



# Integrating Women's Reproductive Roles with Productive Activities in Commerce: The Case of Businesswomen in Kampala, Uganda

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**Summary.** Uganda has registered significant improvement regarding economic growth and the raising of women's status at the macro level. Commerce is one of the sectors that attracts women of varying social status. The paper is based on an exploratory and cross-sectional study that focused on Kampala businesswomen's experiences in coping with productive and reproductive roles. Quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were utilised. The survey involved a total of 224 women. Results reveal an increasingly asymmetric gender division of roles, to women's disadvantage, especially as their incomes increase. Women's experiences in integrating reproductive roles and productive activities in commerce, which have a strong bearing on their economic performance, are discussed.

## Introduction

Uganda is presently rated as one of the fastest-growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa with a growth rate of 7 per cent a year (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1997). The per capita income has increased from approximately \$2 in 1985 to \$210 in 1996; it is, however, still among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. Like other sectors in the economy, the commercial sector has been expanding steadily since 1985. According to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MFEP) (1995), the trade sector (wholesale and retail trade) increased by 148 times between 1985 and 1994 (from 3418 to 504 804 million Ugandan shillings).

Eleven per cent of the Ugandan population live in urban areas. Fifty-two per cent of the population of the capital city, Kampala, is female. At the national level, the majority of

women are subsistence agricultural workers. Forty-one per cent of urban women are unemployed (not in paid employment). Kampala has a high literacy rate—88 per cent—compared with the national rate of 54 per cent—and has an 86 per cent female literacy rate compared with 45 per cent at national level. The national female literacy rate is among the lower half of those other sub-Saharan countries which range from 9 per cent for Burkina Faso to 73 per cent for Madagascar. The total fertility rate for Kampala is 5.2 compared to the national rate of 6.9. It is still among the highest rates found in sub-Saharan countries. The average household size for Uganda is 5.4; it is 4.5 in urban areas, 6.4 among the poorest in urban areas, 4.5 for urban female-headed households and 5.7 for urban male-headed households.

Over the past decade, there have been significant declines in real wages; between 1980 and 1983, wages fell by 26 per cent annually (Mamdani cited by Tripp, 1997, p. 3). Despite the recent economic growth, poverty is still widespread. At the poverty line of US\$6000, 55 per cent of the national population could be defined as poor. Among the urban population, 38 per cent are poor; these face harsher conditions than rural populations due to the high cost of living. Although urban agriculture is practised, it is insufficient as the basic source of food owing to limitations of space, land tenure and city council restrictions (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1995). According to the National Council for Children (1994), the core poor who cannot afford adequate food comprise 19 per cent of the population, and the 'poor'—who can only afford food—constitute 36 per cent of the total population. The average monthly income in urban areas was \$100 dollars by 1993. Central region urban areas earn an equivalent of \$119. Over half of the incomes are spent on food and basic necessities.

Commerce is crucial in the Ugandan context; encouragement of privatisation and civil service reforms entailing retrenchment have led to the need for job creation. Commerce is likely to be a major avenue for future employment for women, given its relative flexibility with regard to freedom of entry and exit. One of the key issues addressed by the present regime is improving the status of women.

### **Gender Roles and Their Analysis**

Traditionally, in most Ugandan cultures—as is the case in any patriarchal society—women are ideally responsible for all domestic-related roles (including agriculture) and men all the public-sphere roles. In the domestic sphere, however, men are usually the heads, making the dominant in both the private and public spheres. Men are usually the financial controllers and final decision-makers (NCC, 1994). In rural areas, men participate in agricultural work. However,

women and girls carry out over 80 per cent of the agricultural work. Male and female children are initiated into their expected roles early in life. Girls start sharing roles with their mothers as early as 5 years of age and, by 10 years of age, they can do the work of adult women. Boys usually have less work to do, in some cases they assist in fetching water and firewood. They also tend to take after their fathers' roles early in life (Natukunda and Nalwanga, 1988). In the early stages of urbanisation, when the means of livelihood changed, women whose spouses earned salaries usually stayed at home, attending to children and household chores while men would still go out to work. Husbands are expected to provide for their households—particularly items that require a cash purchase. Now, however, the gender division of roles is becoming more diffuse. Most couples have to work outside the household setting. This presents problems for child care and the fulfillment of other domestic roles. Most children do not help with domestic work and child care as much as was the case in the past, since they have to go to school. This has led to increasing demand for domestic workers in urban areas, which becomes even greater when women have to go out to work. School-going children are rarely seen assisting parents in business settings. Adult daughters and sons, however, sometimes work with their mothers in business.

