

## Education, Marriage, Fertility and Work Choices of Young Women in Uganda

### Executive summary

Despite the existence of several policies and laws aimed at empowering women to participate as equal partners in development, a number of challenges remain in Uganda. Low female education attainment, early marriages, teenage pregnancies and poor female labour market outcomes continue to hamper progress in attaining Sustainable Development Goals of gender equality. Using the School to Work Transition Surveys (SWTS 2013 and 2015) and the Uganda Demographic and Health Surveys (2006 and 2011), this policy brief explores links between educational attainment, age of marriage and child birth, and labour market among young Ugandans (15-24 years of age). Overall, we find that young women leave school early, give birth and/or get married before the legal age of 18 years, enter the labour market early with limited skills, while a good number are inactive (neither in the labour market nor in school). Additional evidence shows that women (25-49 years) whose first birth/marriage was before the age of 20 are less likely to be in professional /technical and managerial occupations and more likely to be engaged in agriculture (majorly subsistence) with little income accruing to them. This calls for a coordinated approach in implementing the policies that are aimed at keeping young women in school, delaying marriage and births and those that broaden opportunities for decent employment.

Early marriage, early child-birth, and early school dropout rates among female youth predisposes them to early entry into the labour market. This may have long lasting effects on their opportunities and well-being.<sup>iii</sup> For example early labour market entry limits young people from accumulating the human capital necessary to get good jobs; and often confines them to less productive and vulnerable jobs. This may have a strong negative impact on their future labour market experience and earning potential, ultimately increasing their vulnerability to poverty in the long run. This brief presents key descriptive findings on schooling, fertility, marriage and how this affects subsequent labour market experiences of young women in Uganda.

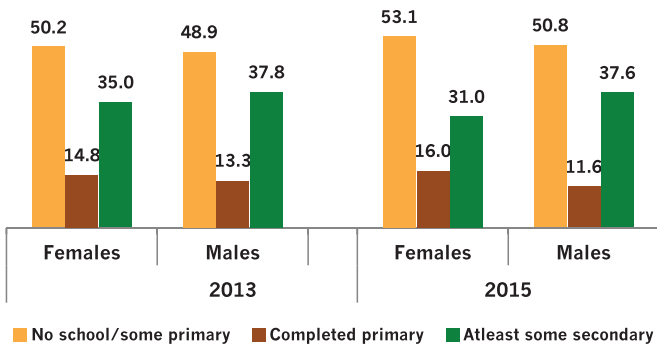


### 1. Key Findings

**Graduation from primary to secondary school remains a challenge for females:** Figure 1 shows that the number of young people (both males and females) that have never attended school or did not complete primary increased between 2013 and 2015. Once in school, the percentage of girls that complete primary school is higher than that of boys, and has improved overtime. However, this improvement is not sustained beyond primary school; compared with boys, less and less girls are completing secondary school and the gender gap is widest at this level. Compared with 2013, fewer girls (less by 4 percentage points) had at least secondary education in 2015; the percentage of boys with at least secondary education remained fairly constant over the two-year period. Early exit from school implies that more girls continue to enter the labour market before acquiring the requisite skills needed to be competitive.

**Early births and marriage/family formation are still prevalent:** While economic related reasons continue to be the major cause of school dropout, pregnancy is the second biggest contributor to the dropout rates among females (SWTS, 2013 & 2015) - partly explaining the high share of females leaving school prior to graduation. Despite the existence of a law on the minimum age for marriage, analysis

**Figure 1: Education attainment of the youth (aged 15-24 years) in 2013 and 2015 (Percent)**



Based on SWTS 2013 and 2015.

based on the 2011 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) indicates that the average age at first birth and average age at first marriage stands at 17 years for young females - just below the minimum age of 18 years that is stipulated in the law (see Box 1).

**Box 1: Fertility choices (15-24 year olds)**



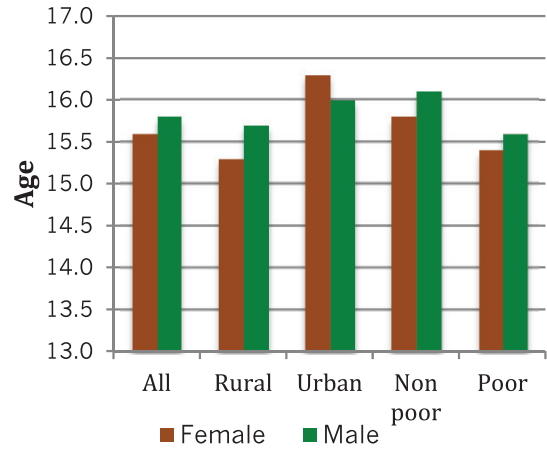
- ❖ **17years:** Average age at first marriage
- ❖ **17.4years:** Average age at first birth
- ❖ **~1:** Average number of children amongst 15-24 years olds

