

A REPORT FOR THE REGIONAL MEETING IN ALBERTINE REGION -BULIISA DISTRICT WITH THE WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



Activity Date(s)	11 th to 12 th May 2026
Activity Title	Regional Meeting in Buliisa district with the Women Human Rights Defenders of the Albertine Region.
Theme	Building the capacity of Women Human Rights Defenders in Safe Documentation

Introduction

The Women Human Rights Defenders Network–Uganda (WHRDN-U) conducted a regional meeting for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in the Albertine Region from 11th to 12th May 2026 in Buliisa District. The meeting brought together Women Human Rights Defenders from different districts including Buliisa, Hoima, Kikuube, Kagadi, Kakumiro and Masindi aimed at building their capacity to be able to improve reporting quality, strengthen verification methods and enhance accuracy of proper and safe documentation.

The meeting provided a platform for WHRDs to reflect on the current human rights situation in the Albertine region, particularly challenges affecting women defenders working on issues related to land rights, environmental justice, gender-based violence, community protection among others. Participants also discussed the risks and violations faced by WHRDs in the course of their work and explored practical approaches to protection, documentation, self-care, and solidarity building.



In addition, the meeting strengthened networking among WHRDs and improving regional collaboration of women human rights defenders in the Albertine region. The meeting further created space for peer learning, experience sharing, and collective reflection on the role of WHRDs in advancing human rights and social justice within their communities. This meeting was attended by 15 WHRDs from the different districts including Buliisa (03), Kikuube (01), Masindi (06), Hoima (03), Kakumiro (01) and Kagadi (01).

Day One

Opening Remarks

Brenda Kugonza - (Team leader – WHRDN-U)

Brenda appreciated WHRD Kugonza Harriet from Buliisa for inviting the Buliisa District Community Development Officer (DCDO), Stella Katusabe, and further commended the DCDO for honouring the invitation and for her continued support towards the work of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) within the district. She also acknowledged the efforts of WHRDs Basemera Norah from Masindi and Robina Tibakanya from Hoima for promoting inclusivity by ensuring the participation of women living with disabilities, namely Nyamaizi Margret and Abiria Madina, as well as Women Farmers Rights Defenders, Atuhaire Elizabeth from Kikuube and Nakagwa Zulaika from Kakumiro.

Brenda informed participants that the Women Human Rights Defenders Network-Uganda (WHRDN-U) was established in 2017 and has since grown to include members and



coordination networks across various regions of the country, including Acholi, Albertine, Karamoja, Rwenzori, West Nile, Central, Eastern, and Busoga regions. She emphasized that the network promotes solidarity among women human rights defenders and recognizes women for their capacities and contributions towards advancing human rights.

She further explained that, in an effort to ensure a safer and more secure environment for WHRDs, WHRDN-U supports women who experience violations while carrying out their human rights work. This support is provided through capacity building on protection, safety and security, emergency protection response interventions, advocacy, and networking for protection. Brenda noted that the purpose of the meeting was to engage women human rights defenders on documentation and related protection concerns. She thereafter invited the Buliisa District Community Development Officer, Stella Katusabe, to deliver her opening remarks.

Katusabe Stella - (Buliisa District Community Development Officer)

She appreciated the network for inviting her for the meeting. *“there is a way we are looked at as women because they do not know what we deserve as women”* she mentioned. DCDO informed defenders that women are violated in health, land and job opportunities. As women defenders, we have been violated in job opportunities, right to own land, property and

so many other violations which have gone unseen, undocumented and unsupported hence a need for proper documentation.



She added that in order to receive support as WHRDs, we need to ensure that the violations are documented with evidence that the violation really happened. This calls for collective efforts so that we work in solidarity as we also ensure rights of others are upheld. As WHRDs we need to know which are our rights that we

deserve so that we can live a positive life and also be able to support others “ *defending human rights is voluntary, it starts with us, we need to love ourselves first before we can be able to support others, lets protect ourselves, lets love ourselves*” Stella quotes. “*We need to build our self-esteem as women defenders so that we can defend others and ourselves with confidence*” she added.

