

A woman with long, dark, curly hair is dancing in a nightclub. She is wearing a white crop top and denim shorts. Her arms are raised, and she is looking away from the camera. The background is filled with purple and blue lights, and a large mirror is visible in the upper left corner. The overall atmosphere is vibrant and energetic.

**DIRTY DANCING:
HOW SOCIETY HAS ALLOWED
THE UGANDAN MUSIC
INDUSTRY TO PORTRAY
WOMEN IN A SOULLESS,
DEMEANING WAY**

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Uganda is famed for, among other things, being one of the most beautiful places in the world; even former British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, famously referred to Uganda as the 'Pearl of Africa'. Also, over the last fifteen or so years, Uganda has been greatly appreciated, the world over, for a fairly successful anti- HIV/AIDS campaign, not forgetting the flattering but equally questionable claims, by both local and international media, about Ugandans being among the happiest people in the world. To some, these claims are debatable, yet regardless of which side of the divide one belongs, what is non-debatable is that Uganda is neither a perfect country nor are Ugandans perfect people. Regarding Uganda's socioeconomic growth and development, the remarkable success and progress in certain areas oftentimes easily mask the poor performance and slow or even stagnated growth in others. For instance, that Uganda is well endowed with a landscape to 'die for', a wide variety of flora and fauna, diverse cultures and traditions, and that Ugandans are very enterprising, is no secret. Just as it's no secret that Uganda still continues to grapple with serious issues like corruption, a poor human rights record, gender inequality, and unemployment, among other issues.

Yet in the past decade, a major social problem has subtly and rapidly crept into our society, mostly in the entertainment industry. Today, if you turn on your television, browse Ugandan music videos online or listen to the lyrics of local songs, you will not fail to notice a prevailing theme: the sexualisation of women. It is now common to see women barely dressed, with exposed breasts, thighs and buttocks, in the name of making 'cutting edge' music videos. Tragically, young girls haven't been spared either, so that even in kindergartens and primary schools, it is now normal during entertainment sessions at various school functions, to find girls performing sexually explicit 'dance moves' such as 'twerking', 'bending over', 'rubbing' against boys and each other, and miming songs with sexually explicit lyrics, while the parents and teachers actively cheer them on, totally oblivious to the negative effects on the children's physical, mental and spiritual development. Unfortunately, society, it seems, is moving on, blindly consuming the offensive music and hardly noticing its negative impact. Or maybe they notice but just don't care. This inappropriate portrayal of women as

sex objects, whose sexuality exists only to 'sell' entertainment and satisfy society's sexual appetites, not only continues to negatively affect women, but is also fuelling the prevailing misconceptions that society has about them. The prevailing levels of violence against women, sexual abuse and low self-esteem, among others, cannot be divorced from the culture of sexualising women. Literally speaking, to many Ugandans, women have no significant role to play in the process of national development, except to 'lie on their backs'. How did we get here? Why do Ugandans continue to let the abuse of women by musicians go unchallenged? Or are we too blind to see what's happening?

Simply put, we allowed ourselves to get here. And no! We are not blind. We see it, but we just don't care that much about women. In fact, largely, society doesn't really know how to care for women. Let me explain.

Mainstream media has greatly contributed to this predicament. Uganda's media coverage of the music industry thrives on ideals copied from global entertainment powerhouses like MTV, BET and Channel O, among others. All these global powerhouses have one thing in common – they sexualise women. Literally, all music shows, on all local television stations, such as Jam Agenda on WBS TV, Horizon Vibe on UBC and Exposed on NTV, among others, reflect the global media culture. It's no surprise then that in an attempt to 'measure up' to 'international standards', media coverage of our rapidly growing local music industry has, inadvertently, adopted this twisted narrative on women. Globally, most music reflects the world's perverted approach towards women's sexuality, with global superstars like Lil' Wayne,



Jay Z, Beyonce, and Africa's Koffi Olomide and P-Square, among others, all making music that portrays women as mere sex 'toys'. Thus, in attempting to 'measure up' to standards set by global superstars, to 'fit in' with current global trends and to make a lot of money, local artists have, over time, had to adjust from writing socially conscious music, to making music with hidden sexual innuendo or sexually explicit content, mostly about women.

