

Gender disparities in social protection in Uganda

Analytical Note¹

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1. Overview

Globally, social protection is considered a human right and not mere charity (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). To this end, social protection is identified as one of the single most effective routes to inclusive economic growth and development (UN, 2015). This has been seen in the design of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in which implementation of social protection initiatives in country agendas will enable many attain at least 12 out of the 17 SDGs outlined in Agenda 2030². Social protection is defined and addressed differently hence, making it context specific. However, commonalities do stand out in the mechanisms used by both state and non-state actors to address various mechanisms that respond to social protection -i.e. reducing vulnerabilities. These involve policies, institutions and processes put in place to help women, men and children reach or maintain an adequate standard of living and good health throughout their lives.

Uganda defines social protection as those public and private interventions that address vulnerabilities associated with being or becoming poor (MoGLSD, 2015)³. Simply put, these are initiatives that can provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalized. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004) assert that the overall objective of social protection is to reduce the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups. As a result, social protection measures include direct income

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² These are SDGs SDG 1,2 ,3 ,4 ,5 ,8 ,10 ,12 ,13 ,14 ,15 and 16 (i.e. ending poverty, ending hunger, ensuring healthy lives, ensuring inclusive and quality education, achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls, promoting economic growth and decent work, reducing inequality within and among countries, all SDGs that aim to protect the environment- such as sustainable consumption and production patterns; promoting peaceful and inclusive societies.

³ MoGLSD (2015). National Social Protection Policy, Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, Kampala-Uganda

transfers, safety nets, regulatory change and sensitization campaigns to protect the rights of socially and economically disadvantaged groups (Devereux *et al.*, 2002). Hagen-Zanker and McCord (2011) argue that meeting most of the social protection targets require government expenditure to increase by 87 percent to 154 percent while keeping expenditure in other sectors constant to meet the sectoral spending targets. However, increased revenue generation is not easily achieved in countries with a small domestic tax base, especially when economic growth is slow. Therefore, there is a need for those responsible for national budgetary coherence to extend support to programmes that yield the highest inclusion for all genders.

The next section highlights the nature of risks that social protection broadly addresses and the programme initiatives Uganda is using to provide social protection for its citizens.

