

Table of Contents

- [***Kampala's market women unite against harassment***](#)
- [***U.N. investigating 'surge' in female genital mutilation in Uganda***](#)
- [***Police arrest 19 people over FGM gang attacks on women in Uganda***](#)
- [***Male feminists inside Uganda's police strike out at killing of women***](#)
- [***Married women now undergoing circumcision***](#)

Kampala's market women unite against harassment

Tired of suffering physical and verbal abuse at one of the Ugandan capital's largest markets, female vendors are holding perpetrators to account

By Alice McCool

The Guardian (19.08.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Z1CtGe> - Some men are in the habit of touching women, says Nora Baguma, a vendor at Nakawa market, in Uganda's capital Kampala. "We call them bayaye," she says, sitting at her banana stall.

"We give men punishment for this. I take men to the office if they cause problems. They can suspend that man for a week or a month," Baguma explains. "It makes them stop. They fear us."

Baguma is the women's representative of Nakawa market, one of Kampala's largest, where about 7,000 workers sell their wares.

The work of a local organisation, the Institute for Social Transformation, has increased awareness about sexual harassment among women at Nakawa. A protocol for dealing with cases has now been established; before, women in the market could only hold perpetrators to account informally.

The market is divided into six zones, each with 40 departments. Every department has a women's representative, and they are the first port of call for sexual harassment complaints. Next is the zone leader, and above that the market's disciplinary committee.

As she puts handfuls of mukene (dried silver fish) in bags for customers, market vendor Catherine Nanzige explains how punishments vary depending on the severity of the crime. "You pay a fee of 50 to 100,000 Ugandan shillings (about £10-20) and if you pay that fee and do the same thing again, you are given a month suspension from the market. If you continue, they expel you."

A Nakawa market committee member, Nanzige has been working there since she was a child, helping at her mother's stall.

"They see me and they fear me, because they know if I see them touching someone I will say that one is not in order, pay 100,000 shillings," she says.

Many, though, are still reluctant to speak out – particularly younger women and girls. “Waitresses serving lunch here are young, 12 or 13 years old. When they take food to customers, those men harass them,” says Susan Tafumba, another vendor and secretary of Nakawa’s groundnuts department.

“They can touch the breast, make some gesture, say something, before they will give them the money,” sighs Tafumba. “Young girls here don’t know they can get help, so they end up keeping quiet.”

Worldwide, women working in the informal sector have long fought sexual harassment at work. A recently adopted international treaty influenced by the #MeToo movement is designed to offer such women new protections.

The convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work has been praised for its focus on informal sector workers, who represent 61% of the world’s labour force and more than 80% of Uganda’s.

“It has redefined the world of work to go beyond the workplace itself, and provides for all kinds of employees,” explains Ophelia Kemigisha, a Ugandan human rights lawyer. The convention covers the formal and informal economy as well as public and private spaces, for example protecting the rights of women when commuting to and from work.

But whether the convention will be useful in Uganda depends on the government, argues Kemigisha. Uganda’s current sexual harassment legislation “was clearly made with women in the formal sector in mind”, she says. Regulations only require employers with more than 25 staff to have a sexual harassment policy, failing to cover women working in markets who also “often don’t have an ‘employer’ per se who would be held accountable”, she says.

At workplaces like Nakawa market women have “found spaces outside of the set legal systems to find redress for sexual harassment and abuse”, explains Kemigisha. The Ugandan government could do more to support these informal mechanisms, she says, “including providing them with more information on how to handle investigations, and sending labour officers to areas that have been neglected to guide them”.

Leah Eryenyu, a researcher at pan-African feminist organisation Akina Mama Wa Afrika, is optimistic that the convention will lead to improvements, despite Uganda leading a successful motion to remove a recommendation that explicitly listed the protection of vulnerable groups including LGBT people – although LGBT people are implicitly included as they remain protected under international human rights and labour standards.

Eryenyu hopes that the treaty can bring about change in Uganda, where she says the #MeToo movement is still small, even in the formal sector. For the informal sector, “the practice [harassment] has been normalised and accepted as a way of life,” she explains.

