

Women's Economic Empowerment in Uganda: Inequalities and Implications

Executive Statement

Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) is a necessary condition for sustainable development and pro-poor growth. It increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities. Although, there are laws, policies and programmes supporting Women's Economic Empowerment in Uganda, evidence from the 2017 Baseline Survey of Perceptions on Violence Against Women, Women's Economic Empowerment and Women's Political Participation and Leadership report of the NGPSS 2017; reveals remarkable gender inequalities. Disproportionately more women than men are disadvantaged in terms of education attainment and so they lack the requisite knowledge and skills for capturing decent employment opportunities. Also, more men than women are opposed to females owning and inheriting land, and being part of the key decision-making organs on land and other property. This brief recommends second chance education for the out-of-school females, popularisation and enforcement of land policy provisions, and targeted rolling out of Women Empowerment programmes.

Introduction

Empowering women economically is a prerequisite for sustainable development and pro-poor growth. It increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information¹. Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) promotes gender equality, which is one of the 17 global UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the International Monetary Fund [IMF] (2018), the lack of gender equality poses a heavy toll on inclusive growth². For long, Government of Uganda (GoU) has demonstrated recognition of the need to empower women and has put in place policies and programmes to this effect.

The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda provides overall legal frame work for Women Economic Empowerment (WEE). It recognizes equality between women and men; provides for gender balance and fair representation of marginalised groups; recognises the role of women in society; accords equal citizenship rights, freedom from discrimination, and af-

firmative action in favour of women; and articulates specific rights of women including outlawing customs, traditions and practices that undermine the welfare, dignity and interests of women. Additionally, GoU development the Uganda Gender Policy (2007) as the overarching framework for ensuring that all Government policies and programmes are consistent with the long-term goal of eliminating gender inequalities. The Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP) is one of the flagship Programmes being implemented by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD). Given that supportive policies and programmes have been in place for some time, this policy brief assesses whether women in Uganda are now economically empowered.

Data Sources and methods

This brief is prepared based on the 2017 Baseline Survey of Perceptions on Violence Against Women, Women's Economic Empowerment and Women's Political Participation and Leadership report of the NGPSS 2017. The NGPSS 2017 collected information from 3,600 households, from which two adults

(18+ years) were interviewed per household (1 man and 1 woman). Other data used in this brief was obtained from the 2018 Statistical Abstract of the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS).

This brief focuses on the following indicators of Women Economic Empowerment: access to quality education, working status and monthly earnings, and access and ownership rights over technology and property. Specifically, ownership and use of mobile phone is used as a proxy for access and ownership of technology. Access and ownership rights over property is looked at in terms of perceptions on women’s ownership, inheritance and participation in key decision-making on matters of land and other property.

Findings

Inequality in education attainment

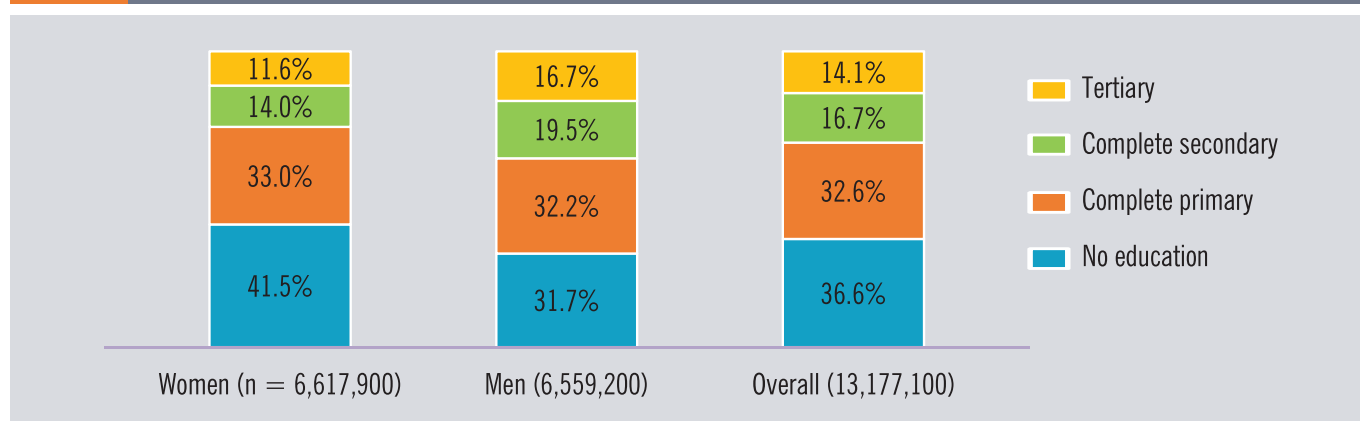
One aspect of women empowerment is provision of quality education. However, this remains a challenge given that a moderately high percentage of women and men do not have any formal education. Even though the overall percentage of people without any formal education is quite high (36.6%), the total lack of formal education is mostly reported among women. Precisely, 41.5 percent of the surveyed women had no education at all compared to 31.7 percent of their male counterparts—the difference of 9.8 percentage points is high

