



ASSESSMENT REPORT

ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN UGANDA.

'Defend Women Defenders'



2020-2024



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Acknowledgements

This report is the combined knowledge and dedication of numerous women defenders, networks, and organizations across Uganda. It reflects the collective thoroughness, commitment, and generosity of all involved to highlight a situation that has long been overlooked, ignored, or downplayed in its severity. More importantly, it is grounded in the trust and willingness of many women defenders who bravely shared their experiences and analyses of the violence and human rights violations they endure in their vital mission to defend lives and rights. The development of this report was a challenging process that involved many dedicated human rights defenders across the different regions in the country who due to security concerns and risks in their areas cannot be named.

Sub regional WHRDs Networks of WHRDN-U Who Contributed to the Monitoring and Registry of Attacks System over the Years (2020-2024):

Regional Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Acholi, Regional Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in West Nile, Regional Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Karamoja, Regional Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Albertine, Regional Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Rwenzori, Regional Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Eastern, Regional Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Lango, National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Central

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List of Acronyms

ACHPR:	African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights
ACTV:	African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims
ACTV:	African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims
CEDAW:	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DPI:	Defenders Protection Initiative
DVA:	Domestic Violence Act
FIDA:	Association of Female Lawyers Uganda
HRAPF:	Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum
HRNJ:	Human Rights Network for Journalists
ICCPR:	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
KTK:	Kvinna Till Kvinna
NCHRDU:	National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders in Uganda
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
NUDIPU:	National Union of Persons with Disabilities in Uganda
POMA:	Public Order Management Act
UAF:	Urgent Action Fund
UCC:	Uganda Communications Commission
UDHR:	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UGANET:	Uganda Network on Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS
UHRC:	Uganda Human Rights Commission
UWONET:	Uganda Women’s Network
UWOPA:	Uganda Women Parliamentary Association
WHRD:	Women Human Rights Defender
WHRDN-U:	Women Human Rights Defenders Network Uganda

Foreword

As an organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights, we are acutely aware of the tremendous risks faced by Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Uganda. These courageous women stand at the frontline of advocacy for gender equality, social justice, and human rights, often at great personal cost. The ongoing violence against them remains a grave concern that demands urgent and sustained attention.

This Assessment Report on Violence Against Women Human Rights Defenders, compiled by Inklood Consults on behalf of the Women Human Rights Defenders Network Uganda, offers an in-depth exploration of the severe and pervasive challenges facing WHRDs in Uganda today. Through comprehensive data collection and analysis, the report provides valuable insights into the systemic violence and risks that these defenders endure as they challenge societal norms, confront institutionalized injustice, and push for a more equitable future.

The findings contained within this report underscore the alarming reality: WHRDs in Uganda are regularly subjected to violence—physical, emotional, and psychological—as a consequence of their activism. These women not only fight against the pervasive forces of patriarchy, but they also combat an entrenched political environment where human rights and gender equality are often side-lined. Their work, which is critical to building a more just and inclusive society, places them at significant risk. Yet, despite the obstacles they face, they continue to advocate for change, calling attention to human rights abuses and empowering marginalized communities, particularly women and girls.

The assessment delves into the specific types of violence experienced by WHRDs, analysing the socio-political context that perpetuates these risks. It paints a stark picture of the intersection of gender-based discrimination, political repression, and the fragility of legal protections for women activists. It also highlights the critical role that WHRDs play in not only protecting individual rights but also in challenging and dismantling the structural inequalities that hinder progress.



Ms. Brenda Kugonza
Executive Director,

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.0 Introduction

The Ugandan Registry of Attacks against WHRDs collects and analyses data on incidents targeting WHRDs and their organizations across Uganda. The registry's purpose is to understand the types of attacks WHRDs face, highlight their gender-specific characteristics, and identify patterns of violence.

This year we decided to publish an assessment report utilizing the data compiled by the registry. In this report, we present our analysis and reflections on the data and patterns of attacks we registered between **2020 to 2024**.

The first part of the report focuses on methodological matters, we describe our registry system, its basis, we analyse the context, we describe women defenders who have received attacks, the work they do, their diversity and identity.

We give an overview of the main rights being defended for which WHRDs are attacked, a description of perpetrators. We use case studies, focus group discussions, key informants and literature review to illustrate some of the main attacks reported and documented in the registry. In addition, we analyse how patriarchy manifests in violence that women defenders experience because of their gender and the work they do.

We conclude by sharing our reflections about data presented and key recommendations for the public as a whole. With this report, we hope to provoke questions, reflections, debate and call to action to stakeholders involved in this work.

This report highlights the invaluable work of WHRDs, the immense challenges they face, and the critical need for greater support. It calls on donors and partners to invest in the safety of WHRDs, amplify their voices, and ensure their work thrives despite adversity.

1.1 About the Women Human Rights Defenders Network Uganda

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Uganda continue to face significant threats to their safety and well-being. Recognizing the urgent need to support these frontline activists, the Women Human Rights Defenders Network Uganda (WHRDN-U) was established in 2017. The network aims to protect and empower women advocates who risk their lives defending justice and human rights, especially in environments marked by hostility and intimidation.

WHRDN-U currently works with over 147 women defending rights in Uganda. WHRDN-U, serves as a vital hub for collecting and analysing data on violence against WHRDs, applying a gender-sensitive lens to its findings. This data is instrumental in identifying patterns of abuse and informing strategic responses to protect activists. Additionally, the network facilitates rapid mobilisation of its members and coordinates with influential allies to engage with government institutions and international human rights bodies. This collaboration strengthens collective efforts to ensure that the voices of WHRDs are heard and their contributions to human rights advocacy are recognized.

WHRDs in Uganda are frequently targeted through acts of violence, intimidation, and harassment. These attacks stem from their advocacy work, challenging injustices and advocating for the rights of marginalised groups. The WHRDN-U plays a pivotal role in addressing these threats by providing critical support to individual defenders and their affiliated organisations. The network offers resources and assistance to help WHRDs navigate security risks while ensuring the sustainability of their work over time.

1.2 Strategic Priority Areas and Objectives

This report emphasizes Priority Area 2, which focuses on providing emergency responses to safeguard the lives, physical safety, mental well-being, and emotional health of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) at risk. Additionally, it highlights Priority Area 3, aimed at advocating for the protection of WHRDs, addressing their situations, raising visibility of the violence they face, valuing their work, and mobilizing solidarity to ensure their safety and empowerment. These priorities align with Strategic Objective 1, which involves responding to specific individual or collective cases of WHRDs at risk. Furthermore, this report addresses Strategic Objective 2, which is centred on transforming the broader context to defend and uphold human rights in Uganda. By integrating these objectives, the report seeks to not only respond to immediate threats but also contribute to creating an enabling and sustainable environment for WHRDs to continue their critical work.

1.3 Registry of attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders in Uganda (2020-2024)

The Ugandan Registry of Attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) serves as a crucial tool for collecting and analysing data on the range and nature of attacks targeting WHRDs and their organisations across Uganda. The registry encompasses all regions Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western, and Central and provides insight into both the scale of these incidents and the gendered dynamics involved.

The 2020-2024 Assessment Report is the first publication utilising the registry data collected over this four-year period. The report draws from detailed documentation of incidents affecting WHRDs across Uganda, providing a basis for understanding the patterns of violence and discrimination directed at these defenders. The data is compiled using a specially designed form, developed and refined through collaboration between Urgent Action Fund (UAF)-Africa, WHRDN-U, and other partners involved in the registry initiative.

This data collection tool focuses on capturing various dimensions of the violence WHRDs face, with a specific emphasis on gender-sensitive indicators. These include, for instance:

- * **Types of Attacks:** The registry tracks incidents such as sexual violence and harassment, domestic violence, and community-based attacks, including instances where defenders are ridiculed or ostracized based on their sexuality.
- * **Perpetrators:** The data reveal a diverse range of attackers, including non-state actors such as family members, community members, social organisations, or even intimate partners.
- * **Rights Defended:** The attacks frequently target WHRDs involved in advocating for sexual and reproductive rights, reflecting a clear gendered aspect in both the rights being defended and the nature of the retaliation.

By documenting these patterns, the report sheds light on the intersection of gender, activism, and violence, offering a critical resource for policy-makers, advocacy groups, and WHRDs themselves. The registry plays a pivotal role in amplifying the voices of WHRDs, ensuring their contributions to peace, democracy, and justice are recognized while advocating for better protection measures to address the unique risks they face.

The regional grassroots Women Human Rights Defender (WHRD) networks play a critical role in documenting incidents of violence and attacks against defenders within their respective regions and districts. These networks have received training in essential digital security measures, as well as guidance on how to accurately complete and submit relevant documentation forms for the Registry. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the information, WHRDN-U employs a verification process in collaboration with these regional networks.

While the establishment of the Registry marks significant progress in improving the documentation of attacks, several challenges persist, particularly with underreporting. One of the main issues is the difficulty many WHRDs experience in identifying and reporting attacks. This is particularly evident when the violence is perpetrated by non-state actors or involves gender-based violence in private settings, such as domestic violence or incidents within the WHRD's own organisation or political group. These types of attacks are often harder to recognize and report, contributing to gaps in the documentation process.

Despite these challenges, the continued collaboration with grassroots networks and ongoing efforts to raise awareness and build capacity among WHRDs is key to enhancing the effectiveness of the Registry and ensuring that the experiences of all defenders are accurately captured and addressed.



CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT ANALYSIS: THE LANDSCAPE FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN UGANDA

In Uganda, Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) are at the forefront of advocating for equality, justice, and human rights in a society marked by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. These women—brave, resolute, and tireless—are challenging a system that systematically oppresses them, placing themselves at great personal risk as they demand change. Their work is nothing short of revolutionary, as they battle both the overt and covert forces that seek to silence their voices and undermine their advocacy.

Uganda’s social and institutional structures are steeped in patriarchy, a reality that manifests itself in multiple forms of gender-based violence, discrimination, and cultural practices that severely restrict women’s rights. Whether it is the widespread prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), child marriage, or harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation (FGM), women’s lives are often controlled and diminished by societal norms that define them as second-class citizens. For WHRDs, this means they are not only confronting the political, legal, and physical dangers associated with human rights work but are also subjected to specific, gendered forms of violence intended to discredit their work and silence their calls for justice.

The risk is particularly high for those who challenge long-standing cultural practices or speak out on issues like sexual and reproductive health, land rights, or gender-based violence. These women find themselves in direct opposition to a culture that views their activism as a challenge to societal order. In a society where women are often expected to remain passive and submissive, WHRDs who assert their rights are often branded as troublemakers or even traitors. Their courage places them at the centre of a storm of societal backlash, ranging from verbal abuse and physical violence to social ostracism and threats of sexual violence.

What makes the environment for WHRDs even more perilous is the deep-rooted cultural attitudes that influence how their activism is perceived. In Uganda, where conservative gender norms dominate, women who push for change are frequently viewed as disrupting the natural order. Particularly in rural areas, where these norms are most strongly adhered to, WHRDs often face intense scrutiny, harassment, and, at times, violence from their own communities. These women are not just fighting for their own rights—they are challenging an entire social system that refuses to grant women the dignity, autonomy, and equality they deserve.

This toxic combination of entrenched patriarchal power, societal stigma, and cultural hostility places WHRDs in a particularly vulnerable position. While the general dangers of human rights activism such as surveillance, arrests, and threats—affect all defenders, WHRDs are uniquely at risk due to the gendered nature of the violence they face. In Uganda, this violence takes many forms: from being discredited in the public sphere to being physically attacked or even killed for daring to speak out. For women who are already living in marginalized circumstances—whether due to their gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status—this risk is even more acute.

Despite these overwhelming challenges, WHRDs continue their advocacy with remarkable resilience, often at great personal cost. They fight for the rights of the most vulnerable—those who suffer in silence, hidden from the view of the larger society. They challenge harmful practices and oppressive systems, working to dismantle the barriers that deny women their rights to equality, freedom, and justice.

2.1 Legal and institutional frameworks

2.1.1 Key international Human Rights Instruments

Uganda is a signatory to numerous regional and international human rights instruments designed to protect the rights of women, human rights defenders, and civil society at large. These frameworks include landmark treaties and conventions that provide a legal and moral basis for the protection of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). However, despite these formal commitments, there is often a discrepancy between Uganda’s obligations on paper and the challenges WHRDs face on the ground.

Table 1: Key international Human Rights Instruments

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS	REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS	NATIONAL LAWS
<p>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) United Nations General Assembly. (1979)¹.</p> <p>Uganda ratified this in 1985 to eliminate discrimination against women. It calls for protecting women from violence and ensuring equal rights in all aspects of life. However, WHRDs still face significant challenges, and enforcement remains weak.</p> <p>Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights². This 1948 declaration outlines basic human rights for all, including freedoms crucial for WHRDs. Despite its influence, WHRDs in Uganda face frequent rights violations.</p> <p>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR): (United Nations General Assembly. (1966)³). Ratified by Uganda in 1995, it guarantees civil and political rights, including freedom from torture and arbitrary detention. WHRDs still experience significant repression, especially those working on sensitive issues.</p>	<p>African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR): Organization of African Unity. (1981)⁴.</p> <p>Ratified by Uganda in 1986, it guarantees rights like freedom of expression and assembly.</p> <p>The Maputo Protocol (2010) focuses on eliminating violence against women.</p> <p>East African Community Treaty: Calls for the promotion and protection of human rights.</p> <p>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): WHRDs are crucial for achieving gender equality (SDG 5), peace (SDG 16), and health (SDG 3). United Nations General Assembly. (2015)⁵.</p>	<p>Public Order Management Act (POMA) (2013): Used to stifle freedoms of expression and assembly, often targeting WHRDs.</p> <p>Domestic Violence Act (DVA) (2010) Uganda. (2010)⁶ .: Aims to protect women from domestic violence, but enforcement is weak, leaving WHRDs vulnerable.</p> <p>Penal Code Act (1950):, enacted in 2013 Government of Uganda. (2013)⁷ . Outdated laws used to silence WHRDs, especially on sensitive issues.</p> <p>Non-Governmental Organizations Act (2016)⁸: of Uganda. (2016) . Regulates NGOs but is misused to restrict human rights organizations.</p> <p>Anti-Pornography Act (2014): Broadly applied to censor discussions on sexual health, affecting WHRDs advocating for reproductive rights.</p>

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Treaty Series, 1249, 13. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw>
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United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998): United Nations General Assembly. (1998 Emphasizes state responsibility to protect human rights defenders from violence and harassment. Despite Uganda’s support, WHRDs continue to face significant risks and criminalization.

Employment Act (2006): Protects women’s labour rights, prohibits discrimination, and mandates equal pay.

Equal Opportunities Commission Act (2007): Establishes the EOC to eliminate discrimination and promote equality.

2.2 Disconnect between Commitments and Reality

While Uganda’s participation in international and regional human rights frameworks demonstrates a formal commitment to protecting Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), the gap between these commitments and on-the-ground realities is stark. WHRDs in Uganda face an environment rife with violence, intimidation, and legal repression. The failure to translate these international commitments into enforceable national laws significantly heightens the risks they face.

Despite Uganda’s obligations under frameworks like CEDAW and the ACHPR, many protections remain symbolic due to a lack of political will. Reports from international bodies continually highlight these gaps, yet tangible change is elusive.