Tough economic times have pushed some women to do unsavoury things to survive, though to the detriment of all womenfolk. As with prostitution and pornography, many women who take part in demeaning performances in music videos justify themselves by stressing the need to survive the harsh economic times, given the high levels of youth unemployment and the high cost of living. Genuine as they may be, they also inspire and lead a younger generation of girls in the wrong direction.

There is widespread ignorance about the value of women to Uganda's growth and development. As opposed to the thinking that women are weaklings who can't do much, but only cook for their men and get pregnant, they are actually not weaklings. They aren't any less important than men, and should never be confined to the kitchen and bedroom. I was taught from a very young age that men and women are equal and equally important

to national development. As a Christian who holds true to Bible teachings, I believe this. I know that Adam alone would never have overseen the advancement of human civilisation, without Eve. Women, too, can be competitive in every one of Uganda's spheres of influence: politics, business, education, sports, the military etc. A woman can't be a father, but can be a member of parliament, a speaker of parliament, a judge, the executive director of a parastatal and, definitely, the president of Uganda. You can't sexualise what you respect. Society should give the very same measure of respect and honour to women, as it does men.

Unfortunately, not only for women but also for society in general, sex actually sells. The world is greatly perverted and, as a result, these days everything seems to revolve around sex. Things like getting good grades at school or university, jobs, promotions, school fees, food etc., involve 'sex transactions'. Little wonder that in the advertising industry, sexuality is a vital component. Consider the majority of billboards in and around Kampala City and you will notice that, irrespective of the products being advertised, most of them have women posing seductively with specific body parts exposed, to generate some degree of sexual excitement and, ultimately, interest in the product,

whether it be soft drinks, car spare parts, steel products, dairy products, cosmetics etc.

Can anything be done to counter this deviance? Yes. A lot can and should be done. The media is powerful and economic times are tough, but parents are powerful and can be tough too. King Solomon of Israel once said, regarding parenting, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he's old, he'll not depart from it.' (Proverbs.22:6). The primary responsibility of parents is to teach and discipline children, in this respect girls, to accept and value who they are, not what the media determines for them, and to teach boys to respect women, and to treat women with brotherly love and not as 'sex toys'. Parents should create an environment that is conducive to discussing sexuality with their children. Failure to do this is the reason why many young people's minds are today perverted by musicians. Today's generation of parents largely seems to have abandoned the role of disciplining their children. Children shouldn't just watch whatever they want, listen to whatever music they desire, and attend whatever concerts they choose, without the guidance of parents or guardians. They are your children. Teach them. Discipline them. King Solomon also once intimated,

'Whoever does not discipline his son hates him. But whoever loves him is diligent to correct him.' Another version puts it this way, 'He that spares his rod hates his son. But he who loves him disciplines him promptly' (Proverbs.13:34)

If parents don't discipline their children, who will? Perverted musicians??

Educational institutions are a defensive line against the sexual perversion of young people, especially at primary, secondary and university levels. They should engage proper and effective sex education programmes, focused on culture, media and peer influences and how they shape a society's sexual behaviour.

Also, parents, educational institutions and civil the society need to join hands and vigorously engage the entertainers, the business community and the government. The business community and entertainment industry must be challenged and held accountable for their marketing and advertising concepts which demean women. Musicians need to be challenged to desist from making music that degrades women and start producing more women-friendly music. Why not come up with a Citizens' Compact on protecting and promoting the dignity of women in the entertainment



industry, just as was done with the Citizens' Manifesto prior to the 2016 general elections? What if we were to rally citizens, beginning with women, to stop consuming products of businesses which are known to promote musicians whose music degrades women, such as one who some time back produced a song insulting popular female television personality of Urban TV? What would happen if women stopped financing such artistes by shunning their concerts and music just like many consumers of local music shunned some local artistes after the 'Tubonga Nawe Fiasco'.

No offence intended, but if you women want your voices to be heard and taken seriously, then you must go beyond the 'nice' affirmative action speeches, women emancipation conferences and begging politicians to fight for your rights, and take a more active role. Now is your time to take this fight to these musicians and businesses which support them. Don't continue just barking! Now is the time for women to start biting hard. Take the lead and surely the rest of the country will hear you and, follow you.

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