2. Social protection landscape in Uganda

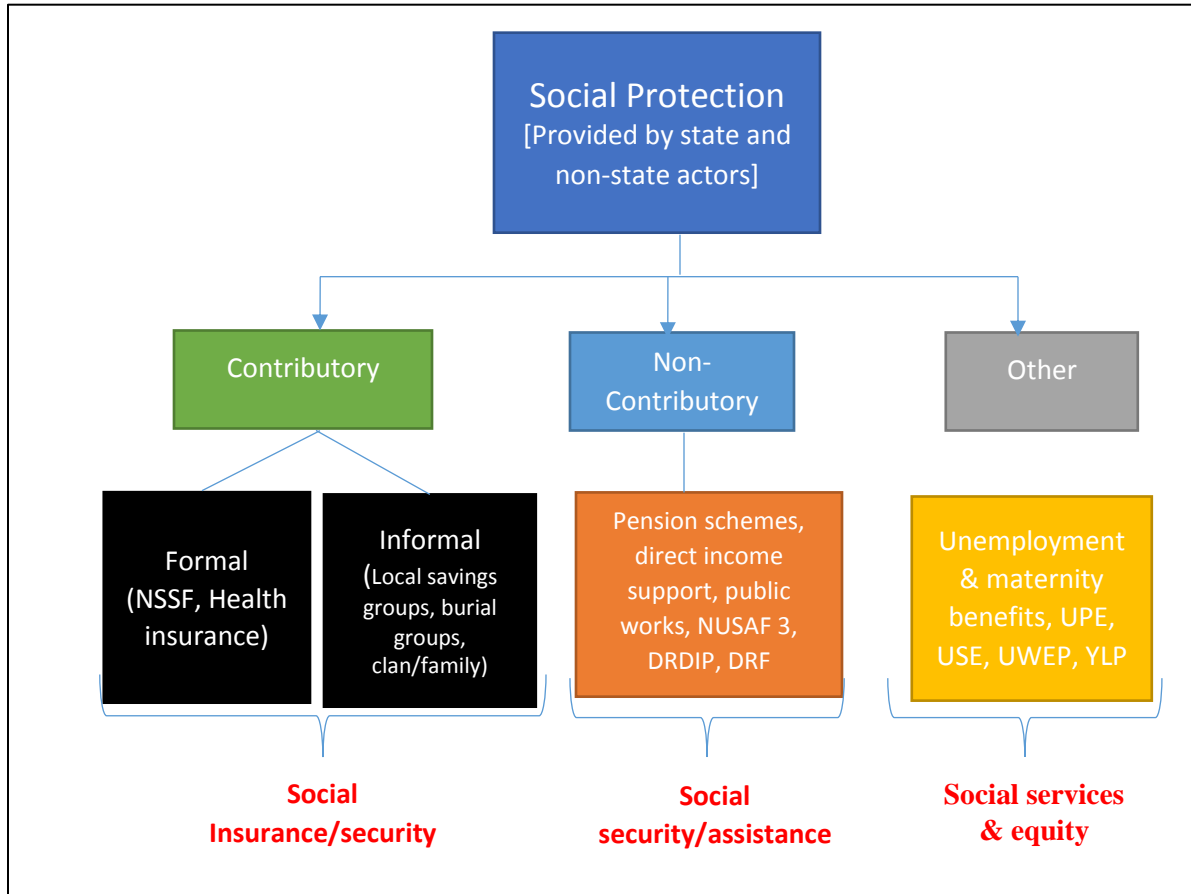
This section highlights the risks that can occur and maps the social protection landscape in Uganda and if it is responsive to the risks in questions. The need for social protection is derived from the context that individuals, households, communities and economies face risks that if no adaptation or mitigation measures are put in place drive them into a state of vulnerability/helplessness. This is because vulnerabilities can take on different faces (economic, social, political or demographic) depending on the risk exposed to. For example, some of the risks include:

- Natural risks {drought, floods, mudslides, landslides, crop and animal epidemics}
- Health risks {illness, injury, accidents, disability, epidemics (e.g., malaria), famines}
- Demographic risks {women, children, orphans, elderly, disabled}
- Economic risks {poor, unemployed, inflation}
- Social risks {crime, domestic, violence, terrorism, gangs, war, social upheaval}
- Political risks {Discrimination, riots, political unrest}
- Environmental risks {Pollution, deforestation, land degradation, nuclear disaster}

Given that the impacts of these risks differ, this implies that social protection interventions must address these wide spectrums of risks for resilience and sustainable inclusive economic growth and development. The Government of Uganda, development partners, civil society and NGOs are increasingly playing an important role in designing, delivering and advocating for social protection (Guloba *et al.*, 2017). Until recently, Uganda's expanding social protection programs have been donor funded; however, it's the GoU which should primarily play this role. In this regard, Uganda has for some time been implementing several social protections related initiatives especially those that

foster gender parity and equity in education plus those in improving service delivery (health and water). Figure 1, highlights the social protection landscape for Uganda.

Figure 1: Uganda’s Social Protection Face



Source: Author’s own compilation based on various sources

From Figure 1, shows that Social protection in Uganda is provided by both state and non-state actors and the modalities are either contributory or non-contributory nature. Most contributory schemes can be formal (e.g. National Social Security Fund⁴, health Insurance-though not yet in place at national level) or informal (such as the village local saving schemes, burial groups, clan/family etc.). Together these form the first component of National Social Protection Policy (NSSP) 2015 i.e. social insurance/security in Uganda. The non-contributory schemes are more formal and mostly provided through formal means.

⁴ **The National Social Security Fund (NSSF):** This is the largest social security scheme and currently has about 800,000 to 900,000 active members (Oketch, 2018). Products include an age benefit, survivor’s benefit, withdrawal benefit, invalidity benefit and an emigration benefit. The scheme is however limited to the formal sector and covers employees who work in firms employing a minimum of five (5) workers. The scheme does not reach people who work in the informal sector, including small holder farmers.

