

When justice fails women, equality is a lie

Every International Women's Day, we speak confidently about women's empowerment, celebrating resilience, progress and recommitting to equality. Yet for many Ugandan women and girls, empowerment remains fragile because justice is unreliable.



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This year's national theme, *Scaling up investments to accelerate access to justice for all women and girls*, is not aspirational. It is an acknowledgement of failure: our justice systems, as currently resourced and structured, do not serve women equally. Without deliberate investment, equality remains rhetorical. Justice is where inequality stops being theoretical and becomes personal. It is the woman who loses her land after displacement caused by floods along the Nile or by government development projects and cannot enforce her rights. It is the girl who drops out of school because reporting abuse feels more dangerous than silence. It is the survivor who waits years for a case to be heard, only to withdraw because the financial, emotional and social costs are too high.

Ugandan women and girls make up over half of the population. Yet gender-based violence remains widespread. In 2024, the Uganda Police Force recorded about 14,000 cases of domestic violence and over 12,000 defilement cases, reflecting the persistent scale of violence against women and girls. Delays in handling these cases, particularly defilement and aggravated defilement, continue to weaken accountability. When justice is slow, costly or intimidating, the law ceases to protect; it becomes another obstacle.

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