

The state of the economy for Ugandan women

Presented at the 2019 Uganda Feminist Forum by Anita Ntale,

Paper developed with support from Hivos



Across the world, many previously unopened and non-existent economic doors have opened for women. Women make vast and positive economic contributions through business, agriculture, trade, industry, and domestic care work. However, these contributions are often undervalued in comparison to men making the same contributions and in the case of care work even unpaid. Research has shown that women's economic empowerment boosts economic growth through economic diversification and increased productivity¹. This is particularly important to developing countries like Uganda where women's economic empowerment would not only result in significant macroeconomic gains but would also substantially reduce poverty rates.

In fact, women's empowerment is key to the attainment of the agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). Specifically, Goal 10 on reducing inequalities; Goal 8 on promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all and Goal 5 on achieving gender equality cannot be realised without women's economic empowerment. Achieving these three goals would in turn significantly contribute to other cross-cutting goals that are also in part dependent on women's economic empowerment like Goal 1 on ending poverty; Goal 2 on food security and Goal 3 on health. This paper examines the state of the Ugandan economy and highlights how women are faring within it. The paper specifically reviews the place of women in both the micro and macro level economic and policy spheres.

State of Uganda's Economy

Uganda has registered an average annual GDP growth of over 5 percent over the last 5 years up to 2018 (WDI). However, this growth is not always reflected at the microeconomic level due to the persistence of inequality between different demographic groups in society. Gender inequality has been identified as the most significant and persistent of all inequalities and women are not reaping the same benefits and returns as men from the country's strong macroeconomic performance. This examination of the state of Uganda's economy and the place of women within it reveals that economic growth has not automatically resulted in a reduction of gender-based inequality. Globally, it is estimated that gender gaps cost the economy some 15 percent of GDP² and this cost is most likely to be more pronounced in developing countries.

Women's empowerment in Uganda

Women's economic empowerment includes access to and control over productive resources, assets and services; political and social agency; meaningful participation in decision-making spaces and processes and access to decent work. To this end, there are a number of laws and policies in Uganda that make a concerted effort to enhance women's positions in the economy³; and many of these have yielded notable results. In fact, the 2nd National Development (NDP II, 2015-2020) makes specific reference to

¹ International Monetary Fund (2018). *Pursuing Women's Economic Empowerment*. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Policy-Papers/Issues/2018/05/31/pp053118pursuing-womens-economic-empowerment>

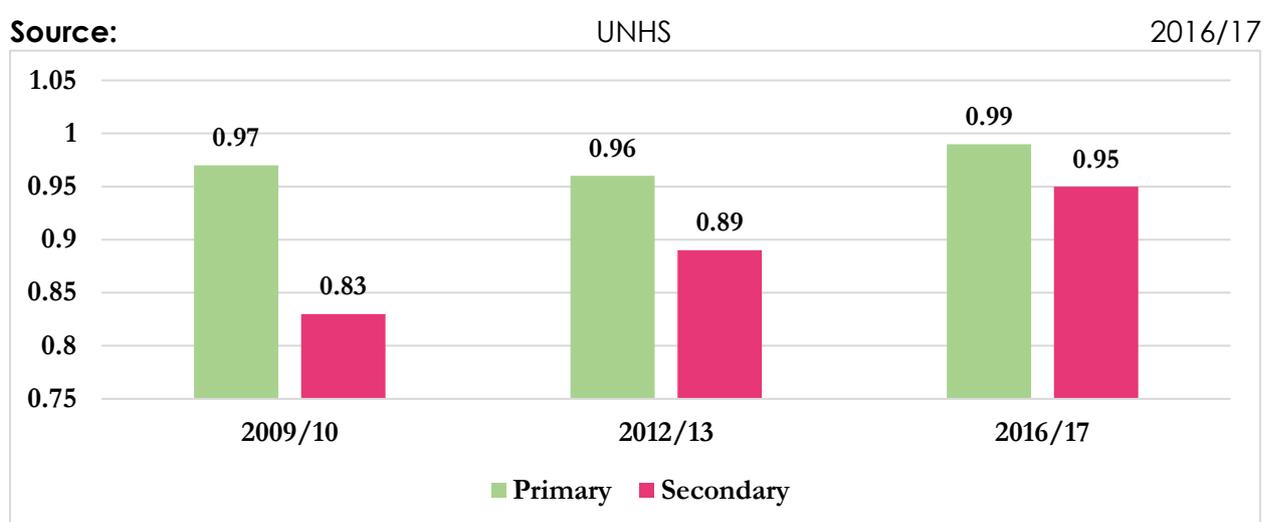
² Cuberes, D., & Teignier, M. (2016). *Aggregate Effects of Gender Gaps in the Labor Market: A Quantitative Estimate*. *Journal of Human Capital*, 10(1), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1086/683847> and Ferrant, G. and A. Kolev (2016), *Does gender discrimination in social institutions matter for long-term growth?: Cross-country evidence*. OECD Development Centre Working Papers, No. 330, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5jm2hz8dgl6-en>

