Running a Winning Political Campaign

Promoting women’s leadership is foundational to FOWODE’s work. We prioritize getting more women into the elective offices, support legislators to navigate the political landscape and to elevate the impact of their leadership. FOWODE positions women as credible candidates in competitive races, provides strategic advice and mentorship to women leaders. To build the pipeline of leaders, FOWODE mentors young women in transformative leadership, feminist values and strategic career building to enable them claim and protect their rights.

According to women’s rights activist Hon. Miria Matembe, a political campaign is an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision making process within a specific group. In democracies, political campaigns often refer to electoral campaigns, by which representatives are chosen or referendums are decided.

During the FOWODE training of women leaders under the Strengthening Citizens Engagement in Elections (SCENE) project, Matembe noted that a candidate’s message should be believable and one should desist from making unrealistic promises.

She added that the impression you make at the launch of a political campaign may determine the success or failure of the campaign, meaning that you must prepare the launch very well.

Voters must believe what you say, both about yourself and what you promise to do. You must talk about topics that are important to your target audience. These topics will often be problems that voters face every day in their lives, not issues that politicians think are important to public policy. Voters are more likely to support candidates that talk to them about their jobs, their children’s education or their pension than a candidate that talks about the budget, even though the budget may deal with all of these things.

She noted that a candidate’s message must be delivered in a language the voters use and understand easily. Too often politicians want to impress the voters with how smart they are, using technical words that either the voters do not understand or have no real meaning for them.

Matembe explained that voters must make a choice between you and other candidates. An aspiring candidate needs to make it clear to the voters how they are different from the other candidates in the race by contrasting themself with them.
Corruption is a major development obstacle for Uganda, estimated to cost the economy over UGX 500 billion annually (World Bank Report, 2016). According to Global Financial Integrity (GFI), tax evasion, money laundering, and related corruption cost Uganda at least $1 billion a year.

To commemorate the International Anti-Corruption Day, FOWODE organized a one-day women-led anti-corruption activation in nine districts (Luweero, Kabale, Rukungiri, Gulu, Amuria, Kibuku, Lyantonde, Sheema, and Masindi) on 9th December 2020. The activations focused on telling the anti-corruption fight story from the stakeholders’ perspective. This culminated into a national dialogue to raise awareness about corruption, and the critical role women can play in fighting the vice.

Citizens Challenged to Join the fight Against Corruption

Many citizens expressed their discontent towards the rampant cases of corruption and the limited efforts of the state in combating the vice. They affirmed their commitment in voting out all the corrupt leaders in the forthcoming election.

There are many corrupt leaders in government who are not even concerned about the nature of service delivery in Uganda. They steal billions of shillings but go unpunished but are only reshuffled from one position to another. With this capacity you have built in us, am going to mobilize fellow citizens in Luweero to sweep out all those leaders who are corrupt from LC1 to the top,” Kesiime Aloysius in Luweero

“I call upon all citizens of Uganda to be vigilant on corruption cases because graft does not only happen at higher levels but also at grassroots. It’s a shame for government officials to be misusing public money” Maj. Santo Okot Lapolo, the Resident District Commissioner for Gulu District.

“We are very much committed to fighting corruption through the legal frame work following the Public Finance Act while advancing funds and the Public Accounts Committee deals with handling corruption,” Masindi District Chief Administrative Officer Geoffrey Nkuraziza Banga

“We have deployed our intelligence team in various agencies to report to us the corrupt government officials who think they are ‘untouchables.’ We will use the full force of the law against them,” Assistant Superintendent of Police, Namara Kellen in Lyantonde.
The knowledge and skills that Nancy Atimango gained from the female leaders training organized by FOWODE have helped her navigate through a hotly contested election where she is the only female candidate in a race she is contesting against 12 men.

On 15th December 2020, FOWODE organized regional conferences which were intended to equip aspiring women leaders with relevant knowledge and skills in effective electoral campaigns management and gender-responsive leadership. At FOWODE, we believe that once women’s confidence is enhanced and they are equipped with knowledge and skills, they become more effective leaders. Through our women leaders capacity building work, more women just like Nancy have continued to garner the courage to join active politics.

Nancy Atimango who is contesting on a direct seat for MP Pece–Laroo constituency in Gulu city, says she was contemplating pulling out of the elections because of scarcity of resources on top of contesting against men in a highly patriarchal society. After the training, Nancy was re-energized and says she will focus more on her messaging to win over the hearts of the electorate.

One of FOWODE's core values is gender equality and equity. To promote this, we regularly conduct civic education meetings with community members on issues such as GBV, Gender Responsive Budgeting and leadership among others, all aimed at enhancing the knowledge and skills of women, men, opinion leaders, policy makers to demand for improved accountability for women and children's rights.

In the Gender Accountability and Peace Project (GAPP), we aim at promoting gender justice for a peaceful environment in Kabale and Sheema districts. The civic education meetings increase awareness of citizens on their rights, roles and responsibilities and foster their demand for the protection of the rights of women and children.

