



Investigating the effects of Gender Inclusion on Family in Uganda

CENTER OF FAITH FAMILY AND JUSTICE

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Executive Summary

In Uganda, women have always been busy on the work scene. In addition to childcare and home care, it has always been the responsibility of wives and mothers to grow the food that their families live on. They have also always participated in trade; in barter trade exchanging parts of their harvest with foodstuffs that they did not grow. It is the women who still pass down knowledge from one generation to the next through oral tradition. Additionally, women were always herbalists, with this medicinal knowledge passed on from one generation onto the next. In this sense, women have fed, educated and healed their children and families for generations. In all this, however, women worked from home.

Modern trends have seen the transition of workplaces from informal home settings to formal office settings. This has taken away many mothers from their homes, allowing children to be raised with the help of relatives and domestic workers. This brief analyses the effects this transition has made on the family. It encourages both families and the government to keep their eye on the prize: *nurturing wholesome families*.



Introduction

For centuries, the place of the African woman was in the home, caring for and nurturing her children, fetching water, fetching firewood tending to her gardens to provide food for her family. In some Ugandan societies, it is the women who also built their homes and fully provided for their family needs.

In Uganda's case, it may not be the case that women are working more now. Instead what has happened to the women over the decades is a gradual shift from subsistence farming (heavy manual labour), to informal and formal work. Shifting from working at home to working away from home.

Definitions

Gender Inclusion: Mainstreaming of gender perspectives in policy formulation (UNESCO n.d.).

Formal work: Work characterized by a contractual agreement, security, health benefits, pays more because requires formal education (Quain 2018)

Informal work: Work characterized by no contract/agreement, insecure, no benefits, pays less, formal education rarely required (Quain 2018)

The Government of Uganda (GoU) made significant strides by putting in place gender inclusive policies, especially for education—urging the girl child to go to school, at work—encouraging more participation of women in the work place and on the business scene, and politically—creating a 'Women Member of Parliament' position to ensure each women are sufficiently represented in Parliament.

To-date, the GoU continues championing the empowerment of women. And the outcome of these efforts can be clearly seen in every sphere.

In the Parliament of Uganda, women enjoy ample representation with every district in Uganda having a woman MP (Parliament 2018).

Women now constitute majority of the informal workforce in Uganda. Markets, restaurants, salons, retail shops, agriculture, services and care industries are widely dominated by women (Mugoda et al. 2020). Majority of these women are either secondary school dropouts who found it very hard to find formal work, or primary school dropout whose skills limit them to the informal work sector.

In schools, the enrolment of the girl child in Uganda continues to increase (UNESCO n.d.), this shows the effectiveness of drives by the Government of Uganda to school the girl child. Drives like providing girls with scholarships at lower cut-off points than boys, providing young girls with sanitary towels to make their school experience smoother and campaigning against teenage pregnancies. These initiatives have resulted in an increased enrolment of girls in school and a higher retention of these girls, reducing the rate of school dropouts and increasing the number of females who complete their education.

The higher academic achievements of women mean they are then able to occupy space in the formal working world. The number of women in the formal workplace and in politics continues to rise.

And with the women busy at work, the family dynamics, which for decades were dependent on the woman who 'runs the home' have faced sweeping changes, even for the African woman! And such changes that continue sweeping through this fast-changing world in the name of modernization are in many ways irreversible.

Effects of gender inclusion on family dynamics

The effect of gender inclusivity on family dynamics are far-reaching, with ripple effects affecting many aspects of life, apart from family itself

With women increasingly more involved in work outside the home, women are less available in the home. This has brought into play a different dynamic, the rise of domestic workers in the home. Because women leave their homes to go to work, they must leave their young children with a caretaker. These caretakers are usually young adult girls and boys who dropped out of school but have not yet fully transitioned into better forms of informal work.

With mothers more involved in the workplace, *children now spend less time with their mothers* than was the case just a few decades ago. Children in this modern era end up being significantly influenced by domestic workers and the media (television) who babysit these children the majority of the time. The effects of children spending less time with mothers vary widely and are dependent on the age of the children. In cases where children are babysat by relatives instead of mothers, the negative effects may not be as dire as with domestic workers. However, in cases of either domestic workers or relatives babysitting children, the children are exposed to increased risk of abuse, sexual assault and abandonment.