Eryenyu’s research on women who work on flower farms has found that sexual exploitation – sex in exchange for temporary work or higher wages – is rife. She says that while there are sexual harassment policies in place and women “can report to gender committees”, implementation by male-dominated leadership structures is often poor.

Eryenyu argues that to protect women working in the informal sector, better recognition of their contribution to the economy is needed.

“The informal sector contributes greatly to our GDP, but when it comes to issues of protection they are suddenly invisible,” she says. “The government should be made to

realise this is an important part of the economy that deserves the same amount of respect and protection as anywhere else.”

Nakawa market chairperson Charles Okuni, whose background is in finance, understands the economic value women bring to the sector: they make up the majority of market vendors. Sitting in his office above the market, he says Nakawa is working to improve the capital of market women through access to bank loans and through the government’s Uganda women entrepreneurship programme, which funds small businesses.

Based on his observations at Nakawa, Okuni considers “women’s affairs highly because they are more responsible, more willing to do business”.

“Men nowadays, they don’t want to take their responsibilities,” says Baguma.

“They leave each and every thing to the woman, then the woman starts struggling, selling these things, buying food, paying rent, school fees, so their capital is lost,” she says.

“I counsel the women who come to me with these complaints. When you give power to that man, at the end of the day that man can kill you.”

U.N. investigating 'surge' in female genital mutilation in Uganda

By Nita Bhalla

Reuters (25.01.2019) - <https://reut.rs/2DDNIOF> - The United Nations said on Friday it had sent a fact-finding team to eastern Uganda to investigate a “surge” in the number of women and girls undergoing female genital mutilation (FGM).

The probe by the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) comes after Ugandan media reported this week that armed groups had been forcefully conducting FGM in Kween district near the eastern border with Kenya.

The reports sparked alarm across the east African nation, which has a strict anti-FGM law in place that has helped reduce the number of FGM cases in recent years.

“We have dispatched a fact-finding mission to Kween which will hopefully provide us with more background on this unexpected surge,” Alain Sibenaler, UNFPA country director in Uganda told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by email.

“But what we know for sure is that FGM is being eliminated and therefore the recent incidents do not erase the achievements of the campaign,” he said, referring to joint efforts since 2009 by authorities, charities and the U.N. to curb the practice.

About 200 million girls and women worldwide have undergone FGM, which usually involves the partial or total removal of the external genitalia, according to U.N. estimates.

Seen as necessary for social acceptance and increasing a woman’s marriage prospects, FGM is prevalent across parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Performed by traditional cutters, often with unsterilized blades, girls can bleed to death or die from infections. FGM can also cause lifelong painful conditions such as fistula and fatal childbirth complications.

At least 100 girls and women in Kween were forced to undergo circumcision by groups led by elderly women and accompanied by men with machetes, Ugandan media reported.

The news reports triggered debate in the country's parliament and the government ministers vowed to take action against the "inhuman" practice.

Uganda criminalized FGM in 2010 with a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment. Compared to other African nations, prevalence rates are low with only 0.3 percent of women aged between 15 and 49 having been cut, according to government data.

However, in some communities in the east and northeastern parts of the country, prevalence rates are more than 90 percent, the U.N. said.

Campaigners said more public awareness campaigns are needed, and law enforcement should be stepped up in remote and rural areas where the tradition persists.

"The eastern part of Uganda had experienced long periods of violence and insecurity that made it difficult to enforce the law as effectively as it had ought to be," said Jean-Paul Murunga of campaign group Equality Now in Nairobi, Kenya.

"This is an opportunity for the government to take advantage of the current tranquility to reach the remotest areas and enforce the anti-FGM law to the fullest."

Police arrest 19 people over FGM gang attacks on women in Uganda

Critics say police should have acted earlier on reports of forceful mutilation of more than 400 women in a month by armed groups

The Guardian (24.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2sLzXBw> - Sixteen men and three women have been arrested for allegedly aiding and abetting female genital mutilation (FGM) in eastern Uganda after reports of gangs attacking women in the region.