³ Some of these include The Gender in Education Sector Policy (2016); The Gender Policy of the Judiciary of the Republic of Uganda (2003); The National Equal Opportunities Policy (2006); The Uganda National Gender Policy (2007); The Makerere University Gender Equality Policy (2009); The National Priority Gender Equality Indicators (2016); The National Policy on the Elimination of Gender-based Violence in Uganda (2016); The Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender in Human Resource Management in the Public Service (2011); The Water and Sanitation Gender Strategy; and The Gender Equity Budgeting Policy.

sector-specific gender in a bid to realise inclusive growth by prioritising gender equality and women's empowerment.

As one of the key gender empowerment indicators and pillars, education has been one of the main sectors to benefit from gender inclusive policies. Through various Girl Child Education initiatives, the introduction of both Universal Primary Education and Universal Secondary Education; and the affirmative action awarding female students an extra one and a half (1.5) points for public university entrance, the education sector in Uganda has made significant strides in promoting equal opportunities. These policies and initiatives have led to an expansion of access to equitable education at all levels and have seen enrolment rates rise with near equal enrolments for both boys and girls. Figure 1 below presents the Gender Parity Index (GPI)⁴ trends in primary and secondary education, illustrating that inequality in education has reduced overtime and is nearing parity in primary.

Figure 1: Trends in Gender Parity over the last 3 survey periods (%)



Political participation: This is another key pillar and indicator of women's empowerment. Exclusion of women from decision making platforms across all levels of society and governance makes it hard for women's concerns to get onto the national agenda. While better representation would increase the passing and advocating for policies that improve the status of women. Accordingly, Uganda took affirmative action to increase women's participation in politics from the local councils to the parliament. This has resulted in an increase in women's participation in politics thus enhancing women's political representation. In the current 10th Parliament⁵, 34.7 percent of representatives are women – 157 women out of 452 members⁶. Of these 157 female representatives, 120 (76.4 percent) are District Women Representatives while only 19 (12 percent) are directly elected (competed with men for the seat). The increase in the number of Women MP's is largely attributable to the creation of new districts and the mandatory district woman MP position. This mandatory representation however does not extend at the local

⁴ The Gender Parity Index (GPI) measures progress towards elimination of gender imbalances in education participation and or availability of learning opportunities to women in relation to those available to men. It also reflects the level of women's empowerment in society. A GPI equal to 1 indicates equality between females and males; a value less than 1 indicates inequality in favour of males while a value greater than 1 indicates inequality in favour of females (UBOS 2017).

⁵ As at 12th April 2018

⁶ [Parliament of the Republic of Uganda](#)

government level where representation at the grassroots is poor. In addition, because few women have gone on to compete against male candidates for the 'directly elected' seats, there is a fear that affirmative action may have had an adverse effect. Several Women MPs remain 'stuck' in the affirmative action seats which are consequently rarely freed for newcomers.