Uganda’s international and regional human rights obligations should offer robust protection for WHRDs, but enforcement is weak. Without genuine implementation and political commitment, WHRDs in Uganda will continue to encounter significant barriers to their activism, with violence and harassment remaining unchecked. It is crucial for Uganda to integrate these international frameworks into its national legislation and bolster accountability mechanisms to ensure WHRDs are protected effectively.

2.3 Gender Violence and Discrimination as a mechanism of Social Control

The civic space in Uganda has been deeply impacted by the erosion of democratic norms, particularly affecting historically marginalized groups, such as women. This situation is exacerbated by a range of factors, most notably the deterioration of the rule of law, the prevalence of militarized security policies, and the increasing influence of anti-human rights movements. Patriarchy continues to thrive, supported by misogynistic practices that are either tolerated or directly endorsed by government structures, further entrenching discrimination against women. Gender discrimination is a critical factor and, in this context, and, in this context, serves as a deliberate mechanism of social control.

According to the 2023 annual police crimes report by the end of 2023, 14,681 cases of domestic violence were reported. Of these, 1,520 cases of Domestic Violence were taken to Court, out of which, 423 cases secured convictions, 25 cases were acquitted, 183 cases were dismissed while 889 cases are still pending in Court. A total of 15,184 people were victims of Domestic Violence, of whom 3,243 were Male Adults, 10,792 were Female Adults and 505 were Male Juveniles while 644 were Female Juveniles⁹. This data at a national scale spotlights the violence experiences of WHRDs who exist within these realities.

In addition, to facing many of the same types of violence as their male counterparts – as a result of their justice-work, WHRDs are also attacked because of their gender, facing various forms of gender discrimination that affect all women.

Gender discrimination, reduces WHRD’s capacity to confront and address risks, some forms of discrimination are so much of our part of life daily experiences that they become normalized. If WHRDs are used to

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being hurt or belittled, or if they come to accept as normal the constant attacks against them, it is understandable that they fail to recognize or tend to minimize the violence they suffer as a result of their work. This can be explained in only 10.3% of crimes reported to police making it to courts of law with a 27.3% conviction rate reported and 1.6% of the cases acquitted. The fact that 89.9% of Domestic violence cases go unreported and 58.4% are pending in court points towards normalisation of abuse and little faith in systems of redress.

2.4 Discriminatory gender norms within family or household also affect WHRDs

Gender-Based – violence upholds unequal power relations between men and women, both within private and public spheres, allowing abusers to maintain social and political privilege. The pervasive nature of this violence has had a profound impact on women, particularly Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), who often experience stigma and discrimination not only as individuals but also as representatives of the communities they defend.



CHAPTER THREE: APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The assessment was conducted by an independent consultant, Inklood Consults, between August and November 2024. A mixed-methods, cross-sectional approach was employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research designs alongside participatory methods to ensure that the experiences of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs).

The research design employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehensively capture the lived experiences of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). The qualitative methods included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies, which allowed for a nuanced exploration of gender, power dynamics, and activism within the context of WHRDs' experiences. In parallel, quantitative methods such as surveys and statistical data were utilized to measure the frequency, severity, and patterns of violence faced by WHRDs, ensuring a balanced and thorough analysis. Participatory methods were a key component, actively involving WHRDs, rightsholders, and survivors in the research process, ensuring their voices shaped the findings and reinforced their agency.

Stakeholder engagement was also integral, with a wide range of stakeholders, including WHRDs, survivors, police, legal aid providers, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), contributing valuable insights into the socio-political challenges and institutional responses encountered by WHRDs. The research was grounded in a feminist theory-based approach, focusing on the exploration of patriarchy, political repression, and structural inequality. Various data collection methods were employed, including purposive and random sampling, which ensured diverse representation from WHRDs, rightsholders, and survivors across different regions such as Acholi, Karamoja, Central, Rwenzori, and West Nile, encompassing both conflict-affected rural and urban areas.

Additionally, a desk review provided contextual and geographical background, while focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and case studies were used to capture in-depth personal experiences. The analysis of data from the WHRDN-U registry further contributed to identifying trends, violence patterns, and perpetrator profiles. To ensure excellence in the assessment, rigorous quality control measures were implemented, prioritizing data accuracy, reliability, and integrity, while adhering to ethical standards of informed consent and confidentiality. The research began with a collaborative inception meeting, bringing together the WHRDN management and technical team to define the project scope, timeline, geographical coverage, and logistical needs, fostering a coordinated and inclusive process from the outset.

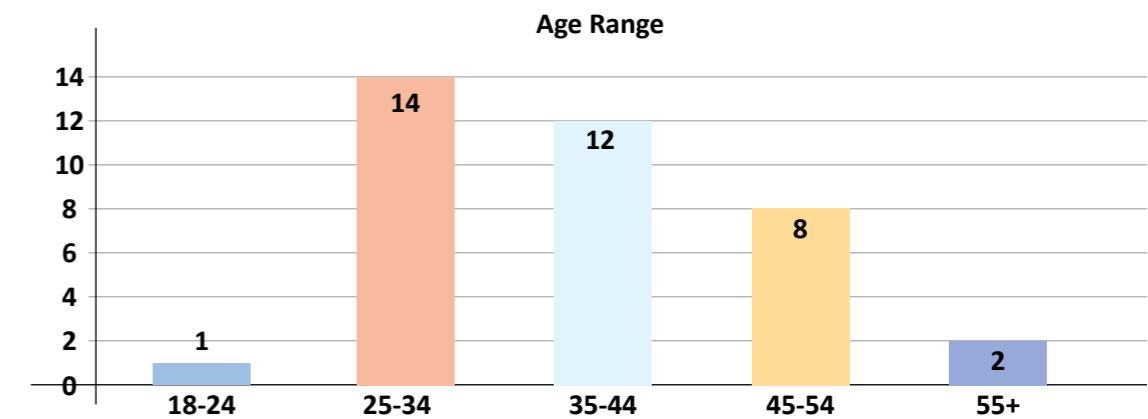
Table 2: Sample matrix by category

Number of respondents reached				
Region	Number of WHRD	Case studies	LASPs	Government and other entities
Central	10	9	2	8
West Nile	10			
Rwenzori	10			
Karamoja	10			
Acholi	10			
Total	50	9	2	8

The consultant reviewed and analysed relevant documents provided by the Women Human Rights Defenders Network (WHRDN-U) to establish a comprehensive background. This was followed by conducting interviews and preliminary activities to ensure inclusive data collection through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Case Studies. The assessment team also extracted and thoroughly analysed data from the WHRDN-U registry, identifying significant trends, patterns of violence, and profiles of perpetrators targeting WHRDs. This registry served as a critical source, documenting various forms of violence, discrimination, as well as resilience and resistance strategies. By drawing meaningful connections between types of violence, perpetrator profiles, and systemic barriers faced by WHRDs, the assessment provided a comprehensive picture of the hostile working environment in which they operate. The findings were then discussed in detail, shedding light on the key issues identified through the assessment of violence against WHRDs.

3.2 Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews and Surveys

1. 37 WHRDs participated in the survey.
2. Of the 37 participants, 36 are female while 1 identifies as non-binary.
3. Majority of the were between 25-34 years.



Our assessment process has been built on rigor, and ethical integrity, ensuring that the final report is reliable and reflective of the lived experiences of WHRDs and those most affected by gender-based violence. To achieve this, we implemented robust quality control measures to ensure data accuracy, reliability, and integrity, ensuring that the data reflects the true lived experiences of WHRDs and other respondents. Ethical conduct was central to our approach, as we adhered to WHRDN ethical standards, including local-language translation and research ethics, while obtaining informed consent, protecting anonymity and confidentiality, and upholding participants' rights. The research design combined both qualitative (interviews, focus groups, case studies) and quantitative (surveys, statistical data) methods, highlighting the intersectionality of gender, power, and activism to provide a comprehensive view of violence against WHRDs. Through participatory methods, we empowered WHRDs, rightsholders, and survivors by involving them as key contributors, fostering ownership, and reinforcing their agency in defining protection strategies. We also engaged a wide range of stakeholders, including WHRDs, survivors, police, legal aid providers, and CSOs, to incorporate unique insights into the socio-political challenges and institutional responses faced by WHRDs. Rooted in feminist principles, our theory-based approach explored the intersections of patriarchy, political repression, and structural inequality, using international standards (DAC/OECD) for a comprehensive human rights and gender justice evaluation. Finally, the collaborative inception process involved an inception meeting with WHRDN management and the technical team to define the project scope, timeline, geographical coverage, deliverables, and logistical needs, ensuring a coordinated and inclusive process.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

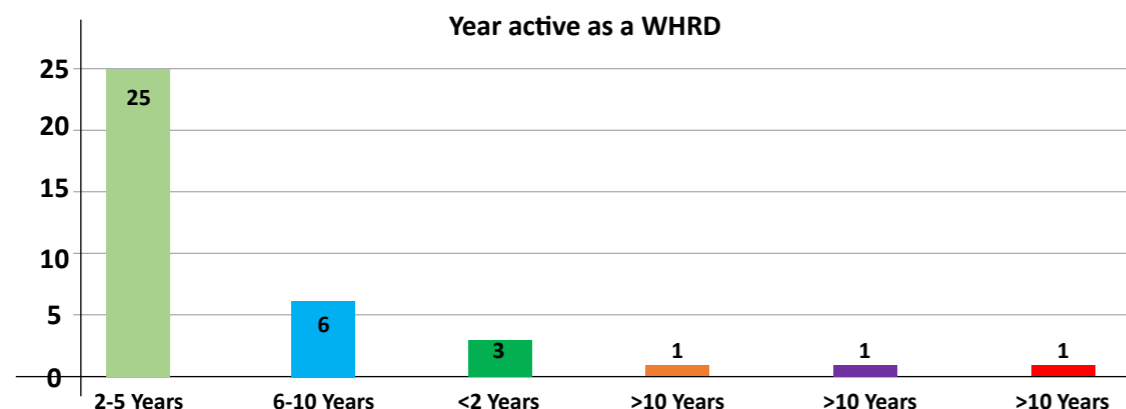
This section presents findings collected from the Data registry which are correlated with the field findings from the Focus Group Discussions, Surveys and Key Informant Interviews.

4.1 Insight to Women Human Rights Defenders Work in the regions.

The focus group discussions, surveys, and key informant interviews revealed the pivotal role Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) play in promoting women’s rights. When interviewed during the assessment study, WHRDs highlighted that addressing HIV programming, and preventing GBV across various regions was key among the work they do. Notable roles captured during the discussions aligned that WHRDs provide safe spaces for distributing condoms, conducting HIV testing, documenting human rights violations, and support in raising awareness about women’s rights and GBV. They support marginalised groups such as LBQ women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), refugees, and adolescent girls through advocacy for education, economic empowerment, and access to justice. Their interventions include mediating disputes on GBV and land rights, promoting girl child education, and empowering women through skill-building initiatives and community dialogue.

The findings also highlight WHRDs’ efforts to challenge harmful cultural practices by advocating for reforms in dowry systems, property ownership rights, and mentoring women into leadership positions. They provide psycho-social support, material assistance, and education advocacy while addressing issues such as FGM, early marriages, and rights for market vendors. However, limited resources and the lack of legal officers hinder their ability to fully address the needs of the communities they serve. WHRDs aspire to expand their capacity to include legal services and enhance advocacy efforts to strengthen their impact further.

Women across the regions during the interviews unanimously noted their awareness of human rights defence and emphasised that they have been actively advocating for these rights under the Women Human Rights Defenders Network. They highlighted their commitment to advancing women’s rights, addressing GBV, and supporting marginalised groups through grassroots initiatives and community engagement. Their work has focused on promoting equality, challenging harmful cultural practices, and ensuring access to justice, education, and economic opportunities. Through the network, they have built solidarity and amplified their efforts to defend and uphold human rights within their communities.



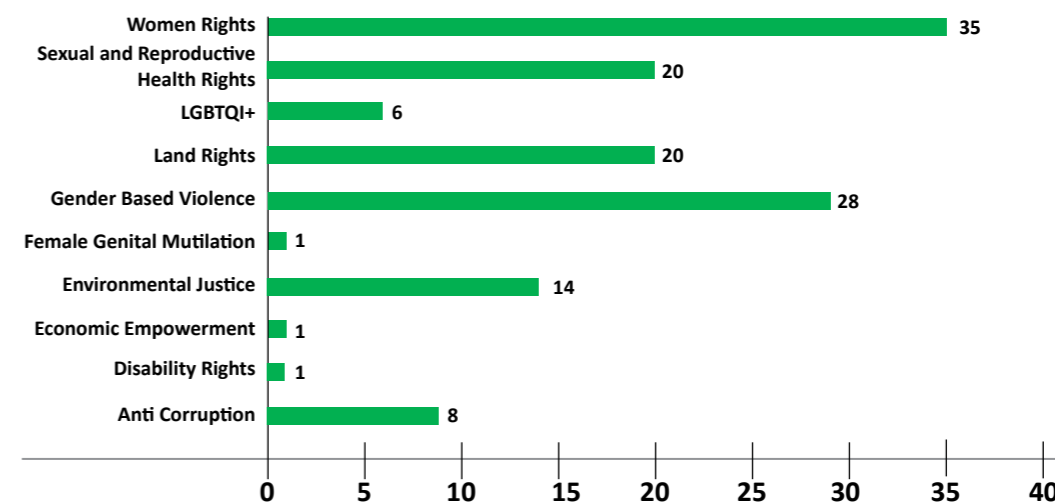
4.2 Key Areas of Focus for Women Human Rights Defenders

The majority of participants in the focus group discussions, surveys, and key informant interviews reported their involvement in advocacy centred on women’s rights, gender-based violence (GBV), land rights, and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). Their work is geared toward addressing systemic inequalities and harmful practices that disproportionately affect women and girls.

In the area of women’s rights, participants advocate for gender equality, empowerment, and the inclusion of women in decision-making processes, often challenging cultural norms and patriarchal systems. Their GBV-related work includes responding to cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child marriage, as well as conducting awareness campaigns and engaging stakeholders in preventive measures.

Land rights advocacy focuses on addressing the disenfranchisement of women in land ownership and inheritance. Participants are working to ensure that women, especially those in rural and marginalized communities, can claim their legal rights to property and land. This often involves community dialogues, mediation, and engaging with local leaders to address disputes and discriminatory practices.

