SCALING UP!

WOMEN BATTLE IT OUT WITH MEN IN THE LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2018

Photo: Local Leaders and FOWODE staff congratulate female VBC members that contested for Chair Person LC 1 posts in Lyantonde district.
Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), a pacesetter in promoting gender equality and women’s leadership in Uganda has permeated through patriarchal hindrances that often keep women away from the public spaces of influence.

Women who were once gripped with fear to engage in democratic spaces in several villages, broke through the confines of powerlessness and embraced leadership in the lower administrative units in 60,800 villages in Uganda.

In this issue, FOWODE celebrates 48 women in 15 districts of Uganda that were inspired into local council leadership through the FOWODE community empowerment programmes that entail consciousness raising and civic education for accountable leadership.

The illustration above shows the total number of women from each respective district that won the recent LC1 elections, had previously participated in FOWODE programmes and as a result enhanced their leadership capabilities.

“My success in this LC1 election is largely attributed to FOWODE’s community empowerment efforts, because of my involvement in VBC work, I got a deeper understanding of the challenges that citizens face in their quest for quality gender responsive service delivery from government. The key service delivery issues in health and education which we always discuss in our VBC meetings, community dialogues and interface meetings became my key message during the campaigns which endeared me to the electorate, and even attracted voluntary campaign agents from other cells. Further, the exposure I got from FOWODE activities augmented my confidence and assertiveness which I used to boldly articulate issues during campaigns. 

Enid Musiimenta, Chairperson Rubanga VBC and LC1 chairperson elect, Nyarutare cell, Rukungiri district

“
FOWODE focused her civic engagement on demystifying the gender stereotypes against women’s leadership and thereby encouraging the community to support women to seize leadership opportunities and join decision making spaces. Elections at the local level offer a greater number of opportunities for women simply because leadership at the local level has served as a training ground for many politicians, both women and men. As such, unlike before, many women actively participated in the Administrative Unit Elections from the Village (LC I) level to the Parish (LC II) level, and Women Councils and Committees Elections from the sub county to the District Level.

Women councils are very important when it comes to implementation of Government programmes. For programmes like the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme, the women’s council is key in the selection of beneficiaries. Many women fearlessly contested for direct seats as LC 1 Chair persons unlike in the past when the post was perceived to be a reserve for only men. Voting in favor of women is illustrative of the changing mindset and belief that people had against women’s leadership where women were confined to the private spaces rather than the public. There is a growing trust that women are capable transformative leaders. For instance, in Buikwe district, 20 women emerged as winners of the Chairperson LC 1 positions in the district. This success is partly attributed to the leadership trainings that were facilitated by FOWODE to reach the rural women. Women’s ability to brave the elections amidst violence, monetization, insecurity, fear and intimidation demonstrates their rising agency to engage in leadership in Uganda.

As such, FOWODE appreciates citizens, both men and women who supported women to effectively participate in political leadership and enter the arenas of power. We appeal to all women to continue to seek greater involvement in the decision-making processes at all levels and to systematically and significantly influence decision-making processes and policy outcomes once in power.

FOWODE, as a leader of the Uganda Gender Consortium on SDGs advocates for women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life as highlighted under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5. Achieving this goal provides a balanced development framework and more accurately reflects the composition of society; strengthens democracy and promotes proper functioning of systems and structures. Women’s equal participation in governance and decision-making is not only a demand for justice, but also a necessary condition for gender equality and making sure that the present institutional culture is deconstructed to take women’s interests into account.
The mode of LC Elections was by lining up behind the nominated candidates or their representatives/portraits or symbols, in accordance with Section 111(2) of the Local Governments Act CAP 243 (as amended). The mode of elections is still a matter of controversial debate especially among human rights activists who argue that the method of lining up is outdated and compromises the democratic right of secrecy of the voter. It is most likely to create room for intimidation where one is forced to vote a particular candidate because some gifts were exchanged, including cash even when that particular candidate lacks leadership skills. This may breed discontent and enmity in society and in families further accelerating violence and disfranchising voters. This fear has been expressed by several women whose choice of leaders may not necessarily tally with the rest of the family members especially the partners. Our work with women during elections has shown that women expressing different political views from those of their partners may sometimes face violence as a consequence. It is therefore without doubt that when eventually a woman lines up behind/votes for a candidate not preferred by the partner, there is high likelihood of violence not only in the home but also with other community members. Some people may therefore stay away from the exercise for fear of being persecuted.

Even amidst such a hostile environment, FOWODE continues to provide civic education to the citizens to freely exercise their rights to participate in electoral and democratic processes and shun all possibilities of violent situations. As citizens prepare to engage in the elections, FOWODE shall re-emphasize on the role of citizens’ support for women to participate in and be elected for political office in the Local Councils and push the gender equality agenda. Elections at the local level offer a greater number of opportunities for women simply because participation at the local level has served as a training ground for many politicians, both women and men. However, it remains a challenge for these women to function effectively because their participation is not yet well-accepted by their male colleagues. Therefore, they face considerable resistance in carrying out functions and exercising authority. Patriarchy still prevails given the traditional norms that militate against the advancement, progress and participation of women in political processes; the low socio-economic status of women, limited resources and self-confidence that prevents them from participating in the political arena. Never the less, politics has to be transformed, and this needs the active involvement of women. Women who believe in serving the public trust and can commit to public accountability should be supported to enter politics to effect this transformation.

