



PRESS STATEMENT

“TAKING STOCK OF UGANDA’S REVERSALS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY”

JUNE 1, 2017

As Uganda commemorates Martyrs Day and celebrates the lives of the 45 Uganda martyrs who lost their lives standing and fighting for truth, justice and human dignity and; prior to the reading of the 2017/2018 National Budget and State of the Nation Address, we the women of Uganda and Women rights activists are concerned about the reversals on women’s rights and gender equality in Uganda. We are worried about the increasing inequality that threatens to tear our society apart, increase insecurity, crime, undermine the fight against poverty and erode the gains of the women’s struggle.

1. Increasing Economic Inequality:

Since 2002, Uganda’s economy has grown by at least 6 percent annually, while GDP per capita has trebled in real terms since 1990. The country aspires to middle-income status by 2020, and has made major advances in tackling poverty. In 1992, nearly 56 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line, but by 2014 this had fallen to 19.7 percent. However, income inequality has increased significantly since the 1990s. Uganda has seen ‘growth with exclusion’, where relatively few have benefited from economic gains. The richest 10 percent of the population enjoy 35.7 percent of national income; while the poorest 10 percent claim a meagre 2.5 Percent and the poorest 20 percent have only 5.8 percent. Those at the bottom majority of who are women are on a downward poverty spiral while those at the top are on an upward trend.¹ This rising economic inequality is a major threat to national stability.

¹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/who-growing-ending-inequality-uganda>



2. Gender Inequality

Marginalization of women in all spheres of life continues across communities. Cultural norms, attitudes and practices perpetuate inequality between men and women, which is accepted as a fact by society. Women find themselves at the bottom of the development pyramid; most are employed in the agricultural sector and other low-paying sectors such as mining, teaching and the informal sector. While women constitute over 70 percent of the agricultural workforce, they own only 7-25 percent of the land and do 90% of farm work with limited control over the sale of farm produce after harvest. In waged jobs in the public sector, the average pay for women is 40 percent less than it is for men.²

Although government has increased the agriculture budget in FY2017/2018 from sh876b to sh832b, with emphasis put on irrigation, mechanisation, value-addition, distribution of farm inputs and packages for agriculture loans to farmers, women stand a high chance of missing out on the proposed agriculture loans which will be accessed through commercial banks. Majority of women do not own the land they till and lack any kind of security to enable them access and benefit from loans from commercial banks, a key requirement for accessing loans.

3. Public expenditure:

Social services and amenities are concentrated in urban areas, along with essential infrastructure such as roads and electricity yet over 85% of the population lives in rural areas with limited access to these services which negatively impacts one women's lives. Significant resources have been spent on health facilities, but they are still under-staffed and under-resourced. Nearly half of mothers deliver their babies without the assistance of a skilled attendant, resulting in high maternal mortality rates. While the 2016 Uganda

² <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/who-growing-ending-inequality-uganda>



Demographic Health Survey shows a reduction in maternal mortality from 438 to 368 deaths per 100, 000 live births, this figure is still unacceptably high.

4. Education

Although we have achieved gender parity at primary level of 50:51 boys and girls from 48 for girls in 2000, the concern is that retention and completion rates of girls in comparison to boys remains low; Drop out of girls' from school is increasing due to teenage pregnancies at 34%, poverty at 28% (FAWEU 2011); and Increasing cases of Gender Based Violence (GBV) against girls which affects girls' enrollment and completion of school. The privatization of secondary and tertiary education has been accompanied by high tuition fees, and many parents struggle to pay. Moreover, the benefits of education are limited by the lack of jobs available.

Young girls who drop out of school are forced into child marriages, placing them and their children at risk of dying in childbirth and increasing their chances of living in poverty.

5. Women's Land Rights

Agriculture contributes about 25 percent of GDP and employs around 70 percent of the workforce. The sector is dominated by smallholder farming, but land ownership is subject to a complex system of tenure, which often favours men, leaving women and children vulnerable to dispossession. Limited access, control and ownership of land by women exposes them to food insecurity and hit hardest by hunger and famine.

Land grabbing by large investors colluding with high placed government officials and arm officers is also leading to the displacement of large numbers of people. Large-scale land investments are increasing, and land grabbing is now the third most significant cause of landlessness in Uganda. Loopholes in the land laws lead to the marginalization of



vulnerable groups such as women. The Land Act of 1998 has twice been amended, but evictions remain widespread.

6. Women's Leadership and Governance

Although women now have achieved 1/3 representation in both parliament and the cabinet, there has been little progress in breaking down gender discrimination, especially at the grassroots level. Most key decisions are made, or influenced, by the executive at National level. At grassroots level, limited information, social norms and patriarchy are limiting the ability of women councilors to influence key decisions in council. Out of 117 districts, there are only 3 female LCV Chairpersons. Women who aspire for political leadership through election are affected by low literacy, lack of resources to run successful campaigns, limited political experience and cultural and traditional beliefs that still place women at home rather than in political leadership.

7. Negative Socio-cultural practices affecting women

Women carry the burden of anchoring the family, and their role as mothers and care givers is taken for granted. Women shoulder the burden of unpaid care work and spend over 14 hours of the day doing care work compared to seven hours for men. This has implications on their health, education and economic opportunities and productivity yet women's unpaid care work often remains unrecognized and undervalued by both government and society. Women also still experience female genital mutilation, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and the denial of their rights to education and employment. The 2017/2018 budget does not make any provision for GBV shelters yet the UDHS 2016 shows that at least 27% of women in Uganda experience domestic violence in any given year. Shelters are supposed to be one stop centres providing free counseling, legal services and psychosocial support to survivors of GBV.



8. Torture, Extortion by Security Agencies

Media reports and human rights watch dogs such as Human Rights Watch have published several reports pinning the police and other security agencies on torture, illegal detention, extortion and extra-judicial killings. Following the murder of Assistant Inspector of Police, Andrew Felix Kaweesi, several suspects including their wives and children were detained with no information provided to their relatives. The incidents that happened in Kasese when the army attacked the palace of the King of the Rwenzururu, Charles Wesley Mumbere left behind many widows and orphans who are now struggling to make a living. Several human rights defenders have been threatened and offices of over 8 NGOs broken into by unknown assailants. It should be noted that whenever there is conflict, it is women and children who suffer most.

Ahead of Martyrs day, reading of the national budget and state of the National address we use the occasion to demand that;

- Government must give women's right to equality high visibility and high political priority, as required in the Sustainable Development Goals, both as a stand-alone goal and one that cross cuts all other goals.
- Women should not be treated merely as one in the listing of many vulnerable groups. Women constitute half of humanity, and themselves constitute generally half or often more than half of each of these vulnerable groups.
- Women's demand for equality must not be subsumed in the important struggle against discrimination on grounds of identity. Discrimination against women is not only an identity issue but a structural issue rooted in the political, economic and cultural foundations of society.

**FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY
UNITED WOMEN CAN!**



For Further Information

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