These include: the Public Service Pension Scheme (PSPS)⁵, public works programmes⁶ (mostly embedded in the Northern Uganda National Social Action Fund (NUSAF) phase 3; Disaster Risk Financing (DRF) especially provided in Karamoja during the dry season; direct income support's social assistance grant for empowerment (SAGE)⁷ provided to elderly persons and more). These form the second arm of the NSSP (2015) policy i.e. social assistance. Other ongoing initiatives that address life cycle vulnerabilities such as unemployment, women, youth, disabled and pregnant women include: Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP), Youth Venture Capital fund (YVCF), Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP)⁸, Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE), and maternity benefits for women in formal employment in the form of 60 days of paid maternity leave.

Informal schemes continue to exist, especially those of a traditional nature. These support systems are valuable and beneficial social protection mechanisms since they define personal and collective identity. These include family and clan support systems, local credit and savings groups, mutual assistance schemes and burial groups (Figure 1). They offer support to vulnerable persons that is immediate, more effective, and culturally familiar. Whereas these initiatives are on the decline, the few that still exist continue to provide support to vulnerable groups. However, these cover a small proportion of the population, leaving the majority without access to any form of social protection services. Worse still, the support received by community members through these initiatives is inadequate hence requiring government intervention to strengthen them.

Social Care and Support Services is one component of social protection that is under addressed in Uganda to date. In the past, social care and support in Uganda was based on

⁵ **The Public Service Pension Scheme (PSPS):** This is currently a non-contributory, defined as pay-as-you-go retirement benefit scheme financed directly by tax revenues from the Consolidated Fund. The benefits include a lump sum amount given upon retirement and a monthly pension based on the last pensionable salary of the civil servant.

⁶ **Public Works Programmes:** The government is implementing a number of programmes with public works components particularly in Northern Uganda. These include the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund, the Karamoja Livelihoods Improvement Programme, Community-Driven Development Programme and Agricultural Livelihoods Recovery Programme. The objectives of the public works include creation of community assets, provision of food items to households affected by famine and transfer of cash to poor households with labour capacity. As of 2012, these programmes have benefited about 500,000 people.

⁷ **The Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE):** This programme provides regular, predictable income support to older persons and vulnerable households under the Senior Citizens Grant (SCG) and the Vulnerable Family Grant (VFG) components. In 2018, 150,000 Ugandans received the benefit but their impact spilled over to between 600,000 and 700,000 secondary beneficiaries who are mainly children. However, since it is still on small scale, it leaves out other vulnerable groups and older persons in other districts that the programme has not yet **not yet been extended to**.

⁸ **Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP):** This government initiative aims at improving women's access to financial services; equip them with the skills for enterprise growth, value addition and marketing of their products and services. The women are availed with interest-free revolving credit to initiate or strengthen their enterprises countrywide. This programme started in October 2016 and it's meant to benefit women from the 18-65 years.

traditional social networks, particularly the family and the community. However, over time these networks have been strained by HIV and AIDS, conflicts, rural-urban migration and poverty, among others. This has compelled government and civil society organizations to play an increasing role in providing social care services. Existing formal social care and support services include resettlement of abandoned and street children, care and protection of children in conflict with the law, institutional support to vulnerable children, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and older persons, care and support to gender-based violence victims/survivors, community-based rehabilitation for PWDs, community-based care and support for older persons (MoGLSD, 2015).

In sum, given the current social protection initiatives in place, and the risks outlined in this section, it can be said that indeed some social protection measures have addressed the risks postulated. Nonetheless, the burgeoning risks in relation to the social protection initiatives still remain of concern. Implementing a diverse mix of programmes still have to be implemented to address such risks. The need to bring back the vulnerable children's grant is one example of initiative that can address risks pertaining to orphan hood etc.

