

QUESTION & ANSWER TIME
WITH **ROSEBELL KAGUMIRE**
ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND
WOMEN AND GIRLS' RIGHTS
ACCOUNTABILITY



ARISE: Are there stereotypes in the traditional media about the way female emancipation is presented?

RK: I think the commonest stereotype is education and equal empowerment. We rarely see pieces on ordinary women who are actually questioning social norms even when they are not educated. We relate emancipation only to formal education. We forget that for generations women defied the set rules and sought justice and equality.

Also often we do not relate men to female emancipation yet men have a big role they can play, whether positively or negatively, in empowerment. An empowered father who believes in equality will play a huge role in the life of his daughter.

ARISE: How has new media helped to challenge this status quo and how is it being used to fight for women's rights?

RK: First of all, if you pick up a newspaper tell me the ratio of male to female columnists or top report-

ers? When you go on social media you will see all these women's voices because the channels are available. More women take part in conversations that traditional media would not have interviewed them on. Women are talking politics and participating in top daily news than ever before.

Also, women online are free to share their stories as is. So online platforms have given room to women to express themselves in ways traditional media had never allowed. It is common to tune in to TVs and see all-male panels every morning or evening. We still have a problem with the way media provides opportunities to impart knowledge.

ARISE: Are we seeing more women reporting on online platforms about previously untouched subjects?

RK: Yes. I see tweets about sex, a subject that was long kept in designated spaces. Women are able to freely talk about sex and pleasure in a way they would not have done before. I see conversations about sexual harassment which rarely get space in traditional media. Women are able to speak about their experiences, whether anonymously or in person.

Also areas that were largely overlooked like homecare work, which is largely done by women, are being tackled on groups like Mama Tendo. Most women spend a good amount of time on this work.

ARISE: How has this new reporting helped to bring attention and accountability to women's rights?

RK: In terms of accountability, I think we still have a huge gap in women access to online spaces and ICTs. So really, except WhatsApp groups, other forums remain only for a few

Ugandans. I think online conversations help show us that we are not alone in our problems. We have to strategically use online spaces for accountability on women's rights but we are still really just getting started. It is important that women are organising online groups where people can share from various corners of the country.

ARISE: What new opportunities can young women take in these new platforms?

RK: I think we need to impart knowledge. Most fast-growing economies have ICT high up in their priorities. We still have many young people not connected. We have to promote more innovation using ICT, not only conversations. We need to see more effort to translate online conversations into real projects and interventions; and young people can be at the centre of this as we fight unemployment.

Unfortunately, with these opportunities come challenges. We see an increase in women's rights violations online, such as abuse, trolling and revenge pornography. We need to see more action in terms of the protection of women's rights.

Kagumire is a multimedia journalist, communication strategist, and public speaker and award-winning blogger. She has worked with various media organisations in Uganda and internationally and recently was Social Media Manager at the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). She is experienced in journalism, new media, migration, women's rights, peace and security in Africa.