Additionally, SRHR advocacy includes promoting access to essential health services, supporting adolescent girls and young women, and raising awareness about family planning and reproductive rights. Participants work to reduce stigma around SRHR, ensuring that women and girls have access to information and services that enable them to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

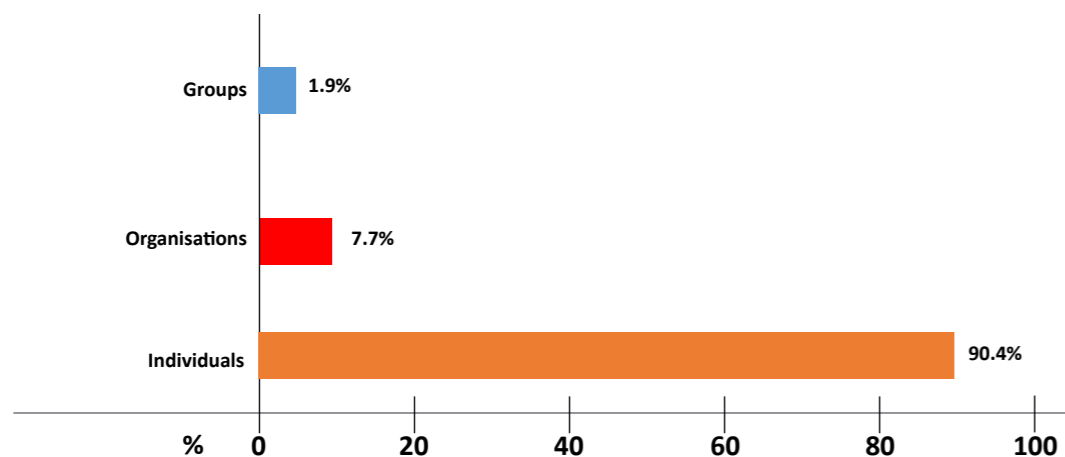


4.2.1 Attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders

This section highlights the number of attacks targeting the women human rights defenders focusing on the types of the survivors and types of attacks and the identities of perpetrators involved.

4.2.1.1 Types of survivors:

Between 2020 and 2024, we documented 260 attacks against women defenders; of these, 235 cases (90.4%) were attacks against an individual, and we registered 20 attacks against organizations (7.7%) that work to defend rights, and 5 (1.9%) against groups, as seen below and in Table one.



4.2.1.2 Number of attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders and perpetrators identified

Table 3: Number of Attacks; Reported and documented cases of violations against women human rights defenders, survivor types, nature of violations and perpetrators (2020–2024)

2020: 21 cases, **2021:** 14 cases, **2022:** 120 cases (sharp increase), **2023:** 49 cases, **2024:** 56 cases. There is a notable peak in 2022, with a subsequent decrease but still elevated levels in 2023 and 2024.

Between 2020 and 2024: we documented 260 attacks against women defenders, of these, 235 cases (90.4%) were attacks against an individual, and we registered 20 attacks against organizations (7.7%) that work to defend rights and 05 (1.9%) against groups

Table 3: Number of attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders and perpetrators identified

YEAR 2020: NUMBER OF CASES: 21		
Survivor Type: Individuals: 17 (81%) Group: 3 (14%) Organization: 1 (5%)	Nature of Violations: Arbitrary arrest and detention: 11 (52%) House break-in: 1(5%) Office break in-1(5%) Threats, warning and ultimatum: 4 (19%) Physical torture/Assault: 2 (10%) Summon: 1 (5%) Discrimination, segregation and ostracization: 1 (5%)	Perpetrator Category: Unknown: 3 (14%) Government Officer: 3 (15%) Uganda police: 13 (62%) Family and community member: 1 (5%) Health officer: 1 (5%)
YEAR 2021: NUMBER OF CASES: 14		
Survivor Type: Individuals: 12 (86%) Group: 0 (0%) Organization: 2 (14%)	Nature of Violations: Hate speech: 5 (36%) Physical torture/Assault: 1 (7%) GBV: 1 (7%) Eviction: 1 (7%) Summon: 1 (7%) Death Threats :1 (7%) Slander, labelling, vilification and smear campaign: 2 (14%) Arbitrary arrests: 2 (14%)	Perpetrator Category: Community member: 5 (36%) Family member: 1 (7%) Unknown: 0 (0%) Head teacher: 1 (7%) Intimate partner: 2 (14%) LC Chairperson: 1 (7%) Government official: 1 (7%) Uganda police: 3 (21%)

YEAR 2022: NUMBER OF CASES: 120		
Survivor Type: Individuals: 113 (94%) Group: 0 (0%) Organization: 7 (6%)	Nature of Violations: Cyber harassment: 3 (3%) Surveillance: 2 (2%) Physical assault: 3 (3%) Discrimination, segregation and ostracization: 9 (8%) Censorship: 2 (2%) Eviction: 7 (6%) Summon :1 (1%) Interrogation: 1 (1%) Exhaustion: 1(1%) Office Break in:1(1%) House break-in :1(1%) Intimidations:3(%) Attempted rape:1(1%) Arbitrary arrest :11(9%) Slander, libelling, vilification and smear campaign:2(2%) Rape:1(1%) Verbal attacks:12 (10%) Destruction of property: 1(1%) Threats, warning and ultimatum: 50 (42%) Attempted arrest: 1 (1%) Emotional abuse: 1 (1%) Psychological harassment: 2 (2%) Sexual harassment: 1 (1%) Office raid: 1 (1%) Attempted assault (Attempted beating): 2 (2%)	Perpetrator Category: Community members: 68 (57%) Private Corporation: 1 (1%) Dokolo district food relief task force: 1 (1%) Family members: 4 (3%) LC 5 chairperson: 1 (1%) Government official: 1 (1%) District officials: 5 (4%) Police officers: 5 (4%) LC 1 Chairperson: 1 (1%) Uganda Wild Life Authority: 5 (4%) Investor: 1 (1%) Security organs: 4 (3%) UPDF: 5 (4%) Mayor: 1 (1%) Nurse: 1 (1%) Government Official Officers: 2 (2%) Unknown: 14 (12%)
YEAR 2023: NUMBER OF CASES : 49		
Survivor Type: Individuals: 43 (88%) Group: 1 (2%) Organization: 5 (10%)	Nature of Violations: Slander, libelling, vilification and smear campaign: 4 (8%) Office raids: 2 (4%) Threats, warning and ultimatum: 20 (41%) Freezing of bank account: 1 (2%) Summon: 3 (6%) Verbal attacks: 3 (6%)	Perpetrator Category: Community members: 31 (63%) Cultural leader and community leaders: 1 (2%) District official: 2 (4%) Family member: 1 (2%) Financial Intelligence Authority: 1 (2%)

	Spying: 1 (2%) Physical assault: 3 (6%) GBV: 3 (6%) Interrogation: 1 (2%) Cyber harassment: 1 (2%) Surveillance: 2 (4%) Intimidation: 1 (2%) Evictions: 1 (2%) Arbitrary arrest and detention: 1 (2%) Acid attack: 1 (2%) Rape: 1 (2%)	Internal security officer: 1 (2%) Political leader: 1 (2%) Religious leader: 1 (2%) Government Official: 2 (4%) Uganda police: 5 (10%) Uganda Wild life Authority: 1 (2%) University Academic Registrar: 1 (2%) Unknown: 1 (2%)
YEAR 2024: NUMBER OF CASES: 56		
Number of Cases: 56 Survivor Type: Individuals: 50 (89%) Group: 1 (2%) Organization: 5 (9%)	Arbitrary arrest and detention: 11 (20%) Physical assault: 3 (5%) Cyber harassment: 3 (5%) Death threats: 2 (4%) GBV: 1 (2%) Evictions: 4 (7%) Hate speech: 2 (4%) Interrogation: 1 (2%) Kidnapping/abductions: 2 (4%) Laws formulated against NGOs: 1(2%)	Perpetrator Category: Clan members: 2 (4%) Colleague: 1 (2%) Commissioner for Education: 1 (2%) Community members: 15 (27%) Deputy mayor: 1 (2%) District councillors: 1 (2%) District Education Officer: 1 (2%) District Internal Security Officer: 1 (2%)
	Psychological harassment: 3 (5%) Office raids: 1 (2%) Slander, libelling, vilification and smear campaign: 1(2%) Summon: 1(2%) Surveillance: 1(2%) Threatening messages: 1(2%) Threats, warning and ultimatum: 16 (29%) Verbal attack: 2 (4%)	District Leader: 1 (2%) Environment officer: 1 (2%) Land lord: 1 (2%) Muslim clerics: 1 (2%) News Blogger: 1 (2%) NGO bureau: 1 (2%) Uganda police: 14 (25%) Partners: 1 (2%) Political leaders: 2 (4%) Relatives: 1 (2%) LC1 Chairperson: 1 (2%) Unknown: 8 (14%)

4.2.1 Findings from FGDs on Threats and Harassment Faced by WHRDs

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and their organizations across the Acholi, Moroto, West Nile, and Rwenzori regions reported facing significant threats and harassment due to their activism. In Amuru, WHRDs advocating against child exploitation have been attacked by family members who prioritize child labor over education. Incidents include attempted break-ins at offices and targeted shutdowns of communication platforms, such as the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) closing a radio station under questionable circumstances. Some defenders have been threatened for involving women in their work, with sub-county leaders withholding support, and police refusing assistance or demanding bribes, especially in cases of defilement or rape. Emotional and verbal attacks, harassment through derogatory nicknames, and discouragement from pursuing justice further compound these challenges.

The main perpetrators of these threats include local leaders, cultural and religious authorities, security forces (police and army), political leaders, and even family members. Businesspeople exploiting child labor, men opposing women's involvement, and some health workers also contribute to the resistance WHRDs encounter. In addition, online harassment through social media has heightened their vulnerability. These challenges highlight the deeply entrenched opposition to human rights activism, particularly in patriarchal and resource-constrained settings, and underscore the urgent need for protection and support mechanisms for WHRDs.

4.2.2 Findings on the Impact of Threats and Violence on WHRDs' Work

The threats and acts of violence reported by Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) across the Acholi, Moroto, West Nile, and Rwenzori regions have profoundly affected their activism, leading to significant shifts in their approaches. Many WHRDs have become more cautious, adopting strategies to minimize risks to themselves and their organizations. Public advocacy efforts have been scaled down due to fears of retaliation and lack of support from powerful individuals, limiting the number of people they can engage with. The trauma resulting from community abuse and hostility has left some defenders feeling overwhelmed, while financial difficulties, such as being denied access to development initiatives like the parish model, have further strained their ability to continue their work effectively. Administrative challenges, such as scrutiny over their organization's registration, have added to the pressure, creating uncertainty and forcing some to defend themselves in emergencies without adequate resources or support.

For some WHRDs, the threats have resulted in a reduction in their capacity to intervene publicly in sensitive cases, such as GBV and child exploitation. Instead, they have shifted to private, less visible methods of engagement to ensure their safety and the safety of survivors. Meeting GBV survivors discreetly and relying on trusted networks to provide referrals and assistance have become necessary adjustments. Some defenders have found ways to involve other actors in their work, building alliances with individuals and groups who share their commitment to justice and human rights. These adaptive measures, though helpful, underscore the restrictive and hostile environment in which WHRDs operate, limiting the scope and reach of their advocacy.

Despite these challenges, many WHRDs have drawn inspiration and motivation from the women and girls they support, who are now becoming advocates for others. This transformation has provided a sense of accomplishment and a reason to persevere. Communication within WHRD networks has also been a source of strength, providing moral support and facilitating the sharing of strategies to overcome obstacles. Additionally, WHRDs have gained confidence in engaging with government officials, security forces, and other stakeholders, advocating for justice and pushing for systemic change. This resilience has enabled them to address GBV and other pressing issues, even in the face of significant resistance.

The backlash against their activism has also prompted WHRDs to innovate their advocacy strategies. Many have turned to policy briefs as a tool to document the challenges faced in handling GBV cases, raising public awareness and highlighting systemic failures. Others have become more assertive in their

engagement with the judicial system, using courts to fight injustices and set precedents for future cases. While the threats and violence have created substantial stress, these defenders remain steadfast in their commitment to promoting human rights, demonstrating resilience and determination to continue their work despite the risks.

4.2.3 Impact of Violence and Harassment on Emotional and Physical Wellbeing

Participants from a focus group discussion (FGD) in Moroto highlighted the profound emotional and physical toll of the violence and harassment they face as Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). The constant threats and intimidation have led to self-censorship and a deep-seated fear of speaking out or protesting, significantly stifling their advocacy efforts. This fear often prevents them from raising critical issues, and when they do, they risk being excluded from future meetings, further isolating them from important discussions and decision-making processes.

The harassment has also harmed their professional reputation, with funders and external stakeholders being misinformed about their work and character. Negative feedback from district authorities and other actors undermines their credibility and jeopardizes their ability to secure support and resources. This environment of hostility not only impacts their advocacy but also leaves them feeling unsupported and alienated, exacerbating emotional stress and mental health challenges.

Overall, the cumulative effects of these experiences create a climate of fear, isolation, and emotional exhaustion, making it increasingly difficult for WHRDs in Moroto to continue their critical work in defending human rights.

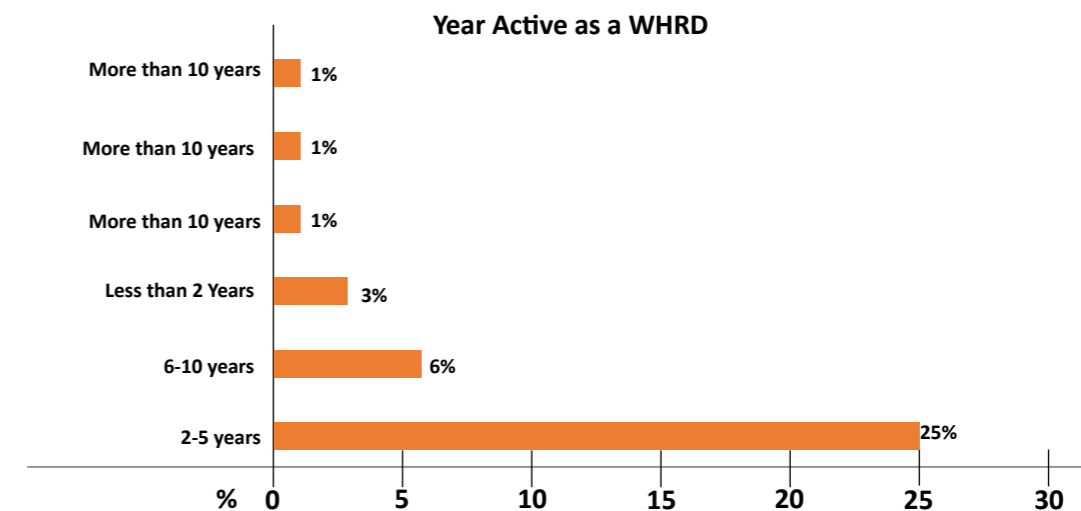
4.2.3.1 Analysis of the findings

- * **Presence of Organizations:** Organizations have shown a notable presence in 2021 and 2022, playing a crucial role in advocating for and supporting human rights defenders.
- * **Community Groups and Journalists:** These groups appear irregularly across the years, with a few documented cases highlighting their intermittent engagement in defending human rights.
- * **Prominence of WHRDs:** Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) became particularly prominent in 2024, with 50 reported cases, indicating a significant rise in their involvement and the challenges they face.
- * **Prevalence of Individual Cases:** Individuals constitute the majority of cases across all years, with a significant increase of 109 cases in 2022 compared to 2021. Several factors contribute to this rise:
 - **Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic:** The lingering effects of the pandemic in 2022, such as economic hardships, lockdowns, and restricted movement, exacerbated vulnerabilities for individuals. This situation heightened risks for women, children, and marginalized groups, leading to increased incidents of domestic violence, unemployment, and health challenges. Consequently, more individuals sought assistance from legal aid organizations like FIDA-Uganda. WHRDN-U is a young growing organisation that began working on the registry in 2020 with in the COVID-19 times, we have witnessed a continued increase in the number of documented attacks. In COVID times WHRDN-U mobilised our regional networks to contribute to our registry system, increased violence and criminalisation faced by WHRDs in Uganda.
 - **Political and Civil Unrest:** Uganda experienced significant political tension during the 2021 general elections. The post-election period in 2022 likely saw an increase in human rights violations against individuals. Incidents of post-election violence, crackdowns on opposition supporters, and civil unrest prompted more individuals to seek legal support and protection.