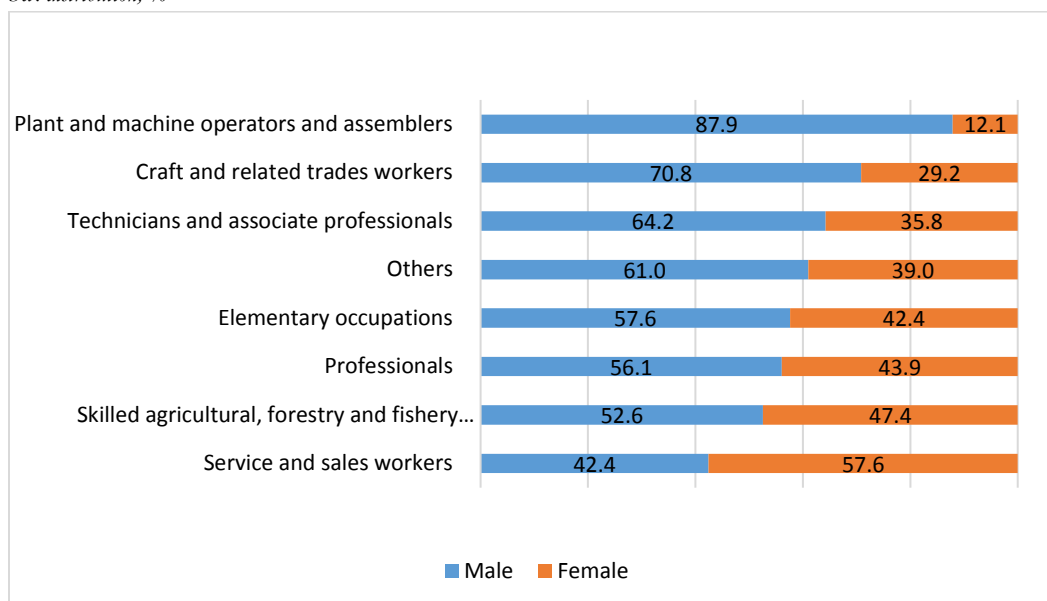
3. Gender disparities in employment and implications for social protection

Given that Uganda's laws (Employment Act 2006, National Social Protection Policy 2015, and National Employment Policy 2011) that directly oversee implementation social protection can be applied more for those in formal employment, its critical to understand the dynamics therein. We do this by discussing areas of occupation, agreement types, rights to social security, maternity leave and their implications by sex. In addition, we take the discussion further to include persons in informal employment and what the current social protection modalities mean for them.

Uganda's formal employment sector has remained stagnant for some time. Less than 8 percent of the working age population (14-64 years) are engaged in formal employment (UBOS, 2017). This has observable gender disparities which favour men more especially in higher income occupations (Figure 2). Higher income has implications on social wellbeing, decision making and higher demand for social rights presented in laws and policies. As Figure 2 shows, women in formal employment are often found in lower paying occupations of the formal employment pyramid (services and sales workers, skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers)). In addition, the share of persons employed in occupations requiring high qualifications like professional occupations and technicians and associate professionals also major sex distribution biases in favour of men][.

Figure 21: Occupation on main job for the working population (14-64 years) in 2016/17

