



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



FULFILLING THE PROMISE:

NAVIGATING GENDER INJUSTICE IN UGANDA
FOR LASTING SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTIONS
3	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
6	INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS AND NATIONAL POLICIES, PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES
11	CURRENT TRENDS & CHALLENGES
12	EDUCATION
16	ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION:
21	POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP:
26	KEY FINDINGS
29	RECOMMENDATIONS

01

INTRODUCTIONS

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Gender inequality is discrimination on the basis of sex or gender that causes one sex or gender to be routinely privileged or prioritised over another, while gender justice involves ending inequalities between men and women in law and practice and providing redress for those inequalities to ensure human development and the realization of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

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Seven years ago, 193 member states of the United Nations (UN) reached a consensus that the path to sustainable development must be built on a foundation of equality, inclusiveness, and universal enjoyment of basic human rights. In keeping with this position, several academic studies have also shown that closing the gender gap can accelerate development and is a precondition for peace to take hold and flourish in societies. However, midway through the 2030 timeline for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN's gender equality agency has expressed deep concern that the world is falling worryingly short of closing the gender gap.¹

Gender inequality in Uganda is deeply rooted in cultural, social, and economic norms that have persisted for generations.² Traditional gender roles and expectations have led to disparities in the enjoyment of human rights, access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power between men and women.

Uganda adopted and is working to fully align with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its legal and policy framework prioritises gender equality and gender mainstreaming, while its Vision 2040 statement prioritises gender equality as a cross-cutting enabler of socio-economic transformation. Over the past 30 years, there has been political dedication to advance gender parity in the country, with significant gains in economic participation and opportunity, attainment of education, access to healthcare, and political participation for women and girls. Despite these efforts, disparities endure, necessitating a re-examination of the prevailing challenges as well as renewed and sustained actions toward gender equality.

The Uganda National NGO Forum has commissioned this policy brief to promote gender justice through a critical review of the current issues behind gender inequality and provide recommendations for informed decision-making, implementation and advocacy by policymakers, duty-bearers, academia, and civil society.

1 UN News. (2023, September 8). Gender gap persists on road to the SDGs: UN Women. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/september-2023/gender-gap-persists-road-sdgs-un-women#:~:text=The%20new%20Gender%20Snapshot%20report,of%20the%20female%20population%20worldwide> last accessed on 10 November 2023.

2 United Nations Development Programme Uganda Country Office. (2022). Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-02/UNDP%20UGANDA%20Gender%20Equality%20Strategy%202022-2025.pdf>

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

02

The following sections provide insights into gender dynamics in Uganda, the current context of gender inequality, the existing legal and policy frameworks, and an analysis of issues and recommendations.

Although pre-colonial Ugandan society had a gender system with assigned gender roles, men and women to an extent had complementary roles in the public and private spheres, enjoying communal property and shared political power. Women from the royal clans, particularly in Buganda, held significant political power³ and played key roles as sisters or queen mothers and advisors to monarchs of the four kingdoms of Bunyoro, Ankole, Buganda, and Tooro. Women were custodians of specialised knowledge on health, spirituality, and social continuity. However, the arrival of European colonial powers in the late 19th century introduced new gender dynamics, limiting women's power and reinforcing patriarchy. The colonial administration enacted laws which further entrenched and cemented gender roles, inevitably leading to gender injustice like the 1955 Marriage and Divorce Act, which codified traditional gender roles, recognised polygamy, allowed men to divorce without cause, and limited women's right to own and inherit property.

The fight for gender equality in Uganda then began with women's groups that emerged after World War II like the Anglican Church's Mothers' Union, the Girl Guides Association, Uganda Council of Women, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and the Catholic Women's Clubs of Uganda. These organisations provided training for indigenous women to mobilise at the local and national levels but conditioned them to reproduce Western notions of domesticity, morality, and division of labour. The Mother's Union advocated for women to attend Makerere University, while the YWCA promoted leadership, marriage, and divorce laws and generally women's rights.⁴ The big growth in women's organising began in earnest with the establishment of the Uganda Council of Women in 1946, which successfully engaged in influencing legislation and in the mid-1950s began to raise issues around marriage, divorce and succession rights.

3 Alicia C. Decker. (2023, January 31). Women in Uganda. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.1451>

4 Tripp Aili M., Ntiro Sarah. 2002 "Women's Activism in colonial Uganda " page 23-37 in Tripp Aili M., Ntiro Sarah. 2002 "The women's movement in Uganda: History, challenges and prospects" Kampala, Fountain Publishers.

Following Uganda's independence in 1962, key events and policies reshaped the country's gender dynamics, such as the enactment of the 1962 independence constitution which granted women the right to vote and stand for political office, and the amendment of the Succession Act in 1972 by Decree No.22 issued by President Idi Amin, which allowed widows and children to inherit a large enough portion of property.⁵ Between 1987 and 1992, the government implemented economic structural adjustment programmes, leading to the privatization of public services and withdrawal of government support for social welfare programmes, thereby disproportionately affecting women.

5
The Succession (Amendment) Decree, 1972.

https://landwise-production.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/2022/03/Uganda_Succession-Act-Amendment-Decree_1972-1.pdf

**INTERNATIONAL
COMMITMENTS
AND NATIONAL
POLICIES, PROGRESS
AND CHALLENGES**

03

A new generation of autonomous women's organisations then emerged in Uganda after the 1985 United Nations Women's Conference in Nairobi. They selected their own leaders, had their own source of funding, set their own agendas, and were independent of President Yoweri Museveni's government which came to power in 1986.

In 1995, a new national constitution was enacted enshrining gender equality as a fundamental principle under National objective XV and articles 21, 32 and 33). It established a legal framework for protecting human rights and freedoms for all, as well as the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MoGLSD) to promote gender equality, social protection and transformation of communities. In the years since then, Uganda has ratified several international instruments which prioritise gender equality and empowerment, prohibiting gender-based violence and discrimination, and enacted national policies and laws to achieve this.