- **Economic Pressures and Poverty:** The economic aftermath of the pandemic, including inflation, unemployment, and rising living costs, contributed to social instability. Vulnerable individuals, particularly in rural areas, were disproportionately affected, leading to increased reports of abuse, land disputes, labor rights violations, and other personal grievances.

4.2.3.2. Types of Survivors:

Individuals are the most affected across all years, comprising between 81% and 94% of cases annually. Groups faced very few cases, with no recorded group cases in 2021 or 2022, and only one case each in 2020, 2023, and 2024, and organizations had a small but consistent presence as survivors, averaging around 5-10% of cases annually during the focus group discussions, surveys and KIIs with case studies it was noted that majority of the participants have spent 2 – 5 years as a WHRD.



4.3 Nature of Violations

4.3.1 Nature of Violations:

Common violations across the years include arbitrary arrests and detention, a recurring violation, particularly high in 2020 (52%) and 2024 (20%), threats, warnings, and ultimatums, frequently used against WHRDs, peaking at 50 cases in 2022 (42%), physical assault and torture, present each year, representing a consistent form of violence against WHRDs, verbal attacks and smear campaigns, seen in various forms such as slander, hate speech, and intimidation, and other notable violations like cyber harassment and surveillance, particularly prevalent in 2022, indicating rising digital threats, and gender-based violence (GBV), evictions, and property destruction, reported irregularly, with specific instances of severe attacks like attempted rape, acid attacks, and kidnappings recorded in recent years.

4.3.2 Perpetrator Categories:

Community members are predominant perpetrators in most years, especially in 2022 (57%) and 2023 (63%), Uganda Police were frequently involved in cases, with a peak involvement of 62% in 2020 and sustained presence across subsequent years, family members and local leaders appeared consistently, especially in cases involving domestic or community disputes, government and security officials, state actors such as district officials, internal security officers, and specific government bodies (e.g., Uganda Wildlife Authority, NGO Bureau) were notable perpetrators, particularly in cases tied to political or environmental advocacy, and other noteworthy perpetrators included private corporations (especially in 2022) and new groups like news bloggers, religious leaders, and specific district and cultural leaders.

4.3.3. Implications

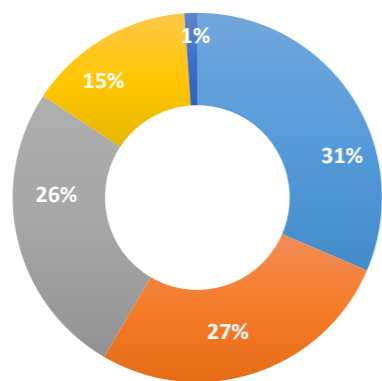
The implications and recommendations emphasize the need to strengthen legal protections by implementing and enforcing laws that prevent arbitrary arrests and threats, thereby providing WHRDs with legal recourse. There is also a call for increased accountability, particularly from the police and other state agencies, to reduce impunity. Community and stakeholder engagement is crucial to addressing community-driven violence, which can be achieved through outreach programs. Additionally, digital security measures should be prioritized, including training and tools for WHRDs to protect them from cyber harassment and digital surveillance. Lastly, support services must be expanded, ensuring that WHRDs have access to psychosocial, legal, and physical security support, providing immediate assistance when they are attacked.

4.3.3.1 Impact of Identity Protection on WHRD Activities

Participants from FGDs in the West Nile and Rwenzori regions emphasized that the need to protect their identities has limited their ability to fully engage in or lead Women Human Rights Defender (WHRD) activities. In the West Nile region, participants noted the paradox of balancing anonymity with the visible nature of WHRD work, which often requires having a public presence to create impact. In the Rwenzori region, the need for identity protection is particularly felt during interactions with police and community members, as these engagements sometimes expose WHRDs to heightened risks of retaliation. The challenge of working “in the shadows” makes it difficult to build trust, mobilize effectively, and fully advocate for human rights.

The majority of participants (71%) reported that violence and harassment have negatively impacted their work as Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), forcing them to adopt increased caution, reduce their outspokenness, and, in some cases, abandon their advocacy altogether. These challenges create a climate of fear and self-censorship, significantly diminishing the effectiveness and reach of WHRD efforts in addressing critical issues like gender-based violence, land rights, and reproductive health rights. Conversely, only 16% of respondents indicated that such adversity motivates them to persevere, often driven by a sense of duty and resilience despite the risks involved. This disparity underscores the urgent need for protective measures and psychosocial support to ensure WHRDs can safely and confidently continue their critical work.

In what ways has violence/ harassment impacted your personal life?



■ Stress or anxiety ■ Fear for my family's safety ■ Reduced social interactions
 ■ Physical health issues ■ Psychologically affected.

4.3.3.2 Increased Threats and Harassment During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated threats and harassment against WHRDs in the West Nile region, as shared by participants in one FGD. Lockdowns kept people at home, intensifying tensions within communities and households. Economic hardships, reduced income, and capital depletion during the pandemic further fuelled the problem. Men, desperate for financial relief, resorted to selling land, which led to conflicts and escalated harassment against WHRDs, particularly those advocating for women's land rights. This period underscored the intersection of economic challenges and social tensions, compounding the risks faced by WHRDs in their work to protect and promote human rights.

These findings illustrate the dual pressures WHRDs face in navigating personal safety and sustaining their advocacy, especially during times of crisis like the pandemic.

4.3.3.3 Risks associated with specific rights: Number of attacks according to the right defended at the time of being attacked

Given the situation in the region, the WHRDs who have suffered the greatest number of attacks are those who challenge, (1) gender inequality especially involving violence, health and sexual reproductive health and (2) prevailing land grabbing. Women defenders defend a wide range of rights at the same time or different times. Since the beginning of the registry in 2020, each case file has documented the main action in defence of human rights that WHRDs were involved when they were attacked (Figure 2 is a number of attacks according to the human rights work defended and table 2) shows attacks per year.

Table 4: Attacks on WHRDs by Rights Defended (2020-2024)

2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
21.57% Right to access Justice (11)	11.9% Right to access Justice (5)	2.63% Right to access Justice (1)	14.3% Right to food (1)	13.3% Right to food (2)
12.5% Right to health (5)	21.4% Right to health (9)	42.11% Right to health (16)	42.9% Right to health (3)	26.7% Right to health (4)
5.0% Right to safety and protection(2)	21.4% Right to safety and protection of LGBTQI persons (9)	18.42% Safety& Protection of LGBTQI to access Justice (7)	28.6% Land rights (2)	6.7% Right to safety and security (1)
32.5% Economic and Social Rights(13)	4.8% Education (2)	2.63% Right to Education (1)	14.3% Economic Right (1)	73.3% Right to food (11)

2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
15.0% Right to land ownership(6)	9.5% Economic Rights (4)	34.21% Economic Rights(13)	100% Right to life free from violence (7)	13.3% Right to a life free from violence (2)
2.5% Right to access information(1)	7.1% Environmental Rights (3)	10.53% Environmental Rights (4)		
32.5% Right to a life free from violence (13)	9.5% Land rights (4)	63.16% Land Rights Justice (24)		
5.0% Right to clean and accessible water (2)	26.2% Right to a life free from violence (11)	2.63% Property Rights (1)		
2.5% Right to shelter (1)	2.4% Right to access information (1)	13.16% Right to shelter (5)		
	2.4% Protection of WHRDs from abuse (1)	2.9% Property Rights (1)		
		92.11% Right to Life free from violence (35)		
		2.63% Right to food (1)		
		28.95% Rights to access information (11)		
		2.63% Freedom from exploitation and abused (1)		

Table 5: For all years combined: The Rights They Defend When Women Human Rights Defenders are attacked.

Right WHRD was defending at the time of attacks	Number of attacks due to this right	Percentage (%)
Right to life free from Violence	68	26.15%
Right to health	37	14.23%
Right to land	47	18.08%
Right to safety and protection	19	7.31%
Economic rights	31	11.92%
Right to access to justice	18	6.92%
Right to food	04	1.54%
Right to access information	13	5.00%
Education rights	05	1.92%
Right to water	02	0.77%
Freedom from Exploitation	01	0.38%
Property rights	01	0.38%
Right to Shelter	06	2.31%
Protection , of WHRDs from abuse	01	0.38%
Environmental rights	07	2.69%
Total	260	100%

4.3.3.4 Key insights and analysis

From the data, it is evident that WHRDs are frequently targeted when defending specific rights, reflecting the prevailing socio-political challenges and gender dynamics within Uganda.

Right to Life Free from Violence (28.92%): WHRDs defending the right to live free from violence (GBV, FGM, DV & SV) face the highest number of attacks, underscoring the pervasive nature of gender-based violence and the critical need for protection mechanisms. Overall, it is the most frequently defended right during attacks, with peaks in 2022 (92.11%) and significant representation across all years. This highlights the critical need for strategies to protect WHRDs addressing such violations.

Right to Health (15.73%): Attacks on WHRDs advocating for health rights reflect systemic barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services and challenge patriarchal norms restricting women’s health autonomy. This right was consistently targeted, especially in 2022 (42.11%), indicating the increased risks faced by defenders of health rights, necessitating targeted interventions.

Right to Land (14.46%): The high incidence of attacks related to land rights indicates the contentious nature of land ownership and the risks faced by WHRDs fighting against land grabbing. These defenders often confront powerful economic and political interests, with high incidences in 2020 (64.71%) and 2022 (63.16%), revealing the risks WHRDs face when advocating for land rights.

Right to Safety and Protection (8.09%): WHRDs advocating for safety and protection, particularly for marginalized groups like LGBTQTI individuals, encounter substantial threats, highlighting the intersectional nature of their activism.

Economic and Social Rights (7.65%): Defenders of economic rights face notable attacks, illustrating the link between economic autonomy and gender equality. These WHRDs challenge discriminatory economic practices that disproportionately affect women, with prominent attacks in 2024 (25.49%) and 2022 (34.21%).

Right to Access to Justice (7.23%): Attacks on WHRDs seeking justice for human rights violations point to systemic failures in legal frameworks and the repression of accountability efforts.

Safety and Protection: The highest frequency of attacks in 2023 (21.43%) and 2022 (18.42%) were related to LGBTQTI persons, demonstrating the intersectional threats WHRDs defending marginalized groups face. Additionally, a report by Front Line Defenders (2022) indicates that 17% of human rights defenders killed in 2022 were women, including transgender individuals, underscoring the heightened vulnerability of WHRDs in conflict with deeply entrenched societal prejudices (Global Analysis, Front Line Defenders, 2022, p. 7).

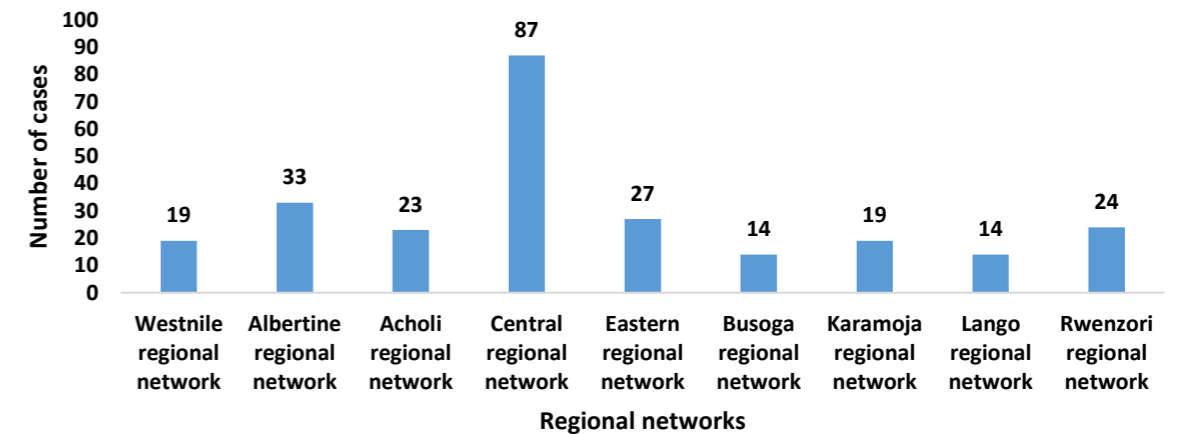
Right to Food, Shelter, and Access to Information: These areas also see significant attacks, emphasizing the broader socio-economic and political dimensions of WHRDs' work. The right to food and shelter has been a targeted area of WHRDs' advocacy, with documented attacks in 2020 related to food insecurity and in 2022 concerning forced evictions and inadequate housing. Advocating for these basic rights involves confronting systemic issues like poverty, inequality, and discrimination. By defending the right to food and shelter, WHRDs not only strive to meet immediate needs but also work towards creating a more equitable and just society. These efforts are essential for the overall well-being of communities and require sustained support from both local and international stakeholders to ensure their safety and effectiveness.

From the above data, it is evident that WHRDs face multi-dimensional threats rooted in systemic gender inequality and power imbalances. This calls for targeted interventions to support and protect WHRDs in their crucial work, particularly in areas most vulnerable to attacks. The attacks are experienced very differently depending on the diversity of struggles, identities and contexts.

4.4 Number and percentage of attacks reported and documented by region

Year	West Nile Region (# & %)	Albertine Region (# & %)	Acholi Region (# & %)	Central Region (# & %)	Eastern Region (# & %)	Lango Region (# & %)	Karamoja Region (# & %)	Rwenzori Region (# & %)	Busoga Region (# & %)	Total Cases Per year
2020	1 (4.76)	13 (61.90%)	2 (9.52%)	1 (4.76%)	1 (4.76%)	1 (4.76%)	1 (4.76%)	1 (4.76%)	0 (0.00%)	21
2021	1 (7.14)	3 (21.43%)	7 (50.00%)	2 (14.29%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (7.14%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	14
2022	5 (4.17%)	12 (10.00%)	6 (5.00%)	50 (41.67%)	8 (6.67%)	6 (5.00%)	14 (11.67%)	15 (12.50%)	4 (3.33%)	120
2023	7 (14.29%)	2 (4.08%)	6 (12.24%)	13 (26.53%)	6 (12.24%)	4 (8.16%)	2 (4.08%)	8 (16.33%)	1 (2.04%)	49
2024	5 (8.93%)	3 (5.36%)	2 (3.57%)	21 (26.53%)	12 (21.43%)	2 (3.57%)	2 (3.57%)	0 (0.00%)	9 (16.07)	56
Total	19 (7.31%)	33 (12.69%)	23 (8.85%)	87 (33.46%)	27 (10.38%)	14 (5.38%)	19 (7.31%)	24 (9.23%)	14 (5.385)	260

A bar graph showing summary of attacks reported and documented per region between 2020-2024.