To ascertain this, FOWODE gathered Field Officers views and experiences in the LC Elections. Below are the community views from different observers:

“The mode of lining up was not fair at all because it creates enmity among the leaders and the people to be served, and many people decided not to vote since there was no secret ballot. In some areas, the top leaders influenced and brought in new people who do not reside in that particular Village to be registered on the day of elections so that the candidate of his choice wins. Also still, bringing the Military in in some areas like Bwijanga created fear among the voters, so some didn’t vote.”

——— Maureen Kyomuhendo, FO Masindi district
“Majority of eligible voters were not comfortable with the government mode of lining up behind the candidates on grounds that most women couldn’t take personal decisions to select their rightful leaders as a result of male dominance and influence, especially in communities where civic education and governance trainings/meetings of FOWODE had not reached. Additionally, there was massive intimidation of women who had taken the decision to contest for direct LCI positions other than affirmative seats like women councils at village level. I also observed issues of election violence and vote buying and selling in 22 polling stations that were sampled.”

Moses Kagwa, FO Kibuku district

“In Busia district, the Register was not used as expected since people were not patient enough to listen to their names as they were being read. Instead, they resorted to lining up behind their candidates without verification in the register. We registered violence in some places; some candidates gave up in the process of lining up after realising that they had few voters behind them; Voter Education was not effectively done especially on the guidelines; Voters kept on moving from one line to another after realising that their candidate was losing. Some people did not turn up to vote the candidate of their choice because they did not want to line up.”

Annet Namwaya, Busia

“The mode of lining up for elections affected the turn up. Some voters shied away from voting because two or more candidates were there friends and they did want voting to affect their relationships. In Okude, Orungo Sub County, one of the candidates after failing in the elections went and fought a voter who he blamed for enjoying his money and at the end voted a different person. This process in one way or another incited violence. There was also fear that the ruling party would mark those who voted against their candidates and later take action on them, so locals from Sub Counties like Ogolai, Akoromit and Willa ended up voting NRM candidates leaving their choice out.”

Simon Jackson Okiror, Amuria District

The above voices represent views of Field Officers in few districts, but certainly, many Ugandans have shared views and thoughts on the lining up mode of elections. Our repeal is to re-adopt the secret ballot voting methodology that is ideal for a democratic country such as Uganda.  

For God and My Country!

Case story two: CAMP ALUMNI

Empowered Women: Transformed societies:

In 2014, we continued to support FOWODE’s national program in identifying young women leaders and individuals in the transformative leadership and capacity building program aimed at creating opportunities and platforms for sustainable district advocacy and encouraging young leaders to join politics for effective participation in the decision making processes. This year, Kibuku field office continued to encourage women to vie for local council positions and indeed in May this year, we witnessed Mrs.Katooko Sylvia Kooli who took firm interest in contesting for an elective position. She was elected as a Workers Councillor in Kibuku district council 2018. With support from FOWODE and empowering strategies, this lead to an increase in the total number of women participating in decision making processes and we hope that our district advocacy will yield results with these new political entrants at both village and district level.

Complied and documented by:
Moses Kagwa,
Kibuku Field Officer
The right to education is identified as a human right and is understood to establish an entitlement to free for all and also compulsory primary education for all children; an obligation to secondary education; accessible to all children; as well as access to higher education. This has been recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals as goal 4 that purposes to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all. This right to education is as well mentioned in a number of international conventions, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which recognizes a right to free, compulsory primary education for all. Today, almost 70 million children across the world are prevented from going to school each day. As of 2015, 164 states were parties to the Covenant, Uganda inclusive.

Every child has a right to attain an education and that is something so fundamental that no child should be denied” Byarugaba Emmanuel, member of Buhara Village. Byarugaba resides in Nyakabungo village, Rwene Parish, Buhara Sub County.

As a member of Buhara Village Budget Club, he has undergone various trainings organized by FOWODE that have greatly influenced his impact on the community. This is one of the reasons he was extremely concerned about Kasulumbana a close door neighbor that has 3 children aged between 4 and 10 years but neither of them was in school by first term of the 2018 academic year. He reached out to the father to find out why the children were not attending school, only to find out that the father was reluctant and therefore disregarded education since he found it as a mere waste of time and resources. He also stated that he could neither afford the school fees and scholastic materials required such as books and pens. The children had since been abandoned by their mother who is entirely a drunkard. In his response he was completely hesitant and un willing to make an effort towards educating his children. Being a concerned VBC member, Byarugaba went ahead to report the matter to the Village Local Council Chairperson who also joined this effort to enable these children attain their right to education.

