



BY CAROL NATUKUNDA

In 2001, Olive Kigongo was greeted with stiff criticism when she decided to contest for the presidency at the Uganda National Chamber of Commerce.

The grumbles were sexist in nature. "Some people said: 'She is just a pretty face, what is she going to do?'" Kigongo remembers. "But I had made up my mind. I contested with three men and I won!"

Fifteen years later as a president, Kigongo believes that such stereotypes discourage women from aiming for greater heights.

"Girls need to be encouraged that they can make it," Kigongo says.

Things seem to be improving at a slow pace for women in corporate Uganda, yet the monster of gender bias is still alive.

Speaking during a women's dialogue at Hotel Protea in Kampala recently, Regina Bafaki, the executive director of Action For Development (ACFODE), an advocacy NGO, said only 22% of executives in decision-making positions are women and even these are facing challenges of prejudice.

The gender and culture state minister, Rukia Nakadama, admits that there is still a long way to go, even beyond corporate boardrooms.

"Women are being sabotaged. The men have not accepted that women can be at the top. They are struggling hard not to see women as inferior," Nakadama says.

She stresses that this goes on even in homes. According to the 2011 Uganda demographic health survey (UDHS), only 38% of married women participate in all three decisions pertaining to their own health care, major household purchases and visits to their family and relatives.

"When you are a full cabinet minister as a woman, you will hear something like 'how can they give her that post?' Even in a home, where the woman probably has more money, it is still a tug-of-war," she says.

Joyce Mpanga, a women's rights activist, concurs. She says while more women are educated than in the past, there is still a lot to be desired. Referring to Maureen Kyalya, the only woman in the recent presidential race, Mpanga says: "We need more Kyalyas who are confident to compete for leadership positions."

Mpanga notes, however, that women are intimidated by the income inequality gap. Several studies show that employed women and men differ in the earnings, with men being more likely to be paid for their work than women doing the same thing.

The UDHS found that a quarter of the women are not paid for the work they did (25%) compared with only a tenth of the men (12%), the study adds.

Similarly, four out of every five women in Uganda are employed in agriculture, according to the 2008 Gender and Productivity Survey (GPS) in Uganda by the Economic Policy Research Centre.

The study further notes that 42% of women in the labour force are unpaid domestic



MINISTER NAKADAMA



KIGONGO



2016 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE KYALYA

workers — receiving no income despite contributing the largest proportion of the agricultural labour.

Whereas 42% of women in Uganda are unpaid family workers, the corresponding rate for men was found to be only 16%, according to the 2008 GPS.

Furthermore, the 2008 GPS shows that in the private sector, women in Uganda receive lower pay than men on average. Paid employment offers limited opportunities to women in Uganda. Only one in 10 women in Uganda are in paid employment, according to the 2008 GPS. It gets worse. The major occupations for women in paid employment are the low-paying jobs.

Nearly 32% of women in the public sector are teachers. The second-largest source of women's employment is in the sales/retailing category. The study notes that such gaps do not only lead to reduced incomes for women, but also affects the status of women.

"The implication for the persistence of the gender pay is the risk of discouraging women from attaining higher education — if they consider that higher education attainment will not be rewarded due to gender discrimination," the report says.

Mpanga agrees: "Our elections, for instance, have become commercialised. But many

women do not have that wealth. It is difficult to compete because the men have more resources."

Both Mpanga and Nakadama note the biggest barriers are culture-related.

A lot of people, for example, believe that women are less competent than men. There is also a 'maternal bias', in which mothers are not given promotions or hired because they will give birth and go away for maternity leave.

Analysis of the GPS also showed that the presence of young children in a household negatively affects labour productivity as measured by hours worked and the effect is greatest among women.

For example, if the youngest child in the household is aged between zero to five years, this reduces the amount of hours worked per week by about 40% for women and 33% for male. And as that happens, women are gagged. They fear to talk.

"When we are growing up, women are raised to listen and not to ask question, unlike the boys. So, even when she is thrown into a leadership position, she keeps quiet about the issues affecting her because that is how she was raised," says Monica Amoding, the newly elected Kumi Woman MP.

Are we at a stalemate?

Amoding believes that there might be need

for review as far as efforts to consolidate gender parity are concerned.

The number of women in Parliament increased to 35% in 2012, from 18% in 2000, according to a 2014 gender analysis report by the Department of International Development and Irish AID.

