to address it comprehensively.

⁵⁷ Addressing Gendered Disinformation Review and Analysis <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/node/resource/Addressing%20Gendered%20Disinformation%20Review%20and%20Analysis.pdf>

⁵⁸ Campaign on digital ethics. (Nov 28, 2024). subverting the truth for power <https://www.code-sa.org/post/new-report-subverting-truth-for-power>

⁵⁹ Gender based disinformation advancing our understanding and response <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/gender-based-disinformation-advancing-our-understanding-and-response/>

Political Use of Disinformation to Undermine Female Leadership

In the political arena, gendered disinformation is increasingly used to undermine female politicians and activists. These campaigns divert attention from their policies and accomplishments by targeting women leaders' personal lives, appearances, or emotional states. This tactic not only damages women's reputations in politics but also discourages other women from entering the political sphere, thus perpetuating gender inequality in governance.⁶⁰ particularly in Uganda, this has brought Character assassination of female politicians. For example, the current Minister of State for Mineral Development, Phionah Nyamutooro, is the wife of a renowned artist, Eddy Kenzo. Following Kenzo's previous relationship with Rema Namakula (Ugandan artist), many have compared Nyamutooro's ministerial performance to her personal life, suggesting she is unfit. People have shared photos of her alongside Rema, labelling her as unworthy of her role and traditional wifely duties.

⁶⁰ Gendered disinformation: a pernicious threat to equality in the Asia pacific
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01296612.2024.2367859#d1e165>

Conclusion

Gendered disinformation remains a significant barrier to women's participation in journalism and politics in Uganda. This issue is deeply rooted in patriarchal societal norms, political competition, and technological manipulation. While digital platforms amplify the spread of disinformation, legal frameworks remain insufficient, leaving women without adequate protection.

Addressing gendered disinformation requires urgent action, including legal reforms, digital literacy programs, and more vigorous enforcement mechanisms. A multi-stakeholder approach involving government, civil society, media organisations, and educational institutions is essential to creating a supportive environment where women can freely participate in public life without fear of disinformation. This will significantly advance digital inclusion in Uganda and harness women's full benefits in journalism and politics.

As Uganda prepares for the 2026 general elections, it is critical to foster collaboration among women politicians, journalists, and civil society organisations to create a cohesive national front against such disinformation.

Recommendations

1. To the state actors (Government)

- Policymakers like the parliament should review the Computer Misuse Act Amendment 2022 to assess its relevance in combating gendered disinformation and identify areas for reform. Align legislation with international human rights standards to ensure equitable protection for women in politics and journalism.⁶¹
- The government of Uganda should strengthen the capacity of institutions such as the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) and law enforcement agencies through targeted training on identifying and addressing gendered disinformation. Equip these institutions with digital tools and gender-sensitive strategies to counter online abuse.⁶²
- The Ministry of ICT and National Guidance should collaborate with CSOs and academic institutions to support data-driven research on gendered disinformation, ensuring access to relevant datasets. Facilitate periodic reviews and updates of disinformation trends to inform policymaking.⁶³
- The Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development should carry out awareness campaigns on the impacts of gendered disinformation, targeting public institutions, schools, and community leaders and focusing on the role of disinformation in undermining democratic values and gender equity.⁶⁴

2. To Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- Civil societies should work with grassroots women to identify the most common forms of gendered disinformation and its impact on women in leadership and media. Ensure participation from rural and marginalised communities.⁶⁵
- Civil society organisations should train women leaders, journalists, and activists on digital literacy and tools to combat online abuse and disinformation.⁶⁶
- Documentation and reporting mechanisms to report and track gendered disinformation in real time should be developed to enable accurate documentation for policy-making, advocacy, and findings shared through accessible formats to build public understanding.

⁶¹ Disinformation pathways and effects on democracy and human rights in Africa <https://cipesa.org/2022/06/new-report-disinformation-pathways-and-effects-on-democracy-and-human-rights-in-africa/>

⁶² UNESCO Online Violence Against Women Journalists <https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/UNESCO%20Online%20Violence%20Against%20Women%20Journalists%20-%20A%20Global%20Snapshot%20Dec9pm.pdf>

⁶³ Internet governance forum report. Best practise forum on gender and digital right https://intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/248/21181

⁶⁴ Association for progressive communications; Placing "gender" in disinformation Research authored by Paula Martins, with chapter-specific inputs from Amalia Toledo and Anja Kovacs <https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/genderDisinformation.pdf>

⁶⁵ Kakande, A., Achieng, G., Iyer, N., Nyamwire, B., Nalubega, S., and Mwendwa, I. (2021) Amplified Abuse: Report on Online Violence Against Women in the 2021 Uganda General Election. <https://policy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Amplified-Abuse-Report-on-online-violence-Against-women-in-the-2021-general-elections.pdf>

⁶⁶ ACT Alliance's Input for the report on gendered disinformation <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/cfis/gender-justice/subm-a78288-gendered-disinformation-cso-act-alliance.pdf>

3. Development Partners and Funders

- Funding should be allocated for research on gendered disinformation, particularly in underrepresented areas like rural Uganda, to support projects that include an intersectional lens to address diverse impacts on women.
- Local researchers should be trained in gender-sensitive methodologies to ensure thorough and nuanced data collection.
- Partners and funders should support multi-stakeholder initiatives involving government, CSOs, media, and academia to create a unified approach to addressing disinformation.⁶⁷

4. Traditional media

- Providing factual reporting and conducting investigative journalism.
- Hosting press conferences to challenge false narratives.
- Reinforcing positive portrayals of women in leadership and public life.
- Encouraging proactive fact-checking and ethical reporting to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

⁶⁷ Preventing and Disrupting the Spread of Gendered Disinformation in the Context of Electoral Processes and Democratic Rollback
https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Conference%20Report%20from%20the%20Global%20Partnership%20Gendered%20Disinformation%20Conference_final.docx.pdf

About WOUGNET

Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) is a non-governmental organization 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. The organization envisions an inclusive and just society where women and girls are enabled to use Information Communications Technologies (ICTs) for sustainable development.

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