

Policy Brief: Redistributing Care Labor to Advance Women's Entrepreneurship and Earning Potential in Uganda

By: Sarah Ray of Neema Development 2022

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

To close the gap in earning potential between men and women, the Ugandan Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development must recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid work responsibilities that disproportionately fall to women by:

1. Addressing adverse gender norms and supporting positive role models
2. Increasing availability of quality care services
3. Investing in infrastructure to reduce time women spend on unpaid work

OVERVIEW

Uganda plans to decrease poverty and improve overall quality of life across the nation by 2025, as detailed within their third National Development Plan (NDP III). For these admirable goals to be attained, female entrepreneurs must acquire the same level of productivity and earning potential as their male counterparts.

Although Ugandan women are highly entrepreneurial -- among the first in the world to achieve gender parity in business ownership-- they tend to operate smaller, less lucrative enterprises, earning 30% less on average than men.¹ According to a 2016 UN Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, for Uganda to advance in its development initiatives, an important strategy will be "to target and lift the constraints facing women entrepreneurs to enhance their earnings and close the gaps in business performance relative to men."⁸ This could go a long way in reducing national poverty levels, as increasing women's earnings to match men's would boost national wealth by 11.8%.¹⁰

This brief evidences Ugandan women's disproportionate responsibility in supplying care labor, acknowledging this as a great barrier in developing full entrepreneurial capacity. In spite of recent advances through programs like the Ugandan Women's Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP), women are prevented from taking full advantage of current and future opportunities to leverage their earning potential as a result of time diverted to unpaid work.



Caption your image here

In Uganda it is estimated that women spend 3.5 times more hours than men providing care labor.⁴ In countries where women spend twice as much time as men in caring activities, they earn only 65% of what their male counterpart earns for the same job.²

FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE PROBLEM

- The World Bank Group found in 2021 that: “women enterprise owners in Uganda use 41% fewer hours of labor, have 50% less capital, and are 37% less likely to have introduced a new product over the previous 12 months compared with men.”⁸
- The UEU reveals that even before the COVID-19 shock, Uganda had already lost an estimated USD \$61 billion due to gender inequality.¹⁰
- Ugandan women spend an average of 5–8 hours a day doing unpaid work, whereas men spend less than 2.²
- 2019 field estimate indicates that Ugandan women spend at least 3.5 times more time on care labor than men.⁴

INTRODUCTION

The Ugandan National Planning Authority launched the NDP III in 2020, aimed at moving Uganda toward a “modern, resilient, and self-sustaining economy,” while increasing household incomes by more than 50%.³

For these ambitious goals to be reached, the plan cites a need to improve productivity “for increased competitiveness and better quality of life for all” acknowledging invalid social protections, gender inequalities, and lack of appropriate skills as (some) reasons for the nation’s lower rate of human development.³

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) finds Ugandan women to be amongst the most entrepreneurial in the world, with 37% enrolled in early stage entrepreneurial activities.⁵ In spite of this, female entrepreneurs earn considerably less than Ugandan men. This broad gap in productivity and earnings is not due to men possessing superior abilities over women but “rather the gender-specific constraints women face in starting, sustaining, and growing their enterprises.”¹

Constraints such as discrimination, accepted gender norms, unequal distribution of care labor responsibilities, and less access to education, skills, networks, and financial assets.¹ These factors lead the majority of Ugandan women to operate within less-lucrative, often informal, female-concentrated sectors, furthering disparities within male/female earning potential.

In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Finance has formed UWEP and the Ugandan Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development has partnered with the World Bank to pursue the GLOW project, allotting 217 million in funding to “create an enabling environment for women’s enterprises by pairing financial and business services with productive infrastructure.”⁴

GLOW IS COMMENDED FOR ITS PLAN TO:

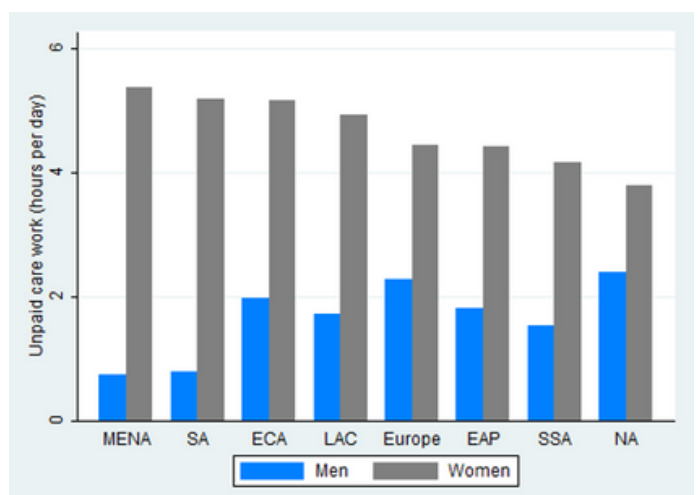
- Offer investment finance to female businesses
- Enhance technical, socio-emotional and digital skills
- Establish professional and business networks
- Coordinate greater access to markets
- Address social norms surrounding GBV
- Increase women’s access to social infrastructure⁴

As this project is implemented, many barriers should begin to lift, however in spite of GLOW’s acknowledgment of the opportunity cost women experience in the face of care labor responsibilities, the current plan lacks a robust approach in addressing the issue.