The heart

Using the Heart with questions posed on “what is the one thing you are bringing to the space?” Participants responded saying Care, love, Peace Solidarity, friendship and sharing as things they are bringing to the space. Another question on “what do you want to take away from this place?” and responses like those of tips on the skills of safe documentation, to be empowered as a human rights defender in Kikuube, Knowledge and friendship, case documentation, learn about human rights, how to protect WHRDs, cooperation’s, to know the limits of the WHRDN-U in providing support were mentioned by the participants.

Types/ Categories of Violations Women Human Rights Defenders Face while doing their work

During this session, participants were divided in groups of four (4) where each group was given to discuss one type of violation faced by WHRDs while doing their work. They were later required to present in the plenary.

Question; Discuss the types/ category of violations against WHRD and try to remember an example of such a violation that happened in your region?

Group 1; Group one was tasked to discuss on the ‘‘attacks on life, bodily and mental integrity. This comprised of killings or attempts on the lives of WHRDs for example journalists are being called funny names like Harriet is termed as ‘‘owolugambo’’ and intimidated, disappearance were persons are arrested, detained or abducted by state agents or non-state actors and their where about undisclosed or unknown. Robina an HIV activist from Hoima city was called a ‘‘mad person’’ after winning the stigma and discrimination case at Hoima stadium supported by Equal Opportunities Commission.



Picture above shows group 1 members during the group discussion and presentation on violations faced by WHRDs during Plenary

Group 2; Group Two was tasked to discuss on the ‘‘attacks on life, bodily and mental integrity. This comprised of torture; cruel inhuman and degrading treatment, rape, sexual assault, abuse and domestic violence, excessive use of force. For example, one WHRD in this group Justine was called a ‘‘black sheep’’ for defending a 7-year-old raped girl because according to Banyoro culture, defilement cases are negotiated and not reported however Justine did not report the threats but also neither did she document them yet she can no longer live her home beyond



certain hours as she is scared for her life.

Norah mentioned that a man from Buliisa was threatened to change the story of a girl that was raped and lie that the blood from the girl was rather cow's blood.

Group 3; Group three was tasked to discuss on the ‘‘attacks on life, bodily and mental integrity. This comprised of excessive use of force and the violation type of physical and psychological deprivation of liberty comprising of arbitrary arrest and detention, kidnapping/abduction and psychiatric incarceration. A defender is criminalized for being a threat to the community and end up being arrested and detained without trials. This is done in order to intimidate and punish them. Another journalist in Albertine region writing on issues about women regularly in the newspaper about violations of women's rights was arrested and accused for the story, kept in cells for 38 days and pressured to confess for working for opposition leader. Robina HIV activist in Hoima was taken to the psychiatric hospital to confine her in a mental institution as a punishment but was intended to suppress her self- esteem.



Picture above shows group 3 members during the group presentation on violations faced by WHRDs during Plenary

Group 4; Group four was tasked to discuss on the ‘‘attacks against personhood and reputations’’. This comprised of threats, warnings and ultimatums, psychological harassment, blackmail and extortion. for example, companies manipulate leaders to attack WHRDs. In Kapchorwa defender was labeled ‘‘Clitoris’’ for fighting against FGM, her children at school were termed children of Clitoris. They stopped school and the family was reallocated to Jinja. Confession from the WHRDs came in during the session that WHRDs receive the death threats, divorce threats, physical abuse, intimidation of potential victims for example ‘‘be careful, go-slow statements from the perpetrators. Elizabeth a woman farmers rights defender from Kikuube has also been facing threats from the president of the sugarcane farmers association that comprises of majorly men for speaking up for women so that they are also be allowed to

join the sugarcane growing business in the district. Elizabeth mentioned that as much as so far 68 women have registered in the women sugarcane growing cooperative, she continues to face threats towards her life.



Picture above shows group 4 members during the group discussions and presentation on violations faced by WHRDs

Summarizing of the group presentation session

This session was facilitated by both the team lead (Brenda) and the Protection Officer (Prossy) from the secretariat who managed to summarise the online and office violations faced by WHRDs in doing their human rights work.

