

Technology should empower, not endanger: Ending digital violence against women and girls

Every year, between November 25 and December 10, the world marks 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, a campaign that calls for collective action to end violence against women and girls in all its forms.

This year's theme, *UNITE to End Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence*, invites us to reflect on a growing and deeply troubling trend: the rise of online harassment, abuse and exploitation of women and girls through digital platforms.

Technology has transformed how we live, learn, and connect. It provides enormous opportunities for education, entrepreneurship, and participation. Yet, for too many women and girls, the digital world has also become a space of fear, a place where they face insults, stalking, blackmail, and non-consensual sharing of images. The same technology that opens doors for empowerment is being misused to intimidate and silence.

Uganda's progress towards gender equality is undeniable, but the challenges remain profound. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics and the UN found that 49%, virtually half of women, had been victims of online gender-based violence (OGBV).

A 2025 WOUGNET study found that 88% of respondents, including women politicians, students, and journalists from various regions, had experienced or witnessed online GBV.

The 2022 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey revealed that a third of girls are married before 18, and nearly one in four adolescent girls has begun childbearing. These figures represent lives interrupted, dreams deferred, and potential lost. Patterns of abuse seen in homes and communities are now mirrored and amplified online.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence is not an abstract issue; it has real-world consequences. It silences women's voices in



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public debate, drives them out of election campaigns and leadership spaces, and limits their participation in education and the economy. When women and girls are afraid to campaign, speak, post or engage online, the entire society loses.

Ireland stands firmly with Uganda in confronting both traditional and emerging forms of violence against women and girls. Guided by our global development policy, A Better World, and our Uganda Country Strategy (2023–2027), we place gender equality at the heart of everything we do.

Through partnerships, Ireland supports programmes that:

- Prevent and respond to GBV, ensuring survivor-centred services in communities across Uganda, including Karamoja and refugee-hosting districts;

- Promote girls' education, helping them remain in school and transition to adulthood safely;
- And advance women's rights, leadership and economic empowerment, ensuring that women's voices shape the policies and decisions that affect their lives.

But we also recognise that the digital world is now central to ensuring equality and safety for women and girls. If the future is digital, then digital spaces must be safe.

This means strengthening online safety laws, ensuring technology companies act responsibly, and expanding digital literacy and awareness, especially among young boys and girls. As we mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, we are reminded that true equality means ensuring women's full participation; in homes, workplaces, parliaments, and online spaces alike.

Ending gender-based violence, whether physical or digital, is more than protecting individual women; it is about strengthening our societies. When women and girls are safe, confident, and free to express themselves and engage, families are stronger, economies grow faster, and communities become more just and peaceful.

During these 16 Days of Activism, let us take a moment to remember that we all have a role to play as governments, as leaders, as the business community, as families, and as individuals. Let us unite to ensure that every woman and girl in Uganda — online or offline — can live free from fear and fulfil her potential. Together, we can ensure that technology can empower, not endanger, connect, not control.

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and safe sex. When young people see information

been educators and youth activists see

wants to talk, learn and support each other without

regain with knowledge, honesty and compassion