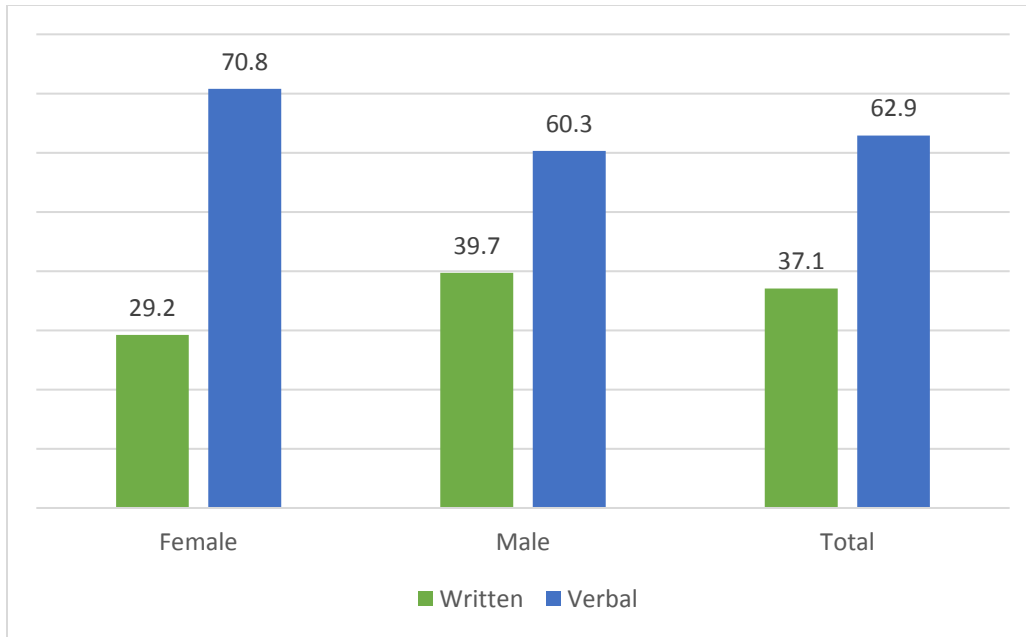
Sex distribution, %



Source: UBOS- UNHS 2016/17

With regard to contractual arrangements, using the Uganda Bureau of Statistics’ national panel surveys, about 63 percent of employees in the formal sector have verbal agreements with their employers, majority of these are female (70.8 percent)-Figure 2. While written agreements are few, about 3 in every ten formally employed women have formal agreements (contracts). This implies that many women miss out on the opportunities that formal contracts bring especially in regard to job security and enforcement of labour rights as per country laws and policies.

Figure 2: Employee employment agreement type by sex (%)

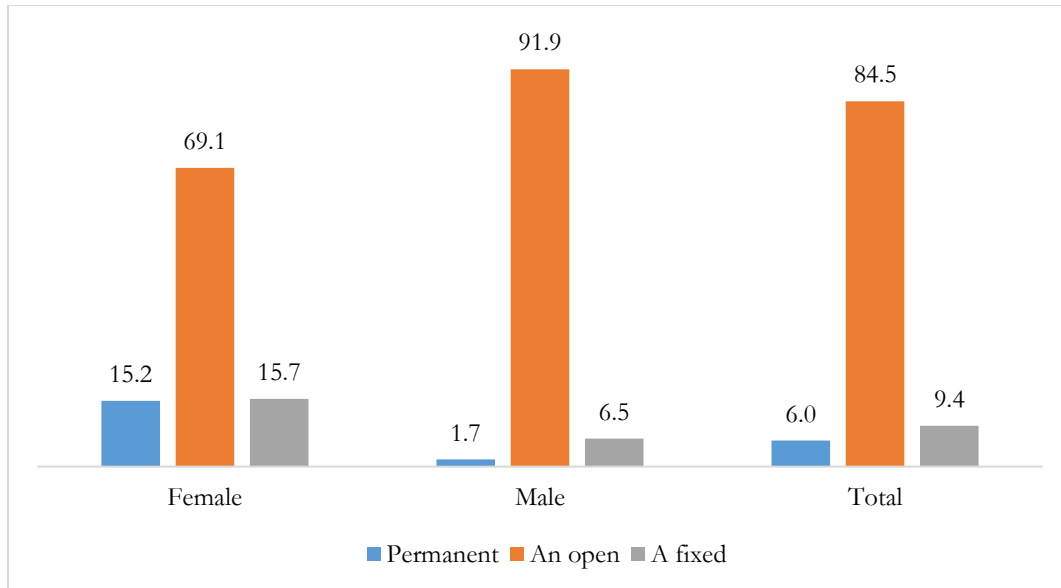


Source: Author's own computations from UNPS surveys

With regard to employee position in place of work, Figure 3 highlights that majority of persons in formal employment have open ended jobs⁹ (more males- 91.9 percent-than females- 69.1 percent) while more females seem to have permanent positions than males (15.2 percent Vs 1.7 percent). While the achievement of permanent jobs by females appears noteworthy, a number of them are low cadre low paying positions like secretaries, cleaners, etc which denies them benefits like NSSF contributions/ pensions and the like. It is also argued that open ended jobs though risky can offer lee-way for higher bargaining and exit in case of oppression.