Uganda has committed to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), a two-pronged agenda, on the one hand focusing on equal opportunities for both genders and on the other, specifically targeting women with actions to remedy long historical disadvantage through a combination of international commitments and national policies. The country has ratified several international agreements, including but not limited to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1945; the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention of 1958 ratified in 2005; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, ratified in 1995; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, ratified in 1987; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995; the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (also known as the Maputo Protocol); and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Additionally, Uganda is working to fully align its gender agenda with the SDGs, specifically Goal 5, that is, to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls".

At the national level, Uganda has enacted and implemented a suite of laws and policies to address gender imbalances including but not limited to

the 1995 Constitution which serves as a foundational document, clearly guaranteeing women equal rights with men and affirmative action to redress imbalances created by history, traditions and customs among other factors, and the Domestic Violence Act of 2010 in alignment with the Beijing Declaration to eliminate violence against women. Other policies include the National Gender Policy (2007); the National Equal Opportunities Policy; the Equal Opportunities Strategic Plan, 2019/2020-2024/2025; the National Development Plans, and laws related to inheritance, succession rights, equal opportunities, and sexual and reproductive health. Government programmes like Vision 2040, the NRM Manifesto 2021/2025, the Presidential Initiative on Wealth and Job Creation (Emyooga), and the Higher Education Students Financing Board (HESFB), among others, also aim to advance gender equality across sectors. Additionally, key institutions such as the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Uganda Human Rights Commission, the Uganda National Women's Council, the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, and other relevant civil society organisations (CSOs) have been established to promote gender equality and monitor progress.

Against this background, the country has made significant progress in addressing gender inequality. Efforts in this regard continue to be a priority for the government and CSOs, and by law, all government ministries, departments, agencies, and local governments are required to allocate resources and implement actions toward gender equality. In FY 2023/2024 for instance, out of UGX 30.4687 Trillion appropriated to the twenty Development Programmes under NDP III, a total of UGX 12,711 Billion (41.7%) was allocated towards gender and equity interventions.⁶

The past two decades have also seen an increase in the number of women in elective offices and executive positions. Women currently hold 34% of seats in Parliament, ranking 48th out of 187 countries worldwide (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022); compared with 16% in the 4th Parliament in 1989. In Africa, Uganda ranks 11th out of 46 countries and 4th in the EAC Region ahead of South Sudan, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁷

6
Equal Opportunities Commission 10th Annual Report on the State of Equal Opportunities in Uganda, FY 2022/2023, Page

79

7 Statista. (2022, December 31). Africa: Women in parliaments by country 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1248493/percentage-of-women-in-national-parliaments-in-african-countries/>

Consistent with SDG 4, Uganda has enacted educational policies to promote gender-sensitive curricula and increase girls' enrolment in schools. The enrolment and completion rates for girls and boys at the primary level have improved steadily, reaching the 50/50 mark by 2015 (EMIS, 2015), although girls continue to trail in respect to school retention and completion, literacy, numeracy and performance at the secondary level. The introduction of Universal Primary and Secondary Education, coupled with special initiatives like the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) and the Presidential Initiative of Skilling the Girl Child, and affirmative action starting in 1992 of awarding female students 1.5 points for admission into public universities have been instrumental in promoting equal education opportunities for all at all levels and bringing education facilities near to learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds within walkable distances. Higher learning institutions have prioritised gender equality in their policies and practices, and significantly increased female student intakes; although female representation across all disciplines of study is still below par. To promote access to higher education, the government has operationalised the higher education financing scheme through which both female and male students can access loans for education.

There is improved access to sexual and reproductive health services in the country, as the government has increased maternal, new-born, and child health programmes in line with SDG 5.6, invested in new health facilities and rehabilitating old ones, improved the supply of medical equipment and hospital furniture as well as transport for health facilities, among other services.⁸ Additionally, the Presidential Fast Track Initiative to end AIDS by 2030 was launched in 2017, adopting a test and treat strategy and scaling up programmes to end mother-to-child transmission.⁹ However, many women aged 15-49 still lack decision-making control over sexual relations, contraceptive use, and sexual or reproductive healthcare. Teenage pregnancy rates have remained unchanged for most of the past 20 years and increased during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the extended national lockdown.

last accessed on 14th December 2023

8 Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (2019, June). National Report on Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/Uganda.pdf>

9 Ibid

In the economic area, major improvements have been registered in women's financial inclusion and economic empowerment. Today, more women have access to informal financial services which promote the ease of doing business such as mobile money and government-assisted low-interest loan schemes targeted at women-owned and operated businesses, and have user-friendly financial services brought closer to them, especially in rural areas. Initiatives like UWEP have been instrumental in uplifting women with positive rankings on the global scale. However, women still face limitations in accessing formal financial services, asset ownership and resources for production. Moreover, there are major gaps concerning access to and retention of decent paid work. Legal reforms such as property co-ownership have increased women's land ownership¹⁰, but men remain more likely than women to own land.

In line with SDG 2 and the Maputo Protocol on gender-based violence, the government has prioritised interventions to eliminate violence against women and girls, enforcing various laws and regulations, and has adopted a multi-sectoral approach to provide legal and support services to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV). The government among other initiatives also established a National GBV database (NGBVD) in 2015 to collect, store and generate real-time reports on GBV. Gender-based violence however remains a significant issue in Uganda; affecting human rights, public health, and economic progress. According to the NGBVD, the two regions with the most prevalent cases are the Northern (35.6%) and Eastern (34.4%) regions.¹¹

Despite these efforts, Uganda faces challenges with policy enforcement to advance gender justice covering the legal, cultural, social, and resource-related areas. Key issues include incomplete alignment of national laws with international commitments, limited awareness among institutions and the public about these commitments and the law, inadequate data collection and monitoring mechanisms, inadequate legal recourse, a culture of impunity, and deep-seated cultural norms and societal attitudes. These factors hinder the full realisation of GEWE and perpetuate gender stereotypes. Other challenges include inconsistencies in political will and institutional capacity to implement gender equality measures, which impede coordinated and sustained implementation of international commitments and protocols.