Moser's gender analytical framework—particularly with regard to the gender division of roles, access and control of resources—is relevant to the discussion of the situation of business women in Kampala (Moser, 1989). Although the traditional view of the gender division of roles prescribes the private/domestic sphere as the domain for women and the public sphere as a male domain, in reality, many women are active in both spheres leading to increasing asymmetry in the division of labour (Rogers, 1980; Mies, 1986; Moser, 1989). This affects their performance in both sectors. It is reflected in terms of time and resource allocation between commerce and household responsibilities. There are trade-offs involved; many

women give priority to the material support of their children and families (Michael, 1971; Kane *et al.*, 1991; Palmer, 1991). Such priorities lead to women's enterprises multiplying in numbers rather than growing in size, since they tend to remain survival-oriented (Palmer, 1991). Some of the contributing factors are marriage without co-habitation, polygamy and, for single mothers, the putative father's inability or refusal to support children (Mandeville, 1979, UNICEF, 1989). According to married business women, men also tend not to reveal their incomes, usually keeping a large share to themselves. Elsewhere, in West Africa, women have learned to do the same (Fapohunda, 1988).

### *Gender and Work in African Cities*

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, emerging cities showed a promise of freedom for the few women who migrated to cities. Women in cities and small towns in east and southern Africa took advantage of fluid social relationships and the fact that colonial policies had not yet taken root to create economic opportunities for themselves. Some women, for instance in Zimbabwe, migrated, seeking social refuge from male domination. Marriage choices reflected both the possibility of mobility and opportunistic attitudes. In west and central Africa, rural and urban women participated in trade as early as the 19th century and were key contributors to urbanisation. They eventually gained greater economic and social independence; they became active in resistance activities at national and local levels (Berger, 1988, 1992; Pellow, 1977; Robertson, 1997).

During colonial days, increasing numbers of women in towns and cities raised the concern of colonial officials who wished to curb urban population growth and of African male authorities loyal to the traditional values of 'a woman's place in society', leading to restrictions. Consequently, more men than women migrated to cities. Initially, Christianity and Western education laid emphasis on teaching women with the purpose of grooming them to be good wives to educated

men. Nevertheless, Christianity in some cases addressed negative cultural practices such as circumcision; with education, women could obtain employment in the formal sector.

For uneducated women, migration to cities and subsequent participation in public-sphere activities were restricted. The economic activities of women were also undermined. This was particularly the case in Zimbabwe and South Africa. In South Africa, black women had limited options. Although many were employed in domestic service, they still preferred offering services on an informal basis or self employment.

Studies in urban areas in east, central, west and southern Africa document the restricted and exploitative economic systems in the formal wage economy as far as women were concerned which undoubtedly influenced their preference for jobs which allowed for independence and flexibility. Some of the common activities were petty trade, domestic service and brewing (Berger, 1988, 1992; White, 1988; Pellow, 1997).

In some areas, many women tried to enter wage labour but were forced to turn to trade owing to low levels of education and limited job opportunities for women. In the cities of Nairobi, Kampala and Johannesburg, formal jobs remained extremely limited. Women again resorted to petty commodity production, trade in agricultural produce, cooked food, beer brewing, prostitution and domestic service. The main investment avenue for women in cities such as Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam and Kampala was and still is housing.

According to Mianda (1996) during colonial days in Kinshasa, a working wife was an indicator of her husband's failure as a provider for his family—hence men's resistance to women's participation in trade. According to Berger (1988), resistance to the presence of women in urban areas is associated with social disintegration. Their presence was associated with moral and social ills such as prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, alcoholism, divorce, high illegitimacy rates and greater independence. Trade

and prostitution were perceived as simultaneous.

In west Africa, divorces were fairly common. Decline in formal marital ties led to decline in parental control. Among the Yoruba, women would leave spouses (if they were a hindrance) in order to trade, to support themselves and their children (Surdakassa, 1973).

After independence, there was a tendency for development programmes to accept the existing gender division of labour as unalterable or to exacerbate this division and therefore little was done to transform the lives of poor women.

The situation of most urban women has altered little since the 1960s—economically (as industrial and commercial capital control led by men continue to dominate the production process) or negative attitudes towards women who blame them for the ‘corruption’ of family life and view them as mothers and wives whose sexuality should be controlled within the conjugal unit—for most urban women the need for independent sources of income remains the main fact of city life (Berger, 1988, p. 37).

Poor women became easy targets for zealous campaigns against prostitution, vagrancy and unlicensed trade, especially in east and central Africa.

Although women have always been involved in productive work, the majority of women have been persistently loyal to their traditional roles of marriage and child-rearing; they remain closely attached to their children (Pellow, 1977). In towns, isolation from extended family and kinship ties often deprives women of the lineage support that existed in the past. It is more difficult to share child-care responsibilities with family members and co-wives since they may not be sharing the same residence.

The obligation and desire to feed dependents has driven many women into the informal sector. In west, central and east Africa, most urban women are largely responsible for feeding their families. This is partly at-

tributed to widespread polygamy (Robertson, 1997; Okojie, 1996). In Harare, women market vendors’ contributions to family incomes constitute 40–100 per cent of family incomes. Among the poor, this presents problems of reinvestment since earnings are needed to cater for family needs (Horn, 1995).