4.4.1 Insights and Observations:

- * The **Central Regional Network** has the highest number of documented cases (87), indicating a concentration of incidents.
- * The **Albertine Regional Network** and **Acholi Regional Network** follow with 33 and 23 cases, respectively.
- * **Busoga Regional Network** and **Lango Regional Network** documented the fewest cases, each totalling 14 over the five years.
- * **West Nile Region:** Steady increase in reporting, with a peak of 14.29% in 2023, suggesting growing awareness and network support. **Albertine Region:** A strong contributor in 2020 (61.90%), though percentages declined as other regions increased reporting. **Central Region:** Consistently leading in total cases (33.46%), showing higher visibility or possibly greater accessibility for reporting. **Karamoja and Busoga Regions:** Though relatively low in total numbers, the percentages highlight their growing participation, particularly in 2022 and 2024.
- * The presence of WHRD networks facilitated reporting. This enabled documentation and awareness in areas previously underreported, reflecting their importance in empowering rural WHRDs. The fact that WHRDs in rural areas are beginning to report is a positive indicator that regional networks are gradually gaining trust and effectiveness. As these networks expand their reach and build awareness, they provide essential mechanisms for WHRDs in remote areas to challenge the normalization of violence and seek justice. Regional networks like those in West Nile, Karamoja, and Busoga have improved reporting of incidents, even though numbers remain relatively low compared to urban areas. The Karamoja Regional Network documented 14 cases in 2022, showing a significant increase from previous years. The West Nile Regional Network saw cases grow from 1 in 2020 to 7 in 2023, demonstrating its expanding reach and effectiveness.
- * The data indicates disparities in the number of cases reported by regional networks, which point to systemic challenges faced by WHRDs in rural and remote areas in reporting violence and abuses. Challenges in reporting by WHRDs in Rural and Remote Areas:
- * **Underreporting in Isolated Locations:** Regions such as Lango, Karamoja, and Busoga documented fewer cases (14 each), suggesting that WHRDs in rural and isolated areas face significant barriers to reporting. These barriers include: **Fear of retaliation:** In small communities, reporting

violations could expose WHRDs to further harm and Lack of awareness or support: Limited knowledge of rights and available protection measures often leaves WHRDs unable to document or report their experiences. Normalization of Violence against Women. Cultural Acceptance: The lower reporting rates in some regions reflect the deeply entrenched normalization of violence against women. For instance; Violence is trivialized: Abuse may not be perceived as significant enough to report due to societal attitudes. Self-blame and societal pressures: Women internalize blame or face cultural stigmatization for speaking out, further suppressing reports. Systemic Challenges: Persistent harmful cultural practices and gender discrimination further silence WHRDs, leaving violence unchallenged.

4.4.2 Key Observations

Key observations indicate that WHRDs in rural areas, such as West Nile, Karamoja, Busoga, and Lango regions, face significant challenges in reporting and documenting violence due to isolation, fear of retaliation, and deeply rooted cultural norms that normalize violence against women, with West Nile showing a steady increase in reported cases, Karamoja demonstrating growing network presence in 2022, and Busoga and Lango regions consistently underreporting due to fear and stigmatization, while urban areas like Central and Acholi regions benefit from higher visibility and more accessible support networks, though the increased reporting in these areas does not necessarily correlate with lower vulnerability, as WHRDs in urban contexts may face greater threats due to their visibility in more active social or political environments.

4.4.2.1 Gender-based attacks and attacks with a gender component on Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs)

Gender-based attacks and attacks with a gender component on Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) reveal the reality of the challenges faced by the WHRDs. Among the total reported cases, direct gender-based attacks constitute a significant majority, with 109 incidents accounting for 59% of all cases. Meanwhile, attacks that include a gender component make up 41%, translating to 78 cases. Gender-based violence (GBV) follows at 21%, with 39 cases, underscoring the heightened risk WHRDs face due to their gender. Slander, a deliberate attempt to undermine reputations and credibility, accounts for 18% of cases, totalling 34 incidents. Arbitrary arrests, a tactic often used to intimidate and suppress, make up 22%, or 41 cases. The perpetrators of these violations are diverse, with the community being the largest category, responsible for 53% of all reported cases. The police, institutions meant to protect citizens, account for 26%, reflecting a troubling misuse of power against WHRDs. Family members, often perceived as sources of support, contribute to 21% of the total cases, demonstrating the intersection of personal and societal pressures in these violations.

The statistics (details below, table and graph) highlight the multifaceted threats faced by WHRDs and emphasize the need for targeted interventions to safeguard their rights and well-being, with 109 cases (59% of total cases reported) classified as direct gender attacks, and 78 cases (41% of total cases reported) involving attacks with a gender component; key violations include threats (39%, 73 cases), gender-based violence (GBV) (21%, 39 cases), slander (18%, 34 cases), and arbitrary arrests (22%, 41 cases); key perpetrators include community members (53% of total cases), police (26% of total cases), and family members (21% of total cases).

Year	Total Reported Cases (%)	District Gender Attacks (%)	Key Violations (% of Cases)	Key Perpetrators	Key Perpetrators	Cultural Drivers
2020	21	52% (11 cases)	48% (10 cases)	Arbitrary arrests (52%), GBV (25%), Verbal attacks (23%)	Community (40%), Police (35%), Family (25%)	Gender discrimination, harmful cultural practices
2021	28	55% (15 cases)	45% (13 cases)	Slander (30%), hate speech (20%), arbitrary arrests (50%)	Police (21%), Community (50%), Family (29%)	Societal norms delegitimizing women's voices
2022	35	58% (20 cases)	42% (15 cases)	Threats (52%), digital harassment (20%), GBV (18%)	Community (55%), Government (25%), Family (20%)	Rise in digital Platforms amplifying harassment
2023	47	60% (28 cases)	40% (19 cases)	Slander (40%), GBV (20%), digital harassment (15%)	Community (63%), Police (15%), Family (22%)	Harmful patriarchal attitudes, systemic oppression
2024	56	62% (35 cases)	38% (21 cases)	Threats (29%), kidnappings (15%), GBV (18%)	Community (50%), Police (30%), Family (20%)	Reinforced cultural control over women
Total	187	59% (109 cases)	41% (78 cases)	Threats (39%), GBV (21%), Slander (18%), Arbitrary arrests (22%)	Community (53%), Police (26%), Family (21%)	Cultural control, systemic oppression

4.5 Recognition of WHRD's contributions: Types of human rights work undertaken by WHRDs across Uganda.

Table 6: Showing the Human Rights Work Done by WHRDs (2020–2024)

Year	Human Rights Focus Area	Number of Cases	Percentage
2020	Disability Rights	1	3.6%
	Economic and Social Rights	2	7.1%
	Female Journalists	1	3.6%
	GBV Activism	2	7.1%
	Health Rights	2	7.1%
	Land Rights	10	35.7%
	Protection of WHRDs	1	3.6%
	Sex Workers' Rights	1	3.6%
	Sexual Reproductive Health Rights	1	3.6%

Year	Human Rights Focus Area	Number of Cases	Percentage
2021	Child's Rights	1	5.3%
	Economic Rights	1	5.3%
	Sex Workers' Rights	3	15.8%
	GBV Activism	4	21.1%
	Land Rights	1	5.3%
	LGBTQI Rights	2	10.5%
2022	Sexual Reproductive Health Rights	2	10.5%
	Anti-trafficking	1	2.9%
	Economic Rights	1	2.9%
	Disability Rights	9	26.5%
	Indigenous Minority Rights	9	26.5%
	Fishing Community Rights	8	23.5%
	GBV Activism	39	11.8%
	Gold Miners' Rights	1	2.9%
	Female Journalists	11	4.4%
	Land Rights	12	3.7%
	LGBTQ Rights	10	2.5%
	Legal Rights	1	2.9%
	Peace Activism	1	2.9%
	Sex Workers' Rights	10	2.5%
	Youth Activism	4	2.5%
	Salt Miners' Rights	2	2.9%
	Sexual Reproductive Health Rights	1	3.9%

Table 7: Summary

Year	Total Cases	Total Percentage Contribution
2020	21	8.08%
2021	14	5.38%
2022	120	46.15%
2023	49	18.85%
2024	56	21.54%
Total	260	100%

Based on the data provided, WHRDN-U highlights some themes or categories of human rights work done by Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) from 2020 to 2024. According to the Human Rights Commission (UHRC) 21st Annual Report 2018, 10 Women human rights defenders make essential contributions to the effective promotion, protection and realisation of international human rights law and play an important role in raising awareness and mobilising civil society in identifying human rights

10 Uganda Human Rights Commission. (2018). 21st Annual Report. Kampala, Uganda: UHRC. pp. 124-128.: <https://uhrc.ug/download/uhrc-21st-annual-report/?wpdmdl=417&refresh=6718f819dac181729689625>

violations and in contributing to the development of genuine solutions that incorporate a gender perspective. Women HRDs face typical challenges due to their gender.

Rights of Marginalized Groups	Social Justice and Economic Rights	Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Protection	Health and Well-being	Legal and Political Rights	Environmental and Resource Rights
(a) Disability Rights (b) Indigenous Minority Rights (c) LGBTQI Rights (d) Sex Workers' Rights (e) Female Journalists	(a) Land Rights (b) Fishing (c) Community Rights (d) Gold Miners' Rights (e) Salt Miners' Rights	(a) GBV Activism (b) Protection of WHRDs (c) Sexual Reproductive Health Rights	Health Rights Sexual Reproductive Health Rights Child's Rights	(a) Legal Rights (b) Peace Activism (c) Youth Activism Legal and Political Rights (a) Legal Rights (b) Peace Activism (c) Youth Activism	(a) Land Rights (b) Fishing Community Rights (c) Gold Miners' Rights Salt Miners' Rights

4.6 Specific attacks on WHRDS in the private sphere

Specific attacks on WHRDs in the private sphere from 2020 to 2024 include various forms of violence and abuse, with the following key incidents: In 2020, there were 21 cases, including a house break-in, discrimination, segregation, ostracization, and threats, with perpetrators being family and community members (5%). In 2021, 14 cases were reported, involving hate speech, eviction, slander, and intimate partner violence. In 2022, 120 cases occurred, including house break-ins, discrimination, ostracization, attempted rape, rape, and emotional abuse, with community members (57%) and family members (3%) being the main perpetrators. In 2023, 49 cases involved eviction, rape, gender-based violence, and slander, with community members (63%) and family members (2%) as perpetrators. In 2024, 56 cases included evictions, kidnappings, death threats, and gender-based violence, with clan members (4%), relatives (2%), and community members (27%) being the main perpetrators.

4.6.1 Observations

- * The documented attacks reveal a disturbing pattern of violations targeting the intimate and private lives of WHRDs. These include intimidation, psychological harassment, defamation, smear campaigns, expressions of hate, sexual harassment, domestic violence, exclusion from communities, and ridicule based on sexuality. Such actions not only threaten their safety but also undermine their dignity and well-being in deeply personal ways.
- * Attacks in the private sphere predominantly involve family and community members or intimate partners, emphasizing the vulnerabilities WHRDs face within their homes and immediate environments. These personal violations highlight the critical need for localized protective mechanisms and interventions that address threats stemming from private relationships and community contexts.

4.7 Types of attacks that affect the intimate and private spheres

In addition, the WHRDN-UB registry reports different types of violence occurring in the private lives of WHRDs.

Table 8: Types of attacks that affect the intimate and private spheres

Year	Number of cases	Types of Attacks	Perpetrators
2020	21	House break in: 1 WHRD experienced intrusion into their home	Family and community members (5%)
		Discrimination, segregation, and ostracization:1 WHRD was excluded from their community.	
		Threats , warnings, and ultimatums targeted WHRDs in personal environments.	
2021	14	Hate speech , WHRDs faced public ridicule from family and community members.	Family and community members
		Eviction:1 WHRD was forced out of their home	
		Slander, labelling and smear campaigns targeting personal reputations	
2022	120	Intimate partner violence, WHRDs abused by their partners.	
		House break in: 1 WHRD’s home invaded	Community members (57%) family members (3%)
		Discrimination, segregation, and ostracization:9 WHRD was excluded from their communities or families	
2023	49	Attempted rape and rape: 1 WHRD faced attempted rape, 1 survived rape	
		Emotional abuse: Psychological harm reported	
		Eviction 1: WHRD removed from their home	Community members (63%), Family members (2%)
2024	56	Rape and GBV 1: WHRD raped, 3 experience gender-based – violence	
		Slander, Labelling and Smear Campaigns targeting private reputations	
		Evictions: 4 WHRDs removed from their homes	Clan members (4%), relative (2%), community members (27%)

4.8 Invisible Violence

Understanding Invisible Violence Against Women Human Rights Defenders.

Invisible violence refers to subtle and often unrecognized forms of harm, including domestic violence, gendered defamation, sexual violence, and abuse within social movements. These types of violence are challenging to document because they are frequently dismissed, underreported, or overlooked.

Table 9: Highlighting Invisible Violence against WHRDs (2020–2024)

This table demonstrated the pervasiveness of invisible violence, which often goes unrecognized but profoundly impacts WHRDs in personal and professional settings

Year	Domestic Violence	Defamation with Gender Component	Sexual Violence	Violence in Social Movements & Human Rights CSOs
2020		Slander and Smear campaign (5%)		Discrimination, threats, warnings by community (19%)
2021	Intimate partner violence (14%)	Slander and Smear campaign (14%)	GBV (7%)	Hate Speech by community members (36%)
2022		Slander and Smear campaign (2%)	Attempted rape and rape (2%)	Emotional abuse, threats, and discrimination (50%)
2023		Slander and Smear campaign (8%)	Rape and GBV (8%)	Threats, intimidation, and physical assaults (53%)
2024		Campaigns (2%)	GBV and abductions (6%)	Psychological harassment, threats, and surveillance (29%)

4.9 Collaborative Strategies for Ensuring the Safety and Empowerment of WHRDs

Local and international actors can ensure the long-term safety and empowerment of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) by addressing their immediate protection needs while fostering systemic change. This requires prioritizing increased funding for grassroots organizations like the Women Human Rights Defenders Network (WRDN) to enable them to expand their advocacy efforts and provide sustained support to WHRDs at the local level. Establishing safe spaces through government policies and implementing protective measures, such as installing CCTV cameras and enhancing secure computing, can help safeguard WHRDs from threats. Capacity-building initiatives, including training on self-defense, data documentation, and storytelling, are essential to strengthening WHRDs’ resilience and effectiveness.