10 The Land Act, 1998

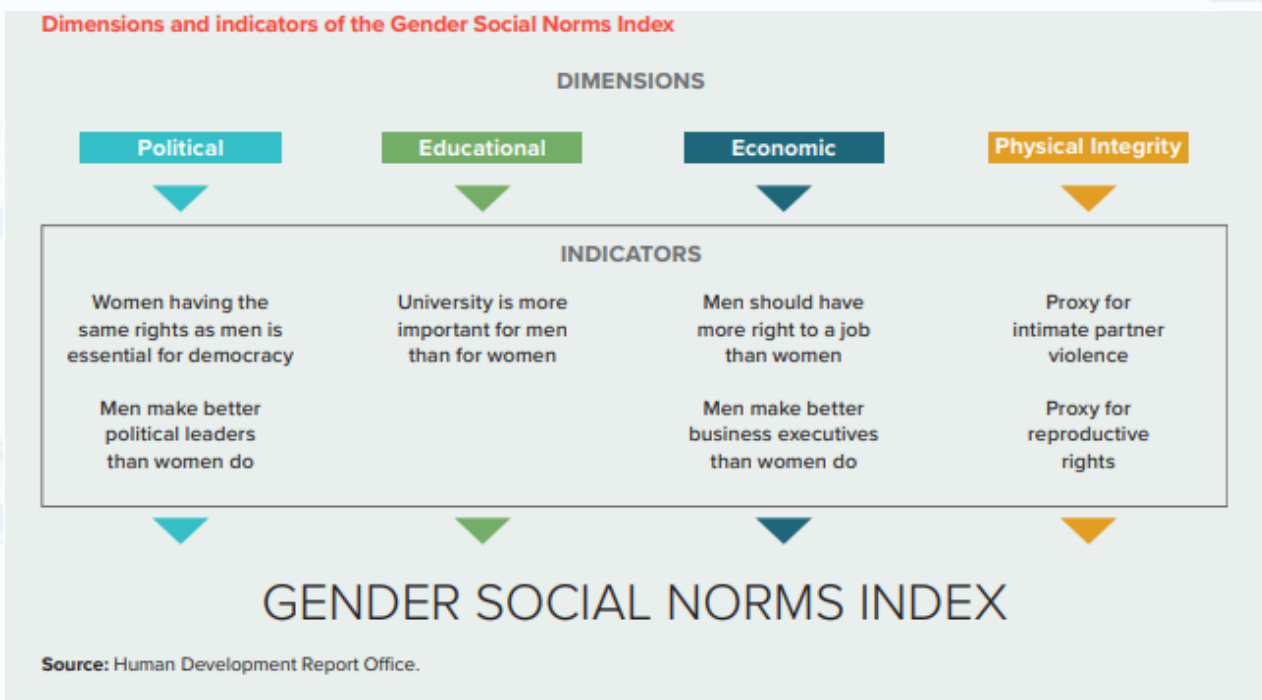
11 Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. (2015). National Gender Based Violence Database. Retrieved from <https://ngbvd.mglsd.go.ug/index/regions> last accessed on 14th December 2023

CURRENT TRENDS & CHALLENGES

04

Biased gender social norms are a major impediment to gender equality in Uganda. The roles assigned by society to each gender have a direct impact on their behaviour and participation in the different spheres of public life. As such, and as has already been pointed out, significant structural gender disparities are seen across four key sectors, including education, access to healthcare services, economic opportunities, leadership and political participation. Below are some statistics which demonstrate this reality:

Figure 1: Dimensions and Indicators of the Gender Social Norms Index

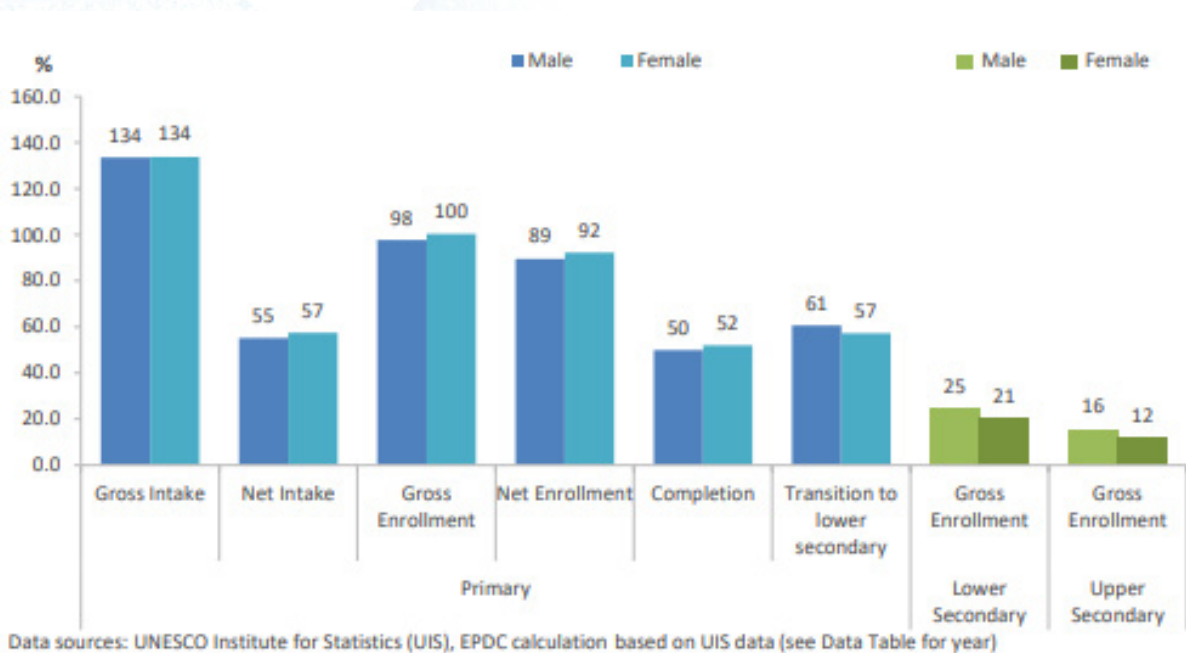


EDUCATION

05

Participation by both genders in this sector varies at different stages. In 2018, the primary school enrolment rate was 89% for boys and 92% for girls,¹² with a 50% completion rate for boys and 52% for girls.¹² In the same year (see Fig 2) fewer girls (57%) than boys (61%) went on to lower secondary school with more boys (25%) than girls (21%) enrolled in lower secondary school. The percentage of girls (12%) lowered in upper secondary as opposed to boys (16%). In 2017, the World Bank¹³ reported that 25.1% of girls and 27.7% of boys completed lower secondary school. Although more girls are enrolling in school, the number of girls dropping out increases as they grow older. There is insufficient information on current school dropout rates per district. Uganda's inconsistent infrastructure makes it difficult to maintain current records of school enrolment and dropout rates, and more children are likely out of school than reported. Over the years, numerous cases have been reported mainly in the Elgon, Bukedi, Tooro, Acholi, Lango, Karamoja, Kigezi, West Nile, Busoga, Bunyoro, Ankole and Buganda sub-regions¹⁴. The Ministry of Education and Sports' Annual School Census, 2017 provides the most recent data.

Figure 2: Student Intake and Flow from Primary to Secondary Schools



¹² UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Education Policy and Data Center. Uganda National Education Profile 2018. <https://www.epdc.org/node/347.html> last accessed on 29th October 2023

¹³ Uganda. World Bank Gender Data Portal. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/uganda/> last accessed on 29th October 2023

¹⁴ Ministry of Education and Sports. (2017, April). Statistics Abstract.

<https://www.education.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Abstract-2017.pdf> last accessed on 6th November 2023

Fewer boys than girls complete primary school mainly due to poverty leading to child labour, especially in child-headed homes and gender roles assigned to them such as tending to cattle and home farms, which limit their education. Girls on the other hand drop out after the primary level and increasingly at the secondary level, mainly due to factors such as teenage pregnancy, early marriages, poor performance and poor menstrual health management facilities which hinder their education, among other dynamics which prioritise education of boys. When resources are scarce, boys are prioritised for education as they are expected to take on family leadership in the future.

Dropout rates at the university level are significantly high. According to a statement by Makerere University Vice-Chancellor Professor Barnabas Nawangwe before the Education Committee of Parliament in April 2023, the university has consistently been losing a minimum of 1,000 students each academic year due to their inability to pay tuition expenses,¹⁵ forcing some female students to resort to sex work to raise tuition fees.¹⁶ As of March 2022, female literacy rates were at 72%, while male literacy rates were at 81%.¹⁷ Additionally, in the financial year 2022/2023, fewer females (33.1%) than males benefited from the Students University Loan scheme.¹⁸

15 The Independent. (2023, October 11). Students initiate campaign to combat alarming dropout rates at Makerere University. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.ug/students-initiate-campaign-to-combat-alarming-dropout-rates-at-makerere-university/>

16 Ibid

17 Uganda Bureau of Statistics. 2022 Statistical Abstract. https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/05_20232022_Statistical_Abstract.pdf last accessed on 10 November 2023

18 Equal Opportunities Commission 10th Annual Report on the State of Equal Opportunities in Uganda, FY 2022/2023, Page 152

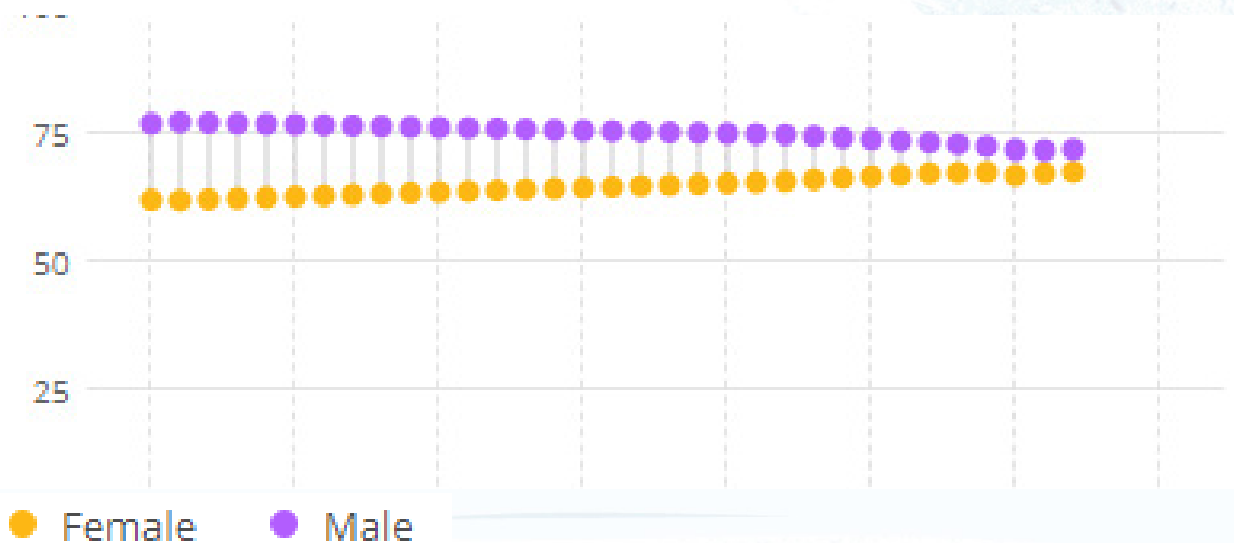
ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION:

06

Societal norms and gender stereotypes have influenced gender participation in the economic and employment sectors, thereby affecting career choices, experience, productivity, and economic yields. These norms are common at home, school and the workplace, affecting both genders' experiences and productivity in their chosen income-generating spaces.