Source: Authors' computations based on UDHS 2011

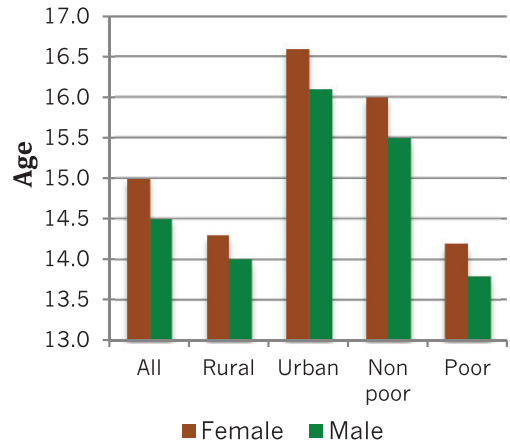
**Premature exit from formal schooling, early fertility experiences incline young people to early entry into the labour market:**

Findings from the SWTS 2015 show that the average age of leaving school among youth aged 15-24 years is about 15.6 among females and 15.8 for males with marginal changes between 2013 and 2015 (Figure 2). Under normal circumstances, at this age, these youth would be attending senior three. Moreover early exit is correlated with entry into the labour market; the average age of leaving school is more or less the same as the age at first employment experience/started looking for a job (Figure 2 & 3). The likelihood of males entering the labour market earlier than females is noted (although the differences are marginal). Regardless of gender, youth residing in urban areas, and living in non-poor households seem to enter the labour market later.

**Figure 2: Average age of leaving formal education**



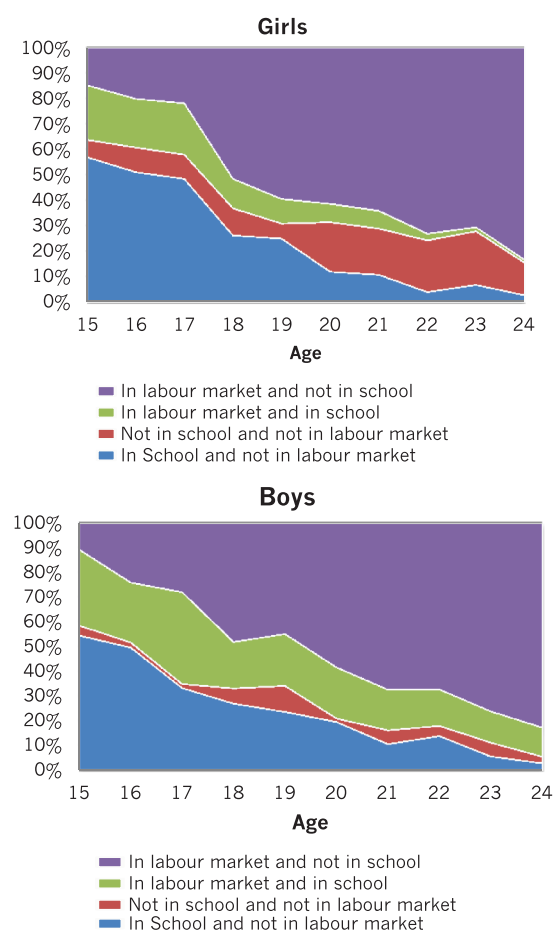
**Figure 3: Average age at first job**



Source: Author's computations based on SWTS 2015.

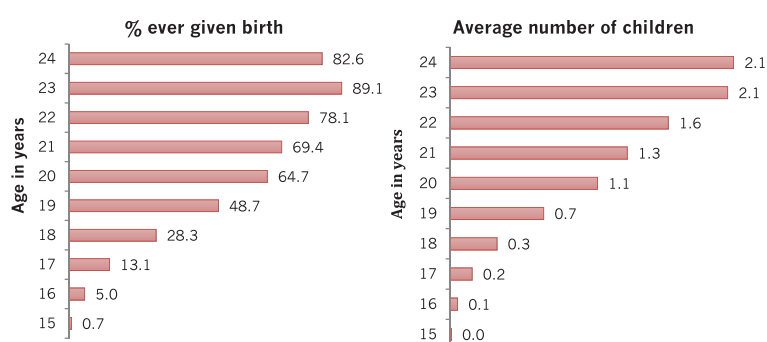
**Gender gaps in economic activities.** Figure 4 below shows the current economic activity of young women and men in Uganda in 2015 and a number of issues are evident. First, although more girls seem to be in school than boys in the late teens – i.e. ages 15-18 years, boys stay longer in school after 18 years. Second, a higher proportion of girls enter into the labour market overall and drop out of school in greater proportion. Third, more boys are likely to combine school and work than girls. Finally, a much higher percentage of girls are not in school and not in labour market than boys, particularly for those aged at least 20 years. Indeed, a higher proportion of women are inactive. The share of female youth who were economically inactive was more than twice that of the male youth.