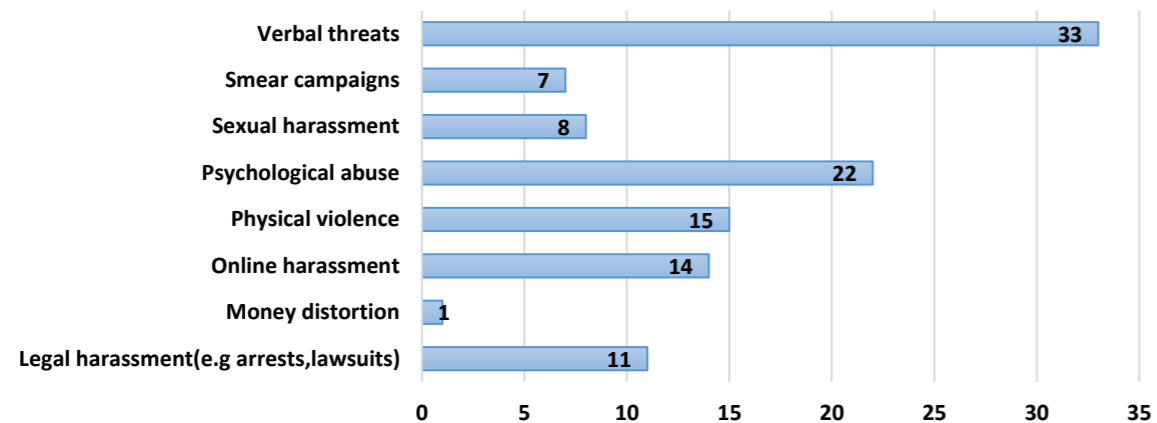
Collaboration between local WHRD networks and international human rights organizations, can amplify their voices and efforts. Facilitating exchange visits and travel opportunities can promote knowledge-sharing and networking, allowing WHRDs to learn from diverse strategies and practices. Stakeholder engagements should be organized to raise awareness about the critical role of WHRDs and to build community support for their work. Furthermore, identifying and leveraging legal frameworks related to human rights can form the basis for educational programs, empowering WHRDs and their communities with the knowledge to advocate for their rights effectively.

In the digital age, a dedicated website for WHRDs could increase their visibility, offering a platform to share advocacy materials, document cases, and connect with supporters globally. Additionally, international security efforts should be harnessed to provide technical assistance and resources for WHRDs, including crisis response protocols and emergency support mechanisms. By combining local insights with international resources and expertise, actors can build a robust support system that not only protects WHRDs from immediate risks but also empowers them to continue their critical work in advancing human rights.

4.10 Digital Attacks on Women Human Rights Defenders

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) face escalating risks of digital attacks that undermine their advocacy and threaten their safety. These attacks often manifest as online harassment, smear campaigns, and the spread of misinformation, with perpetrators including local leaders, community members, and even institutional actors. Negative narratives about WHRDs are sometimes deliberately shared with funders and stakeholders to damage their credibility. The lack of secure computing tools exacerbates their vulnerability, with many WHRDs unable to protect sensitive information or their online presence. During the COVID-19 pandemic, increased reliance on digital platforms amplified these risks, as WHRDs navigated both heightened harassment and limited access to secure technology. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts to enhance WHRDs' digital literacy, provide secure communication tools, and establish protocols for responding to cyber threats, ensuring they can safely continue their critical work in defending human rights. . Most WHRDs have faced verbal threats, psychological abuse and online harassment.

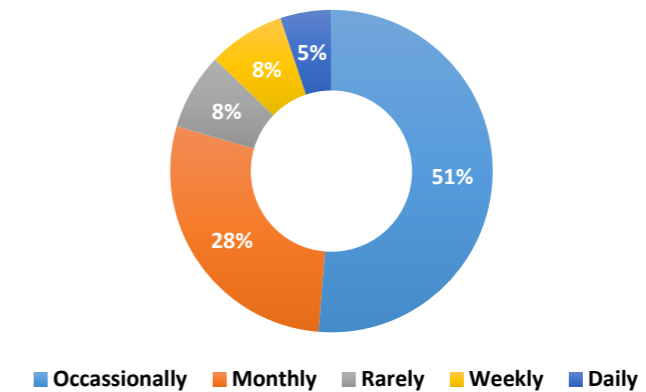
If yes, what forms have you experienced?



4.11 Prevalence of Threats and Harassment Against WHRDs

Findings reveal that 51% of respondents occasionally face threats and harassment in the course of their work as Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). These threats range from verbal abuse and intimidation to more severe forms of harassment, such as office break-ins, professional discrediting, and online attacks. The prevalence of such incidents underscores the hostile environment in which WHRDs operate, with many reporting a pervasive fear of retaliation that forces them to self-censor or adopt less visible approaches to their advocacy. The occasional nature of these threats does not diminish their impact, as even sporadic harassment contributes to emotional distress, professional isolation, and a reduction in public advocacy. This finding highlights the urgent need for protective measures and systemic changes to ensure the safety and sustainability of WHRDs' efforts in advancing human rights.

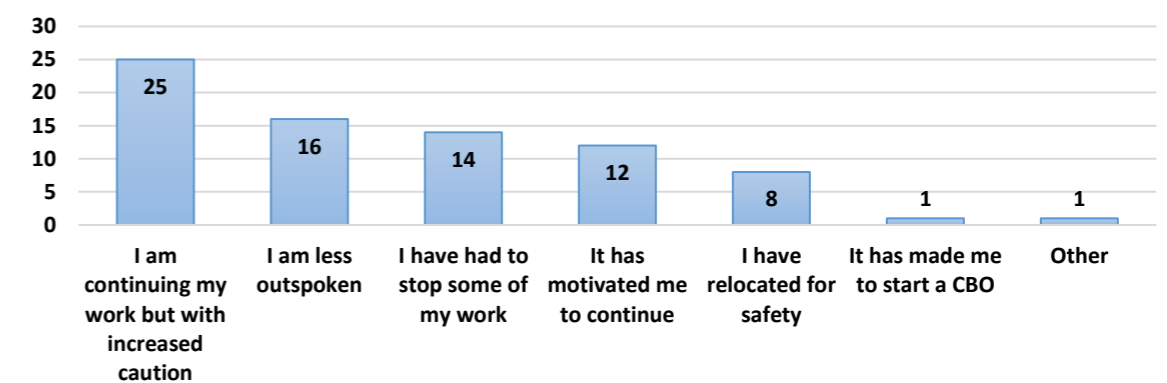
How frequent do you face threats or harassment?



4.12 Rising Levels of Harassment and Violence Against WHRDs

A significant 73% of participants reported that the level of harassment and violence against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) has increased over the past two to three years. This escalation is attributed to multiple factors, including heightened community tensions, economic hardships, and entrenched resistance to gender equality and human rights advocacy. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, with lockdowns intensifying domestic and community conflicts, and financial pressures fuelling aggressive behaviour toward WHRDs. Participants noted increased verbal threats, physical intimidation, and professional sabotage, creating a hostile environment that hinders their work and compromises their safety. This alarming trend highlights the urgent need for concerted efforts to address the root causes of these threats and to implement robust protection mechanisms for WHRDs at both local and systemic levels.

How has violence / harassment affected your work as a WHRD?

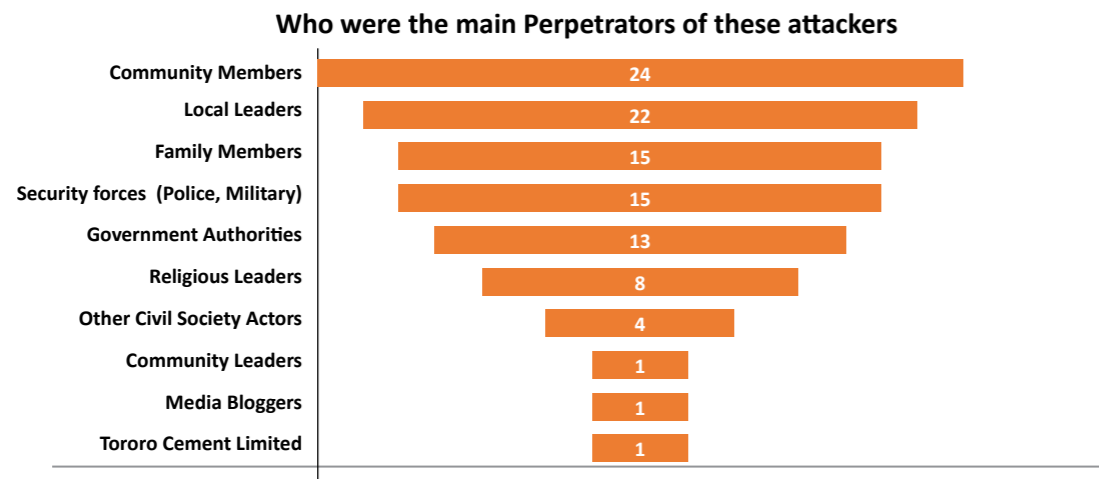


4.13 Perpetrators of Violence and Harassment Against WHRDs

The main perpetrators of violence and harassment against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) are community leaders, local leaders, family members, government authorities, and security forces. These groups often hold positions of influence or power within communities, making it difficult for WHRDs to challenge them or seek justice. Community and local leaders frequently resist WHRDs' efforts to advocate

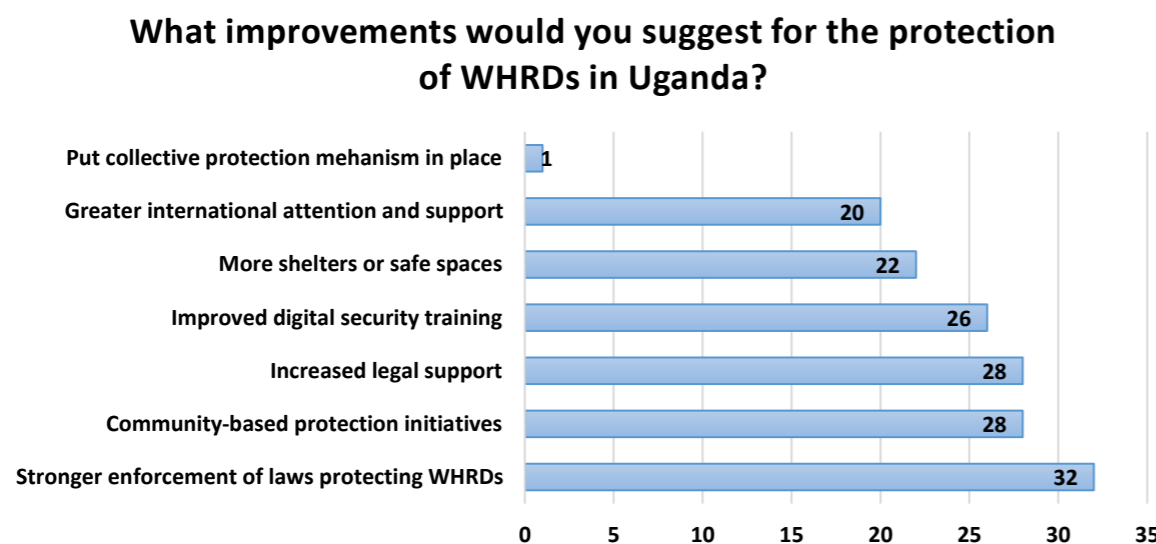
for gender equality, land rights, or protection against gender-based violence, viewing these activities as a threat to entrenched cultural norms or their authority. Family members, including husbands and in-laws, also contribute to harassment by perpetuating patriarchal expectations and discouraging WHRDs from engaging in public advocacy.

Government authorities and security forces compound these challenges by using their positions to intimidate or suppress WHRDs' work. This includes denying support for cases of abuse, refusing to provide necessary legal documents, or engaging in verbal and physical threats. In some cases, WHRDs face targeted smear campaigns or professional sabotage orchestrated by these actors to undermine their credibility and activism. The involvement of these influential groups not only increases the risks faced by WHRDs but also creates a pervasive culture of fear, further marginalizing their voices and hindering their ability to advocate for human rights effectively.



4.13 Below are some of the key questions analysed separately from the interviews had with the WHRDs

4.13.1 Improvements suggested for protection of WHRDs in Uganda.



4.13.2. How can civil society and international organisations better support WHRDs in Uganda?

To better support WHRDs, Civil Society and International organizations should organize more training sessions on security and advocacy, provide funding for WHRD protection, Facilitate better collaboration between WHRDs and local authorities, enhance media visibility of WHRDs issues and lobby for stronger legal protection of WHRDs.

Support Strategy	Number of Respondents
Organizing more training sessions on security and advocacy	35
Providing more funding for WHRD protection	35
Facilitating better collaboration between WHRDs and local authorities	34
Enhancing media visibility of WHRDs' issues	30
Lobbying for stronger legal protection of WHRDs	30
others	1
Strengthening coordination and collaboration of the WHRDS	1

4.13.3. How do you perceive your safety and ability to continue your work as a WHRD in the next five years?

Perception	Number of Respondents
I feel increasingly safe and empowered	25
I feel my safety is at risk, but I will continue	22
I am considering stepping back due to safety concerns	4
I have already reduced my involvement due to threats	4
Other	1

4.13.4 Is there any specific case or experience related to your work as a WHRD that you would like to share for the report?

Eighteen out of the 37 respondents shared their experiences as follows.

Case/Experience	Number of Respondents
A girl was defiled by a teacher who was HIV positive	1
After trying to stop the relationship between my husband and a primary girl child, the girl's parents were not in agreement with me. My husband beat me up and locked up in the house (when pregnant) after telling him to stop and let the girl finish her studies.	1
Batwa women are raped and when they go to hospital they are not treated.	1
Threatened by community leaders/members, who encourage child labour, instead of taking them to school.	1
Capacity building/fund support	1

I believe that as WHRDs, we can do our work without clashing with authorities if we are all supportive	1
I was physically abused for trying to support a widow (WHRD) who was thrown out of the husbands house with her 6 children and I too fell victim of the same.	1
Lack of commitment to implement gender laws ie; domestic violence which directly affects the ability to mobilise and rise awareness about GBV.	1
The rella house of hope rehabilitation raids	1
There's a problem or food relief access	2
They are chased from their forest land	1
We have our network of WHRDs, we connect with allies and partners.	1
Yes, I reported a case of early marriage to the police. And the relatives burnt down our house.	1
Yes, I rescued some girls from F.G.M, I was threatened by the community and later my house burnt down by an unknown person.	1
Yes,, land issues in kisirci, between tororo cement Industry and community.	1
Yes, last month August the UWA officials destroyed peoples' property due to them being near the Elgon national park	1
Yes, there was an acid attack after we protected a lady in the community from an abusive partner. Which in turn affected workers performance up to date.	1

4.13.5 Do you have any additional comments or recommendations regarding the protection of WHRDs in Uganda?

Do you have any additional comments or recommendations regarding the protection of WHRDs in Uganda?	
Ask government to help create a safe working space in their line of duty.	1
Availing civic space; where citizens, NGOs, CSOs, CBOs can say or do what is needed freely. But this is lacking and thus limiting our nation.	1
Conflict in Bundibugyo.	1
Donors to come through and see/ be involved at the grassroots with the WHRDs in their districts.	1
Double efforts on mental health to reduce causing of anxiety, stress and health concerns.	1
Funding of the WHRDs so that they can be able to support the Batwa groups.	1
Government of Uganda should recognise the noble and key roles that the WHRDs go through and put laws in place to oritect them.	1
Healing spaces for women	1
I am going to continue being a defender and would like WHRDs to come to my aid in case I need it.	1
Increase enforcement of WHRD's protection training.	1
International bodies/communities should show support by availing protection and resources to improve on their safety	1
It is hard for WHRDs to register bodies to assist them in their work.	1

Linkage to government programs to support women	1
More co-ordination meetings	1
More funding to support the WHRDs.	1
More mobilization for the funding to(WHRDS)	1
More NGOs agencies should pull more donors to support grass root CBOs	1
More quarterly learning sessions for WHRDs.	1
More trainings	1
Need for a state spaces to network	1
Need for more safe spaces at grass root level	1
Need for protection of WHRDs in terms of having them formalised and registered to the regions	1
Need money for capacity building, protection, support.	1
Need to closely work and report to Uganda Human Rights Commission	1
Need to identify legal officers in the safe spaces where women can freely report cases of violence against women	1
Networking with different communities of the Batwa in Kisoro.	1
Safeguarding defenders from exposing themselves on the frontlines which are life threatening at times.	1
There is need for funding from the international community to support	1
There is need for more funds to support our activities.	1
There is need for more trainings	1
There should be more support from WHRDs in Uganda such that there is an open space like policy making and inclusions of PWDs like albinos.	1
There's need for more WHRDs in different areas of Acholi sub-region	1
To ask government to create a safe space for WHRDs to do their work	1
To educate us on how to document our work.	1
To engaging stake holders in the training.	1
To give funding towards the protection of WHRDs who speak out against violence	2
To have more vibrant women WHRDs	1
We need more trainings about mental health	1
WHRDs at the grass root level need more protection and support	1
Yes, more funding for protection.	1
Yes, there's need for the WHRDS to be introduced to government officials and communities' partners (sub-county level); so as to ensure their safety.	1

CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDIES – VOICES

5.1 Lived Experiences of WHRDs

I was physically abused for trying to support a widow who was thrown out of her husband's land and house with her 6 children and I too fell victim to the same.