Labour force participation: In 2022, the World Bank¹⁹ reported that more men (72%) than women (67.6%) participated in the labour force. Compared to previous years, however, improvements in female participation rates have been observed, placing Uganda among the best-performing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2022.²⁰

Figure 3: Labour force participation rate, by sex (% of population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)



Source: The World Bank Gender Data Portal, International Labour Organization. "ILO Modelled Estimates and Projections database (ILOEST)" ILOSTAT

Entrepreneurial activity: The 2021 Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE), ranked Uganda for the third consecutive year as one of the countries with the highest concentration of women entrepreneurs (38.4%) globally.²¹ Despite these gains, traditional social attitudes and

¹⁹ The World Bank, Gender Data Portal retrieved from <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/uganda/> last accessed on 6 November 2023

²⁰ The World Bank. (2022). World Bank Open Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=ZG> last accessed on 6 November 2023

²¹ Botswana, Uganda, and Ghana show the highest concentration of women entrepreneurs – Mastercard index of women entrepreneurs. (2022, March 28). Mastercard - A Global Technology Company in The Payments Industry. <https://www.mastercard.com/>

beliefs, particularly in rural areas, continue to exclude more women from the labour market²².

Wage and salaried work: In 2021, male wage and salaried workers accounted for 27.6%, while females accounted for 15.9%.²³ Factors such as education, work experience, productivity, occupation, and industry sector contribute to this disparity and the resulting wage gap²⁴. Fewer women participate effectively at work due to challenges in balancing paid and unpaid work²⁵. More gaps are seen in women's work experience due to childbirth and child-care, which affect their accumulation of work experience, productivity, and motivation to upgrade their skills. Women also tend to invest less in market-oriented education due to labour market interruptions, thereby affecting their wages.²⁶ Additionally, gender stereotypes also compel women to pursue easier and more "feminine" careers²⁷ like nursing or kindergarten teaching, which are similar to their unpaid domestic work, to balance their private and public roles even though they are capable of performing well in sectors dominated by men²⁸.

Unpaid care work: A 2022 survey in Paliisa, Mpigi, Mbarara and Masindi districts found that women spend 5.5 hours (more than 30 hours per week) on unpaid care work, compared to men who spend 3.5 hours.²⁹ Conversely, men spend at least 7.4 hours compared to 5.3 hours for women in paid employment. The undervaluation of effort and time put into unpaid care work has direct negative implications on their economic empowerment and effectiveness in paid work, thereby placing them at a greater disadvantage than men in both unpaid and paid work.

[news/eemea/en/newsroom/press-releases/press-releases/en/2022/march/botswana-uganda-and-ghana-show-the-highest-concentration-of-women-entrepreneurs-mastercard-index-of-women-entrepreneurs/#:~:text=Pan%20Africa%20%E2%80%93%2028%2C%20March%202022,most%20women%20business%20owners%20globally](https://eemea/en/newsroom/press-releases/press-releases/en/2022/march/botswana-uganda-and-ghana-show-the-highest-concentration-of-women-entrepreneurs-mastercard-index-of-women-entrepreneurs/#:~:text=Pan%20Africa%20%E2%80%93%2028%2C%20March%202022,most%20women%20business%20owners%20globally)

22 Danish Trade Union Development Agency, Labour Market Profile Uganda - 2022/2023 retrieved from <https://www.ulandssekretariatet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/LMP-Uganda-2022-final.pdf> last accessed on 9 November 2023

23 World Bank Gender Data Portal. Uganda Gender Landscape. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099021507042294716/pdf/IDU08c8c38240ca8a04af00a3e2032857d0f84c6.pdf> last accessed on 2 November 2023

24 Mehjabeen Alarakhia, Marjan Petreski, Zahra Sheikh Ahmed and Tanima Tanima. (2023, October 24). Why Women Earn Less: Gender Pay Gap and Labour-Market Inequalities in East and Southern Africa, retrieved from https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/gpg_regional_report_un_women.pdf

25 Ibid

26 Ibid

27 Ibid

28 Kassenboehmer, S.C. and M.G. Sinning (2014), "Distributional Changes in the Gender Wage Gap." *International Labor Review* 67 (2), pp. 335–361.

29 Alon Mwesigwa. (2022, September 25). Women in Uganda still spend more time in unpaid care work – report – Economic policy research centre. Economic Policy Research Centre – Towards Sustainable Development. <https://eprcug.org/press-releases/women-in-uganda-still-spend-more-time-in-unpaid-care-work-report/>

Agricultural employment: In 2021, 58% of men and 68% of women were employed in agricultural work.³⁰ More women tend to engage in farming and food production due to social conditioning and perceptions which treat these activities as an extension of their domestic duties, and for many, this is their only livelihood even though most do not own the land they till.

Unemployment: Unemployment in the country is estimated at 8.2% of every 769,000 persons as of 2021.³¹ The unemployment rate among women in the urban areas is at 8.9% compared to 7.6% among men while that in the rural areas is 9.3% and 8.8% for men and women respectively as of 2019/2020.³² This is because in urban areas most employment is in the informal sector which is labour intensive, thereby favouring men, while in rural areas the main economic activity is agriculture which is mostly left to women. In addition, unemployment among women is due to low levels of education, lack of adequate skills, possession of skills that do not match the job market, and limited job opportunities in the formal sector.³³ This limits their ability to acquire and control economic resources, limits their economic decision making and consequently reinforces dependency on their male kin. Conversely, its effects on men include depression and anxiety, as well as a lowered sense of self-esteem.

Land ownership: There is no available data on women's ownership of customary land, but concerning registered land, women's ownership is between 5% and 26%.³⁴ The absence of gender-disaggregated data on land ownership hinders the development of effective policies and programmes to redress gender inequalities. Although women constitute more than 50% of the Ugandan population and the larger percentage of the agricultural labour force, a very small percentage of them own land.

