FOWODE is excited to bring you her first newsletter of the year 2021. We prioritize getting more women into elective office and our highlight this quarter is that out of the 1,703 female candidates we supported, 422 emerged successful in the 2021 general elections. During this period, we also joined the rest of the world in commemorating the International Women's Day with a series of activities both online and using mainstream media.

Deterred Not Barred: Still, Women Rise

Following the 2021 general elections that were highly draining especially for women aspirants, FOWODE organized the pioneer Women in Politics Conference as a safe space for women to collectively share their experiences, reflect, learn, heal and strengthen solidarity. In attendance were 172 women comprised of politicians, political parties’ representatives, the public and private sector actors, development partners and civil society. The highly interactive event was characterized by sharing of stories, dancing, networking, strategizing with the focus on celebrating women's courage, strength and resilience under the theme, “Deterred Not Barred: Still We Rise!”

The conference attracted experienced, passionate and highly knowledgeable guests including; Hon. Martha Karua who was the keynote speaker and Hon Rebecca Kadaga, the current speaker of Uganda’s parliament. They shared their personal experiences and emphasized the importance of nurturing sisterhood and working together as a collective to ensure the visibility of women's leadership in Uganda.

“The women’s participation in politics must be anchored on women claiming the center stage in leadership and decision-making spaces including political parties. This means collectively freeing ourselves from the shackles of patronage, that convince us that we can only rise through co-option and reward not by negotiating and claiming our space as equals.” Hon. Martha Karua

The Speaker of Parliament Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, reminded women that despite them being the majority, she was the only woman among the top 30 leaders in Uganda. She also recalled the painful eleven-year journey towards attainment of the Certificate of Gender and Equity in Uganda which was largely due to inadequate numbers of women leaders to support the cause. She emphasized the importance of having women in leadership to ensure that laws, policies and programs address women and girls’ priorities.

At the end of the conference, women leaders from political parties committed to ensuring that their parties implemented the women's manifesto. There was also consensus on the need to advocate for more inclusive, gender responsive, non-commercialized, violent free electoral processes that facilitate women's meaningfully participation. Lastly, all participants committed to re-ignite the flame of sisterhood and solidarity.
Women Demand for Top Government Positions

Women are still under-represented in decision-making positions in Uganda at a time when gender equality and diversity are recognised to have beneficial effects on organisations, institutions and the overall economy.

Following one of the key resolutions of the National Conference on Women in Politics, FOWODE organized a press conference that brought together women from like-minded CSOs, women activists, the media and politicians to demand that the President of Uganda appoints more women into key positions of decision making especially in the new cabinet as a step towards achieving parity.

Perry Aritua, the Executive Director of Women Democracy Network-Uganda decried the fact that there are only 28 women out of the 80 ministers, which is a big imbalance. She emphasized that, “Having more women in leadership is a critical step towards challenging patriarchal forms of oppression that constrain women and girls.”

The 1995 Uganda Constitution, the supreme law of the land, reaffirms equality and women’s leadership in Article 33 (4) which states that “Women shall have the right to equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.” Article 32 provides for affirmative action “in favour of groups marginalized on the basis of gender, age, disability or any other reason created by history, tradition or custom, for the purpose of redressing imbalances which exist against them.

During the conference, women reminded the President of the global, regional and national commitments that Uganda has made towards advancing women’s leadership, highlighted some of the key achievements by some women leaders and asserted that Uganda was not short of capable women to fill key cabinet positions.

While addressing the press, Patricia Munabi Babiiha, FOWODE’s Executive Director appreciated Government’s move to promote gender equality but noted that women are still operating on the sidelines.

While citing the excellent leadership by Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, Members of the 11th Parliament were called upon to elect a Female Speaker to head the Legislative Arm of Government. A call was also made to the President to appoint women in key ministries like Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of water, ministry of Lands, Ministry of Trade and Ministry of Environment so that they are able to make decisions that positively affect the lives of women in Uganda.