Figure 3: Employee position in organization by sex (%)

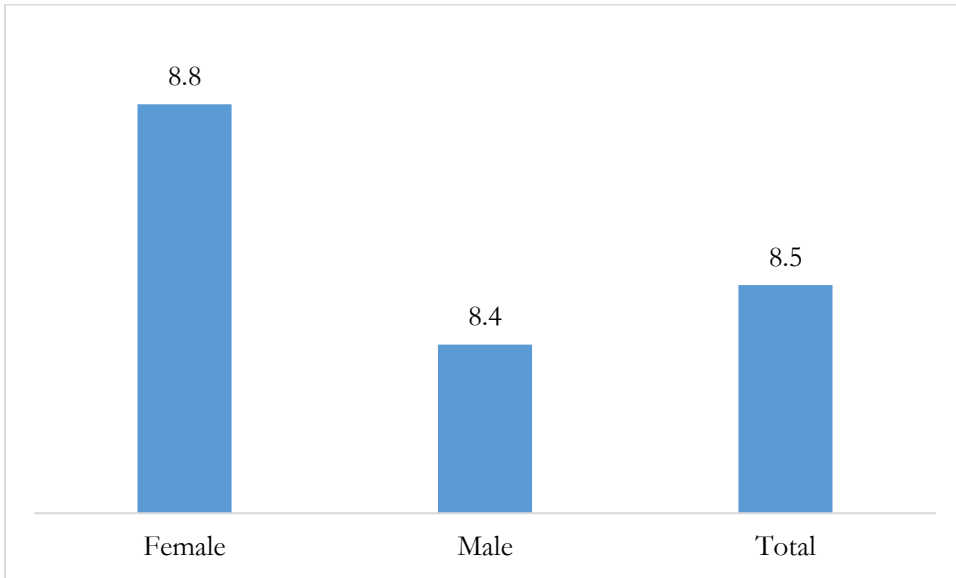
⁹ The open-ended employment contract is the normal form of employment contract between an employer and an employee, and has no fixed term. The contract may be concluded in writing or it may be the result of a verbal agreement between the employer and the employee for full-time open-ended employment contracts (unless specified otherwise by the provisions of law or branch agreements). However, the employer must inform the employee in writing of the essential points of the employment relationship: the identity of the two parties, the place of work, the position to be taken up and the pay (source: <https://www.insee.fr/en/metadonnees/definition/c1416>).



Source: Author's own computations from UNPS surveys

Figure 4 reveals that there were no significant differences between males and females in receipt of medical benefits from employers (8.4 percent and 8.8 percent respectively). This suggests that very few women are actually receiving maternity leave with full benefits from employers. Yet, according to the employment policy, maternity leave of 60 working days is a right for every woman who has just given birth. One thing for sure is that employers are hesitant to employ women of child bearing age as they are considered risky especially for private firms whose aim is to make profits. In addition, it is often argued that women in private sector do not go on leave given that their job security is at risk. Hence, we need for social protection enforcement for women at the workplace especially, in the formal private sector.

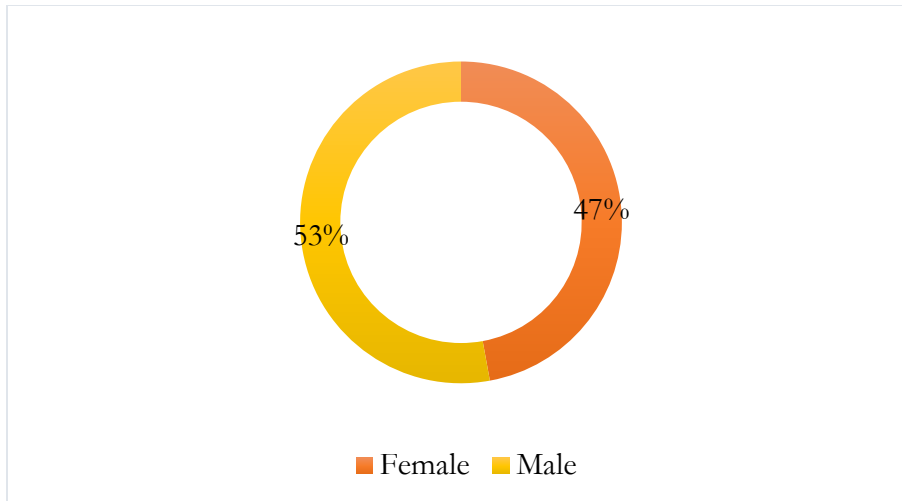
Figure 4: Share of employed persons entitled to medical benefits from employer by sex (%)



