



THE REVOLUTION SHALL INCLUDE OLDER WOMEN!

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Elderly persons' rights in Uganda have been largely overlooked as is the case with many African countries that struggle with small populations of people in their 70's+. When compared to nations like Japan and Canada, Uganda struggles with a small population of elder aged people due to a variety of physical and economic circumstances which have culminated in the loss of generations of people to crises such as the AIDS epidemic and other circumstances exacerbated by poverty. As a result of these issues, Elderly women in Uganda are often neglected and have their contributions overlooked by other members of society.

All their lives, many women suffer inequalities and these continue to old age. Older women's contributions. In setting like homes, communities and the economy is usually undervalued if even recognized at all. In Uganda, they carry out this work with little or no choice over what they do, and often without sufficient support. Their contributions-like that of other women are often not included in economic measures despite the inability of economies to function fully without them. It is not uncommon for instance to find orphans getting taken care of by their grandmother or grandaunt with little or no support from family or, to find older women providing food and housing to children who lack in communities. We, therefore, continue to see situations where without their contribution, families would lose out on economic, social and cultural opportunities, communities would be less cohesive, and society would struggle to function fully.

Because of the systemic gender-based inequalities women face all their lives, many of these women reach old age with few assets and savings and no access to a pension or any other kind of state benefits. They are therefore often framed as burdens that everyone has to deal with, cater to, and hence seen as a burden for many of their families, communities and the state. These assumptions about older women, therefore, create a situation where they are only viewed as recipients of care which is an untrue reflection of the diversity and complexity of older women's lives. This also relegates them to the side-lines of participation in society initiatives including social movements.

However, it is very important that we develop infrastructure that can sustain people well into their older years, as an aging population is an indication of a healthy society which is consistently supportive of citizens. We should not enable a system that discards you once you reach a certain age, no one can be young forever and it is fruitless to discriminate against those we are soon to be ourselves. We often find that had elderly women not been there to support their children and grandchildren at some point, that those same children and grandchildren would not have managed to flourish, or make as much money as they are able to with the support of grandparents. Although so many working men and women contribute to strengthening our economy, many of them are only able to engage economically because there is someone at home helping them and giving them housing and most of the time, this person is of elderly age. Thus, not only are older women contributing to the economy directly by having their own shops and businesses and continuing to



have their careers, they are also indirectly contributing by supporting younger populations with issues such as childcare and housing.

For Kasfer Nampiima- a market vendor in Nakawa- and a member of the Kampala Coalition under The We Can't Wait Project (*implemented by the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) Network, MUSAWAH, the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), NAGAAD Network and FIDA Uganda*)



Figure 1 Kasfer on the far right dancing away during the IWD 2022

experiencing this gendered ageism is a normal fixture of her everyday life as a 71-year-old woman working in a market. Every day, she has to work extra hard to fit in, to make big sales, to participate in most spaces and to organize with other younger women.

FIDA's love story with Kasfer's started during the first Barraza conducted in Nakawa market where Kasfer shared concerns of child care and security in the market; violence from young men in the market;

the continued disagreement on ownership of the market and the unclarity around access to Government funds for women from the Barraza. The Resident District Commissioner- The political lead appointed by the Head of State for every district made several commitments including working with the women to address the challenges the market women were facing accessing UWEP. The Mayor- the Nakawa Division whose core role is monitoring the general administration in the area of jurisdiction committed to ensuring that the low standard of sanitation in the marketplace is addressed and solutions are implemented. Check out part of her story here .

From this engagement, Kasfer's journey continued to her joining the coalition of women from the market who petitioned the Mayor of Nakawa Division about their sanitary needs since the market had been operating with only one toilet and no washrooms for over a year. The women also addressed the Resident District Commissioner about their access to funds under UWEP. UWEP guidelines prescribe that the enterprise for which the groups / SACCOs/cooperatives access money for is stationed in the area of residence shown on one's national identity card. Most market women including Kasfer registered for National Identity cards in their different areas of residence but do not have any business enterprises there because they spend more than 8 hours of their time in the market. Because of the nature of their work, it is almost impossible to set up any enterprise in their different places of residence. This therefore disqualifies them from benefiting from their residential



areas' UWEP basket and also Nakawa market's basket. The Resident District Commissioner, therefore, lifted this requirement for the market women in Nakawa market and they are now able to apply for UWEP funds from Nakawa Division even when their Identity cards show a different area of residence.

Kasfer's journey continued all the way to virtually participating in CSW. She was one of the 10 women who participated in a CSW event organized in collaboration with IWRAW Asia Pacific, Global Labor Justice, International Labor Rights Forum, ESCR-Net, IWRAW Asia Pacific, Rutgers Center for Women's Global Leadership, Asia Floor Wage Alliance, National Union of Domestic Employees, and Awaj Foundation. The event also doubled as a launch for the **'Equality and Justice for Women Workers: Launch of A Global Tribunal'** -which is a global initiative focusing on crowdsourcing narratives and testimonies of women workers in various sectors and situating their struggles within a broader women's movement to demand accountability of state and non-state duty-bearers. challenging duty-bearers to account for their role in perpetrating, enabling, or failing to punish violations and discrimination against women in the world of work.

Kasfer was also one of the women with whom women's day celebrations were planned and executed. FIDA Uganda's team joined Kasfer and other market women to commemorate the day through a traditional dance which was deliberately moved to the market to allow for the market women to be a part of the celebrations. By virtue of their work, market vendors never get days off even when other workers especially those in the formal sector get the opportunity to stay home, rest and to be part of different celebrations by different entities and CSOs on such public holidays.

By organizing with older women like Kasfer and having them take charge and be at the forefront we allow them to open up about their struggles, and propose what works for them –which is part of what an inclusive and intersectional movement should look like. We also hope to further prove that their exclusion consequently derails all efforts to achieve women's economic empowerment,



Figure 2 Kasfer submitting during the Nakawa vendors Barazza organised by FIDA Uganda at Nakawa market



gender equality, and equity and therefore the work we do, the systems communities build and the programmes the Government implements must be cognizance of that.