However, Amoding feels the achievement is not enough.

"We seem to be at a stalemate. By and large, people think it is about more women on the political office. But how many of those women are elected on the general ticket? Most of them are through affirmative action. If we are saying we have 30% representation, then we need to go to 50%," Amoding says.

"Since we launched our Constitution in 1995, we need to carry out reviews to assess where were are two decades after it was promulgated and how to move forward," she says.

In Amoding's assessment, empowerment also goes beyond making men understand that gender parity is needed.

"Even educated women, who have an income, still feel that they are inferior; that it is the man to provide for them. It gets complicated," she says.

Not all hope is lost

Over the years, there have been law reforms to bridge the gender gaps.

In 1987, the Government set up the "Education Review Committee" in 1987. This review resulted in the 1991 publication of a Government White Paper on Education which outlined a major education reform programme for the next 25 years. By

Gender parity: What is Uganda's status?



FEMALE STUDENTS IN CLASS. THE ENROLMENT OF GIRLS IN SCHOOLS HAS INCREASED OVER THE YEARS

2000, the Government had developed the National Strategy for Girls' Education aimed at eradicating barriers that hindered girls from attending school. Furthermore, in 2007, the Government introduced the Gender in Education Policy, which was designed to ensure that the needs of the girl-child were met.

The major issue at stake was that there were more boys than girls in school. Today, Uganda has made 95% progress in addressing the gender gaps at the primary level. According to the Education Ministry statistics, the net enrolment for girls at primary level increased

The Adult Literacy stands at 59% for females and 75% for males.

Minister Nakadama stresses there is a strong link between educating girls and positive outcomes in their lives.

"Education gives a voice to girls and women in their communities. They are equipped with lifelong skills and in turn they also become champions of education. The power of girls' education shines through in families and society at large. Ultimately, an educated woman contributes to nation building," explains Nakadama.

an impetus for strengthening women's participation in decision making across the country.

Women's rights

According to the World Bank, Uganda is among 136 countries whose constitutions have explicit guarantees for the equality of all citizens and non-discrimination between men and women.

Uganda has also agreed to a wide range of international and regional laws and instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

"The laws are there, but it is about attitude in the minds of each one of us," says Nakadama.

Way forward

Amoding agrees and says women need to be supported from the grassroots. "For every woman, it is a process to be inspired. Her background needs to be taken care of."

Growing up, Mpanga says she was encouraged by her parents to make it in life.

"They were not rich, but they sacrificed everything they could to take me to Gayaza High School. But even in school, society had their bias against a girl going to school... Luckily, my teachers were also supportive," she recalls.

Nakadama says the ministry is working with the local government to ensure that men are sensitised and trained on gender equality.

"The community needs to know that it is okay to have no difference between a woman and a girl. That it is okay to go home and serve food. That it is okay to go to the kitchen and prepare a meal without waiting for the woman," says Nakadama.

Men also say equality does not mean that women become big-headed.

"We are failing to accept this change because an empowered woman stops listening to you," says one Phillip, 40.

Rwanda ranks higher than countries such as the US, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia when it comes to equal rights between the sexes, according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2014. Sixty-four percent of Rwanda's parliament is female.

HAS GOVT DONE ENOUGH TO ACHIEVE GENDER PARITY IN UGANDA?

➡ **More girls are now in school**

The Government has tried. A large number of girls attend school nowadays, unlike in the past, where they were meant to be prepared for marriage at an early age. The only challenge currently is getting employment after attaining a degree or diploma. It goes back to square one by competing with men.

Usita Kyampanire, Nakawa



➡ **Few girls in technical schools**

The Government has done enough, but on the side of skilling Ugandans. There are few girls pursuing certain courses in vocational schools, such as bricklaying, mechanics and metal fabrication. The Government should do more to attract girls to technical schools.

Peter Gimeyi, Jinja Road, Industrial Area



➡ **Women are not complaining**

I remember when we were admitted to universities, girls were given extra 1.5 points. The Government has put their efforts in to ensuring equality in education.

Sarah Nalwoga



➡ **Why are girls favoured?**

Girls are favoured these days. At university, they are given free extra points. Why is this the case, yet we are all equal before the creator?

Musa Galiwango



➡ **There is too much pampering**

Women emancipation has been taken to the extreme. Girls are over pampered at all educational levels. At A'level, a lot of attention is given to them including getting extra points to join university. This is too much.

Warren Nahamya