Figure 2: Distribution of Women and Men in Local Government Councils, 2016

Local Government Councils	Total Number	Number of women	Percentage (%) of Women
District Council	3280	1,364	41.6
Municipality/Municipal Divisions Council	1282	537	41.9
Sub-County/ Town Councils	23,193	10,781	46.5
Total	27,755	12,682	45.7

Source: Women in Local Government, 2017

As seen in figure 2, 45.7 percent of the total representatives of the local governments at different levels are women. Although this figure is above the constitutionally required affirmative level (33 percent), there are significant gendered disparities at the beyond and within the local government councils. 99 percent of all chairpersons (who are the political heads of their respective LGs) are men. The municipality level offers the largest percentage of female chairpersons (6 percent) although this is also well below the targeted 33 percent (See Figure 3). In fact, the overall representation of women in directly elected positions is low and out of 8,793 directly elected council positions, only 87 were won by women⁷.

Figure 3: Distribution of Women and Men Chairperson in Local Government by LC level, 2016.

Local Government Councils	Total Number	Number of women	Percentage (%) of Women
District Council	112	1	0.9
Municipality/Municipal Divisions Council	50	3	6.0
Sub-County/ Town Councils	1,406	12	0.9
All Levels	1,568	16	1.0
Total	3,136	32	1.0

Source: Women in Local Government, 2017

Data shows that while affirmative action has brought more women into decision-making positions and in school, Uganda has made significant progress in increasing opportunities for women. However there remain several disparities indicating that women are still at a considerable disadvantage. While more girls are attending school, literacy rates for women and girls are lower than their male counterparts. Increasing women's education outcomes allows them to keep pace with the growing economy by providing better access to income generating opportunities and increased participation in the formal labour market. However, for most Ugandan women, significant gains in education have not necessarily translated into better labour market outcomes⁸.

⁷ Uganda Bureau of Statistics -UBOS. (2017), *Women in Local Government, 2017: Baseline Statistics for Local Council levels III-V in Uganda*. Available at: https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/04_2019Women_In_Local_Government.pdf

⁸ UN Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016*. Chapter 2, p. 69.

Women at work

According to the Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) 2016/17, over 10 million women were recorded to be in the working age (14-64 years) with about 75 percent of them working compared to 82 percent of men. In line with this, the unemployment rate was observed to be higher for women (14.4 percent) than for men (6.2 percent). Despite the existence of the Equal Opportunities Commission Act which promotes gender equality and women's empowerment, occupational segregation is still high as women are often restricted to low-skilled and lower paying jobs and continue to earn less than their male counterparts. The median nominal monthly earnings for women was estimated to be UGX. 110,000 which is half the median nominal monthly earnings for men (UGX. 220,000). This can be attributed to the large number of women confined to the lower paying jobs. Figure 4 below highlights some of the labour market disparities between men and women.

Figure 4: Selected Labour Market Indicators by sex (%)

	Female	Male	
Women remain less likely to participate in the labour market	LFPR ⁹	44.9	61.2
	EPR ¹⁰	39.8	56.8
Women are over-represented in informal and vulnerable employment	<i>Paid Employee</i>	26.3	40.8
	<i>Employer</i>	1.7	4.0
	<i>Own Account Worker</i>	57.8	48.8
	<i>Contributing Family Workers</i>	14.1	6.4
Women bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work (UCW).	<i>National</i>	87.8	64.4
	<i>No education</i>	79.2	44.8
	<i>Primary</i>	94.7	58.4
	<i>Secondary</i>	95.9	60.1
	<i>Post primary/Secondary specialized training</i>	92.4	51.1
	<i>Degree and above</i>	86.4	53.0
	<i>Average weekly number of hours spent on UCW</i>	19.9	10.3

Source: National Labour Force Survey 2016/17

The amount of time devoted to unpaid care work is typically negatively correlated with female labour force participation¹¹; and this is evident in figure 4 above. On average women spend almost twice as much time as men on UCW while the proportion of women doing UCW generally increases with education. Although investing in education improves the wage potential of individuals, women's average monthly wages are typically lower than men's average monthly wages regardless of education level. The

⁹ The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) indicates the proportion of working age population that is active in the labour market either employed or actively looking for employment.