30 Supra note 22

31 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2021. Uganda National Household Survey 2019/2020. https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/09_2021Uganda-National-Survey-Report-2019-2020.pdf

32 Ibid

33 Ibid

34 Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development. (2018, July). Land and Property Ownership The Gender Strategy for National Land Policy Implementation. <https://mlhud.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Gender-Strategy-on-Land-for-the-NLP-July-2018-reviewed.pdf>

Financial inclusion: Uganda has seen a significant increase in women's financial inclusion over the past decade,³⁵ with 65% of women owning bank accounts compared to 67% of men³⁶ and 67% with mobile money accounts compared to 65% of men.³⁷ However, women still face limitations in accessing formal financial services, such as the need for collateral for loans and discriminatory succession laws which hinder them from acquiring property. As a result, 57% of women prefer informal micro-credit facilities compared to 54% of men. This trend is driven by a targeted national gender policy, supported by donors and NGOs, which prioritises women. However, women in some markets have reported not receiving the prescribed government-assisted low-interest loans due to delays or misappropriation of funds by unscrupulous middlemen entrusted with this exercise.³⁸ Furthermore, although these initiatives are useful in economically empowering women, this policy neglects the realities of today's economic times where most men engaged in small-scale businesses in the informal sector are equally as financially vulnerable as their female counterparts.

35 World Bank. The Global Findex Database 2021: Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099900507072221470/idu0b-535da43011d30400a0a653047cef362b613> last accessed on 3 November 2023

36 Ibid

37 Ibid

38 Interview with small business owners in a local trading centre in Kirombe, Lukuli on 17th November 2023

**POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION AND
REPRESENTATION
IN POSITIONS OF
LEADERSHIP:**

07

In the past two decades since the formulation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, much progress has been made in closing the gaps for women's participation in decision-making in political and senior executive positions; however, their numbers remain lower than those of their male counterparts.

Representation in Parliament: Men hold the majority of seats in the 11th Parliament, with women holding 34% of 557 seats.³⁹ Although trends⁴⁰ indicate a significant increase in women's representation over the years from 16% in the 4th Parliament to 35% in the 9th Parliament, a comparison of the 9th Parliament which had 35% women representation out of 455 MPs with the current 11th Parliament with 34% women representation out of 556 MPs suggests a significant drop in numbers. While the number of women in elective politics has increased due to affirmative action, little progress has been made in direct competitive politics, as only 16 out of 189 women MPs are directly elected constituency representatives.

Cabinet and Managerial positions: Uganda has more men (54.2%) in cabinet positions than women (45.8%)⁴¹. Out of 30 cabinet ministers, 12 are female (40%), and out of 50 state ministers, 24 are female (48%).⁴² The percentage of women in managerial positions is 31.8%⁴³ and those in senior and middle management positions is 25.5%.⁴⁴

District leadership: Representation of women in top district leadership positions is significantly lower than men's,⁴⁵ with only 2.6% of District Chairpersons, 13.7% of District Speakers and 26.5% of Vice Chairpersons being women, resulting in unfavourable implications for women's voices in decision-making processes at the local council level.⁴⁶

39 Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) retrieved from <https://www.parliament.go.ug/page/uganda-women-parliamentary-association-uwopa> last accessed on 5 November 2023

40 Centre for Policy Analysis. (2020, September). Trends in the Number of Parliamentarians in Uganda, 1962 to Date. Retrieved from <https://cepa.or.ug/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Trends-in-the-number-of-parliamentarians-162-to-date.pdf>

41 Parliament of Uganda, Cabinet Data retrieved from <https://www.parliament.go.ug/page/cabinet-members-and-ministers-state-03-may-2023> last accessed on 5 November 2023

42 Ibid

43 UN Women. Country fact sheet. UN Women Data Hub. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/uganda> last accessed on 6 November 2023

44 Ibid

45 Equal Opportunities Commission 10th Annual Report on the State of Equal Opportunities in Uganda, FY 2022/2023

46 Ibid

Low representation for women is attributed to inadequate mentoring, confidence building, exposure and lack of support from their families. Moreover, women and girls are excluded from inheritance and property management, thereby limiting their ability to innovate, develop skills, reason critically, and manage systems, ultimately hindering their potential in leadership roles. The society also perceives men as better political leaders and business executives than women.

1.1. Health and Access to Healthcare:

As of December 2020, Uganda's HIV prevalence among adults aged 15-49 was 5.4%, with females having a higher prevalence (6.8%). Despite a significant decrease in new HIV infections between 2010 and 2020, 37% of new infections were among young people aged 15-24, with 79% of these infections among young women.⁴⁷

HIV disproportionately affects women, particularly young women, partly due to social norms that perpetuate gender inequality and create harmful power dynamics. This prevents women from protecting their health, including from HIV. Additionally, a low socioeconomic status makes girls and women more vulnerable to risky behaviour such as sex work, which exposes them to HIV infection. It has also been established that most women and girls do not access sexual and reproductive health services, partly due to social conditioning which stigmatises females who seek these services.

