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Address violations of women's rights

Early this year, I read with dismay the reports about the resurgence of female genital mutilation in the eastern region of Uganda.

More than 400 women and girls, some as young as 12 years, were being forcibly mutilated by local gangs. This was being done despite numerous government efforts to put an end to this degrading act, through laws and policies, like the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2010). After all has been said and done, laws implemented, systems, institutions and policies set up, it will all come to nought if people's mindsets remain the same.

A change of mindset is key to addressing and combating the root causes of the violations of women's rights and this needs to be addressed every single day, especially this women's month.

For ages, women and men have been socialised to accept and accommodate violations women suffer, simply because they are women. This mindset can be seen in the everyday examples all around us. A woman is taught that marriage validates her and therefore, even if her husband turns her into a punching bag, she should change her behaviour, because she must have provoked him. She is taught to 'stay for the sake of the children' and so her daughters believe it's normal and end up with men who treat them the same way or the sons treat their future wives the same way and the cycle of violence continues.

A woman is taught that matters of the home should be kept within the home, and when abuse occurs, the matter is kept hidden because 'we do not to wash our dirty linen in public'. In the end, the dirty linen is never washed at all. When an abused woman finally finds the strength to walk away, people's comments range from: "Why did she publicise the issue?" or "I miss the good, old days where our grandmothers withstood everything in marriage". The abused woman is blamed, forgetting the perpetrator. Violence against women affects us all. We all need to challenge our mindset and create change within our immediate environment.

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