Source: Author's own computations from UNPS surveys

Social security is more for persons in formal employment where employers contribute a certain percentage based on employee's salary and position and at the same time, the employee also contributes a set percentage of their salary to social security. However, as earlier noted, while women have more permanent jobs, access to social benefits escape many as most often benefits are tied to the position a person holds. This is because majority of women are in low end jobs that attract very low NSSF contributions or pension or nothing at all depending on the contract type. In Uganda, persons in public service receive pension (non-contributory by employees) while NSSF collects social security for formal private employees. Simply put, both modalities deal with persons in formal paying jobs with written contracts that are enforceable. From Figure 5, more males than females have their employers paying social security or pension upon retirement (above 60 years of age in Uganda).

Figure 5: Share of employees whose employer contributes to any pension/retirement fund



Source: Author's own computations from UNPS surveys

From the above discussion, social protection initiatives need to be biased towards women as the gap in social security provision is in favour of males. In addition, it is vital for government to enforce social security payments for persons in vulnerable positions of formal employment especially where verbal contracts are holding. Furthermore, if passed into law, enforcement and active implementation of the minimum wage law at Ush130,000 (most likely to enforce for persons in formal employment) should take effect as a social protection tool. This will enhance livelihoods for women especially those in domestic work and in casual employment.

The political economy in enforcement of labour laws (minimum wage in particular) especially in light of full liberalization might prove cumbersome. Capabilities of Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD) need to be strengthened in order to ensure compliance. However, given that MoGLSD has only 40 labour officers, this puts into doubt the success of some of the social protection tools that are likely to ensue.

Does social protection work for the informal economy?

The need to understand the informal sector stems from the fact that the Ugandan economy is largely informal. By definition, the informal economy is the diversified set of economic activities, enterprises, jobs, and workers that are **not** regulated /monitored / taxed or protected by the state. In Uganda, informal workers make up over 90 per cent of the labour force [UNHS, 2016/17]. In the informal sector employees are **not** subject to:

- standard labour legislation-whether in law or practice (no contractual arrangements)
- income taxation

- social protection or entitlement to the employment benefits specified in a national definition

From this, the informal sector has become one in which there is low technology absorption, high rates of tax evasion and where for emphasis, workers have no, or insufficient, access to any form of social protection e.g. health care, benefits in case of injury, sickness, maternity or old age.

The contribution of the informal sector to the economy cannot be underestimated. Over 42 per cent of GDP at constant prices (UBOS, 2017) is attributed to the informal sector economic activities, and over 90 per cent of the labour force work is in the informal economy (Table 1). From Table 1, the highest level of informality is in the agricultural sector. This is observed from the high level of labour force participation in informal activities which has averaged at 78 percent for the last seven years (Table 1). Table 1 further reveals that on average more women are engaged informally in manufacturing and trade (over 80 percent on average) compared to men. However there were no significant differences between men and women in formal and informal agriculture (about 90 percent). Thus, the informal sector remains the largest employer of Uganda’s working age population which has implications on the need to reshape social protection laws to bring on board the informal sector. Currently, the informal sector is not protected by national social protection policy and laws. Participants in the informal economy are hard to find in one place as businesses and persons move from one location to another. Thus, women are at a disadvantage they are the majority hence more likely to be left out of Social protection programmes.

Table 1: Transition of employment status by industry, %

Industry	Male			Female			Total
	Formal	In-Out	Informal	Formal	In-Out	Informal	
Agriculture	2.5	7.6	90.0	2.1	8.9	89.0	100
Manufacturing	25.1	12.5	62.5	16.0	2.3	81.8	100
Construction	55.0	39.5	5.5	58.8	41.3	0.0	100
Trade	5.5	15.6	79.0	9.7	15.6	74.8	100
Transport	32.5	30.0	37.5	49.7	15.0	35.3	100
Services	54.5	24.6	20.9	59.8	21.2	19.0	100
Total	10.5	11.3	78.2	10.2	11.0	78.8	100

Source: Author’s own computations from UNPS surveys

Are there costs and barriers in accessing social protection especially for women?

