

More shelters, advocacy will end GBV

AS the global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) conclude today, we should remain alive to the fact that ending this campaign must not mean ending the fight.

GBV is a serious violation of human rights and a life-threatening health and protection issue.

When people flee their homes, they are often at greater risk of physical, sexual and psychological violence, such as rape, sexual abuse, trafficking and forced sex work.

Although anyone (women, girls, men and boys) can fall victim to violence simply because of their sex or gender, women and girls are, especially at risk.

It is estimated that one in three women will experience sexual or physical violence in their lifetime.

With 45% of Ugandan women experiencing intimate partner violence (UBOS 2022), peaking at 78% in Acholi region, shelters become and remain lifelines.

These safe havens offer survivors refuge, medical care, legal aid and pathways to economic independence. However, today, instead of expanding the shelters, we are witnessing their collapse as several are closing because of chronic underfunding.



EDITORIAL

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resourced civil society groups. When shelters close, survivors face impossible choices: Return to abusers or navigate a broken justice system alone. This cannot continue.

The Government should lead by integrating shelters into national and local budgets.

Indeed, shelters alone are not the solution, but they are emergency places where preliminary assessment is done for GBV victims. True progress needs the dismantling of GBV roots.

To reduce reliance on shelters, we must prevent violence at its source by strengthening community-based advice centres, which are already handling 50 cases monthly per district, to mediate early and educate communities.

GBV perpetrators should be held to account through expedited courts and strict bail conditions. Investing in economic empowerment programmes has proven to cut vulnerability. Most importantly, we need to dismantle cultural barriers demonising women who speak out.

A GBV-free Uganda will have numerous benefits, including thriving children, resilient communities and an economy unburdened by violence's cost.

Police recorded 15,184 domestic violence cases in 2023, yet most shelters, over 20 serving 146 districts, are run by under-