especially when converted to absolute numbers (Figure 1). This means that disproportionately more women than men are disadvantaged in terms of education attainment and so they lack the requisite knowledge and skills for capturing employment opportunities. Indeed, women alone account for 83.5 percent of the population of unemployed persons without any formal education. This points to the need to skill people without education, especially the women such that they can begin to engage in economically meaningful activities.

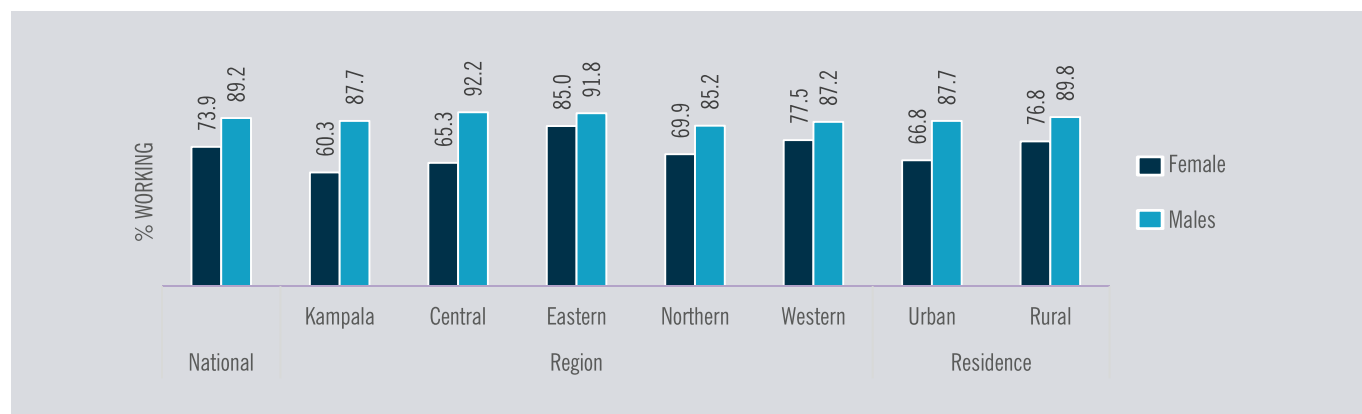
Wide gender gaps in employment

The 2017 Baseline Survey of Perceptions on Violence Against Women, Women’s Economic Empowerment and Women’s Political Participation and Leadership report of the NGPSS 2017, working status included individuals that had worked in the last seven (7) days for a wage, salary, commission or payment in kind even if it was for only one hour. Based on that definition, 19 percent of the labour force were not working. The percent of women not working (26.1%) was more than double that of their male counterparts (10.8%) (Figure 2). Women account for the lion’s share of unemployed people across all regions in Uganda. According to the full sample of the 2017 Baseline Survey of Perceptions on Violence Against Women, Women’s Economic Empowerment and Women’s Political Participation and Leadership report of the NGPSS 2017, out of every 100 unemployed persons, 74 are females. Even though, the proportion of working women is quite high, many of these are en-

Figure 1: Education attainment by gender



Source: 2017 Baseline Survey of Perceptions on Violence Against Women, Women’s Economic Empowerment and Women’s Political Participation and Leadership report of the NGPSS 2017

Figure 2: Working status of men and women based on the NGPSS 2017

Source: 2017 Baseline Survey of Perceptions on Violence Against Women, Women's Economic Empowerment and Women's Political Participation and Leadership report of the NGPSS 2017

gaged in subsistence farming only (47.1%) compared to 31.2 percent of their male counterparts (UBOS, 2018)³. Apparently, the findings thus suggest huge gender gaps with respect to access to economically meaningful employment opportunities.