With girls now spending more time in school in academic pursuits, *the average age at first marriage continues to rise*, especially in urban areas. The traditional trend of child marriages continues to decline as parents get enlightened about the benefits of educating the girl child.

Women at work are now earning more and are thus contributing more, financially, towards family needs. Because of this, women now have more agency within the family setting. .

Women are busy on the investment scene. They are investing more in businesses and in property, something that used to be a 'man thing'.

More and more *girls are inheriting property* from their parents, something that was a no-no in this patriarchal and still-traditional society. Parents are now realizing that girls too can care for property and make a positive contribution economically.

The levels of polygamy are dropping: Although this may look more like a cultural transition, women empowerment has a significant role to play in this trend. When women are educated and financially able to take care of themselves, they are less willing to be subjected to undesirable relationship patterns. For men, without factoring in religious tendencies like the Islamic religion which allows men up to four wives, the more educated and financially able they are, the less likely they are to engage in polygamy (UBOS 2018). Thus, the level of infidelity remains high in Uganda.

Regarding role sharing, the majority of women in Uganda still carry the care burden in the home, even when both men and women are working outside the home. Many families still operate in the traditional role system, with women in charge of food preparation, child care and housework while men build the home, pay school fees and provide the groceries. The women in homes thus supervise the domestic workers to ensure that their own roles are well executed. This in turn, frees up their time for other priorities, work and childcare when at home.

Families have increased access to health care and education because the women are more empowered.

The decrease in school dropout rates could also be partly attributed to encouraging parents who see to it that children are spending longer and longer in school.

Women are also more likely to visit a health centre when any family members have ailments because they are assured of better health outcomes after medical care. This means less and less people die from home due to treatable diseases.

The combination of the alluring modernization, westernization, religion coupled with mother absenteeism from home is *slowly eroding the traditional and cultural values* in modern Ugandan families. Although Africans are typically keen about their culture, the waves of modern lifestyles leave many young people ignorant of their original traditions.

Having a working mother means that *families enjoy two sources of income* (assuming the father is also working). More income allows better standards of living for the family members. This means families with empowered women enjoy more comfort compared to if these women had not been working.

Decreased fertility levels are also a definite effect of having more women in the workplace. Because women are getting increasingly career-oriented, the number of children they can more comfortably produce has now gone down bringing the national average from 7 babies per woman for decades to a little more than 4 babies in 2020 (World Bank 2020). This decline shows that women's priorities are slowly shifting from amassing children to providing better standards of living for the children they do have. Choosing quality over quantity of children.

Divorce and separation rates remain low in Uganda. Women still hold strongly to their social values. Divorce is still viewed as an abomination in many traditional societies. Moreover, women and their children usually suffer most in cases of divorce because of lack of financial stability and so to avoid that, women often stick to their guns and ride through the tides and storms of marriage (HIIL 2020).

Increased economic development. Women significantly contribute to Uganda's GDP and tax base, and the goods and services they produce significantly impact society.

Conclusions

The Gender Inclusive policies that the GoU put in place to empower women have indeed opened many doors for women in the public sphere. The benefits of this transition seem to outweigh the costs, especially regarding economic progress.

The major cost of this transition is children being unable to enjoy as much time with their mothers—especially in the urban settings—as other children with stay-at-home mothers, but again maybe the material benefits that come with a working mother outweigh these costs.

Policy Implications

Protecting the family, is rightly the top agenda for any society because the people make the nation. The GoU is pro-family and has done what it can to preserve the strong family culture in Uganda. However, more can be done to protect the family.

Allow working mothers more maternity leave days so that their newly born children can enjoy more time with them.

Increase the paternity leave for fathers so that they can spend more time with their newly born children whenever need arises.

Provide wholesome education to both girls and boys so that they can lead highly productive lives. Educated people are better fed, are healthier and raise children who are more likely to finish school. Overall, the economy gets generally better for it.

Deal severely with cases of child defilement. Since domestic care workers are part of family life in Uganda, children must be protected from any criminal actions they may face from relatives, domestic workers, and other potential perpetrators

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