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**WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN EAST
AFRICA WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO UGANDA**

By

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(i) *Executive Summary*

This paper seeks to explicate the discourse of women's political leadership in East Africa with specific reference to Uganda. It is premised on chronologically tracking the progress by Uganda as a country in as far as advancing women's political leadership is concerned. The author argues that governments should work towards increasing the number of women in positions of influence at national level and within other state institutions. Increasing their number, especially in positions of influence, will give an opportunity for women to provide leadership and participate in decision-making processes. Countries in the sub-Saharan region should end oppressive cultural practices, illiteracy, domestic violence and other factors preventing an increase in female political representation

The endorsement of gender equality is at the top of many international institutions' agendas following a decade of democratization in Africa. The Beijing Platform for Action 1995, later revised at the 23rd Special Session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly held in June 2000, encouraged governments to "set and encourage the use of explicit short and long-term time-bound targets or measurable goals, including where appropriate, quotas to promote progress towards gender balance, including women's equal access to and full participation on the basis of equality with men in all areas and at all levels of public life, especially in decision-making positions, in political parties and political activities."(2) International mandates calling for gender political parity include The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), The Millennium Developmental Goals (MDG's) and the UN Security Council Resolution 1324 of 2000.

Formal gender equality, manifested as female political representation at national level and within governmental institutions is not yet a reality, however. Even when equality is reached in numbers, this will not automatically translate into better lives for women citizens. This paper contends that the emphasis on representational quantity ought to be shifted to the quality of women's participation in Parliament. There is need to focus not only on increasing the number of women in government, but also on women's effectiveness in political positions and their impact on decision-making. Simply having females in the appropriate positions does not mean

that women citizens' lives are going to improve. Women in politics need to negotiate a variety of possible obstacles that may hinder the promotion of women's interests. Quantitatively equal political representation of the sexes may allude to a sense of formal equality, but women in East Africa particularly in Uganda still face many struggles on a daily basis because their needs are not adequately represented.

Statistics since 1986 when the NRM government came to power indicate a steady rise in female political participation in elective offices. Elections for women can be traced back to the establishment of the National Resistance Council (NRC) in 1989. In this election affirmative action measures for women were introduced, and 34 women were elected to "women's seats". Some women were also elected on the "regular" seats and in total women constituted 17% of the NRC (41 seats) (Tripp, 2000:39, 71). During the 6th Parliament (1996-2001) there were 39 districts in Uganda, accordingly 39 women were elected as female district MPs. When the 7th Parliament (2001-2006) was elected, Uganda had introduced 17 new districts, securing women with at least 56 seats in Parliament.

The 8th Parliament of Uganda comprised of 217 Constituency Representatives, 10 Uganda People's Defence Forces Representatives, 5 Representatives of the Youth, 5 Representatives of Persons with Disabilities, 5 Representatives of Workers, and 13 Ex-officio Members. Out of the total number of members of Parliament, 99 were women, 79 of whom were District Women representatives, 14 directly elected women parliamentarians and 6 special interest representatives. This constituted 31% of female representation in the 8th Parliament. .

From the perspective of the 9th Parliament, with the new constituencies created in 2010, Uganda's 9th Parliament comprises of 375 members with 129 (34.4%) women MPs, 34% increase from the 31% in the 8th Parliament, but is still lower than the parity target set by the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. However, the numbers of women MPs who competed with men fell from 16 in 2006 to 11 in 2011; and of the 129 women MPs, 112 represent districts as a result of affirmative action. This shows that women have not yet broken through the barriers of competing with men for a political position. While many women had hoped that this seat would be a training ground for more women to enter Parliament, those

that gain the seat find it safer to keep it than to compete with a man even after two or three terms.

Obviously, a number of opportunities in Uganda have a relatively conducive atmosphere for women political leadership. However, significant challenges still exist. Opportunities and challenges are outlined below:

(a) Opportunities

▪ *Friendly legislative framework*

This has not only provided for affirmative action in the Uganda Constitution of 1995 but also allowed women to contest for leadership positions outside affirmative action seats. The laws and policies in Uganda have provided more opportunities for women to run for elective office. There are more women in leadership. This is important for women aspiring for leadership because they already have those whom they can look up to for guidance as they aspire for elective office and when they get elected for instance Uganda's 9th Parliament is comprised of 34% women.