West African cultures in general are more supportive of women’s participation in trade. There is not much interference from spouses, despite the fact that some are sources of initial capital, provided there is an understanding that women have to use the proceeds to support the family (Surdakassa, 1973). Among the Kikuyu, as among some west African peoples, trade is deemed suitable for women’s skills, part of women’s roles and is therefore encouraged (Robertson, 1997; Surdakassa, 1973). Child care is the main determinant of the level of mobility. Those who participated in long-distance trade were women in their prime. In Uganda, the participation of women in long-distance trade is relatively new.

#### *Women and Work in Urban Settings in Uganda*

Women in Uganda have always been involved in both production- and reproduction-related work. What makes women’s work in trade away from home in urban areas different is the aspect of interaction with strangers. During the colonial era, the presence of women in urban settings and their participation in the public sphere were restricted. Women who did not comply were suspected of being prostitutes and were constantly harassed by city authorities (Southall and Gutkind, 1957; Katende *et al.*, 1976). Only a few women used to trade in the markets. Some, especially those in low-income settlements, operated home-based enterprises. The commercial sector was dominated by Asians. Women (from middle-income households) were expected to stay at home and concentrate on domestic work and child care or production work that did not necessitate interaction with the public. Then, there were

very few women with formal education and employment. Major income-related responsibilities were catered for by men. During this period, average households could be supported by one major income-earner, usually a man, since earnings were substantial relative to the cost of living. In reality, some women were already living on their own and were supporting dependants. Many resided in low-income unplanned settlements (Southall and Gutkind, 1957).

With the advent of Amin's regime, more indigenous Ugandans, both men and women, came to urban areas to take over the businesses of departed Asians. However, the economic situation deteriorated drastically. Concerted efforts to reverse the situation have been made by the National Resistance Movement regime. However, the cost of living remains high relative to average incomes. With the increasing need for subsistence, coupled with the prior opportunity for participation in commerce during Amin's regime, many women—irrespective of marital status—could no longer afford to confine themselves to domestic roles, but had to go out to work to contribute to or wholly support their households. Income earned by one party was no longer sufficient to cater for household basic needs and increasing health and education costs. The need to support family/dependents is stated as the main reason for women's participation in commerce.

### *Women in Commerce*

Commerce is one of the productive activities that has attracted most women. Women account for over half of the labour force in trade in many African countries. In Ghana, 80 per cent of the female labour force are engaged in commerce. In Kenya, 85 per cent of urban working women are engaged in commerce (World Bank, 1989). In Uganda, too, with the prevailing economic conditions, women have joined commerce. According to the Demographic Health Survey (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1995), 46 per cent of women are involved in sales and services. Given the fact that only Jinja and

Kampala are considered urban, the percentage is likely to be higher for Kampala. Among Kampala business women, 12 per cent (21) entered commerce in the 1970s; 17 per cent (31) between 1980 and 1984; 41 per cent (74) between 1985 and 1989; and in 1990 alone 30 per cent (54) had joined commerce (Kwagala, 1991). Over half of the women who go for business trips also commenced work between 1985 and 1989. For many women, entrepreneurship provides a key avenue by which they become decision-makers.

As a result of women's active participation in commerce, there is an increasingly asymmetric division of roles at the household level. Women are taking on more of the male-ascribed roles, particularly with regard to household budget expenditures especially on food and general child maintenance. The majority of women have to continue their responsibility for domestic work, including most of the roles with regard to child care. This is costly in terms of finance, time and role conflict, given the fact that men are not taking on more gender-ascribed female responsibilities. Although the majority of women work to meet basic needs—i.e. food, shelter, clothing, health care and sometimes payment of school fees—many expressed the need to expand their enterprises.

Findings reveal patriarchal attitudes and ambiguities in women's gender-ascribed roles *vis à vis* their actual experiences in the domestic (private) sphere and in the market. The copying mechanisms, and shifts in the roles and power relations involved are discussed below.

### **Methodology**

The paper is based on a study of business women carried out in Kampala city. It is basically a cross-sectional descriptive study based on interviews and documentary review. Furthermore, it is exploratory since there is not much prior evidence about women in commerce in Uganda. The study focused on businesswomen in five basic locations of the city: three markets; Owino,

Kabalagala and Nakawa; and two streets; Kikuubo and South Street.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used. A structured questionnaire was administered to 200 regular businesswomen and 24 high-income women who make business trips. These were randomly selected within each locality. Qualitative data collection methods entailed key-informant interviews and in-depth interviews. Key-informant interviews were conducted with health personnel at the nutrition section in a main training hospital in the city, with businessmen and with women's business organisations. In-depth interviews involved women with children attending the nutrition clinic and substitute child-care providers. Qualitative data are used to supplement quantitative data.

