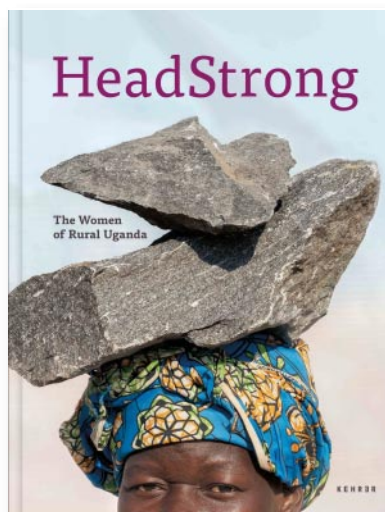


NEW RELEASE 2026



Dan Nelken
HeadStrong
The Women of Rural Uganda

Texts by Ber Anena, Beatrice Lamwaka, Dan Nelken, Stella Nyanzi
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Vibrant portraits of self-determined women in Uganda

HeadStrong brings together a powerful collection of photographs and personal testimonies from a diverse group of working women in rural Uganda. Through their stories, they speak of war and abduction, of endurance, family responsibility, labor, and faith—offering intimate accounts shaped by both hardship and strength. Each portrait is titled with the woman's name, age, and profession, affirming her agency and acknowledging her presence as an individual rather than a subject. Set against a backdrop of mosquito netting, the portraits remove visual distractions and draw attention to the women's direct gaze, conveying dignity, self-possession, and presence.

The project was developed in close collaboration with award-winning Ugandan author Beatrice Lamwaka, who conducted interviews with each participant and wrote the accompanying texts. Contributions by poet and activist Ber Anena and human rights scholar Dr Stella Nyanzi provide further social, historical, and political context, grounding the work in local knowledge and lived experience.

By combining portraiture with personal narrative, *HeadStrong* creates a powerful connection between viewer and subject, offering nuanced insight into the challenges these women face—from food insecurity and educational barriers to systemic inequality and the enduring effects of conflict—while celebrating their resilience, individuality, and strength.

From the text *The sacrificial lambs of our systems*
 by **Beatrice Lamwaka**

These are photos of some of the women who refused to give up on their children and families. They have refused to be defined by

the circumstances around them. »I didn't get an education, but I will crack stones till my hands bleed, and with that I will send my children to school« kind of attitude. They are rock stars in their own right. They smile, laugh, and dance when they can. They are not beaten down by their circumstances, for they must live and find paths where there is long grass and snakes.

Dan Nelken is a visual artist, documentary storyteller, educator, and lecturer based in New York City. His photographs have been exhibited and published internationally and are held in both public and private collections, including the MAST Foundation, Bologna; The International Center of Photography, New York; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Portland Museum of Art.

Beatrice Lamwaka is a Ugandan writer and journalist. She serves as the President of PEN Uganda and is a member of PEN International's board.

Dr. Stella Nyanzi is a human rights activist, poet, medical anthropologist, feminist, queer rights advocate, and scholar of sexuality, family planning, and public health. Due to government persecution, she lives in Germany on a writer-in-exile program run by PEN Germany.

Ber Anena is a Ugandan poet, writer, and performer. Her prose and poetry have been published extensively. Anena won the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa in 2018 for her debut poetry collection, *A Nation in Labour*.

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press@kehrerverlag.com

Phone +49 (0) 6221 - 649 20-18

www.kehrerverlag.com

Kehrer Verlag, Mannheimer Str. 175, 69123 Heidelberg, Germany

Press Images



01_Adong Prossy: age 27, sells jackfruit for 500 ugx per slice © Dan Nelken



02_Atoo Mary: age 18, selling soft brooms for two years © Dan Nelken



03_Aloyo Nancy: age 32. Junior: age 6. Angel: 12 months, selling g-nut paste for four years © Dan Nelken



04_Charity Akelli: age 26, a mechanic for nine years © Dan Nelken



05_Xlamukera Irene: age 23, with her daughter, selling used clothes for three years © Dan Nelken



06_Obol Kevin: age 38, selling shoes for 20 years © Dan Nelken



07_The Central Market in Gulu. A young girl selling Jack Fruit underneath the elephant statue © Dan Nelken



08_ View of the Quarry © Dan Nelken



09_Aciro Vicky: age 18 with her son Michael (age 10 months), working in quarry for one year © Dan Nelken



10_ Women working in the quarry load their day's worth of gravel to be paid © Dan Nelken



11_Apur Janet: age 38, working in quarry for 10 years © Dan Nelken



12_Hope: age 4 & her mother Amito Nancy Faith: age 19, working in quarry for 10 years © Dan Nelken



13_Acayo Margeret: age 59, nurse & healer for 35 years © Dan Nelken



14_Akello Nancy: age 28, selling poultry for three years © Dan Nelken



15_Afiya Namazzi: age 29, videogames designer for four years © Dan Nelken