The Buhara sub county CDO, Liberty Kasande noted that the content shared during the sessions was speaking directly to the people’s life experiences and women realized the importance of working together with their husbands to end GBV.

During the sessions, community members learnt about the dangers of GBV and realized its hindrance to development. Liberty adds that some families have now appreciated the fact that it is the role of both men and women in a family to stop GBV and ensure family development. As a result of the civic education, couples now understand that rights go with responsibilities and that for one to demand for their rights, they too have to observe their responsibilities to others.

“I almost gave up after seeing 12 men contesting on the same seat against me”. However, after I gained knowledge and skills on how to effectively manage campaigns during a Female leaders training organized by FOWODE, my confidence was restored. Using the tips that we were given both during the training and at the regional conference, I was able to pull more crowds. I am delighted and sure of winning in the forth coming election.”

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"Personally, I believe that, with continued efforts, we are going to reduce or even end GBV in Buhara Sub County because the women in groups don’t keep the information to themselves. They also share it with their families and other community members" Kasande Liberty CDO Buhara sub county Kabale District
In September 2019, a group of women trained by FOWODE to track service delivery paid a visit to Omel HCII, Paicho sub county Gulu district on a fact finding mission.

Jane Anying, the incharge nurse of the facility says that the team came at a time when the situation at the facility was appalling. The health center only had one delivery and postnatal bed and the solar lighting system was not functioning, which made night deliveries extremely difficult to handle. The team promised to follow this up with the duty bearers in their community.

"In addition to scarcity of delivery beds and the challenge of lighting, we also didn't even have a refrigerator for the vaccines. The team promised to follow this up with the duty bearers in their community. However, I was skeptical about this because several organizations had previously visited the health center and promised to change the situation but failed to deliver." Jane Anying

To Jane's surprise, the FOWODE team later organised an interface meeting that brought both community members and duty bearers at the district and sub-county to discuss such issues. Luckily, those responsible stakeholders were present and promised to ensure that the challenges were addressed. And a year later, the facility has received more equipment due to the lobbying sparked off by the FOWODE Gender Responsive Budget monitoring visit.

"I am delighted to note that we have since received a fridge, 5 postnatal and 2 delivery beds and a Solar (Yellow Box). All these have considerably eased our work in serving the community." Jane Anying

"The new delivery and postnatal beds"
FOWODE with support from the European Union (EU) and Horizont3000 is implementing the Gender Accountability and Peace Project (GAPP) which aims at promoting gender justice for a peaceful environment in Kabale and Sheema districts.

Sheema district, like many Ugandan communities, is highly patriarchal, making it a hostile environment for women who would like to join the political scene. Women have instead been relegated to lower positions. However, following our training sessions with grass-root women, their mindsets towards leadership are being changed.

Byoruganda Margaret, a member of Nyakarama VHT Group always believed that “women are supposed to be secretaries and vice chairpersons.” After attending a civic education session with FOWODE, Margaret’s mind was changed to the point that she later joined the 2021 political race, where she is contesting as the Lady councillor for her sub-county, Nyakarama North.

Tell us about yourself?
My name is Brenda Aromorach, the FOWODE Gulu district Field Officer. I am a passionate feminist and advocate for the rights of those whose voices can't be heard.

When did you join FOWODE?
I joined FOWODE in 2018 and it had always been my dream to work in a women’s rights organization. FOWODE was on the list of organizations I had to work with and I have achieved a lot from the time I joined the organization.

What have you learnt at FOWODE that you have put to good use?
I have learnt the importance of working with others. Advocacy can not be done in isolation, you need a network if you are to be successful. This has helped me in the execution of my duties in the field. Working with FOWODE has also changed my mindset on women and leadership. Before joining FOWODE, I also believed that there are certain positions for women and men. However, through the various training sessions, dialogues and outreaches that I have organized, I learnt that leadership is for all, and should not be restricted. I have also observed through my work that women make better leaders than men. Working with FOWODE has also helped me get recognition both at the local and national level. For instance, I am a member of the the Gulu district gender-based violence and child protection working group.

What has been your experience working in a women’s rights organization?
My experience has been good so far. I am happy I get to live out my passion and achieve my career objective of promoting gender equality in the community. However, I have also faced a few challenges because you are at the forefront as a field officer. One of the biggest challenges we continue to face is culture. Culture brings us down, there is too much resistance from men. Some of them ignorantly think that we are spoiling their women with our message of promoting gender equality. Since patriarchy is high in the community, FOWODE’s model of using Male Champions has helped a lot because now it’s fellow men spreading the gospel of gender equality, we are beginning to see a gradual change in attitude towards women in leadership.

Where do you see yourself five years from now?
I plan to continue contributing to the fight against GBV. My region has the highest number of GBV cases in the country, especially among the youth. I feel like this is a monster that we need to tackle by addressing it’s root causes. I also plan to work with local leaders since the community trusts them. It is easier for the community members to believe a message if it comes from cultural leaders.