The suspects were taken into custody earlier this week after joint police and military operations in Kween district. The arrests followed local media reports of more than 400 women, some as young as 12, being mutilated by force by local gangs in the past month.

FGM was outlawed in Uganda in 2010, but campaigners say too little is being done to persuade people, especially in rural areas, to stamp out the practice.

The reported groups of up to about 100 people are led by elderly women, accompanied by men armed with machetes.

"We carried out an operation," said Polly Namaye, Uganda's deputy police spokesperson. "Some of the people we arrested include those who participate in the process, the people who cut, those who prepare the girls for circumcision, the ones who sing during the celebrations and all that.

"It [FGM] hurts the girls [and women], it makes them uncomfortable and fear for themselves. It's torture in itself.

"We encourage that this [practice] is not carried on. We encourage the women to stand up for themselves and refuse to take part in this ritual, which was made criminal by law."

Mercy Munduru, programme officer with the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers, said the police should have taken action earlier.

"FGM has no place in our society and should not be happening in 2019 under the watch of our security personnel. FGM violates the rights of women and girls to sexual and physical integrity," said Munduru.

"We strongly condemn the forceful and continued prevalence of FGM in eastern Uganda, which in essence is washing away the relevance of the FGM Act, a law we fought so hard for to avert such a gross violation of women's rights."

Livingstone Sewanyana, executive director of the Foundation for Human Rights Initiatives, said: "The biggest weakness with our legal system is inability to implement laws that have a bearing on individual dignity and integrity. The FGM Act is one such piece of legislation that has hardly been enforced, yet FGM is both dehumanising and degrading to those who are subjected to this inhuman act.

"What needs to be done to eradicate such a practice on a more sustainable basis, besides prosecution under the law, is to carry out intensive sensitisation of communities about the dangers of such an archaic practice to a person's health, bodily integrity and wellbeing.

"A collective public education campaign by state institutions and civil society organisations, alongside local leaders, would offer a more effective and deterrent solution to this problem."

Traditional beliefs in the Kween, Bukwo and Kapchorwa districts, in Sebei region, and Amudat and Moroto in semi-arid Karamoja region, make it hard to combat FGM.

Munduru said: "No single approach can eliminate FGM. Criminalising the practice only will not change people's behaviour. We recommend greater government involvement in the protection of women's rights. Tackle the secrecy that allows cutting to continue.

"It is time for advocates to invoke human rights standards and hold governments accountable for their inaction in response to FGM. So that girls and women no longer have to suffer in silence."

Male feminists inside Uganda's police strike out at killing of women

By Thomas Lewton

Thomson Reuters Foundation (05.03.2018) - <http://tmsnrt.rs/2p9cTL0> - Balancing a heavy clay pot on his head with a baby tied to his back, policeman Francis Ogweng caused a scene as he marched down the busy highway towards Uganda's capital, Kampala.

With traffic backed up to the horizon, crowds of men stared and laughed as the baby girl swaddled in white cloth slipped precariously down Ogweng's back, pulling his khaki uniform into disarray.

"We want to put ourselves in the shoes of women," Ogweng, an assistant superintendent in the Uganda Police Force (UPF), told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Is it difficult to carry water? Is it difficult to carry a baby?"

Judging by the sweat dripping down his face, it is.

Onlookers were surprised to see a senior officer marching to stop violence against women, in a force that opponents of Uganda's long-serving President Yoweri Museveni accuse of spending more time suppressing dissent than tackling crime.

Police often break up opposition rallies in the east African nation with teargas and beatings, rights groups say they torture suspects to illicit confessions, and surveys often rank the force as Uganda's most corrupt institution.

"Their image has been tainted," said Regina Bafaki, head of Action for Development, a local women's rights group.

"They have actually been more violators than protectors of citizen's rights."

But a spate of unsolved murders of young women, with more than 20 corpses found beside roadsides south of the capital since May, is putting rare public pressure on the police.

They have charged more than a dozen suspects with the women's murders, listing possible motives range from domestic rows through sexual abuse to ritual murder linked to human sacrifice.

Battering of women

Ogweng was not alone, flanked by three policemen carrying bundles of firewood, a 50-strong police brass band and other officers carrying placards that read: "Peace in the home. Peace in the nation. Prevent Gender Based Violence".

