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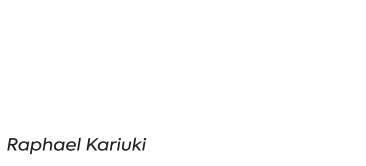
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Raphael Kariuki



## Terre des Hommes Netherlands leads the way in Empowering Girls and Young Women



As we commemorate International Women's Day under Uganda's main theme "Accelerating Gender Equality through Women's Economic Empowerment," it's imperative to recognise the persistent global call for the empowerment of girls and women. This call resonates strongly in international and regional policy and development frameworks such as the Maputo Protocol on the rights of women in Africa and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, SDG 5, where commitments to gender equality are clearly stipulated. On this significant day, Terre des Hommes Netherlands, an international organisation whose mission is to protect children by preventing and stopping child exploitation, calls for the urgent acceleration of progress towards achieving gender equality.

In Uganda, significant strides have been made towards achieving gender equality. For example, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has instituted mechanisms and set up structures to address barriers to gender equality and empowerment of girls and women. Unlike in the previous years, today we witness more stakeholders, including civil society organisations and girls and women come to the forefront to champion gender equality and empowerment; working to change the status quo of girls and women. However, the journey is far from over. For instance, the resource allocation, domestication of relevant frameworks and implementation of policies are still limited. Therefore, continued initiatives and prioritisation are crucial in ensuring progress.

One ongoing initiative is the She Leads programme, implemented by Terre des Hommes Netherlands which has its goal as empowering children and Girls and Young Women to make their voices count. Terre des Hommes Netherlands, in partnership with Plan International and FEMNET, with funding from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is currently implementing the 5-year She Leads programme (2021-2025) in the regions of Karamoja, Busoga, and Kampala.

*"She Leads has given Girls and Young Women (GYW) platforms to become top leaders in their communities and has helped GYW to know their worth in the world."*

Quote from Clare, She Leads Uganda GYW advocate



She Leads Advocates in Bugiri presenting key ASKs in a stakeholder meeting. Photo credit: Terre des Hommes Netherlands

The She Leads programme is instrumental in transforming gender norms and promoting active participation of girls and young women in decision-making processes. Successful strategies implemented include engaging influential traditional and religious leaders to denounce discriminatory norms, involving boys and young men as agents of change, and collaborating with the media to disseminate new narratives. Community engagement and mobilisation have been effective in challenging harmful norms and promoting girls' participation in decision-making.

Through the She Leads programme, girls and young women have been empowered and they have transformed their girl/young women-led groups into

alliances that are steering advocacy at sub-county and district levels. Girls and young women have gained recognition in their communities, taking up leadership roles and influencing decision-making processes. Their advocacy efforts have resulted in consultation by Government officials and input in policy-making, including the enactment of bylaws against violence. Additionally, government officials, religious leaders, cultural leaders, and young men are increasingly advocating for gender equality.

On this International Women's Day, our recommendations for sustaining and accelerating progress in gender equality are clear. As Terre des Hommes Netherlands, we urge local and national Governments to prioritise the approval

and implementation of legislation, policies, laws and programmes that uplift girls and women. Moreover, we emphasise the urgent need for meaningful inclusion of girls and women in decision-making processes – It should not just be a slogan but a necessity at every level of governance. GYW/Youth-led groups are changing the world, mentoring, protecting, and advocating for change. Therefore, we call upon all stakeholders including Civil Society Organisations and donors to provide long-term funding and support for our young leaders. By prioritising the empowerment of girls and women, we will pave the way for a sustainable, equitable and inclusive world for all.

Quoting the words of Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Regional Director, Africa, Mr. Raphael Kariuki, who is also an International Gender Champion, "Gender Equality is the Responsibility of All. I believe that it can be achieved if leaders give space and support women and girls, particularly the younger generation, to have their voices heard at all levels. Let us work together to make gender equality a reality in our lifetime."

Article written by Josephine Akiru, Country Director, Terre des Hommes Netherlands and co-authored by Raphael Kariuki, Regional Director, Africa, Terre des Hommes Netherlands.