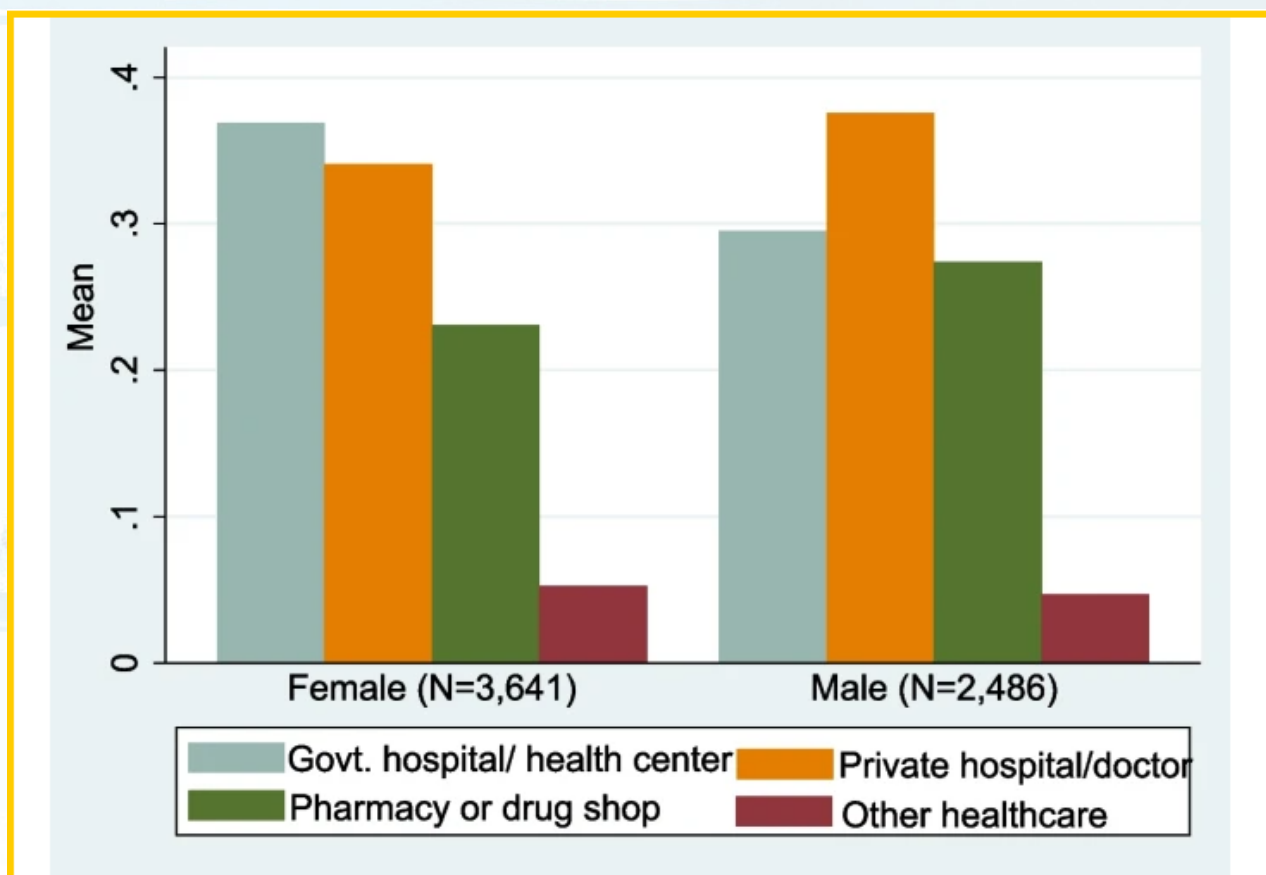
In 2022, the International Journal for Equity in Health in Uganda reported⁴⁸ that females (59.4%) consult various health institutions more than males (40.5%) in the sample communities surveyed, as shown in Figure 4. However, a close analysis of this graph suggests that access to specific health institutions is unequal. According to the survey, more females than males consult government hospitals and health centres which offer free services but tend to be under-resourced, while more males consult private hospitals and doctors, which are better-resourced. Additionally, more men

47 UNAIDS. (2021). Factsheet - Facts on HIV and AIDS in Uganda 2021 (Based on Data ending 31st December 2020).

48 Health gender gap in Uganda: Do weather effects and water play a role? (2022, December 5). Retrieved from <https://equity-health.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-022-01769-3>

than women visit pharmacies and drug shops, and more females consult alternative healthcare methods, signifying financial constraints, all of which affect access. This disparity reflects the economic status of females relative to males and impacts their access to quality healthcare and health outcomes.

Figure 4: Proportion of men and women consulting different health institutions (only for sick individuals)



Source: International Journal for Equity in Health

Apart from the above, an additional issue of concerns is the gender gap in national responses to domestic violence and abuse. Reports indicate that whereas women and girls face discrimination and abuse the most in Uganda, men and boys too are increasingly experiencing domestic abuse

and other gender-related challenges but are hesitant to report and seek help due to limited support as well as fear of ridicule and societal expectations of masculinity⁴⁹. According to the Family Desk at Kabalagala Police Station in Kampala, only two in five men register complaints of domestic abuse in a week⁵⁰, and the few men who have approached the complaints desk at the Equal Opportunities Commission have withdrawn their complaints once it was suggested that they record their complaints and refer their cases for legal action⁵¹.

The 2022 Annual Crime Report indicates that out of 18,549 victims of domestic violence, 3,728 were male adults, 13,052 were female adults, 819 were male juveniles and 950 were female juveniles. While the report does not indicate prevalence by gender in terms of districts or regions, the areas cited with the most prevalent cases were the Albertine, North Kyoga, East Kyoga, Aswa and Greater Masaka regions.

49 Interviews with 3 local council chairpersons and 3 religious leaders in Makindye, Nakawa and Kawempe Divisions on 15th, 16th and 17th November 2023

50 Interview with the Family Desk at Kabalagala Police Station on 15th November 2023

51 Interview with the Complaints and Investigations Unit at the EOC on 10th November 2023

KEY FINDINGS

08

This brief is informed by findings drawn from a recent survey comprising a desk review of literature on gender inequality in Uganda comprising laws, policies, reports and other publications, as well as key informant interviews with different stakeholders from the general public and key institutions. In addition to issues highlighted in the above sections on current trends, the following have been identified as the main factors behind persistent gender inequality in Uganda:

- a) Skewed beliefs and attitudes toward gender justice and roles. The general public (including duty bearers and gender justice advocates) mainly associates the term “gender” with women and girls, leading to varying attitudes towards gender justice. Some are ignorant, apathetic, or averse to the idea due to its promotion solely in favour of women, and this has shaped mindsets and responses to gender justice issues. Moreover, there is a social conditioning of women and girls (regardless of their social and economic standing) among some cultures, especially in the central region, to depend entirely on men for their sustenance; which makes them reluctant to fend for themselves, thereby increasing the economic burden on men⁵² and ultimately prompting domestic violence.
- b) Systemic inadequacies in gender data collection and storage: The available data is sketchy, inadequate, inconsistent, and outdated⁵³, and often collected by institutions based on funders’ interests, and is not readily available to the public, making it difficult to access recent and specific data for policy responses.
- c) Unbalanced approaches to gender justice. Gender programmes in the past two decades have primarily focused on women’s empowerment and neglected men, necessitating affirmative action for the latter. The research on gender-related challenges faced by men and boys is equally limited due to stereotypes over time. Minimal attention to men’s issues has led to increased misogyny, frustration, aggression, mental health issues, and substance abuse, reinforcing continued cycles of gender-based