### *The Study Population*

The biggest percentage of respondents interviewed were Baganda by ethnicity (the city is located in Buganda), with a mean age of 30 years for regular businesswomen and 37 years for women who make business trips abroad (see Table 1). The majority were Christians by religion. Ethnicity and religion generally tally with the overall distribution in Kampala. The majority have secondary/tertiary levels of education and are married. Most of the regular businesswomen are engaged in retail trade, while women who go for trips abroad operate on a larger scale combining both retail and wholesale trade.

Women who do not go for business trips are classified as regular businesswomen. Women who go for business trips abroad have the high incomes necessary for international trade, which requires more capital inputs to justify the travelling.<sup>1</sup> This group is special in this context because of the way they handle child care; their travelling incites negative attitudes from the community, but results in relative success in commerce.

Regular business women (low and middle combined) earn between 333 437 to 350 437 shillings a month and high-income women who are involved in the import trade earn an

average of 2 400 000 shillings a month (personal communication, Revenue officer, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1998).

The majority of women specialise in merchandise and services that relate to their gender-prescribed roles in the domestic sphere, including food, child care and dressing. In the markets, women sell food items—mainly perishable agricultural produce—old clothes and charcoal. In the shops, they deal in essential commodities such as salt, sugar, kitchenware and clothes, shoes mainly for women and children, cosmetics and jewels.

The main reason why women work, regardless of marital status, is to support their children. This is emphasised by 74 per cent of regular businesswomen and 52 per cent of women who make business trips. Women also had to support themselves and other categories of people like orphaned children and their mothers; hence, reflecting high dependence. A recent study among businesswomen revealed that they have an average of six (5.5) household members and two additional dependents. The numbers are higher for women who make trips abroad; these had a mean of seven household members and three dependents (Kwagala, 1996).<sup>2</sup>

## **Survey Results**

### *The Constraints of Child Care*

Sixty-two per cent of all businesswomen had children aged 0–5 years. Child-care services by relatives or through ethnic support networks are gradually being replaced by hired workers (see below); relatives are usually active in getting domestic workers from their areas of origin. Despite their busy schedules, business women still play a key role in child care. Many businesswomen had to stay at home on several occasions either because they had no responsible people to leave the children with while they worked, or because they had to nurse sick children at home or in hospital. In cases of child illness, 76 per cent were the sole caretakers of the children and 85 per cent in cases of hospitalisation. If there was nobody to assist with the busi-

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of the women in the sample and their spouses

Variable	Attribute	Regular businesswomen/ Their spouses	Businesswomen who make trips/ Their spouses
<i>The businesswomen<sup>a</sup></i>			
Ethnicity (percentage)	Ganda	79	57
	Banyankole (W. Uganda)	12	30
	Others	9	13
Age (years)	Mean age	30	37
Religion (percentage)	Christians	76	83
	Moslems	18	17
	Others	6	—
Education (percentage)	None	8	13
	Primary	40	9
	Secondary/Tertiary	52	78
Marital status (percentage)	Married	59	70.8
	Single	22	8.3
	Separated/divorced	10	12.5
	Widowed	8	8.3
<i>The spouses<sup>b</sup></i>			
Ethnicity (percentage)	Ganda	75	58.8
	Banyankole (W.Uganda)	8.6	23.5
	Eastern Uganda (Soga, Teso, etc.)	10.3	17.6
	Northern (Acholi, Lango)	3.4	—
	Others	2.6	—
Religion (percentage)	Catholics	36.8	5.9
	Protestants	28	64.7
	Moslems	32	29.4
	Others	3.2	—
Education (percentage)	None	1.8	17.6
	Primary	11.4	5.9
	Secondary/Tertiary	63.1	35.3
	University	9.6	41.2
	Others	3.5	—
	Don't know	10.5	—
Occupation (percentage)	Business	49.5	47.0
	Services (driver, mechanic)	30.3	5.9
	Professional/civil servant	10.1	35.3
	Civil servants/clerical	9.2	11.7
	None	0.9	—
Age (years)	Mean age	37	40

<sup>a</sup>  $N = 224$  (200 regular businesswomen + 24 businesswomen who make trips).

<sup>b</sup>  $n = 136$  (119 spouses of regular businesswomen + 17 spouses of businesswomen who make trips).

Source: Survey data.

nesses during their absence, for some women—particularly female heads of households and those who were key earners in the

households—this meant loss of income on which the households depend for their livelihood. All the above responsibilities are time-

consuming and may not always be compatible with commerce. In cases where production work takes precedence, women with busy business schedules, particularly those that go on business trips, take brief maternity leaves (3–14 days, compared to the regular 1 month) and wean their children at an early age (3 months, compared to 10 months for the rest of the businesswomen). These are some of the issues of contention.

A case was reported in a local newspaper (*New Vision*, 7 August 1991) that elaborates on coping with child care and a thriving business enterprise. Baine is a high-income businesswoman dealing in import trade that necessitates travelling to London and Paris. She deals in kitchenware. At the date of the interview, she had been in the trade for three years. She is a mother of five; and previously worked in a bank. She narrates the following:

How to combine a big business and family obligations is what most working mothers fear; the pressure is too much; I have to make sure that everything is going on well at home and at the shop ... I do most of the shopping myself in London and France and above all, I have young children to care for ... most times I usually divide my time in favour of my family ... Sometimes you cannot have a baby and a well-stocked shop at the same time.