Figure 4: Current economic activity status, %



This can partially be explained by the fact that child bearing and family formation set in at around this age (19-20 years) implying increased caring and household responsibilities. Thus, early family formation is associated with both early exit from school and fragmented work opportunities for women. It is also reflected in high levels of fertility; by 22-23 years, a Ugandan female youth already has 2 children when they should otherwise be completing their tertiary education.

Figure 5: Fertility choices



**Unpaid family labour is increasingly the first activity for most young people.** Table 1 presents a breakdown of the activity status for the youth in both 2013 and 2015. Nearly half of the young people, their first labour market activity was working as unpaid family member (work for family gain). Furthermore, young women are engaged in home activities in much higher proportion than men. The table also shows that at least while 24.2 percent of the youth were working for wage/salary. However, females were significantly less likely to be in wage employment (20.3 percent) as their first economic activity compared with males (28.4 percent) yet wage or salaried employment is associated with higher wages, job security, and social protection among other entitlements.

Table 1: Nature of first activity in 2013 and 2015 by gender (percent)

Activity	2013			2015		
	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All
Work for wage/salary	12.6	21	16.6	20.3	28.4	24.2
Self employed	33.6	36.2	34.8	19.1	18.5	18.8
Work as unpaid family member	21.7	26.7	24.1	45.4	42.2	43.8
In apprenticeship/internship	2.1	1.6	1.8	1	0.5	0.8
Available & actively looking for work	2.1	3.4	2.7	6.1	6.5	6.3
Full-time education or training	0.8	0.6	0.7	1.9	2.5	2.2
Engaged in home duties	25	9.3	17.5	6	1.4	3.8
Did not work or seek work	2.1	1.2	1.7	0.3	0.1	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's computations based on SWTS 2013 and 2015.

**Early marriage /early child-birth reduces a woman's future decent employment prospects:** Compared with those who married or gave birth after 20 years, women who gave birth or married at a young age (before 20 years) are less likely to be in professional/technical and managerial positions. Moreover, a higher proportion is self-employed in the agricultural sector (e.g. 54.8 percent against 40.4 percent for those who married later) (see table 2). Yet employment earnings from agriculture remain meager, in fact, according to the 2012/13 Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) findings, 30 percent of those employed in agriculture are considered as working poor compared with

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16.5 percent and 8.4 percent for the industry and services sectors.

**Table 2: Correlation between age at first birth / marriage and current occupation**

	Age at first birth < 20 years	Age at first birth > 19 years	Age at marriage < 20 years	Age at marriage > 19 years
Not working	17.1	14.8	16.8	15.0
Professional/technical/managerial	1.9	11.6	1.7	13.6
Clerical	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.8
Agricultural – self employed	53.0	45.7	54.8	40.4
Agricultural – employee	5.4	5.2	4.8	6.7
Sales and services	22.5	22.1	22.0	23.5
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors' calculations based on UDHS 2011

## 2. Call to Action

Despite the existence of policy frameworks to address gender inequalities, these inequalities still exist – and some have widened overtime. If the patterns and trends of gender inequalities remain, Uganda is less likely to achieve the sustainable development goal (SDGs) on gender equality.

**To change the status quo, there is need for concerted efforts to close the policy implementation gaps that currently exist:** The array of government policies and laws need to be

promoted and implemented with clear cut roles for various stakeholders at all levels –community to national level.

**Mind-set change:** There is an urgent need to invest in campaigns to uproot the deep-rooted social norms and practices that drive early marriages and pregnancies. Furthermore, religious and cultural institutions need to be engaged and supported in the campaign to change current attitudes and practices that perpetuate child marriages and early pregnancies in communities.

**Provide second chance interventions for young people that are out of school:** For the cohort of youth that left school early and are ill equipped for the labour market, holistic skills development initiatives should be promoted to enhance their capacities and capability to be productive participants in the labour market.

**About this Brief:** This brief highlights key findings from a working paper “*An assessment of early labour market transitions of women in Uganda: A descriptive approach*” by Ssewanyana S., Ahaibwe G. and Kasirye I. (2016). The work is part of a multi-country research project examining labour market transitions for young girls in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda funded under the auspices of the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program. The GrOW program is jointly funded by Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC), UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Opinions stated in this brief, and the paper that it draws from, are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the GrOW program or its funding partners.

## Endnotes

i Bridges, S., and D. Lawson (2008). A Gender Based Investigation into the Determinants of Labour Market Outcomes: Evidence from Uganda. *Journal of African Economies*, Vol 18(3), 461-495.

ii Longwe, A., Smits, J. and De Jong, E. (2013) Number and spacing of children and women’s employment in Africa Nijmegen Center for Economics (NICE). Working Paper 13-103.

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