52
Supra note 50

53
The UBOS 2022 Statistical Abstract for instance cites primary, enrolment, completion and transition rates to S.1 by years up to 2017.

violence and deaths. Additionally, women have more recourse to legal and psycho-social support following gender-based violence and discrimination compared to men. Due to society's unrealistic expectations of masculinity, fewer men are inclined to report it for fear of ridicule, and there are few psycho-social facilities to support them.

d) Inadequate enforcement of policies within institutions. Despite Uganda's notable record of ratifying international obligations on gender equality and women's empowerment, its policies have not adequately been implemented across its institutions. This is partly due to limited awareness and understanding of the practical application or translation of these obligations within the key institutions, as well as resource constraints which hinder the implementation of the obligations.

e) Inappropriate and inadequate management of some government economic empowerment initiatives. A case in point is the government-assisted low-interest loans intended to boost women-owned businesses, which many women in some markets have not received due to delays or misappropriation of funds by unscrupulous middlemen entrusted with this exercise. Additionally, these initiatives target only women and ignore men operating in the same sector with similar economic vulnerabilities. This limits sustainable development.

f) Incomplete alignment of national laws with international commitments. Although significant efforts have been made on the legal front to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, some laws such as those on ownership of property are not fully aligned with the provisions of key international instruments, making it difficult to fully enforce their provisions.

g) Low representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions. Women participate less in these positions due to limited capacity and exposure as well as challenges in balancing paid and domestic work. Gender roles like childbirth and childcare affect their experience, productivity, and motivation to enhance work skills, leading to lower pay compared to their male counterparts. Limited education, work experience, and societal influences to take on less engaging jobs also contribute to this pay gap, hindering women's competitiveness in male-dominated sectors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

09

- a) To reduce school dropout rates and promote completion among young people, the government should:
- Establish partnerships between schools, families and their communities to support the social, emotional, and educational development of the youth,
 - Establish professional school counselling and mentorship programmes and services to support and motivate learners for continued learning,
 - Continually sensitise parents on the benefits of educating children and motivate them to keep children in school,
 - Secure more bursaries for learners from low-income backgrounds and secure community support for child-headed homes,
 - Provide free and adequate menstrual hygiene management facilities for girls, and
 - Strongly enforce policies against child labour and early marriages.
- b) To improve attitudes toward gender justice and roles, the Ministry of Gender and civil society should clearly articulate the nuances in the complex subject of gender justice through messaging and initiatives that advance gender inclusivity and involve both genders as allies in the pursuit of gender equality. This is likely to improve attitudes and support for the GEWE agenda.
- c) The gender ministry and civil society should launch intensive public awareness campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes and promote mindset change for all, regardless of age. This will require a nuanced approach to cultural resistance to ensure the effectiveness of gender equality measures.
- d) The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender should establish a comprehensive, accessible, and current resource for collecting and storing disaggregated gender data to close gender data gaps and facilitate informed and targeted policy responses.

- e) All stakeholders, including the government, private sector, civil society, and development partners should adopt a balanced and intersectional approach to gender justice, prioritising the well-being of both genders, especially women and girls through education, economic empowerment and healthcare. Responses to gender-based violence and discrimination should be impartial, readily available and user-friendly to both genders.
- f) The government should closely monitor and evaluate the implementation of its economic empowerment programmes. Furthermore, these programmes should be gender inclusive to allow for sustainable development.
- g) The government and civil society should undertake targeted studies on gender challenges affecting men alongside those on women. Development partners should also be encouraged to support these initiatives. This is central to advancing a gender perspective which will inform decisions and actions that do not contribute to or perpetuate inequality.
- h) To ensure effective policy implementation, the government should:
- Accelerate implementation, and increase institutional efforts for gender mainstreaming, with measurable standards and incentives, as well as harmonise mechanisms to ensure accountability and paced progress.
 - Facilitate increased institutional capacities through improved understanding of international commitments and better resourcing in terms of finances and skilled labour.
- i) The Ministry of Gender in collaboration with the Uganda Law Reform Commission, Parliament and other relevant actors should address existing gaps in legislation concerning women's full access to and ownership of property including land, to align fully with international commitments.
- j) The government and private sector should collaborate to reduce high unemployment rates among urban women by creating more jobs, providing continuous on-the-job mentoring, and skilling to facilitate

gainful employment and effective performance in the job market. Rural men should be motivated to engage in agricultural activities and work with women to boost the economy.

- k) To attract more women in leadership and decision-making positions:
- The government and all political parties should in addition to gender quotas, establish women's sections in political parties, provide women candidates with more training and financial assistance to hold effective campaigns and create a forum for women to lobby and discuss policy. Additionally, more women should be encouraged and supported to participate in elective politics and contests for constituency representation rather than only focusing on seats reserved for women.
 - All public and private institutions should be inspected to ensure the implementation of gender quotas and offer mentoring and capacity-building programmes across all sectors to boost women's confidence and capacity to undertake decision-making roles.
- l) The government should enact and implement policies⁵⁴ on unpaid care work to promote a balance between paid work and unpaid care work, especially for women. These policies should include shared household responsibility, public services like childcare facilities, improved access to relevant physical infrastructure, and labour-saving technology as is nationally possible, to reduce time spent on domestic chores. A budget should be dedicated to this purpose.
- m) To narrow gender pay gaps, the government should introduce a gender-neutral minimum wage, enhance women's work valuation through legal and collective regulation, and conduct gender pay audits to boost women's employment.
- n) The government should expedite its efforts to ensure women's full access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services, and develop innovative strategies to bring these services closer to them, to prevent social stigma.

- o) It is important to note that international human rights standards encourage affirmative action policies or special measures designed strictly to correct inequalities of the past for a limited period. The government needs to revisit its affirmative action policy with a view to determining areas where affirmative action needs to be lifted or applied with strict limitations to guard against unintended negative effects of this well-meaning measure.

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