This newsletter profiles some of the activities that during the 16 days of activism November 24 - December 10 with together with our implementing partners in Uganda.
16 Days of Activism Launch

On November 24th, Kiryandongo district became the focal point for the national launch of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, hosted at Siriba Primary School in Bweyale Town Council. This significant event unfolded under the theme "UNITE! Invest to Prevent and Respond to Violence against Women and Girls."

The vibrant occasion was illuminated by a diverse array of activities, featuring compelling performances by local artist Kofi Annan (named after former UN Secretary General- the late Kofi Annan). His songs not only entertained but also carried poignant messages denouncing gender-based violence.

Dignitaries, including the Swedish ambassador to Uganda, Amb. Maria Håkansson, UN Women Uganda Country Representative, Dr. Paulina Chiwangu, UNICEF Uganda Country Representative, Munir Safieldin, and the State Minister for Gender, Labour, and Social Development, Hon. Peace Mutuzo, among others were captivated by the musician’s melodies, prompting them to dance in unison. This collective display symbolized their commitment to combating gender-based violence.

The urgency of this commitment was underscored by the alarming statistics revealed during the event. Kiryandongo district, recently ranked highest in the national gender-based violence index, reporting a staggering 3,000 cases in the current year alone. This concerning figure served as a stark reminder of the pervasive nature of the issue and the crucial need for concerted efforts to eradicate gender-based violence in the district.

From (L-R) Dr. Paulina Chiwangu, UN Women Uganda Country Representative, Munir Safieldin, UNICEF Uganda Country Representative, Swedish Ambassador to Uganda, Amb. Maria Håkansson and State Minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development, Peace Mutuzo join hands in solidarity during the national launch of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence in Kiryandongo district.
As the attendees danced and celebrated, their unity sent a powerful message—a message that echoed a shared determination to address and eliminate the menace of gender-based violence. The event not only marked the commencement of the 16 Days of Activism but also ignited a renewed sense of purpose in the ongoing battle against gender-based violence in Kiryandongo district and beyond. The festive atmosphere belied the seriousness of the cause, demonstrating that, when united, communities can strive to create an environment where every individual is free from the scourge of violence based on gender.
On November 28th, the Makerere University rugby grounds buzzed with activity as a coalition of partners, including UN Women, UNFPA, the Swedish embassy, and the celebrated Ugandan music icon Navio, joined forces with his Swedish counterpart, Timbuktu. This collaboration, along with other stakeholders, marked a significant pledge to act against gender-based violence.

The gathering at Makerere University was more than just a discussion; it evolved into an immersive experience, enhanced by the presence of influential figures such as Navio and Timbuktu. The event served as a platform for these partners to reaffirm their dedication to combating gender-based violence, recognizing it as a critical issue requiring collective action.

Beyond words, the stakeholders actively engaged in the cause, pledging to strengthen their commitment to addressing gender-based violence. Navio and Timbuktu, through their musical talents, added a unique dimension to the event, blending education and entertainment. Their participation helped create a dynamic atmosphere, inspiring students to become advocates for change. The students, in turn, pledged their commitment to combating gender-based violence not only within the university but also, in their respective communities.

This collaborative effort at Makerere University showcased the power of influential voices and partnerships in tackling pressing societal issues. By combining awareness, commitment, and the arts, the event left a lasting impact, fostering a sense of responsibility and empowerment among the participants to actively contribute to the fight against gender-based violence.
UNFPA Deputy Country Representative, Daniel Alemu, Makerere University Vice Chancellor, Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe, Swedish Ambassador in Uganda, Amb. Maria Håkansson, UN Women Uganda Country Representative, Dr. Paulina Chiwangu, local artist Navio and Swedish rapper Timbuktu pose for a group photo during the Makerere University 16 days of activism event (Samuel Wamuttu/UN Women)
The Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa (COTLA) – Uganda Chapter Launches Strategic Documents to Guide their Operations

In a significant move to combat Gender-Based Violence (GBV), the Council for Traditional Leaders in Africa (COTLA) Uganda Chapter marked the 16 Days of Activism against GBV by unveiling its strategic documents on November 29, 2023. Under the theme “Unite! Invest to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls!” these documents including a Strategic Plan, an Operational Manual, and a Charter, will steer the Council’s initiatives over the next three years.