With rapid rates of inflation, she argues that there is great pressure on families to improve or even just to maintain the living standards by increasing family income; this is often only possible if both men and women work.

Some women without child caretakers take their children with them to work. Among women with children aged 5 years and below, 38 per cent (48 in number) had taken their children with them to work. Combining child care with work outside the household in the same setting is inconvenient and encroaches on women's time for commercial activities. It is also undesirable for the children; in market places, children are tucked under stalls if they need rest, or for fear of being seen by the city authorities. For street vendors who operate without licenses, chil-

dren become a major hindrance to them in case they have to flee from the city council authorities.

The majority of businesswomen interviewed worked for longer hours than a normal working day for civil servants (8 hours): 9 hours on average for women who go for business trips abroad and 10 hours for the rest of the businesswomen.<sup>3</sup> The longer hours of work do not necessarily imply compatibility with domestic roles, many have to 'sacrifice' the time that they would have spent with their children in order to work that long. Moreover, over half of the respondents in both categories had to do housework after the day's work.

In this study, all businesswomen who had benefited from commerce spontaneously mentioned the daily feeding and general maintenance of their children and dependants as the main benefit. Several women who make business trips have improved the quality of education for their children by taking them to good schools; some mentioned educating their children abroad. Improved quality of care for children is one of the best ways they can qualitatively evaluate their success. For many women whose incomes are marginal, this would mean foregoing resources for reinvestment. This is one of the reasons for women's enterprises remaining survival-oriented.

Among women who go for business trips, 48 per cent indicated the reason for their participation in commerce is a quest for independence and they have specialised in work options that would enable them to fulfil this need. These women had advanced beyond survival, and through entrepreneurship had become decision-makers.

### *Spending Patterns and Related Power Relations*

Married businesswomen's share in household expenses increases as their incomes increase. This is also confirmed by another study (Kwagala, 1996). While this may be viewed as an equitable sharing of expenses, some women have a different view. To them,

apart from the desire of spouses to evade responsibilities, it is attributed to spouses' endeavour to exhaust the women's resources in order to keep women in a dependent and subservient position. In the words of a Kampala business man:

It is not good for the marriage if a woman has substantial independent resources. If I come to know that my wife has some good money, I pretend to be broke. Then she would have to use the money to buy consumables, food etc. since she cannot let the children to go hungry. If I still suspect that she has money, I 'borrow' it from her and I do not pay back; she cannot make me sign an agreement. If children are going back to school and I still 'do not have the money for school fees', the children stay at home for 1 or 2 days and still she does not contribute, then I would know that her resources are exhausted. This is when I revert to my usual responsibilities.

While women's incomes are used on a daily basis, men use theirs to expand their businesses and to purchase non-expendable assets like furniture, cars and houses. In many cases at low-income levels, women's incomes are usually spent on daily items rather than being invested in permanent assets since their incomes are usually comparatively smaller than their spouses'. Tripp (1997, p. 8) notes that in Uganda,

the burden of economic crisis has fallen heaviest on women. ... They are responsible for paying for food, clothes, school fees and health costs.

When the incomes become substantial, then the men try to take control or seek for a joint venture as partners but still endeavour to be the senior partners/controllers (see also Lockhead, 1989; Stichter, 1986). Women are hesitant since in the majority of cases, if women separate from their spouses, according to the customary laws applicable in most parts of Uganda, they have a limited or no share of the property (NCC, 1994). This is reinforced by women's limited awareness of marital/property rights, making women cau-

tious with regard to joint ownership of property in marriage. As observed by Fapohunda (1988), some women try to get around the problem by either not revealing or pooling their resources. A recent study carried out in two Ugandan districts revealed that the tendency for secrecy with regard to incomes is more prevalent in urban areas and mainly among women. This is possibly due to men and women's involvement in different kinds of work, in different locations—unlike in rural areas which are predominantly agricultural, and where major sales are apparent, on common pieces of land. In Masaka town, 64 per cent of the men and 64 per cent of the women shared information about earnings; while 85 per cent of couples in rural Masaka did the same (Blanc *et al.*, 1996). Nonetheless, although some women can conceal their incomes, the majority have to spend—catering for children and dependants. The fact that most women's enterprises remain at the micro level should not be completely attributed to a lack of desire to expand their business enterprises. Some, particularly household heads and others who are the key providers in the households, have no alternative but to do so.

Table 2 provides details on who usually makes payment for some of the household expenses related to child care. Women participate significantly in contributing to food and medical expenses. The majority of women who go for business trips footed practically all the bills (see Table 3). According to respondents' suppositions, men usually spend on property acquisition and pleasure. Although men are traditionally believed to be the key contributors to household budgets, even in 'male headed households' there are many cases where women not only provided for food in the households, but also wholly or partially contributed to other expenses (see Table 4).