Ugandan women spend half their daylight hours caring for children/elderly/disabled, gathering water and firewood, cooking and cleaning -- unpaid hours that prevent them from growing their businesses.

Without a means to redistribute so many productive hours, Ugandan women will continue to lack the time required to access many of the initiatives GLOW proposes.

FIGURE 1: TIME SPENT ON UNPAID CARE WORK VARIES BY GENDER AND REGION²



Women in the MENA region spend disproportionately more time in unpaid care work than men in comparison to every other global region

CURRENT GAPS WITHIN GLOW PROJECT AIMS

1. Adverse gender norms restrict women's entrepreneurial capacity

Many sub-issues fall beneath the more encompassing issue of gender inequality; including adverse power dynamics that directly impact a women's entrepreneurial capacity. GLOW responds to gender-related inequalities with proposed technical fixes, such as enhancing access to digital and financial assets and expanding network opportunities.

While research indicates that these initiatives are necessary, techno-fixes provide a reactive response when a proactive one is also required. Current mindsets around socially accepted gender inequalities must be challenged if women are to obtain the necessary agency and opportunity to challenge gender norms and operate formal businesses within traditionally male-dominated sectors.

Positive role modeling is a proven method that challenges gender stereotypes. Campaigns showing men taking an active role in parenting and household management have proven helpful in shifting mindsets around adverse gender norms. According to UN Women, "starting young and working at the community level has been shown to bring about fundamental change in attitudes and behaviours around gender roles, gender violence and outcomes like girls' educational achievements."⁸ Fatherhood campaigns such as MenCare, which portray men as non-violent and equitable caregivers, utilize positive role models and social media campaigns to challenge existing social norms and promote more equitable ones across 40 nations.⁸

Women are also in need of positive role modeling. One Ugandan study found that enabling young women to witness female role models occupying elevated positions in business and politics helped girls to envision themselves in future positions of power. Increasing women's knowledge of earning potential across traditionally male-dominated industries provides the impetus needed for young women to cross over to more lucrative male-dominated sectors.⁴

Techno-fixes alone are incapable of uprooting deep-seated gender norms that inhibit the advancement of women. For change to be realized, a mindset that recognizes the value and capabilities of women must be adopted.

2. Lack of affordable facilities and qualified workers to supply care, particularly in rural areas.

In a society in which at least 30% of households are single parent households and an estimated 10% of children aged 3-5 are enrolled in early education, socially supported access to quality childcare services must be expanded, particularly in rural areas.⁶

There is a strong correlation between availability and affordability of child care facilities and women's participation in the workforce. Conversely, populations with lower incomes tend to have less capacity to purchase the care they require, regardless of being those who experience the greatest need.¹¹

While GLOW briefly mentions an intention to support communal childcare facilities, they fail to discuss whether these will reach rural communities and who will be equipped and willing to staff these centers. Another omission is a plan for elder and disability care services, a significant oversight as a 2017 WHO study finds, "there are almost no financial resources [in Uganda] and there is little implementing capacity and skills to address older persons' issues in government, civil society organizations and communities."¹²

The costs of developing rural care centers could potentially be offset by the revenues they produce, creating a sustainable economy while bolstering employment. A Turkish initiative to expand early childhood centers creates 700,000 new jobs, with 73% going to women. Initial investments are funded by a 77% growth in tax revenues resulting from the increased number of women in the workforce¹¹

A similarly robust program in Uganda that not only subsidizes and equips affordable child and elder care centers, but also creates, formalizes, and protects jobs within the care sector would simultaneously increase the number of qualified caregivers, free women to invest in their businesses, provide quality care for those in need, and stimulate local economies.

3. Lack of public sector investment in dispersed time and energy saving infrastructure.

In sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls carry 70% or more of the water necessary for households when water must be collected.¹¹ For every 33 minutes a woman spends collecting water, Ugandan men will spend an average of 6.⁹ While water gathering can be socially connecting, it is largely representative of time that could be spent in more productive activities.