The conference amplified women’s demand for more representation in decision making spaces and enhanced visibility on women’s leadership.

"Most of these influential positions where decisions are made are mainly occupied by men, making it hard for women to push for what they want. Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not simply a demand for justice or democracy but a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account” – Patrícia Munabi

The 11th Parliament has only 14 women on direct seats. The situation is even worse at LCV Chairperson level where we have only three women! The other two are Rashidah Namboowa for Butambala district and Jemimah Buhanda Tumwijukye for Sheema district. FOWODE celebrates the three female LCV Chairpersons because having more women on direct seats is the only way to attaining parity.
Evelyn Chebet, a member of the Kapchorwa district women’s caucus, has become the first female LCV Chairperson in the history of the district.

Following her participation in FOWODE’s leadership trainings and mentorship sessions between 2015 and 2017, Chebet began taking on progressive leadership roles as part of the women’s caucus executive and later, as a member of the District Executive Committee. She capitalized on these platforms to foster her political leadership goal as she sensitized communities on key Government programs.

Driven by her passion for women's empowerment, Chebet embarked on the pursuit for higher political ambitions in 2016. Upon joining the district council as the woman representative from Chepterech Sub County, she immediately developed an interest run for a direct seat. She built networks in her community which played a critical role in her quest to become the first woman LCV Chairperson in Kapchorwa district.

Chebet asserts that the FOWODE trainings in transformative leadership helped build her confidence, information base and supportive network, all of which contributed greatly to her triumph.

“I will continue, in my humble capacity, working on the agenda of encouraging women to participate in decision making process at all levels. I am now a different person, not only as woman managing my routine tasks, but a leader with a vision and commitment to women's empowerment. Attending FOWODE’s district and regional trainings prepared me to chase a higher goal of working for the betterment of women in Kapchorwa,” says a jovial Chebet.

26 years old Juliet Ngaigino is a member of Kituti Youth Association, a beneficiary group supported by the Women’s Economic and Leadership project (WELP) in Kituti sub county, Kibuku district. She first benefited from FOWODE leadership and entrepreneurship training in June 2020; and she at the time had no income generating projects of her own nor the skills.

“After the training, I enrolled for practical skilling at a carpentry unit operating in Kibuku Town Council. We had two mentorship sessions as a group which enhanced my knowledge on how to run a successful business. To further my dream, I started my own carpentry unit and employed three experienced men to help me produce quality furniture for sale. I am now able to maximize my savings and obtain bigger credit from my group to support my business growth. I now have the ability to support my family in terms of food and clothing. I have also used this opportunity to sensitize a total of 12 youth and girls to participate in income generating activities,” Juliet says.
In October 2020, Kwagalana PWD Women’s Group in Zirobwe sub-county was one those that benefited from FOWODE’s training on transformative leadership and entrepreneurship trainings in Luweero district. Specioza Nanjovu, a member of the group recalls how she gained the confidence to contest for the position of woman councilor for the People with Disabilities (PWDs) of Zirobwe sub-county during the training. In the course of her campaigns, she articulated solutions to some of the pressing issues in her community particularly those affecting women and girls living with disabilities, and quoted articles from various legal instruments that emphasized their protection.

Before actively joining politics, Nanjovu was concerned that issues affecting women and girls living with disabilities in Luwero district were not being addressed by the leaders. With her little influence, she always tried to make known the importance of women and girls living with Disabilities in the society despite the limitations that hindered her voice from being heard; the fact that she too is disabled.

“I was ridiculed on the basis on my disability, background and education level but that did not deter me. I remained focused and kept advancing the PWD agenda particularly that of women and girls. I could barely believe it when I was declared the winner of the elections having defeated the other 2 contestants who had higher academic qualifications and funds. I will always be grateful to FOWODE for helping me realize my leadership dream,” Nanjovu narrates.