Gender-Based Violence: Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) working to combat gender-based violence (GBV) are especially vulnerable due to the nature of their activism, which often challenges deeply rooted cultural norms, power structures, and patriarchal systems. These defenders frequently face targeted retaliation that is not only gender-specific but intensely personal, including threats of sexual violence, harassment, and smear campaigns aimed at undermining their credibility and silencing their efforts. WHRDs confronting GBV are perceived as disruptive or threatening to established norms, drawing opposition from not only state actors but also community members and conservative groups. This hostile environment is further intensified by limited legal protections and inadequate institutional support, leaving WHRDs exposed to both physical and psychological harm. Moreover, as they work directly with survivors and expose systemic failures to protect women, WHRDs often encounter emotional burnout and a heightened risk of trauma without sufficient access to mental health resources. These factors make WHRDs in the GBV space exceptionally vulnerable, as they stand at the forefront of advocating for fundamental shifts in attitudes toward women's rights and safety, often at significant personal risk.

After trying to stop the relationship between my husband and a primary girl child, the girl's parents were not in agreement with me. My husband beat me up and locked me up in the house (when pregnant) after telling him to stop and let the girl finish her studies.

Natural Resource Rights: Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) engaged in advocating for natural resource rights often stand against powerful entities such as corporations, political elites, and government agencies that profit from resource extraction and land exploitation. These defenders are typically women from rural or Indigenous communities where land, water, and forests are integral to cultural identity, subsistence, and community survival. WHRDs advocating for these resources frequently encounter threats of violence, harassment, and criminalization aimed at stifling their resistance to land grabs, mining projects, and deforestation. Gendered threats, including physical assault and sexual violence, are commonly used tactics to intimidate them, especially given the limited legal protections available in the country. Additionally, WHRDs working in isolated areas like the Batwa and the Ik are often excluded from formal networks of support, leaving them without immediate access to legal recourse, protection, or funding. This lack of resources and legal backing makes them extremely vulnerable as they confront powerful stakeholders, often without adequate security and institutional support, in defense of both their communities and the environment.

Because of my advocacy work on environmental and climate justice, I was attacked by the RDC, the Meya Nile Plastics, and Modern Distillery. Because of these attacks, I left my advocacy work and also had to take my baby to my parents for safety.

Batwa and Ik people are beaten by the Wildlife Authority when they try to access the forest

LGBTQ+ Rights: Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) advocating for LGBTQ+ rights face profound vulnerabilities as they confront both societal prejudice and legal risks in our environment where LGBTQ+ identities are often stigmatized and criminalized. These defenders are frequently targeted by both state and non-state actors with harassment, social exclusion, threats of violence, and even unlawful arrest, especially in communities where same-sex relationships are outlawed and where conservative social norms dominate. WHRDs advocating for LGBTQ+ rights often encounter online harassment, defamation campaigns, and threats to their personal safety, tactics specifically aimed at silencing them by attacking their credibility and isolating them socially. In many cases, these defenders have been left without legal recourse and institutional protection, as state authorities view their activism as a threat to "public morality" and national values. Additionally, their work is often under-resourced, leaving them without adequate security and access to support networks, which increases their vulnerability to both physical and psychological harm as they courageously promote equality and inclusivity for LGBTQ+ communities. Defenders of LGBTQ+ rights in Uganda face dual stigmatization. They are not only targeted for advocating for human rights but also for defending a highly marginalized community that is often demonized by the public and state institutions. They are also accused of promoting "immorality" and "Western values".

We experience consistent raids of the rehabilitation safe homes eg Rella House of Hope living us homeless

Sexual and Reproductive Health: Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) advocating for Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) face heightened vulnerabilities due to the sensitive and often stigmatized nature of their work, which challenges deeply ingrained social, cultural, and religious norms. WHRDs promoting SRHR frequently encounter hostility from conservative factions within communities, as well as from state actors in regions where reproductive rights are restricted. This hostility often manifests as threats of violence, harassment, and public shaming, which aim to discredit and intimidate them, sometimes targeting their families as well. In many regions, the legal environment adds to their vulnerability, as SRHR advocacy is sometimes criminalized and met with restrictive laws that limit access to information, contraception, and safe abortion services. These defenders often work in isolation with limited funding, facing not only physical and psychological risks but also social ostracism and legal repercussions, all of which severely impact their safety, efficacy, and mental well-being as they champion women's rights to bodily autonomy and health.

I rescued some girls from F.G.M. I was threatened by the community and later my house was burnt down by an unknown person and my cows were slaughtered.

5.2 Forms of Violence Against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs).

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Uganda face a wide spectrum of violence, rooted in both their gender and their activism. These risks often emanate from state and non-state actors, who aim to silence their advocacy for women's rights and broader human rights. The most common forms of violence WHRDs experience include Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and harassment by both state and community actors.

Lived experience: *Yes, they ask so many questions, ask for ID, state that we are big heads, what rights, you are called thieves, called LGBQ, everything you do is super examined,*

some have been killed, some WHRDs have backslidened, they have lost marriages, they say gender trainings are all LGBQ and that they want to erode the culture.

State actors, especially law enforcement agencies like the Uganda Police Force, are often considered to be at the forefront of harassment against WHRDs. This includes arbitrary arrests, detention, and in some cases, torture. WHRDs advocating for sensitive issues, such as land rights, LGBTQ+ rights, or government accountability, are frequently targeted by state actors. Many of these arrests occur during peaceful protests, organised advocacy events, or public assemblies, with the Public Order Management Act (POMA) being a tool of repression. WHRDs are often accused of inciting violence or disturbing public order, even when their activities are lawful.

Defender's Experience: *A 28-year-old from Acholi region, faced assault from her husband after opposing his decision to withdraw their children from school. Despite multiple reports to local authorities, no legal action was taken. However, with support from a WHRD network, she was connected to legal aid and a women's shelter. Although her husband was not prosecuted, the network ensured ongoing follow-up.*

Case Story: *A 35-year-old refugee in Arua, suffered sexual violence at the hands of a local authority figure. Her case, documented in the registry database, revealed the abuse of power within refugee camps. Her testimony contributed to broader advocacy efforts, and WHRDs are now assisting her in pursuing legal action.*

5.3 Online Violence and Digital attacks on WHRDs.

WHRDs in Uganda are increasingly subjected to digital violence. WHRDs rely on social media and other online platforms to share information, raise awareness, and organise movements. However, these platforms have also become spaces where WHRDs are subjected to trolling, cyberstalking, and threats of violence. A study on Uganda's 2021 elections revealed significant online abuse directed at women candidates and activists, often targeting their gender, appearance, or marital status. Such violence deters women from engaging online, undermines democratic participation, and exacerbates gender inequalities.¹¹ This violence is facilitated by existing structural gender biases, poor digital literacy among women, and a lack of robust policy interventions. Additionally, the absence of proactive measures by social media platforms and limited legal enforcement mechanisms further emboldens perpetrators.

Perpetrators use anonymous accounts to attack WHRDs, often sending them sexually explicit messages, threats of physical violence, or defamatory accusations. This form of violence is particularly concerning because it can happen in real time, is highly visible, and can be amplified quickly, leading to reputational harm and psychological distress. The rise of online harassment has created new forms of attack that WHRDs must navigate. The Safety and Security Guidelines for WHRDs in Uganda (2021) highlighted the growing trend of online harassment, including doxing, cyberbullying, and defamation campaigns, all designed to silence WHRDs or discredit their work. These online attacks are particularly damaging in the context of a society where much of the advocacy and awareness-raising work is conducted digitally.

¹¹ <file:///C:/Users/IT/Desktop/Amplified-Abuse-Report-on-online-violence-Against-women-in-the-2021-general-elections.pdf>

5.4 Protection mechanisms and programs in Uganda

Efforts to establish effective protection mechanisms for human rights defenders (HRDs) in Uganda remain insufficient and underdeveloped. While some government institutions have initiated relevant programs, there appears to be limited evidence of their impact or widespread implementation. In contrast, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are seen as more prominent by women human rights defenders (WHRDs) for their continued support. During the focus group discussions, WHRDs highlighted several key NGOs, such as Chapter Four Uganda, Defend Defenders, WHRDN-U, HRNJ, SMUG, NCHRDU, FIDA-U, DPI, and ACTV, as crucial players in advancing their protection. This indicates a recognition by WHRDs of the vital role NGOs play in their advocacy and defense, even though the primary responsibility for the protection of HRDs rests with the government.

5.5 Experience Voices from WHRD's

These quotes encapsulate the WHRD's transformative experience and commitment to uplifting their communities through activism and collaboration.

Threats and Harassment

"My journey from being a young, vulnerable mother to becoming a voice for marginalized sex workers has been shaped by resilience and the need for justice. Through advocacy, leadership, and building bridges with the police and community, I have learned that creating change starts with empowering others to speak up and take charge of their rights. Over the years, I have had to turn my struggles into a source of empowerment for others despite facing physical violence, social stigma, and even betrayal. "

"A WHRD, a mother of two, and a defender of women's rights I have faced relentless threats, defamation, and even forced relocation for standing up against domestic violence. Despite being targeted with accusations, intimidation, and cultural stigma, I continue to champion justice, navigating systemic obstacles and personal risk with resilience. My courage shines as a testament to the sacrifices and strength of women human rights defenders in the fight against abuse and inequality."

"Fighting for climate justice and women's rights has been a journey of resilience and sacrifice. I've faced threats, defamation, and emotional torture, including being forced to give up my daughter and endure relentless resistance. Yet, I believe in the power of collective action and continue to support the cause from behind the scenes, knowing that justice for women and the environment is worth every struggle."

"In the face of relentless threats, community raids, and the constant need to uproot my life, I've learned that resilience comes from holding onto the belief that safety and equality are worth fighting for. The cost is high, but so is the need to defend human dignity and provide refuge for those who need it most."

"The work of defending women's rights is both my purpose and my burden. It has cost me everything—my safety, my resources, and my peace of mind—but I cannot stop. Every step I take brings us closer to justice, even when the path is paved with threats and sacrifices."

"Being a woman defending rights in a patriarchal society means living with constant threats and sacrifices. Yet, each victory, no matter how small, reminds me that our fight for justice and equality is worth every risk."

"Saying no to injustice, whether against women or our land, has made me a target. But my voice is my weapon, and silence would only perpetuate the harm."

"This work is not easy, but I believe in a future where our women are safe, our land is secure, and our voices are heard."

"They call us useless, but I see value in our stories, our struggles, and our hope. I fight because the Batwa deserve dignity like anyone else."

"It is not easy to fight for a community that many ignore or judge. But if I don't, who will? I need others to stand with us, to remind the world that we matter."

"I stood for my community's rights, but it cost me my home, my income, and my safety. Yet, I cannot give up because justice for our people is worth the fight."

"I have lost so much, but I am determined to ensure that our people know their rights and that companies cannot exploit us with impunity. Together, we are stronger."

"I never chose this path, but life pushed me here. Now, I fight so others won't have to endure what I did. Advocacy isn't just work; it's survival."

"This work is not easy, but I believe in a future where our women are safe, our land is secure, and our voices are heard."

"My voice is my strength, and no amount of intimidation will silence it. If we keep standing together, we can make a change."

"I never chose this path, but life pushed me here. Now, I fight so others won't have to endure what I did. Advocacy isn't just work; it's survival."

"I may have lost relationships and faced violence, but seeing empowered women and safer communities makes every sacrifice worthwhile. This work will never stop."

"Standing up for justice comes at a cost, but silence would cost far more. If we do nothing, violence will persist unchecked."

"The stress of threats and harassment takes a toll on your mental health." — WHRD

"In my work, I've faced attacks from the media and political leaders, especially after the Public Order Management Bill came into effect. I've received threats like 'if you don't stop what you're doing, you'll regret it,' making it difficult to continue my activism smoothly."

"There are moments when the violence we face goes beyond words. I've had men chase me with a machete for defending a widow's land rights. This is the kind of physical and emotional torture we deal with every day." — WHRD focused on land rights

"Being a journalist for over 10 years, I've experienced both online and offline attacks. I've had threats on my life and my career simply for telling the truth about GBV." — Journalist WHRD

"When you speak out against injustice, even your own family turn against you. I've been called 'big-headed' and even a 'man' by my clan for standing up for women's rights." — Widow WHRD

"I've been called a traitor for helping children in need, and threatened by those who believe I'm taking away their labor force. These threats don't stop me — they only motivate me to continue fighting for the girls who need help." — Participant

"As a journalist, I'm often forced to censor myself. Talking about government issues or speaking out on human rights can lead to harassment and even threats of violence from local leaders. It's a risk we face daily." — Journalist

"I face a lot of stigma because of my disability. People often say things like, 'You are cursed; you can't help anyone.' But I refuse to let that stop me. I believe that if I don't do this work, no one else will." — WHRD

"As a woman standing up for rights, I'm constantly called names—'iron lady,' 'prostitute'—just for trying to empower women. It's disheartening, but I know I'm making a difference, and that motivates me to continue." — WHRD

Impact of Threats on Their Work

"Threats, both physical and online, have forced me and my colleagues to be more cautious. Now we have to meet survivors in private places to ensure their safety, and often, we limit how many people we can help because of the risks." — GBV Response Activist

"It's not just the physical threats we face. It's the fear of being socially ostracized or professionally ruined. For example, my own husband asked me to choose between my activism and our marriage. This kind of pressure affects every aspect of our work." — Journalist WHRD

"We've had to reduce the scale of our work due to the constant threats. The more powerful the person we challenge, the greater the risk to us." — Economic Empowerment Activist

"The environment has become increasingly restrictive, not just politically but socially. Cultural norms are used to silence us. People see our work as a challenge to their power and tradition." — WHRD focused on child education

"The lack of commitment to implement laws that protect us and the shrinking space for civic activism has made it difficult to mobilize and organize. Funding has also been cut, and donors are now hesitant to support our work due to political restrictions." — WHRD in Northern Uganda

"The risks are real: break-ins, threats from political leaders, and even threats to our safety when we speak out about issues like domestic violence. I've learned to keep a low profile and coordinate closely with others for protection." — Participant

"We use networking and collaboration with other WHRDs to stay safe. Having strong community ties and digital security measures helps protect us from attacks. But, we know that every day we're at risk." — Participant

"The violence and harassment have not only affected me physically but also emotionally. It's hard to keep pushing forward when you're constantly threatened, but every time I face a challenge, it strengthens my resolve to continue defending women's rights." — WHRD

"Being constantly attacked for my work has made me stronger, but it's emotionally exhausting. When people say 'You are cursed because of your disability,' I draw strength from proving them wrong. However, sometimes I feel like giving up." — WHRD.