Widening gender wage gaps for persons in paid employment

The average monthly earnings presented in Table 1 reveal widening gender inequalities and confirm the report by the International Monetary Fund [IMF] (2018) that wage gaps continue to be a global issue with women receiving lower wages than men. In Uganda, though the earnings for both men and women have modestly increased, the gender wage gap has widened by over 20 percent in a space of five (5) years. In 2012/13, females in paid employment earned on average UGX 55,772 less than their male counterparts. The wage gap increased to UGX 67,021 in 2016/17, with males earning double the amount earned by females. The available data however does

not specify whether the difference in earnings is for employees doing the same kind of work. Nonetheless, the fact that women earn much less can be attributed to engagement in low cadre jobs (as opposed to senior management jobs) that by their nature attract low pay.

Access and ownership rights over technology

Target 5.B of SDG5 seeks to enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communication technology as a pathway of promoting women empowerment. Findings presented in Figure 2 show that there is gender disparity in ownership and use of mobile phone technology across all regions. At national level, 53.7 percent of females own phones compared to 74.5 percent of males. In terms of phone usage, about 72 percent of females use mobile phones compared to 83.2 percent of males (Table 2). Females account for the largest share (66%) of people who do not use mobile phones. It should be appreciated that people need mobile phones for

Table 1: Monthly earnings and the widening gender wage gap

	Earnings (Uganda Shillings)		Change in earnings over the 5-year period	
	FY 2012/13	FY2016/17	Absolute (UGX)	%
Males	121,427	134,041	12,614	10.4%
Females	65,655	67,021	1,366	2.1%
<i>Gender wage gap</i>	<i>55,772</i>	<i>67,021</i>	<i>11,249</i>	<i>20.2%</i>

Source: 2018 UBOS Statistical Abstract

Table 2: Mobile phone ownership and usage by gender

	Own a mobile phone (%)		Use a mobile phone (%)	
	Female	Males	Female	Males
<i>National</i>	53.7	74.5	71.9	83.2
<i>Region</i>				
Kampala	90.6	96.8	95.3	96.8
Central	76.3	84.3	82.3	88.9
Eastern	37.7	66.3	68.3	77.7
Northern	24.8	60.2	60.4	79.9
Western	61.1	78.7	69.1	82.6
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	76.2	86.6	85.1	91.6
Rural	44.5	70.0	66.5	80.0

Source: 2017 Baseline Survey of Perceptions on Violence Against Women, Women's Economic Empowerment and Women's Political Participation and Leadership report of the NGPSS 2017

the various functions they perform including communication and information sharing¹, mobile money transactions (including school fees payment), and payment of utilities (e.g. water bills, electricity and DSTV). Therefore, the lack of ownership or access to mobile phones deprives people of services that can be obtained through phone usage. Since females are the least owners and users of mobile phones, they become the most deprived of services received using mobile phones.

Perceptions on ownership and inheritance of land and other property

Appreciably majority of people are agreeable to women and girls owning (90%) and inheriting (85.8%) land and other property. Similarly, over 92 percent of Ugandans agree that women and girls should be part of key decision-making on land and other property. Nonetheless, some women and men are opposed to the idea of females owning, inheriting or being part of key decision-making on land and other property. Evidently, more men than women are opposed to gender equality in access and ownership of land and property. Specifically, about 15 percent of men compared to 5.7 percent of women do not agree that women and girls should own land and other property. Twenty-one (21) percent of men compared to 8.4 percent of women do not agree that women and girls should inherit land and other property. About 12 percent of men compared to 4.4 percent of women do not agree that women and girls should take part in