¹⁰ The employment to population ratio (EPR) provides an indication of the degree to which the economy is utilising its key productive labour resources. It is the proportion of the working age population that is employed i.e. involved in the production of goods and services for pay or profit.

¹¹ OECD Development Centre, 2014. *Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes* (2014). Available at: https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf

gender wage gap is highest at the lower levels of education and women and women in the private sector earn only half of what their male counterparts earn.

Figure 5: Median monthly nominal wages for employees by education and place of work.

		Male	Female	Total	Wage Gap ¹²
Education					
No formal schooling		88,000	66,000	75,000	75.00
Primary		120,000	70,000	110,000	58.33
Secondary		220,000	110,000	200,000	50.00
Post-primary specialization		350,000	280,000	300,000	80.00
Post-secondary specializations		411,000	250,000	390,000	60.83
Degree and above		900,000	600,000	780,000	66.67
Place of work	Public	460,000	450,000	457,500	97.83
	Private	200,000	100,000	150,000	50.00
Total		220,000	110,000	168,000	50.00

Source: UNHS 2016/17

Women's absence in critical spaces

Women are still less likely to have access to social protection: The gendered inequalities in employment and occupation also lead to gender gaps in access to social protection. The social protection schemes in Uganda are primarily for formal sector workers that cover only 10 percent of the working population. The informal sector which employs the most females is excluded and left without pensions, health insurance or maternity protection etc. Those few women with access to social protection schemes often become the social protection for their families and dependents.

Women are less likely to have access to financial services: While the overall financial inclusion is similar for both men and women, there are still significant gender gaps as is illustrated by the findings in figure below.

Figure 6: Financial Inclusion Status of Women

	Women	Men	
	2013	2018	2018
% of adults financially included	77%	77%	78%
% of adults formally served	48%	54%	63%
% of adults relying on informal services only	29%	23%	15%

Source: [FinScope Uganda 2018](#)

More women than men are reliant on informal financial services, this means that they have less access to formal credit lines and are vulnerable to informal lenders.

¹² This is women's wages as a proportion of men's wages. For example, a wage gap of 75 for those with no formal schooling indicates that women make 75 percent of what men make. The lower the figure the larger the gap.

There's a gendered digital divide: Male adults are significantly more likely to have mobile phones (58%; 5 million) than female adults (46%; 4.6 million). In addition, male adults are more likely to have access to internet (13%; 1.1 million) than female adults (8%; 0.8 million)¹³; This is despite the fact that the economy is increasingly digitising especially the financial services.

The gendered cost of a liberal economy: Conclusions

The economy is inherently gendered, and the free market has been unable to fully correct the shortcomings that are leaving women at an economic disadvantage. This has repercussions on women's ability to take advantage of the opportunities emerging from economic growth and their prospects of equally sharing in the growth and development dividends with men. One of the persistent shortcomings of the liberal Ugandan economy can be found in the disconnect between economic growth and social development. A disconnect which primarily affects women as they continue to be the foundation of social development.

Despite the noted progress, women's full and equal participation in economic and social development still faces some obstacles and more needs to be done if women are to fully reap the benefits of economic empowerment. Women make up over half of the population, but this is not reflected in the workforce, nor meaningfully mirrored at the different levels of power. Women are not accessing the same political, social and economic opportunities as men, and this is negatively impacting social development. The sum of these negative impacts is an economic manifestation of the gendered cost of Uganda's economic growth. Global capitalism deservedly takes the blame for driving the growth of the gendered economy. At the theoretical level the concluding consideration is whether the economy can be un-gendered? Or how Unpaid domestic work and UCW can get the value they deserve for being the foundation of the economy. Finally, with the overarching theme of "Going Forward: Silencing the Fears" the ultimate aim should be to achieve representation beyond gender, and this can only be achieved by allowing Social Development to lead economic growth.

¹³ [FinScope Uganda 2018](#)