They both talked to the Chairperson PTA, who advised Kasulumbana to register his children in school otherwise he would be arrested. In fear of being arrested, he immediately started looking for means to earn a living through offering labor in farms within the village and is able to earn about 5,000 shillings daily. Kasulumbana was able to enroll all his children with the older girl and boy aged 7 and 10 respectively in Buhara Primary school that pays a fee of 4,000 shillings, the last boy child aged 4 in Nursery that pays a fee of 20,000 shillings. Due to the joint efforts of Byarugaba and the community leadership. Kasulumbana is able to give his children an education and appreciates the value of education since his children are now learning how to read and write in English. He is now an advocate for Education through advising parents to take their children to school. Accordingly, there has been an increased effort to increase literacy levels in Buhara Sub County.
Rubanga Village Budget Club was formed on 22nd September 2017 and consists of 20 members; 8 men and 12 women. Rubanga is a parish within Buyanja Sub County, Rukungiri district. Members attended a two day training on SDGs organized by FOWODE and as a result sought out to do good on their own and cause change in their community because of the knowledge they were able to acquire.

In June 2018, during one of the monitoring visits, the team identified Ibumba Primary School in Nyakasharara village, a facility that was facing a major shortage of water and only had one shallow well that was open and shared by both people and animals. This largely deterred sanitation and hygiene especially among the children because the water in the well was dirty and contaminated and would further lead to water borne diseases.

They there after sat down and planned as a team on what to do to address this alarming issue. After the meeting, it was resolved that each member was to contribute a sum of 10,000shillings and managed to contribute a total of 200,000shillings. They later purchased a 200 liter tank at 120,000shillings and the balance of 80,000shillings was used to cater for two hand washing facilities for both boys and girls that were all donated to Ibumba Primary School. The VBC team also collectively organized, bought reeds and nails then cleared and fenced the shallow well that was previously used by the pupils. Another of their contributions was at Rubanga Health Center 11 that was open with no fence and invited intruders, criminals, loitering cattle and animals. In October 2017 they decided amongst themselves to collect 15,000 shillings each totaling up to 300,000shillings that was used to purchase hammers, nails, wooden logs to put up a barbed wire fence and gate at Rubanga Health Center 11 and hire a security guard. Through community contributions, money is collected to pay 80,000shillings to the guard on a monthly basis. The VBC team is even considering opening a SACCO to save money to invest in rearing goats late this year so as to have an income generating activity to sustain their activities.
The school administration, Health center personnel and entire community were overwhelmed and so thankful to the team for their concern and decision to take the matter into their hands. This has since then changed the negative attitude and bias the community had towards the Village Budget Club and are now more than ever willing to offer support and work hand in hand with them to develop their community.

Compiled by Elizabeth Karungi Mara
Programs Volunteer

Our camp contributes towards building the next generation of leaders who are equipped with the skills necessary to fearlessly and tirelessly improve their communities by advocating for good governance.

Photo: Boys and girls at Ibumba Primary school wash their hands at the new tank.

Photo: Some of the Rubanga VBC members actively fencing the shallo well that was previously being used by the pupils at Ibumbi Primary School.
MY SUCCESS STORY

THE SUUBI CENTER- KIBUKU

In 2012, FOWODE continued to support national programs in identifying young women leaders for transformative leadership and capacity building programs aimed at creating opportunities and platforms for sustainable district advocacy, increasing young women in leadership and politics for effective participation in the decision making processes.

In 2013, I started a women’s local saving group called ‘The Suubi Centre’ which was founded after the FOWODE leadership camp which took place in October 2012. The Suubi Centre is a women’s local savings group registered as a CBO. This girl and Women empowerment organisation is located in Kibuku District.

The Suubi Centre has registered a number of remarkable achievements i.e we have graduated about 200 girls and women with marketable skill sets, ever since the center started sourcing for sponsorship and a lady accepted to fundraise in the USA on our behalf, the centre has experienced a certain level of what I would call ‘steady progress’.

After sharing and interacting closely with the women of Kibuku, I felt the need for a better platform. In FOWODE’s effort for Alumni and partners for political engagement within the district leadership advisory desk (LAD) for support, FOWODE has continued to encourage women to vie for local council positions and indeed in May 2018 year I, Ms. Katooko Sylvia Carolyn took firm interest in contesting for an elective position and as a result, I was elected Female District Workers Councilor in Kibuku District council 2018.

With support from FOWODE’s empowering strategies, this has led to an increase in the total number of women participating in decision making processes and I believe our district advocacy will yield results at district level. I believe “meaningful change comes with hope.” I wished and had the Ideas but would never have come this far without FOWODE.

I dream of a day when women are no longer forced to place their children in an orphanage due to poverty. The Suubi Centre is committed to empowering women to be lifelong leaders and catalysts for sustainable positive change in their families and communities. We are dedicated to advancing social Justice for all women and their families regardless of their religion, race, ethnicity, or lifestyle.

I extend my special thanks to the Kibuku field officer Mr. Kagwa Moses, the Executive Director at FOWODE Ms. Patricia Munabi Babiiha and Ms. Julie Luutu for their continued support and creating platforms for me and all other women to grow in leadership. Thank you.

Yours in service,

Katooko Sylvia Carolyn
Executive Director/ Co Founder
The Suubi Center Kibuku