Although women are actively involved in commerce, they are still held responsible for the care of children during their absence and are blamed if the children are undernourished, have accidents, or if the substitute care arrangements are not appropriate. This

**Table 2.** Expenditure of the general sample, for married respondents: (who makes the payment)

Item	Respondent	Spouse	Spouse and respondent	Others
Food	47 (41) <sup>a</sup>	27 (24)	35 (31)	5 (4)
Bedding	35 (37)	23 (24)	36 (38)	1 (1)
Medical charges	45 (47)	19 (20)	29 (31)	2 (2)
Baby sitting	18 (42)	15 (35)	10 (23)	—

<sup>a</sup> Percentages in parenthesis.

Source: Survey data.

**Table 3.** Expenditure of women who make business trips: (who makes the payments)

Item	Respondent	Spouse	Spouse and respondent	Others
Regular expenses	16 (70) <sup>a</sup>	5 (22)	1 (4)	1 (4)
Food	13 (57)	4 (17)	5 (22)	1 (4)

<sup>a</sup> Percentages in parenthesis.

Source: Survey data.

**Table 4.** Expenditure by income levels (excluding shared items and those paid by others)

Regular expenses	Who pays	Low income	Middle income	High income
School fees	Respondent	44 (42) <sup>a</sup>	16 (36)	24 (51) <sup>b</sup>
	Spouse	60 (58)	28 (64)	23 (49)
Maid	Respondent	42 (51) <sup>b</sup>	16 (53) <sup>b</sup>	34 (72) <sup>b</sup>
	Spouse	40 (49)	14 (47)	13 (28)
Medical	Respondent	49 (44)	19 (43)	27 (61) <sup>b</sup>
	Spouse	63 (56)	25 (57)	17 (39)
Food	Respondent	49 (47)	27 (60) <sup>b</sup>	30 (67) <sup>b</sup>
	Spouse	55 (53)	18 (40)	15 (33)
Rent	Respondent	33 (49)	24 (58) <sup>b</sup>	23 (53) <sup>b</sup>
	Spouse	60 (61)	17 (42)	20 (47)

<sup>a</sup> Percentages in parenthesis.

<sup>b</sup> Cases where women are predominant in meeting the needs.

Source: Kwagala (1996).

conception reveals that women are expected to continue with the domestic roles ascribed to them—or perhaps to remain in the domestic sphere. Child care is becoming more difficult for business women. With regard to domestic service, with the recent implementation of universal ‘free’ primary education (January 1997), the child-care problem has become more acute especially for low-income women who employ young girls who

are now eligible for the programme. The mean age for domestic workers is 10 years for regular businesswomen. This category is the most vulnerable since the maximum age for UPE support is 12 years. Child care by siblings only occurred in 3 per cent of cases (only 3 of the sampled families in 1990) (Table 5). A recent study has revealed that child care by siblings is now almost non-existent (Kwagala, 1996). Women who go

**Table 5.** Child caretaker categories for the general sample

Care arrangements	1989/90	1995
House girls	43 (41.7) <sup>a</sup>	119 (59.5)
Sister/mother	36 (34.9)	38 (19)
Neighbour	6 (8.7)	10 (5)
Siblings	3 (1)	—
Houseboys	—	6 (3)
Day care/nursery	—	5 (2.5)
Other relatives	15 (14.6)	22 (11)
Total	103 (100)	200 (100)

<sup>a</sup> Percentages in parenthesis.

Sources: Survey data and Kwagala (1996).

for business trips are better off since they can afford to employ adult women.

#### *Attitudes towards Women's Involvement in Commerce*

According to married businesswomen, most of the spouses that support their participation are businessmen. Spouses were the main source of initial capital. The amounts are usually meagre but vary with levels of income. Spouses provide the capital because the income therefrom will lighten 'their' financial responsibilities. This is positive in that women are provided with the opportunity to participate in economically gainful work. However, according to some businesswomen, it is partly a way in which male control over them is perpetuated. When spouses are the source of initial capital, women may not be able to make independent decisions concerning the enterprise or purchase property independently (if desired). A woman has a better opportunity of controlling her income if the initial capital was not obtained from the spouse but from her savings or other sources.

For women who go for business trips, among the separated and widowed, two out of eight obtained initial capital from deceased or former spouse sources, two from male relatives and the rest (four) from their own savings. One of the two single/never-married women obtained a loan from the bank and the other used her own savings. Among reg-

ular businesswomen who are not married (widows and separated inclusive), the most outstanding source of initial capital is their own savings (55 per cent of the responses). This is particularly the case for single/never-married women. This is followed by male relatives (30 per cent) and female relatives (12 per cent). Assistance from male relatives is almost exclusively rendered to widowed or separated women for purposes of self and child support. Unmarried women have a better chance of controlling their resources.