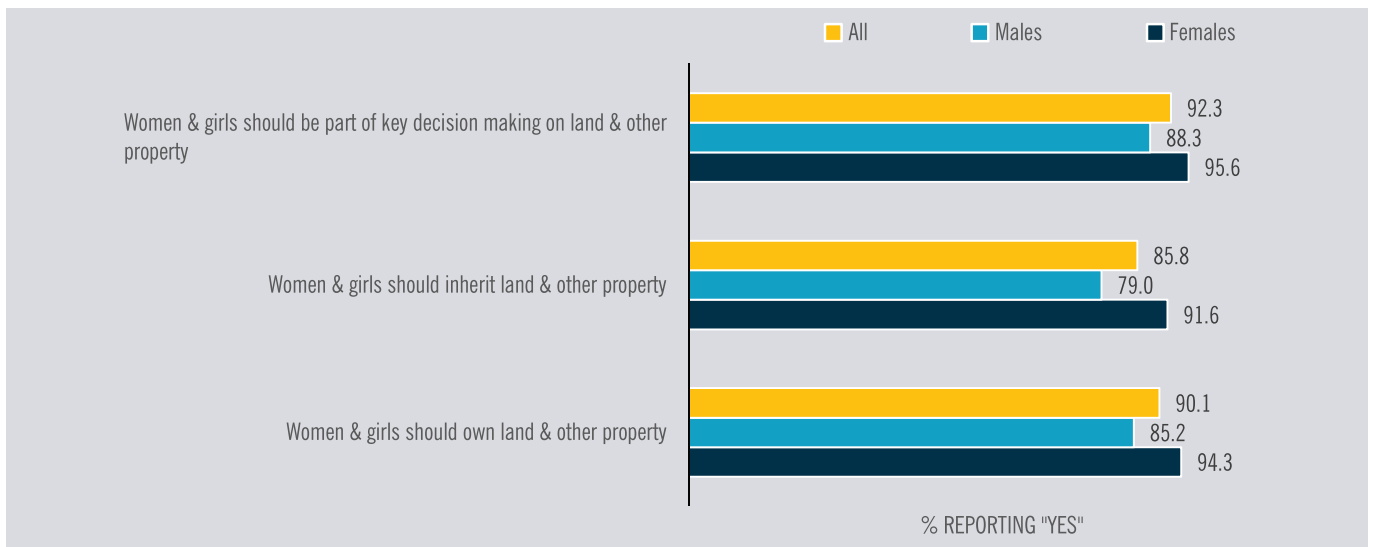
key decision making on land and other property (Figure 3).

From the foregoing perceptions, it is implied that women and girls may be constrained to own land and yet it is a key factor of agricultural production, the biggest employer in Uganda. Inheritance is one way through which people acquire property, but since there is resistance (especially from men) to female inheritance of land and other property, the only option left for women is through purchases. Acquiring land through purchases is quite costly, more so for women since they on average earn less income than men—as shown earlier in Table 1, the average monthly earning for men in paid employment is double the amount for female paid employees.

The perception regarding access and ownership of land further suggest that women and girls are largely land insecure – they only have land use rights but no transfer rights, a sign of tenure insecurity. Mwesigye and Barungi (2019) examined the effect of land tenure security on crop choice in Uganda and reported that having tenure security significantly increases the likelihood of and land allocated to growing perennial commercial crops. Thus, unless women are empowered to own land, their potential to contribute towards economic development through agricultural commercialization may not be fully realised.

The laws policy frameworks (Land Act 1998, 1995 Constitution, and National Land Policy 2013) provide for equal rights to land ownership and inheritance for both men and women. But the fact that most men are still opposed to women owning land, in-

¹ In agriculture, for example, mobile phones serve as a platform for sharing weather information, market prices and good agricultural practices, hence allowing farmers to make better farming decisions.

Figure 3: Perceptions on ownership, inheritance and decision-making of land and other property

Source: 2017 Baseline Survey of Perceptions on Violence Against Women, Women's Economic Empowerment and Women's Political Participation and Leadership report of the NGPSS 2017

heriting land and being part of the key decision-making organs on land implies women's land rights are often violated. It also points to limited awareness about land rights, and failure of policy implementation and enforcement.

Emerging Issues for Policy Consideration

- a) Second chance education to give early school leavers a chance to obtain a qualification, improve their quality of life and integrate in society: Availing formal learning opportunities to the out-of-school females who are not working would help increase their chances of becoming employable. This is critical because unemployment is highest among females without any formal education.
- b) Further popularize relevant policies (Land Act 1998, 1995 Constitution, and National Land Policy 2013) to create awareness about the various provisions in support of gender equality in land ownership and decision making on land. Also, institutions mandated to implement the NLP should be empowered to effectively implement and enforce the strategic interventions therein.
- c) Organise women in [agricultural cooperatives](#); these hold much potential to enable women in subsistence agriculture to enhance individual productive capacity and access markets with better collective bargaining power. Additionally, support women to participate in all stages of agricultural value chains.

- d) Targeting the most in need women during programme implementation: When rolling out programs aimed at economically empowering women (e.g. the Uganda Women Empowerment Program (UWEP)), special focus should be on the most unemployed women. These include: those with no formal education, women in Kampala, central and northern regions, and those living in rural areas.

Reference

This brief is an excerpt from a 2018 report by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) titled "2017 Baseline Survey of Perceptions on Violence Against Women, Women's Economic Empowerment and Women's Political Participation and Leadership report of the NGPSS 2017"

Endnotes

- 1 DAC Network on Gender Equality (2011). Women's Economic Empowerment. Issues Paper.
- 2 International Monetary Fund [IMF] (2018). Pursuing Women's Economic Empowerment.
- 3 Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS] (2018). 2018 Statistical Abstract

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