The launch event, graced by dignitaries including traditional leaders, government officials, UN agencies, civil society leaders, and media representatives, was presided over by the Hon. Betty Amongi, the Minister of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, who also served as the Chief Guest.

The day’s theme, ‘Harnessing Cultural Resources and Partnerships to End Violence against Women and Girls,’ resonated with COTLA Uganda’s core mission, grounded in utilizing cultural resources to promote gender equality and eliminate harmful customs, particularly child marriage.

The COTLA Uganda was established in 2020 with support from the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU), UN Women, EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, and the Embassy of Sweden.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Paulina Chiwangu, UN Women’s Uganda Country Representative, highlighted the alarming prevalence of gender-based violence in communities.

She emphasized that this constitutes a gross violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls, hindering not only individuals but also societal development.
Chiwangu noted that Uganda faces stark statistics, with over half of women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Additionally, a quarter of girls give birth by the age of 18, one of the highest rates in East Africa. Gender-based violence-related crimes are reported to the police in Uganda every 13 minutes, illustrating the urgent need for concerted efforts.

Hon. Betty Amongi emphasized the importance of working with cultural leaders, acknowledging that about eighty percentage of women in Uganda especially in rural areas, access justice through traditional provisions. She highlighted ongoing efforts to reform customary norms perpetuating violence against women and girls.

Rwot Onen David Acana II, the Paramount Chief of Ker Kwaro Acholi, who spoke on behalf of cultural and traditional leaders, echoed this sentiment, urging development partners to support cultural institutions to identify positive cultural resources and incorporate them into interventions to address violence against women and girls.

During the launch, the traditional leaders elected Kwar Adhola of Tieng Adhola, His Royal Highness Stephen Moses Owor, as the 1st Chairperson of COTLA Uganda Chapter, with Hon. Richard Josel Obbo as Secretary General and Prince Lawrence Opar Angala as Deputy Secretary General for the period 2023-2026.

The development of COTLA Uganda's strategic documents involved extensive consultations with cultural leaders from the 15 gazetted cultural institutions in Uganda, community outreaches, and dialogues on ending Female Genital Mutilation and Violence Against Women and Girls.

Participants noted that despite Uganda's constitutional commitment to equal rights and numerous policies and laws addressing VAWG, the threat remains pervasive. COTLA Uganda guided by its strategic plan, aims to promote positive cultural norms, engage in advocacy, and collaborate across different levels to contribute to ending violence against women and girls.

As the Council for Traditional Leaders takes this bold step forward, it underscores the pivotal role traditional and cultural leaders can play in transforming societal norms and fostering a safer environment for women and girls across Uganda.
UN women engaged it’s stakeholders in a breakfast meeting that involved various ambassadors, heads of UN agencies, CSOs and some government officials to evaluate our strides against gender based violence. The discussions mainly focused on the investments in the prevention of violence against women and girls.

Dr. Paulina Chiwangu in her speech urged partners to take stock, understand what is working – or not working, assess our gaps and see how we can move forward.

She said GBV statistics represent lived experiences.

Chiwangu said there is need to tackle the underlying factors that breed violence in our societies so as to foster lasting change.

“While the necessity of responding to incidents of violence is undeniable, the financial burdens associated with response can be overwhelming. Statistics tell us that only 0.2% of the overall development spending globally is allocated to gender-based violence prevention,” she noted.

Chiwangu said prevention programming offers substantial long-term savings by reducing the strain on healthcare, justice systems, and national budgets.