Reducing the amount of unpaid work that falls to women allows them to use freed time to better pursue initiatives like UWEP and GLOW. A study in Senegal reveals that rural women spent time saved as a result of investments in water piping systems to increase their entrepreneurial activities, setting up livestock and gardening businesses to enhance their earning potential.¹¹ Similarly, when electricity was introduced in rural South Africa, the time women spent on chores reduced, leading to a 9% increase in female labor participation.²

From the 1980s, water, electricity, and sanitation have increasingly moved from public sector investments to private, leading to a disparity between urban and agrarian areas, with the lack of investment in dispersed services resulting in rural Ugandan women experiencing a greater burden of unpaid work when compared with their urban neighbors.¹¹ This intersectionality of experience could be addressed by incentivizing the public sector to expand services to poor and remote areas. Meanwhile, projects like GLOW could introduce time and energy saving technologies as enterprise models, investing in female-led businesses marketing clean cooking stoves, water gathering devices, and transportation services.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The reduction and redistribution of unpaid care labor must be at the forefront of any project that seeks to increase the capacity and earning potential of women entrepreneurs in Uganda. Investments in positive national role modeling campaigns, affordable, high-quality care facilities and providers, and time and energy saving infrastructure are critical to shifting adverse social norms while reducing and redistributing care responsibilities in families and society. Implementing the policy recommendations below will help to remove constraints to women's full participation in the economy while increasing jobs in the care sector and lowering levels of abject poverty throughout Uganda.

RECOMMENDED POLICY INCLUSIONS:

1. Recognize and mitigate adverse gender norms that restrict women's entrepreneurial capacity and earning potential by introducing positive role modeling programs in support of redistribution of unpaid work within families and to shift power dynamics that limit agency, opportunities, and valuation of women.
2. Increase quantity and quality of affordable care facilities for both children and the elderly, particularly in rural areas with subsidized care for low-income families. Initiate the formalization and training of care providers and enhance greater social protections for those working within this sector in order to increase number of care professionals while sharing the burden of care between the family and state.
3. Invest in public sector expansion of time and energy saving infrastructure, particularly electricity, running water, and transportation services to rural areas; reducing the drudgery of unpaid work and increasing the amount of time women have available to invest in entrepreneurial activities.

FURTHER READING:

- [Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment, United Nations, 2016](#)
- [Unlocking the Potential of Women Entrepreneurs in Uganda, World Bank, 2019](#)
- [Redistributing Unpaid Care and Sustaining Quality Care Services: A Prerequisite for Gender Equality, UN Women](#)
- [Generating Livelihoods and Opportunities for Women \(GLOW\) Uganda, World Bank, 2021](#)
- [Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes, OECD, 2014](#)

REFERENCES

1. Copley, A., Gokalp, B. and Kirkwood, D., 2021. *Unlocking the Potential of Women Entrepreneurs in Uganda* (No. 36220). The World Bank Group.
2. Ferrant, G., Pesando, L.M. and Nowacka, K., 2014. Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes. *Boulogne Billancourt: OECD Development Center*.
3. National Planning Authority, 2020. "Third National Development Plan" (NDPIII) 2020/21 – 2024/25: Republic of Uganda. Accessed at: http://www.npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NDPIII-Finale_Compressed.pdf, November 10, 2022.
4. Puerto Gomez, M., 2021. Concept Project Information Document (PID)-Generating Livelihoods and Opportunities for Women (GLOW) Uganda-P176747.
5. Tan, G., 2018. Mastercard index of women entrepreneurs (MIWE) 2018. *Mastercard Social Newsroom*.
6. Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2021. Uganda National Household Survey 2019/2020. Kampala, Uganda; UBOS
7. 2017. UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment Working Paper, "Driver 2 Toolkit: How to ensure legal protections and reform discriminatory laws and regulations" accessed: <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/hlp%20wee/attachments/reports-toolkits/hlp-wee-toolkit-driver-2-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5412> on November 8, 2022.
8. Level, U.S.G.S.H., 2016. Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. Leave No One Behind, 34.
9. Unicef and UNICEF, 2016. Collecting water is often a colossal waste of time for women and girls. *Press release*.
10. Walker, Richard Ancrum; Solotaroff, Jennifer; Sebudde, Rachel K.; Atamanov, Aziz; Puerto Gomez, Margarita; Willman, Alys M.; Naqvi, Fatima. Uganda Economic Update 18th Edition : *Putting Women at the Center of Uganda's Economic Revival* (English). Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099100011302141746/P1748840506ccf0da0ba0d08902edcbc883>
11. Women, U.N., 2016. Redistributing unpaid care and sustaining quality care services: A prerequisite for gender equality. *Policy brief*, (5).
12. Namara., E., 2021, Facing old age without adequate support, Global Press Journal. Available at: <https://globalpressjournal.com/africa/uganda/facing-old-age-without-adequate-support/>. (Accessed 12, December 2022).