Men's attitudes, especially those of spouses, have some bearing on the type of business that women get involved in and the extent of their participation. Eighty-four per cent of regular businesswomen pointed out that they had to be allowed to trade because their spouses' incomes could no longer suffice. It is evident that it is mainly those who have received the consent of their spouses that have come out to participate in commerce. Some of the respondents (9 per cent) pointed out that their spouses were completely opposed to their work in commerce and 4 per cent 'did not know'. Of the married businesswomen who make business trips, 65 per cent observed that their spouses had a positive attitude towards their participation; 24 per cent of the spouses had a negative attitude; and 11 per cent were indifferent. There was a higher percentage of spouses with negative attitudes towards businesswomen who make trips, as opposed to regular businesswomen. Other studies

(Kwagala, 1996; Blanc *et al.*, 1996) have revealed that this resistance is also reflected in negative attitudes towards contraception (by spouses) in urban areas and particularly for high-income women who make business trips.

Another concern on the part of spouses is the economic independence of women. Single wealthy businesswomen are not regarded as eligible marriage partners among their peers, unless the men are wealthier. Money in this case represents power and independence. If a woman has substantial amounts of money in her control, then she is thought to be difficult to control. A key informant cited two cases where women became successful and rejected their spouses who had fewer economic resources. He commented that when a woman has the resources to meet all her needs, perhaps to support a household single-handedly, she may no longer see the need for a man in the house. However, as Table 1 suggests, many prosperous businesswomen are still married. Marriage is still respected although there is evidence of marital instability; many have been married more than once. At the national level, only 1.8 per cent of women aged 40 years and above had never married (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1996). Twenty-two per cent (45) of regular businesswomen were single/never-married; among these, 4 were 40 years and above. All with the exception of one had children. In actual terms, only one woman aged 35 years among businesswomen who make trips was in this category. In all these cases, the reasons for not marrying were not given.

Although there have been changes in comparison with the past, some men and women still have reservations about trade as a vocation for women and a number mentioned that they are compelled to trade due to economic pressure. There are certain 'types' of trade or localities that are deemed improper for women. Women who go for business trips are not highly regarded by society, although their achievements are substantial. This is due to suspicions of immorality. However, through productive work in com-

merce, many of these women have become wealthy and have acquired property, plots of land, houses and cars and have supported their families and relatives. Women who go to Dubai—an open sea port—are suspected of practicing prostitution in exchange for merchandise. Apart from suspicions related to extra-marital sex and prostitution, it is alleged that these women carry out abortions especially of pregnancies resulting from prostitution (abortion is illegal in Uganda). A recent study that partly focused on the possibility of abortion among businesswomen of different income levels where women who go for business trips were included, revealed that there was no significant difference between the groups. For women who go for trips, chances were minimal since they are the frequent users of contraceptives (Kwagala, 1996). Owing to mobility, this category of businesswomen is also said to have become emotionally callous towards children and families—yet their main reason for working is for the good of their children.

With regard to locations of operation, Nairobi was preferred to other locations because the women could come back on the same day. It is more acceptable for men to trade in Dubai yet, according to the women, the merchandise at Dubai is cheaper than elsewhere. As a result, some women have been compelled to shift to 'respectable' places like London, Rome and Paris. This could affect their profits. A recently married businesswoman notes the following:

I used to go to Dubai and my profits had increased. Now my husband has advised me to change to Tanzania or quit business. Tanzania is nearer but it has more problems than Dubai.

Although Tanzania is regarded as a decent and convenient place for trade due to its proximity, traders usually get problems with customs. Some women have resorted to using middlemen—for the older women, their sons—in order to escape the stigma but remain in business. Nevertheless, the impetus for economic gains and survival in many cases overrides the stigma. This type of trade

still attracts new entrants. A study on contraception among businesswomen (Kwagala, 1996) revealed that 78 per cent of women (53) who go for business trips started doing so between 1990 and 1995. A substantial number still go to Dubai and to countries south of the Sahara. Europe accounted for 12 per cent yet it was slightly more popular than Dubai in 1990.

Women's economic independence has not yet been fully accepted. Men and society in general, particularly those in the business sphere, stereotype independent successful businesswomen. They are called names with negative connotations: '*nahukalala*' meaning a notorious, loud-mouthed, bossy woman; and '*mukazi-musajja*' meaning a woman who takes over men's roles. To use MacGaffey's (1988) expression, writing about Zaire, they are detested because of their independence but at the same time held in awe for their achievements. Men's attitudes towards the 'changes' in women's reproductive and productive roles reflect their patriarchal perceptions in paradoxical ways. They would have preferred the women to stay at home, performing their traditional roles, but at the same time many have consented to women's involvement in commerce due to economic pressure.

Despite the constraints, the majority of women are not ready to shun marriage or child-bearing altogether for 'career' achievements and independence. Marriage in the Ugandan context is a vital social institution; it defines the respect/status of an individual. This applies irrespective of ethnic and socioeconomic background.