As Women Human Rights Defenders we face the following offline violations;

- Gender based violence (GBV) from our family members due to the human rights work we done. Our partners attack us to stop doing human rights work claiming we put their lives in trouble.
- Hate speech from the community members terming us as baby killers because we promote family planning methods, prostitutes, home breaker as we act as mediator between the married couples, nakyeyombekedde, Jovia is called a short thing trying to help who, Robina in the community was termed as a person eating money for HIV people. These are intended to lead others to not associate with us.
- Denial of operating license where Susan a human rights activist from Hoima, her NGO was denied operating license that it supports rebel activities to over throw the government.

- Attacks and intimidation from our family members and community members for example Robina an HIV activist from Hoima city was attacked for supporting lesbian women, she was attacked that she was supporting immorality.

Online violations we face:

- Phone tracking on the conversations and the messages we get.
- Threatening messages through whatsapp and text message
- Sharing non-consensual intimate content without seeking approval from the victim.
- Spreading of fake rumors for example the defender is pretending to meditate in your marriage but she is trying to break it because she is interested in your husband.
- Doxing where the defender's personal information is revealed without her consent for example her contacts, emails, her family, where her children go to schools.

In conclusion therefore, Day One of the regional meeting provided an important platform for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) from the Albertine region to openly share experiences, reflect on the realities of their work, and strengthen their understanding of the different forms of violations faced while defending human rights within their communities. Through the participatory group discussions and plenary presentations, participants identified violations affecting WHRDs, including threats, intimidation, hate speech, gender-based violence, arbitrary arrests, psychological harassment, cyberbullying, phone tracking, and reputational attacks. Participants noted that many violations often go undocumented due to fear, stigma, limited knowledge on safe documentation, and lack of support systems. The session further emphasized the importance of solidarity, proper documentation, self-protection, and collective action among WHRDs. Participants appreciated the safe space created by WHRDN-U that allowed them to share openly, learn from one another, and build confidence in responding to violations affecting themselves and the communities they support.

Day Two

Day Two sessions were designed to provide participants with practical skills and knowledge on self-care, this was followed by a session where each WHRD was asked to mention what human rights work they do, followed with the Universal Peer Review (UPR) process session, and responding to real-life protection and documentation challenges through case scenario group-based discussions.

Self-care session

The day began with a session on self-care with a visit at lake Albert. This aimed at helping WHRDs reflect on the importance of prioritizing their mental, emotional, physical, and psychosocial wellbeing while carrying out human rights work.



Picture above shows some of the WHRDs pose for a photo on the Wanseko Ferry on Lake Albert during the self-care session.

Which kind of human rights activism work are we doing or currently involved in?

- Robinah an HIV activist from Hoima city mentioned to have won the stigma and discrimination case against Hoima stadium supported by Equal Opportunities Commission. She has also supported 2 children through school and other needs among so many other works.
- Suzan also an activist from Hoima city under the create peace project Uganda which majorly deals with women experiencing discomfort in their homes. They have worked with students and orphans to coach them in football and later recommend them to schools for bursaries.

- Jane also a chairperson Lc1 in her village has faced with challenges with parents whose children get bursaries but parents claim not to have requirements for their children to attend school.
- Jovia, a land rights activist of women through championing the worker's rights. She is currently involved in a case with 'Sinopec' which failed to give its workers protective gears and they were involved in an accident in the camp.
- Sherifa is a journalist at 'kings broadcasting radio' who reports about injustices and exposes perpetrators and people that use their power to exploit others. She has also gone ahead to fight for the right to education for teenage mothers through initiatives for example during the celebration of Mother's Day on the 10th by giving free cervical and prostate cancer screenings and family planning.
- Emily, an advocate in Buliisa on the rights of women's right to own land, through sensitization and other initiatives, started a Village Savings and Loans Association called 'Kijumbya Rural Community Association (Kiruca)'. Through this group, 40,000shs is saved every month which is later given out as loan at a 10% interest to not only group members but also to the community which profits are used to support orphans with scholastic materials and in 2024, over 20 students were supported. They were able to make a profit of 2 Million shillings between the years 2024 to 2025. She has also preserved the environment through briquette making and local saving stoves.

