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'NO DEMOCRACY WITHOUT WOMEN': Let's Turn The Page Uganda (TLP Uganda) Launches National Women Leaders' Group To Empower Marginalized Women and Young Mothers in Democracy.

30th March 2023, Masaka City-Uganda

TLP Uganda (Let's Turn The Page Uganda) has launched a Women Leaders' Group comprising of five member organizations, including Community Transformation Foundation Network (COTFONE) in **Greater Masaka Sub-region**, Mid-west Regional Anti-Corruption Coalition (MIRAC) in **Bunyoro Sub-region**, Local Sustainable Community Organisation (LOSCAL) in **Kigezi Sub-region**, Support Transformation Efforts Program (STEP) in **Bugisu Sub-region** and Vision International Actors (VIA) in **Rwenzururu sub-region**.

The coalition aims to voice their discontent over the increasing civic, political, economic, and social rights disparities in Uganda and empower women and other marginalized groups to take an active role in shaping their communities and advancing their rights.

Despite Uganda's efforts to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women, women in Uganda still face significant challenges in political representation. Women remain underrepresented in both national and local government, with women holding only about 35% of the seats in the Ugandan parliament.

Women also face significant cultural and social barriers to their participation in politics, such as traditional gender roles and patriarchal attitudes that view women as inferior to men.

According to Emmily Kabahumuza from MIRAC, who also the TLP Uganda National Women Leaders' Group chairperson, increasing the representation of women in political

positions is an important step towards achieving gender equality in Uganda, and there are several reasons why this is crucial.

“Women bring unique perspectives and experiences to political discussions and decision-making, which can lead to more inclusive and effective policies,” **said Kabahumuza.**

Studies have also shown that increasing the representation of women in political positions can lead to improved governance, including more transparent and accountable decision-making processes.

By seeing women in positions of power, she said, young girls can be inspired to pursue their own leadership aspirations and have greater confidence in their abilities to achieve their goals.

Additionally, by increasing the representation of women in political positions, there is a greater chance that policies and laws addressing gender-based violence and other issues affecting women will be prioritized and effectively implemented.

The women leaders' coalition launched by TLP Uganda seeks to promote gender equality and empower marginalized groups by advocating for their rights and active participation in political decision-making.

“So, this coalition is strong and determined to push various initiatives and programs aim to create a more just, equitable, and inclusive society for all Ugandans,” **Kabahumuza emphasised.**

The coalition further recognizes the importance of sanitary pad distribution in schools and advocates for its policy implementation in the East African country.

Florence Nakandi from COTFONE believes that the provision of sanitary pads can help to reduce absenteeism during menstruation, improve academic performance, promote gender equality, address menstrual stigma, improve hygiene, support girls' health and empower them, reduce drop-out rates, address poverty, and promote sustainable development.

“No democracy is complete without the equal representation and active participation of women and marginalized groups. But we believe that the women leaders' coalition and TLP Uganda's various initiatives and programs are significant steps towards achieving gender equality, promoting diversity and inclusion, and creating a just and equitable society in Uganda,” **she added.**

Sex For Pads

Honest Kyomugisha from LOSCO highlighted that sex for pads is a common and disturbing phenomenon in the Kigezi sub-region. “Some girls there engage in sexual activities with men in exchange for sanitary pads,” she said noting that this practice often leads to early and unwanted pregnancies among children in Uganda in several ways.

She emphasized that engaging in sexual activities at an early age can increase the risk of unwanted pregnancies. 'Young girls may not be fully aware of the consequences of sexual intercourse, including the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs),' **she explained.**

Soulmy Noeline Nabbosa from STEP-Uganda noted that men usually take advantage of the girls in Mbale by offering to provide sanitary pads. Eventually, they have sex with the girls without protection leading to increasing cases of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STI) and unwanted pregnancies.

Additionally, some of the men who provide the pads may be older, which raises concerns about exploitation and abuse. "Still, this can lead to physical, psychological, and emotional harm to the girls," **said Nabbosa.**

Furthermore, when girls engage in sex for pads, they may not have the freedom to choose their sexual partners or negotiate safe sex practices. "Frequently this situation renders them susceptible to being coerced or sexually assaulted," she recounted.

Way Forward

To address the challenges of increasing civic, political, economic, and social rights disparities in Uganda and empower women and other marginalized groups to take an active role in shaping their communities and advancing their rights, the following action plans can be taken:

Promote women's political participation: Efforts should be made to increase the representation of women in both national and local government by implementing affirmative action policies, such as quotas for women's representation in parliament. Education and sensitization campaigns should also be conducted to raise awareness of the importance of women's participation in politics.

Challenge cultural and social barriers: Cultural and social attitudes that view women as inferior to men and traditional gender roles that limit women's participation in politics must be challenged. Education and sensitization campaigns should be conducted to change these attitudes and behaviours.

Provide access to sanitary pads: The provision of sanitary pads in schools should be prioritized to reduce absenteeism during menstruation, improve academic performance, promote gender equality, address menstrual stigma, improve hygiene, support girls' health, reduce drop-out rates, address poverty, and promote sustainable development. This will also reduce the practice of "sex for pads" which leads to early and unwanted pregnancies among girls.

Prioritize gender-based violence laws: Laws addressing gender-based violence and other issues affecting women should be prioritized and effectively implemented. By increasing the representation of women in political positions, there is a greater chance that policies and laws addressing gender-based violence will be prioritized and effectively implemented.

Empower women and marginalized groups: Empowerment programs should be created to promote gender equality and empower marginalized groups by advocating for their rights and active participation in political decision-making. This will enable them to take an active role in shaping their communities and advancing their rights.

By implementing these action plans, the coalition can create a more just, equitable, and inclusive society for all Ugandans, and promote gender equality, diversity, and inclusion.

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About TLP Uganda

TLP Uganda National Coalition hosted by COTFONE in Greater Masaka, is a coalition of Ugandan CSOs dedicated to promoting democracy, civic engagement, and political participation in Uganda. The organization aims to empower women and other marginalized groups to take an active role in shaping their communities and advancing their rights. Through various initiatives and programs, TLP Uganda seeks to create a more just, equitable, and inclusive society for all Ugandans.

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