"Men can also carry water, men can carry babies ... it does no harm at all, it doesn't make a man less of a man," said Ogweng, who describes himself as a feminist - a rarity in a country where women often kneel to show deference to men.

About half of Ugandans believe that domestic violence is justified under certain circumstances, such as when women neglect children or burn food, government data shows.

"There are those who still believe that battering of women, beating of women, is something normal," said Asan Kasingye, assistant inspector general, another unlikely ally in Uganda's fight for gender equality.

"We must invest our resources, our training, our recruitment ... into fighting against gender based violence," he said, seated in his top floor office at the police headquarters.

"It must percolate, it must be known by everybody. So it preoccupies us."

Stripped naked

The police demonstration calling for an end of violence against women went down well with locals around Entebbe, where about 20 women were raped and murdered in 2017.

"This government prides itself for bringing security ... but at the same time when these ladies were being murdered, the government didn't even talk about it," said Anatoli Ndyabagyera, whose fiancée Rose Nakimuli was killed in July.

The murders illustrate a broader problem in Uganda, where government data shows more than one in three women suffer physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner, although few report it to the police.

"We have in our society a dangerous attitude of men thinking they can dispense with women and they can get away with it," said Ndyabagyera. "They look at women and tend to think of them as items of ownership."

Four in 10 girls wed before they turn 18, even though Uganda has banned child marriage, according to the United Nations children's fund (UNICEF), and few go beyond primary school.

Efforts to pass a bill seeking to ban traditional practices, like dowry and the inheritance of widows by their husbands' male relatives, and to grant rights to women in divorce have floundered for years.

Women wearing miniskirts were stripped by mobs of men following the 2014 Anti Pornography Act that banned "indecent" dressing and the police in 2015 stripped female opposition leader Zaina Fatuma naked in the street.

"There are (officers) who are badly behaved," said Ogweng, who works in the child and family protection department.

"But there are those who are good, and there are many."

Given the influential role of the police in Ugandan society, Ogweng believes he can help to change people's perceptions about what it means to be a man.

"People are so rooted in the culture where some things are only done by women and some things are done by men," he said.

"If a man, a police officer, can carry a baby, can carry a pot, then other men can do it ... Men even called me afterwards and said: 'You have opened my eyes' ... So I think people are beginning to understand."

Married women now undergoing circumcision

By David Mafabi

Daily Monitor (19.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2mRoldO> - Faced with the new law against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), traditionalists have now shifted to circumcising married women with the consent of their husbands.

Statistics released at the 2017 cultural day celebrations that focused on public health, reported that among more than 200 youth interviewed across Sebei sub-region (Kapchorwa, Kween and Bukwo districts), only 24 per cent of girls aged 10 to 14 have experienced some form of genital mutilation, while 76 per cent of women between 25 and 35 have undergone the procedure. Speaking to Daily Monitor last week, the Reproductive Education and Community Health programme executive director, Ms Beatrice Chelangat, said although the practice of circumcising young girls is slowly declining in Sebei, the trend has changed to circumcising married women.

“And this is being done in houses with the knowledge of husbands, in the villages and in the bushes even across the borders to Kenya. Wives claim that they are visiting relatives in Kenya but cross with local surgeons,” said Ms Chelangat.

The statistics reveal that uncircumcised married women are undergoing pressure from their husbands and society because they are not allowed to serve elders, get food from the granary and attend traditional meetings.

“The mothers-in-law abuse them, they are shunned,” said Ms Chelangat.

While reading from the 2017 FGM survey in Sebei sub-region, she said REACH found that in spite of the ban, traditionalists are carrying out the practice unabated in the bushes, in the hills and in caves with most incidents happening in secret, sometimes unhygienic places - creating a big risk of infection.

Former Kapchorwa District chairman Nelson Chelimo urged NGOs involved in the fight against FGM to now target married people.

FMG source

Globally, it is estimated that 100 million to 140 million girls and women alive have undergone some form of female genital mutilation, according to the United Nations Population Fund.