FOWODE’s work in communities has proven that male engagement is critical in disrupting community power dynamics hence creating a more conducive environment for women to thrive. During the quarter, we built the capacity of 18 male champions on human rights, gender awareness and the legal and policy frameworks governing SGBV. These were opinion leaders who were purposely selected to positively influence public perceptions and attitudes regarding SGBV in the districts of Mubende, Mityana and Wakiso.

Hussein Kawuki, a male champion from Wakiso District shared his personal experience during the training.

“"In my family, I share responsibilities with my wife. I usually give my wife the autonomy to do the decision making because she is also a leader in the home. I advise men to assist their wives while at home with household chores instead of leaving everything to them which may lead to GBV," says Hussein Kawuki.
Voice, Power and Resources

Rashidah Najjuma is a proud beneficiary of FOWODE’s trainings on transformative leadership which she says were critical in building her agency. As a political aspirant during the 2021 general election, Rashidah appreciated the need for money to facilitate her campaigns. She then established a tailoring business in Kasana, Luweero specializing in making craft bags. Using her skills in tailoring, she started training prospective young women leaders to help them overcome financial constraints associated with a lack of a fall-back position when they lost elections.

38 year old Najjuma, says that her business is visionary in the sense that it is aimed at economically empowering female aspirants for the 2026 general elections. She noted that many women leaders are facing a lot of financial challenges and there is need to train them in financial literacy.

“I faced difficulties in raising finances to inject in my campaigns and the same happened to other young women who wanted to join leadership. Politics has been commercialized and is extremely expensive. During FOWODE’s leadership trainings, we learnt how to accumulate wealth, manage resources and fundraise for our campaigns. We sell every bag at UGX20,000 and if 100 bags are sold a week, that is two million shillings. You cannot be politically empowered when you are not financially stable,” Najjuma asserts.

Najjuma is grateful to FOWODE and proclaims that her journey to being elected the Woman district councilor for Luwero Town Council and Luwero Sub County would have been very rocky had it not been for FOWODE’s support.

Changes At FOWODE

The FOWODE Board of Directors appointed Elizabeth Ampairwe to the position of Director of Programmes following the departure of Juliet Nakato Odoi. Elizabeth has been serving as the Women and Leadership Programme Manager for the last three years.

Juliet served as Director of Programmes for 4 years from 2017. We wish her all the best in her new journey.

FOWODE In The News

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Tell us about Yourself?
My name is Ritah Kampi, and I am many things. I am a writer who is passionate about positive change, especially peace, a leader at different levels, enthusiastic, and self-driven.

Achievements from working with FOWODE?
I joined FOWODE in March 2020, and 3 days later, a lockdown was announced. It was a challenging time for me because I had not yet been oriented into the organization to know how to navigate properly. However, with help from colleagues, I found my way, and today I am proud to be associated with FOWODE. In the one year that I have been here, I have built on my social and professional network. FOWODE has also given me the platform to meet people I never thought I would meet, people like Hon. Winnie Byanyima.

Also, because of the position I hold, my marketing skills improved, which has helped me personally because aside from working with FOWODE, I also do telemarketing.

What have you learnt at FOWODE that you have put to good use?
Being on the fundraising and marketing committee for the FOWODE home has built my skills to socialize with different people from different backgrounds. I have also learnt how to use my phone more productively to market.

What has been your experience working with a women's rights organization?
Before joining FOWODE, I had a bias about women rights organizations. I believed that they only fought for women's rights; it was only after I joined FOWODE that I realized that when they advocate for gender equality, it is not just for women but rather equality for all.

What attracted you to FOWODE?
I wanted a challenge after working with Uganda Red Cross Society which is a humanitarian organization. I was curious to work with an organization such as FOWODE.

Where do you see yourself in the next five years?
In the next five years, I see myself as being self-employed with a Public Relations firm. And since I love peace, I see myself continuing the struggle for a peaceful world.