"The closure of our offices and the constant threats have made it harder to fight for women's rights. The government and local authorities have made it clear they don't want us around."

"My activism is impacted by the constant fear of being attacked. I'm forced to work in secrecy, with online platforms being the only safe space for sharing our stories."

"I've been threatened with job loss and public shaming for defending women's rights. My colleagues and I are constantly under emotional and physical attack from family, police, and the community."

6

CHAPTER 6: CHALLENGES

“The worst threats come from family members who say that I’m working with LGBTQ people and sex workers and that I’m destroying our culture. It’s heartbreaking to feel rejected by those closest to you.”

“There are so many layers of harassment, from police beatings to social media attacks. It affects not only my work but my emotional health and relationships.”

“We’ve had to adjust our working hours and change our office locations for safety. The risks are so high that we can no longer work openly, but we have found ways to adapt and stay connected through online networks.”

“It’s hard to maintain your sanity when you’re constantly under attack. “The emotional toll is heavy. I feel drained most of the time, but I find strength in knowing I’m not alone. Sisterhood and solidarity with other WHRDs keep me going.”

“My health has suffered, but I take time to recharge. It’s a delicate balance—protecting myself while continuing the fight for others.”



6.0 Key Challenges:

1. Limited Impact of Government Commitments

Despite Uganda’s international and constitutional obligations to protect human rights, the government’s efforts to safeguard Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) have yielded limited impact. While there are policies and programs in place that acknowledge the importance of protecting human rights, their implementation is inconsistent, often leaving WHRDs vulnerable to attacks, particularly by state actors such as security forces, law enforcement, and local government officials. These attacks manifest as intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrests, and violence, often targeting WHRDs because of their advocacy on sensitive issues such as gender equality, land rights, and LGBTQ+ rights. The absence of a significant reduction in these violations reflects systemic weaknesses in the accountability structures that should deter state-perpetrated abuses. This not only erodes trust in government mechanisms but also discourages WHRDs from pursuing their vital work due to fear of retaliation.

2. Weak Investigative Mechanisms and Insufficient Financial Resources

Government protection programs often fail to deliver justice for attacks on WHRDs due to weak investigative mechanisms and a lack of financial resources. Investigations into such attacks are often superficial, delayed, or outright neglected, even when compelling evidence exists. This inefficiency allows perpetrators both state and non-state actors to act with impunity, undermining the rule of law and perpetuating cycles of violence against WHRDs. The lack of accountability sends a troubling message that crimes against these defenders are not a priority, further emboldening violators.

In addition to procedural shortcomings, these mechanisms are chronically underfunded. Budgetary constraints mean that investigative agencies lack the personnel, training, and technology required for thorough investigations. This financial neglect weakens the state’s capacity to protect WHRDs effectively, leaving gaps in support services such as legal aid, emergency response mechanisms, and physical protection measures. Without adequate resources, even the best-intentioned policies and programs are reduced to mere formalities, offering little practical benefit to WHRDs on the ground.

3. Lack of Gender-Sensitive Analysis

The absence of gender-sensitive analysis within government protection mechanisms is a significant barrier to addressing the unique challenges faced by WHRDs. Unlike male defenders, WHRDs often encounter risks that are both gender-specific and compounded by cultural and societal norms. For example, they may face sexual violence, gender-based intimidation, or stigmatization within their communities, particularly when advocating for women’s rights, reproductive health, or LGBTQ+ equality.

However, current protection frameworks fail to incorporate these gendered risks into their assessments and responses. Without tailored risk assessments, the strategies devised are often generic and ill-suited to address the distinct vulnerabilities of WHRDs. For instance, measures such as providing physical security may overlook the emotional and psychological toll of threats, or the stigma and isolation that WHRDs face when attacked. Additionally, there is limited provision for gender-specific safeguards such as safe housing, trauma counseling, or support systems for WHRDs with caregiving responsibilities.

This lack of gender-sensitive measures perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability, as WHRDs remain exposed to targeted violence and harassment. It also undermines the effectiveness of protective efforts, as interventions fail to address the root causes of the risks faced by WHRDs. Incorporating a gender-sensitive analysis would enable the development of nuanced strategies, ensuring that the needs of WHRDs are recognized and adequately addressed, and their ability to continue their advocacy work is safeguarded.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2020-2024 Assessment Report sheds light on the violence faced by Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Uganda. It recognizes the bravery of hundreds of women targeted for their efforts to defend human rights and emphasizes the urgent need for better protection mechanisms. The report highlights how gender-based discrimination and inequality undermine WHRDs' work, perpetuating injustice and obstructing societal progress.

7.1 Key areas identified for improvement to ensure comprehensive protection for WHRDs include:

- ✳ To enhance the comprehensive protection of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), it is important to consider integrating a gender perspective into existing mechanisms. Government bodies and human rights organizations are encouraged to incorporate gender-sensitive analysis into their data collection processes concerning WHRDs at risk. By including gender-specific indicators in safety-related data, these efforts can more effectively capture and address the unique challenges and threats faced by WHRDs.
- ✳ Strengthening advocacy efforts at regional and international levels is another area with significant potential. Human rights mechanisms can play a pivotal role by supporting governments to incorporate gender-based analyses into their reporting processes. In doing so, specific recommendations can be developed to enhance protections for WHRDs, acknowledging their unique vulnerabilities while also recognizing the vital contributions they make to advancing human rights, peace, and justice.
- ✳ Developing methodologies for gender-based analysis offers an additional opportunity to reinforce protection measures. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are well-placed to lead the creation of such methodologies, which can provide a deeper understanding of gender-specific threats and the impacts of attacks on WHRDs. These tools will be instrumental in crafting tailored protective strategies that address the diverse risks WHRDs encounter in their work.
- ✳ Recognising the dual nature of the digital space as an enabler of defenders work as well as a tool of violence is key in protecting them and sustaining the work they do. Without adequate knowledge on the forms this violence takes, it proves difficult to track and document its manifestation. We urge stakeholder to invest in research to collect data on the prevalence and impact of digital violence against WHRDs and support the development of localized tools to monitor online spaces for gender-based violence in local languages. In addition, we recommend continuous training on digital security practices and implementation of campaigns that highlight the impact of this kind of violence.

7.2 Specific Recommendations

i. The Uganda Human Rights Commission

Prioritize addressing violence against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), particularly those advocating for land rights, natural resource protection, and combating gender-based violence or impunity. Strengthen annual reporting by including specific recommendations on WHRD safety and enhancing access to protection mechanisms.

ii. The Equal Opportunities Commission

Expand the scope of research to analyse the national dynamics of discrimination affecting WHRDs in public spaces, collaborate with WHRD organizations to develop and implement holistic protection strategies that address the needs of marginalized WHRDs.

iii. Uganda Police Force

Based on the documented attacks against women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in Uganda between 2020 and 2024, the following recommendations are made to the police to enhance the safety of WHRDs:

- ✳ **Strengthen Accountability and Training for Law Enforcement:** Given the high number of attacks involving police officers (especially in 2020 and 2024), there is an urgent need for targeted training programs for law enforcement officials on the protection of human rights defenders. This training should focus on respecting the rights of WHRDs, understanding their role in society, and ensuring accountability for violations committed by security forces. Additionally, police should be held accountable for any violations of WHRDs' rights, with mechanisms in place to investigate and address cases of police involvement in attacks.
- ✳ **Improve Reporting and Response Mechanisms:** WHRDs often face violence and threats from a range of perpetrators, including community members and government officials. To better ensure their safety, the police should establish clear, accessible reporting channels for WHRDs to report threats and incidents without fear of retribution. This could include creating a dedicated unit within the police force specializing in the protection of WHRDs, as well as ensuring swift and transparent investigations into any incidents of violence, including arbitrary arrests, physical assault, and threats, especially those involving state actors.

iv. The Public

Recognizing the Role of WHRDs in Building Democracy, Peace, and Justice

Recommendations:

Uganda should formally acknowledge the critical role of WHRDs in tackling inequality, discrimination, and injustice, and recognize their contributions to democracy and peace building. Governments are encouraged to take action against individuals or entities that stigmatize WHRDs, ensuring their reputation and work are protected. Civil society organizations and social movements should lead public campaigns to raise awareness about the invaluable contributions of WHRDs, fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment for their work.

Women Human Rights Defenders Network Uganda (WHRDN-U)

- ✳ WHRDN-U leads the way in implementing alternative protection strategies for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in Uganda. In this effort, the registry can play a vital role in documenting and sharing experiences of feminist holistic protection. By focusing on building and strengthening grassroots, cross-movement, and regional networks, as well as sharing knowledge on safety, self-care, and collective well-being, the registry can serve as an invaluable resource. Disseminating this knowledge will empower WHRDs in various regions to adopt and implement these practices, enhancing their resilience, solidarity, and ability to effectively address threats. This approach fosters a more unified and resilient network of WHRDs, better equipped to navigate challenges together.
- ✳ Strengthening regional network teams is key to enabling grassroots and rural WHRD networks to take a proactive role in identifying and reporting incidents of attacks. Improving the database through automation will enhance efficiency, promote equality, and ensure the independence of information management processes. These efforts will empower regional and grassroots-level networks to respond more effectively to threats, fostering a more robust and coordinated protection framework.

v. Donors' recommendations for enhancing support for Women Human Rights Defenders

This report underscores the vital role that WHRDs play as agents of social transformation, while also highlighting the unique challenges they face in carrying out this important work. In light of these findings,

we offer the following key recommendations to further strengthen our collective efforts to support WHRDs with dignity, security, and sustainability:

- **Recognizing the Role of WHRDs in Social Transformation**

WHRDs are fundamental to the advancement of democracy, human rights, and peace in their communities. Their work extends beyond individual activism—it is about reshaping societies and upholding the values we all strive for. It is crucial that WHRDs’ contributions are consistently recognized and valued by both national and international actors. We recommend that donors prioritize initiatives that elevate the visibility and impact of WHRDs, reinforcing their essential role in shaping social change.

- **Context-Specific Protection Measures**

WHRDs face a wide range of risks that vary by region, sector, and context. These challenges demand protection mechanisms that are not one-size-fits-all, but rather tailored to the specific needs of the defenders and the communities they serve. Protection should be seen not as an isolated objective but as an ongoing, collective process that addresses the needs of WHRDs, their families, and their organizations. We recommend that donors support context-specific protection strategies that are adaptable and inclusive, ensuring that WHRDs can continue their work without fear of retribution.

- **Acknowledging the Risks to WHRDs**

The cost of defending human rights is often immense, with many WHRDs facing persecution, criminalization, and violence. These risks deeply affect their personal safety, health, and well-being, and often extend to their families and communities. From rural activists to Indigenous leaders, environmental advocates, and LGBTI defenders, the diverse faces of WHRDs must be supported in their efforts to work freely and safely. We urge donors to prioritize financial and technical support for those at the greatest risk, ensuring they can continue their critical work without fear.

- **Addressing Unrecognized Efforts and Burnout**

Many WHRDs continue their work without adequate recognition, compensation, or support, resulting in widespread burnout and physical exhaustion. Without access to health support, fair pay, or retirement security, WHRDs often carry disproportionate burdens—both in their advocacy and within their families. We recommend that donors advocate for more robust funding mechanisms that allow WHRDs to receive fair compensation and access to health and retirement support, reducing the personal toll their advocacy often entails.

- **Supporting Advocacy and Alliance-Building Efforts**

Increased visibility of WHRD-led protection networks and the promotion of diverse leadership are essential for advancing the recognition and protection of WHRDs. Collaborative advocacy at national and international levels is key to ensuring the voices of WHRDs are amplified and their rights and security are prioritized. We encourage donors to invest in supporting strategic alliances and advocacy efforts that bring WHRDs together to advocate for systemic change.

- **Flexible and Sustained Funding for Protection**

The urgent need for flexible, sustained financial support is critical to enable WHRDs to safeguard their security, strengthen their organizations, and ensure their well-being. We recommend that donors consider long-term funding commitments for:

- * Holistic feminist protection strategies, including mental and physical self-care.
- * Immediate crisis response mechanisms for WHRDs facing direct threats.
- * Fair compensation for women leaders working in their communities.
- * Streamlined processes to reduce bureaucratic barriers to accessing and managing funds.

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ANNEX 1: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED.

- * Institutional Quarterly reports,
- * WHRDN-US' Strategic Plan and Annual Reports,
- * Uganda Human Rights Centre's 21st Annual Report
- * Annual Uganda Police Crime Report 2023
- * Final Safety and Security Guidelines of WHRDs in Uganda
- * Situation of WHRDs Report – HRCU
- * UN Resolution 68-181 of 2013 – Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- * UN Special Rapporteur report on Women Human Rights Defenders
- * WHRD Information Brief on shrinking civic space
- * Chapter Four Uganda – The 2020 report on civic space addresses the shrinking space for WHRDs and civil society actors.
- * Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI) – The 2019 report on women's political participation provides a gender analysis of the electoral process and threats to women activists.
- * National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda (NCHRD-U) – The 2021 report on WHRD protection mechanisms discusses how national laws affect the safety of WHRDs.
- * Amnesty International – The 2021 Amnesty International Report highlighted the repression of WHRDs during the elections.
- * Human Rights Watch – The 2017 report on sexual and reproductive health rights in Uganda discusses how legal and social environments affect WHRDs working in this field.
- * Front Line Defenders – The 2022 report on global threats to WHRDs includes Uganda and documents cases of harassment and violence.
- * International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) – The 2018 FIDH report on Uganda's civic space discusses the impact of security forces on WHRDs.
- * African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) – The 2016 ACHPR report on women's rights defenders in East Africa includes case studies from Uganda.
- * A 2019 FIDA-Uganda position paper on legal reforms for better protection of WHRDs.
- * East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) – The 2021 EHAHRDP report on protection needs for WHRDs in Uganda.
- * A 2020 campaign report from Akina Mama wa Afrika on WHRDs' role in combating gender-based violence.
- * The 2020 report on gender equality progress assesses women's economic and political participation.
- * The 2019 UBOS Gender Statistics Profile provides crucial data on the status of women in Uganda.
- * NDP II (2015/16 – 2019/20), NDP III (2020/21 – 2024/25) – NDP III has a dedicated focus on improving women's socio-economic empowerment.

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