It is encouraging to note that, despite the attitudes, spouses of businesswomen allowed them to participate in commercial activities outside the household environment. Women's substantial contributions to household budgets are appreciated. Women have endeavoured to alleviate child-care/maintenance related constraints through intensified contraception. The prevalence of contraceptive use among businesswomen is higher than the national and urban estimates; 15 per cent at national level and 35 per cent

of urban women (married and aged 15–49 years) are currently using contraceptives. For urban businesswomen, 56 per cent among the married and 64 per cent of single/never-married women are currently using contraceptives. Furthermore, women who go for business trips use contraceptives irrespective of levels of education attained or marital status (Kwagala, 1996). The prevailing enabling environment that favours the promotion of women's causes—especially by the government and NGOs—is facilitating gender awareness. Government ministries and the media are contributing to the promotion of a positive image of successful women in non stereotyped sectors. With privatisation, a few day-care centres have been established, although these are not readily accessible to low-income earners due to their high charges.

#### *Achievements and Challenges*

Among older regular businesswomen (39 years and above), the major achievements emphasised by the majority relate to subsistence and the payment of school fees (21/27). Only four mentioned the purchase of land and construction of houses. Although the group does not have problems relating to care of pre-school children, they have other challenges. The key ones are: expensive inputs, the need for substantial capital, perishability and the lack of a market for their goods. This is followed by high subsistence, health and education costs for children and dependents. Most of the older respondents who go for business trips were concerned about the high costs of air tickets, the timing of flights and high taxation. A few of the younger ones (3) were concerned about child welfare, especially during their absence, but this does not deter them from participating in business. Although older women have fewer child-care duties, they do not necessarily spend more time in business due to their tradition of dependence.

Achievements by unmarried regular businesswomen are mainly subsistence-related; the majority have children and dependants to

support. Only three women (who have never been married) have been able to construct houses. Problems of not having enough resources to support dependents and low profit margins were common to all, especially the separated and widowed.

Apart from time allocation to child care, accomplishments in commerce for categories of the businesswomen discussed above are mainly dependent on the scale of their operation, capital inputs and the magnitude of responsibilities that require financial inputs.

### Conclusion and Remarks

Women's reproductive roles and their domestic situations motivate women to get involved in productive work outside the household. This has practically resulted in doubling women's responsibilities. Apart from the bearing and rearing of children, there has been a shift in that sometimes women have to take on the maintenance of the children, wholly or partially, in addition to that of other dependants. The gender division of roles at the household level is not expected to change, although women are taking on more financial responsibilities and productive work outside the home; hence, the division of roles is becoming more asymmetric—to the disadvantage of women. This tendency is reinforcing male dominance.

It is evident that women's mobility could be limited by their major role with regard to child care and spouse control. This has bearing on the type of business a woman gets involved in, her opportunities for market expansion and making of business contacts and, in the final analysis, the profits to be realised. While economic independence may not be an all-inclusive solution to women's emancipation, it is a big step forward. Men at least show signs of realising this.

There is tendency towards maintenance of the traditional family care and support system with a view that child care should be restricted within the household setting. In order to facilitate women's active involvement in feasible and necessary work outside the home, affordable day-care centres should

further be encouraged since domestic workers are no longer a reliable alternative.

Although there is a desire on the part of some women for economic self-reliance and for independence from men by maintaining the children single-handedly, the biological fathers of the children need to become actively involved in the well-being of their children. The Federation of Women Lawyers—Uganda (FIDA) presently offers legal services to women (and sometimes to men) regarding child support and inheritance issues at a minimal fee. However, awareness needs to be created if the services are to be fully utilised; many women are not aware of their availability. More awareness creation is necessary for both men and women, especially with regard to the equitable control of resources and freedom of movement.

Despite the constraints enumerated, the prevailing economic situation, although demanding, has given women an opportunity to advance into the public sector where some have become successful. They have been provided with an opportunity for exposure, mobility and a sense of self-worth through their diverse contributions and accomplishments.

### Notes

1. An effort was made in the pilot stage of the study to inquire about incomes of the business women. The responses, however, did not reflect the nature of the enterprise. There is usually a fear about revealing incomes, that is usually associated with taxation; also for some to understate the amount is viewed as modesty.
2. 'Dependants' exclude members of the nuclear family.
3. The hours of work for women who go for trips abroad apply to the time when they are back at home. They spend shorter hours working in the shops because they have to distribute goods to other business persons and have to spend time clearing goods or acquiring travel clearance in preparation for subsequent trips.
4. The different items for women who make business trips were grouped into one category—'regular' expenses—because of the nature of the interviews. The women were very busy and could not be interviewed on

each item separately. They usually asked the interviewers to mention all the items, after which they would point out the items where expenses were paid by the spouses, where items were shared and where they were solely responsible for payment (but mostly in grouped form). They were, however, clear in cases where they made all the payments. The question on food was asked separately.

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