The absence of social protection systems perpetrates poverty because it plays a major role in smoothing incomes and aggregate demand. This is evident especially among households that are not working. It also inhibits the protection and enhancement of human capital and human capabilities which would facilitate structural change and contribute to inclusive growth. The lack of social protection systems also worsens the income insecurity problem in many households since people are unable to cope with the financial consequences of life events. In absence of a maternity social protection scheme, the implicit costs of hiring women if maternity protection is directly financed by employers' increases. This further reduces women's access to labour markets.

Women continue to face barriers face in accessing social protection interventions due to:

- Low awareness in terms of what is in policy and practice. In addition, on-going programmes by pass many women making them lost opportunities.
- The high levels of illiteracy among women make them easy targets of unscrupulous employment in which employers take advantage.
- Low self esteem
- Culture norms that support a patriarchy society
- High participation in unpaid care work for women and girls.

4. Conclusions and policy insights

The analytical note has shown that having social protection initiatives is a means of Uganda attaining 12 of the SDGs. Care and support services remain unaddressed. For instance the Vulnerable Children Grant failed to take off and the question is why and what should have been done differently to make it effective rather than government discontinuing the programme due to it being unpopular. The unpopularity has never been explained in detail in policy spaces. Also, verbal contractual agreements still dominate the employment industry. This alludes to hidden vulnerabilities especially for women. In addition, social security contributions for formal employees are higher for men than women. This implies that there is need for sensitisation and awareness on workers' rights for social security and receipt of pay slips that clearly indicate individual and employer contributions. We also see high level of informal participation of women in agriculture, manufacturing and trade. Persons operating informally in these sectors should set up own social protection mechanisms such a MAZIMA and KACITA that directly deal with clusters with common interests/businesses. Social protection has the potential to reduce insecurity for workers and help to formalize employment contracts, thereby promoting decent work [UNESCAP, 2018]. However, we should be aware that social protection social protection initiatives are closely shaped by the existence, extent and form of a political

contract between states and citizens (Hickey, undated). In essence, countries do not have to be rich to invest in social protection [UNESCAP, 2018].

Policy implications

Government should identify new strategies to expand fiscal space for social protection and secure adequate financing of social protection systems. Also we must encourage the move away from employer liability to social insurance for maternity benefits. Similarly, it should extend social protection to workers in the informal economy in a bid to formalise and improve their working conditions. In order to ensure universal coverage of the different programmes, there is a need to review the national social protection policy to enable non-contributory and contributory schemes to ensure universal coverage. Lastly, there is need for continued political commitment beyond triggering the different programmes but also ensuring that they are sustainable and scaled up in the long run.

In addition;

- For social protection to achieve inclusive development, it must be universally provided and non-excludable (i.e. whoever is eligible based on a certain criteria must receive support). But this will require better targeting, implementation and enforcement of the laws and policies of social protection in place
- Designing of social protection programmes requires authentic biometrics (street address, social security number). Uganda is trying, as we have NIN, Tax ID, death certificate and birth certificate, however these have to be merged to ease transparency and targeting of persons receiving support.
- High population affects quality of social protection interventions especially amidst a constrained resource envelope. For instance, national health insurance coverage will tackle access, but issues of quality and sustainability are likely to feature (Patient doctor ratios) if implemented.
- Probably the informal contributory mechanisms are working and we can learn from these, however, their refusal to formalize alludes to loss of trust in government structures
- Political economy plays key role in successful social protection initiatives (transparency is needed in government with clear accountability lines)
- Power relations between different policy tendencies, 'finance' and 'civil society' are very important. Social welfare ministries provide a natural home but SP requires the political backing of key ministries (e.g. finance, planning).

- Targeted programmes may be politically sustainable. Can endure and be expanded, even during economic decline, while more universal programmes can be placed under political pressure on cost grounds.

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