Case Scenario Session

The day also included participatory group discussions facilitated by Racheal Demba (Staff at the secretariat) based on practical scenario cases (eligible, non-eligible and fabricated cases) related to violations faced by WHRDs. Participants worked in groups to analyse the cases, identify protection concerns, discuss appropriate documentation approaches, and propose possible response and referral mechanisms. The discussions encouraged peer learning, critical reflection, teamwork, and practical application of the knowledge acquired during the training sessions.



Picture above shows panel presentation during the group case scenario discussion by different groups.



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Learnings from the Group Discussions and way forward included;

- **Group One;** This was an eligible case and participants learned that in order to receive support from the WHRDN-U, the threats should be directly connected to their activism work and there should be supporting documentation and witness or evidence.
- **Group two;** Participants learned that online violence, hacking, cyberbullying and digital surveillance targeting WHRDs are legitimate violations and require documentation such as screenshots, links, dates, reports and witness accounts.
- **Group Three;** This was a non-eligible case and participants were able to understand that not every violation automatically falls within WHRDN-U's mandate. While the victim in the case deserved justice and referral to appropriate GBV services, this case was not eligible under the WHRDN-U because the survivor is not targeted due to human rights work which is the focus of the network.
- **Group Four;** Participants learned the importance of verification, fact-checking, documentation standards and ethical assessment before support is provided. They also learned that lack of evidence does not always mean a case is fake, but inconsistent information requires careful follow-up and risk assessment.

Way Forward

- WHRDs in the Albertine region committed to improving safe and ethical documentation of violations by ensuring that cases are properly recorded with supporting evidence.

- Participants agreed to strengthen networking and solidarity among WHRDs within the Albertine region through regular communication, peer support, and referrals for protection concerns.
- WHRDs committed to increasing awareness within their communities on women's rights, land rights, GBV prevention, environmental justice, and protection of human rights defenders.
- Participants committed to documenting both online and offline violations affecting WHRDs, including threats, intimidation, hate speech, cyber harassment, and arbitrary arrests.
- WHRDN-U secretariat to follow up with participants after the meeting to assess progress on documentation efforts, protection concerns, referrals, and implementation of lessons learned from the training.

Key Successes

- The meeting successfully brought together 15 Women Human Rights Defenders from six districts in the Albertine region, creating a platform for networking, peer learning, and collaboration.
- Participants increased their knowledge and understanding of safe documentation, verification methods, ethical reporting, and evidence collection when handling human rights violations.
- WHRDs openly shared experiences of violations faced during their human rights work, which strengthened collective reflection and understanding of protection concerns affecting defenders in the region.
- Entry into the training venue at Country Sights Hotel was worked on by putting a ramp to ease accessibility to the training venue after a complaint was raised by Margret a Woman Human Rights Defender living with disability. Margret and Abiria had to be carried from their wheel chairs to access the venue.
- Participants gained practical knowledge on the different forms of violations affecting WHRDs, including physical, psychological, reputational, online, and institutional violations.
- The self-care session created space for participants to reflect on the importance of prioritizing mental health, wellbeing, and personal protection while carrying out human rights work.

- Participants gained increased understanding of the Universal Peer Review (UPR) process and the role of WHRDs in contributing to shadow reports and advocacy for human rights accountability.
- The scenario-based group discussions enhanced practical learning on identifying eligible and non-eligible cases, risk assessment, verification, referrals, and documentation standards.
- The meeting strengthened solidarity and trust among WHRDs, creating stronger regional linkages for future collaboration and support.

Key Challenges

- Many WHRDs continue to operate in environments characterized by threats, intimidation, stigma, and fear, which affects their ability to safely document and report violations.
- Limited financial resources and logistical support remain a challenge for WHRDs carrying out community-based human rights work, especially in remote areas considering the withdraw of donor funding.
- Participants noted that many violations against WHRDs go undocumented due to fear of retaliation, lack of evidence, stigma, and inadequate knowledge on safe documentation processes.
- Cultural norms and harmful social beliefs continue to negatively affect women defenders, especially those working on sensitive issues such as GBV, sexual and reproductive health rights, land rights, and harmful cultural practices.
- Participants also highlighted the emotional and psychological burden associated with human rights work, including burnout, trauma, stress, and lack of adequate psychosocial support services for WHRDs.