

THIS YEAR'S WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS WILL BE HELD IN BUNYANGABU DISTRICT

By Owen Wagabaza

Uganda will today join the world in celebrating the International Women's Day. The day is meant to celebrate women's achievements, while calling for gender equality. It is a day that recognises the role and contribution of women to the development process all over the world. It is celebrated each year on March 8.

The day provides an opportunity to enhance advocacy for inclusion of women's concerns in the development agenda at all levels by calling on United Nations member states to design and implement interventions aimed at attaining gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The day is marked around the world with arts performances, rallies, networking events, conferences and marches.

History

It is difficult to say exactly when International Women's Day began. Its roots can be traced to 1908, when 15,000 women marched through New York city in the US demanding voting rights, better pay and shorter working hours.

A year later, the first National Woman's Day was observed in the US on February 28, in accordance with a declaration by the Socialist Party of America.

In 1910, a woman called Clara Zetkin, the leader of the 'women's office' for the Social Democratic Party in Germany, tabled the idea of an International Women's Day. She suggested that every country should celebrate women once every year to push for their demands.

A conference of more than 100 women from 17 countries agreed to her suggestion and International Women's Day was formed. In 1911, it was celebrated for the first time in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland on March 19.

In 1913, it was decided that International Women's Day is celebrated on March 8, and it has been so since then. The day was only recognised by the United Nations in 1975 and since 1975, a theme has been created each year for the celebration.

Relevance

Dr Nelson Oyesige, a lecturer of social work and social administration at Victoria University, Kampala, says the day is relevant because the original aim of achieving full gender equality for women has still not been realised.

"A gender gap persists across the globe and women are still not present in equal numbers in business or politics. Figures show that

Empowering women through social protection



Janat Mukwaya, the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Affairs. Women's social protection interventions are implemented under the gender ministry

globally, women's education, health and violence towards them is still worse than that of men," Oyesige says.

"On International Women's Day, women come together to make the world recognise these inequalities, while also celebrating the achievements of women who have overcome these barriers," he adds.

According to a 2017 report by the World Economic Forum, it could still take another 100 years before the global equality gap between men and women disappears entirely.

Theme

This year, the International Women's Day will be celebrated under the global theme *Think Equal, Build Smart and Innovate for Change*. This theme focuses on creating a paradigm shift for transforming mindsets to the goal of gender equality, as well as identifying new ways of advancing the women's agenda at all levels.

However, the local theme selected for the national celebrations is, *Empowering*

Women through Innovative Approaches to Social Protection; a Pre-requisite for Inclusive and Sustainable Development.

Janat Mukwaya, the Minister for Gender, Labour and Social Affairs, says the theme recognises the importance of providing social protection to women with the aim of minimising their vulnerability. The theme also aims at building women's potential through innovative approaches so that they contribute to and benefit from the development process.

Social protection refers to public and private interventions to address risks and vulnerabilities that expose individuals to income insecurity and social deprivation leading to undignified lives.

"It is now globally recognised that social protection programmes enable countries to address poverty and vulnerability and in so doing improve the socio-economic wellbeing of their otherwise excluded people. Within the context

of poverty and inequality, social protection programmes are increasingly seen as

promising interventions for inclusive development," Mukwaya says.

Mukwaya, however, adds that effective programming for social protection requires an analysis of the underlying causes of gender inequalities as the basis for which gender responsive social protection programming can be undertaken.

"Gender mainstreaming in social protection is critical in the programme design, implementation and evaluation because it lays a foundation for fair distribution of outcomes and impacts on all the categories of beneficiaries," she says.

A number of social protection interventions are being implemented in Uganda. These include Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment, Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme and the Youth Livelihood Programme. "We also have programmes such as asset transfers,

where tangible transfers of agricultural inputs, livestock, agricultural machinery and land have been transferred to the poor, the majority of whom are women. This is done through the restocking programme and Operation Wealth Creation," Mukwaya says.

The minister adds that under the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), 70,200 beneficiaries are being targeted for livelihood investments and 285,500 beneficiaries to earn income from temporary employment through the labour intensive public works component.

"This is aimed at improving livelihoods of the community, especially women who are primary target beneficiaries due to the level of their vulnerability and the Government's efforts to promote gender equality," the minister says.

This year's celebrations will be held in Bunyangabu district with over 200 women expected to be awarded national medals in recognition of their role in national development.

There will also be exhibitions from women entrepreneurs and different groups from Bunyangabu district will receive interest-free credit for enterprise development.



In line with the theme for international women's day 2019, "#BalanceforBetter", BRAC is proud to associate with women in the struggle to bridge gender parity gap through a number of initiatives.

BRAC in 2008, started microfinance operations in Uganda with the aim of creating access to reliable and cost effective financial services. Central to it being the microloans exclusively provided to women groups, which has over the years seen a number of women benefit and build capacity. Many women now own businesses that provide employment to a number of youth and women in society.

In the same vein, BRAC has a deliberate recruitment policy towards empowering women through employment where, 86% of BRAC staff are women. BRAC's Empowerment and livelihood for adolescent (ELA) program is one of the best youth empowerment platforms in Uganda. ELA operates through youth clubs by creating opportunities for out-of-school adolescent girls to access financial services and achieve economic and social empowerment. This programme combines both livelihood and life-skills training to improve quality of life of vulnerable young people, mainly girls in the communities.

With the above and many other initiatives, we take this opportunity to congratulate all Women of Uganda as they celebrate this year's edition of International women's day. With women empowerment a better tomorrow is possible.

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THIS YEAR'S THEME FOCUSES ON CREATING A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR TRANSFORMING MINDSETS TO THE GOAL OF GENDER EQUALITY, AS WELL AS IDENTIFYING NEW WAYS OF ADVANCING THE WOMEN'S AGENDA AT ALL LEVELS