



From left: permanent secretaries Dr Alfred Okot (Ministry of Water and Environment), Aggrey Kibenge (gender ministry), Amongi, Alupo Kristine Blokhuis, the UNFPA representative to Uganda and Nabbanja after the launch of the second national action plan on elimination of gender-based violence in Uganda. This was at Kololo Independence Grounds during the Women's Day celebrations yesterday. (Scan picture with the Vision Digital Experience to watch video)

WOMEN ARE BETTER LEADERS, SAYS MUSEVENI

By Eddie Ssejjoba

Ugandan women have proved to be better leaders and managers than men since the start of the gender empowerment programmes under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government, President Yoweri Museveni has noted.

The President said when the NRM came to power in 1986, it introduced women empowerment programmes such as affirmative action seats at various levels and the extra 1.5 points that are given to

girls when joining university.

The President made the observation during the International Women's Day celebrations at Kololo Independence Grounds yesterday.

Museveni, whose speech was delivered by Vice-President Jessica Alupo, said gender equity was at the core of the NRM even during the bush war era.

"During our resistance against dictatorships, we treated everyone equally and I found the women to be much more resolute than many

men," the President said.

Alupo represented Museveni, who was attending the East African Community summit in Arusha, Tanzania.

The Vice-President inspected a female-mounted parade commanded by Lt Col Evarlyne Asiimwe. She later inspected stalls of exhibitors, mainly women showcasing their value-added products.

She was accompanied by women leaders, such as Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja, Third Deputy Prime Minister Rukia Nakadama, the gender and labour minister, Betty

Amongi, among others. The function was also attended by high-ranking female dignitaries in government, including the Principal Judge, Jane Frances Abodo.

The day's theme was: *Scaling up Investments to Accelerate Access to Justice for all Women and Girls in Uganda.*

In the speech, the President noted that the International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate the significant role played by women and girls in families, communities and the country.

He noted that when the NRM came to power in 1986, it found out that although half of the 14 million Ugandans then were women, their full potential had not been fully realised on account of their lack of education, opportunities, chronic ill health and early death. "Women were trapped in a very disadvantaged position despite being at the centre of the subsistence economy and provided half of the labour for producing the few cash crops," he said.

Museveni noted that the NRM fought the suppression of women and other groups that faced marginalisation on account of historical and cultural factors.

Under the NRM Government, women have taken the lead role in many spheres of life, including business, education, politics and sports. In 1994, Uganda's Dr Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe became the first female vice-president in Africa. In the subsequent years, women have taken up top positions in the country on merit.

34 MEDALS

The National Medal Commission, led by the head of chancery, Brig. Gen. Richard Karemire awarded at least 34 people with various medals, including four men. The medals included 18 National Independence Diamond Jubilee awarded to civilians, five National Independence Diamond Jubilee (prisons), one National Independence Diamond Jubilee (police) and one Personal Sacrifice (policeman), two long service of 30 years (policemen), one meritorious (police), one honorary (police) and five National Independence Diamond Jubilee medals to women in the Uganda People's Defence Forces.

The President said through programmes such as education for all, the NRM fought marginalisation of women.

"This was a fundamental empowerment of the girl child, because once somebody is educated, he or she cannot easily be suppressed," he explained.

Museveni said before 1986, girls faced a lot of discrimination, especially where families had limited resources.

"They would tell the girl to stay home and let the boy go to school. But when we

introduced free education for all, those who benefited in a special way were the girls because they are the ones who were kept at home," the President said, noting that education and skilling of the girl child is an effective method of empowering not only women, but the entire society.

Museveni said the NRM also introduced harsh punishments for rape and defilement in order to provide justice to women.

"We have also fought against inhuman cultural practices that undermine the dignity of women such as female genital mutilation, early marriages, wife inheritance, wife beating and others," he said.

Museveni added that such measures have been supported by the NRM's poverty eradication programmes, which are aimed at creating wealth and jobs at household level.

"When families get out of poverty through commercial farming, manufacturing, services and ICT, it is easier to address the remaining challenges faced by women," the President stressed.

VP COMMENDS EXHIBITORS

On her behalf, Alupo commended women who exhibited various products, which she said demonstrated the progress the NRM Government has made over the years.

The exhibitors included women enterprises supported by the National Agricultural Research Organisation who showcased a range of technologies and innovations.