▪ *Gender policies (Uganda Gender Policy, 2007) that promote gender mainstreaming in all government ministries and districts local governments are making it mandatory to have women in positions of leadership.*

▪ *A More gender sensitive population that is beginning to appreciate the positive roles that women are playing in leadership. This has been enhanced by good female role models in leadership e.g. the Speaker of Uganda's 9th Parliament.*

▪ *A Young population that is more accepting to women in leadership. More than 70% of Uganda's population is made up of youth. Their attitudes towards women in leadership are more liberal than their predecessors.*

▪ *A more diverse media that is reaching more citizens and providing a platform for women leaders thereby increasing information about them and their contribution to decision making.*

▪ *More women NGOs that are conducting advocacy to demand for more female representation in politics, providing training for women aspiring candidates and those elected into political leadership. Women organizations are also conducting civic education to educate women and men about various issues including civic participation in governance.*

(b) Challenges

- *Women who aspire for political leadership through election are affected by low literacy levels, lack of resources for their campaigns, limited political experience and cultural and traditional beliefs that still place women at “home” rather than in political leadership.*
- *Reluctance by women to compete for political leadership due to economic, cultural and political environment that is at times plagued by violence.*
- *Intimidation of female voters by their spouses thereby preventing some women from listening to campaigns and voting for candidates of their choice. In addition some women are not supported by their spouses when they aspire to join politics. This discourages some qualified women from joining politics.*
- *Some women leaders in both Parliament and local councils are unable to effectively articulate the interests of women and objectively support interests that promote the common good for various reasons including low literacy levels, low capacity, limited exposure, dynamics of multiparty politics which emphasis supporting party positions regardless of whether they do not promote the interests of the electorate.*
- *Poverty affects the effective participation of citizens in governance e.g. during elections many are bribed and vote without scrutinizing the manifestoes and abilities of candidates.*
- *After elections they are more concerned about day to day survival and do not prioritize attending community meetings, trainings and dialogues on governance. This has an effect on their support for women leaders as they do not know the contribution women leaders make and remain with a biased attitude towards women in political leadership.*
- *Limited resources that have the effect of denying some women the opportunity to contest for political leadership.*
- *Limited civic education thereby denying some citizens an opportunity to gain information on different candidates, the issues they should look out for when making their decisions.*
- *Apathy towards politics. This has affected the quality of women particularly in local councils.*

- *Corruption which has affected use of public resources for personal gain and negatively impacted on women majority of whom do not have the economic resources to compete with male counterparts.*
- *While women in Parliament have used their numbers to lobby and get gender sensitive legislation passed, , the women have not used their numbers to influence resource allocation to critical areas such as maternal health, and sectors like agriculture where the majority and poorest of the population who are largely women eke a living.*

The author concludes by asserting that clear that Uganda has made tremendous progress towards gender equality over the last 20 years. The country has one of the most gender sensitive constitutions in the world, has many laws and policies in place to address gender imbalances and women's empowerment. The challenge remains at the implementation level coupled with inexplicable complexities that are inherent in the Ugandan socio-economic setting.

1. Introduction

Over the past 10 years, a number of countries in East Africa and the Great Lakes Region have undergone a process of political transition following a period of conflict. In countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), there has been a significant improvement in women's participation in decision-making following the period of conflict.

However, a number of challenges exist that need to be addressed. These include: translation of the political gains into changes in women's status at all levels of society; the issue of quantitative versus qualitative representation that clearly addresses the needs of women; legislative and policy reforms that support and promote women's advancement; maintaining the gains; role and position of women in multiparty politics; establishing effective links between women politicians and the women's movement and the contribution of women's political participation to peace building processes in the region.

This brief explores the notion of women's political leadership in East Africa with specific reference to Uganda.

2. Key factors in women's political participation

In any discussion on women leadership, it is imperative to first divulge in the factors that actually dictate their level of participation in any given society. Theorists have pointed out social, economic, political and cultural factors that significantly influence female political participation. Yoon proposes four social, economic and cultural aspects that guide women's access to political leadership. The first is access to education. Education instills interest in political matters and educated women would be more adept to seek elective office. The United Nations Development Report of 2000 (16) reports sub-Saharan Africa's female educational enrolment rates to be the lowest globally. Norris and Inglehart reiterate the power of social structure: women find it

challenging to enter elective offices because they also have to deal with issues like poor childcare, low literacy levels, inadequate health care and poverty.

The second factor that influences female political participation is their non-participation in the labour force. Women who find themselves in the formal wage labour force are more likely to enjoy more chances of political leadership. They have greater financial independence as well as higher levels of self-esteem. Technical presentation and supervisory skills are skills that women in the formal economy bring to the political realm. Jobs in such fields as law and journalism commonly provide the flexibility, financial resources, experience, and social networks that facilitate running for elected office. Women in sub-Saharan Africa are, however, frequently employed in the informal sector or involved in subsistence agricultural activities. Active women in the formal labour force are therefore in the minority. A focus on socio-economic development does not fully explain the obstacles to female political leadership, as a comparison between countries such as Canada (where more 20 percent of Parliamentarians are women), the United States (13 percent) and South Africa (30 percent) clearly illustrates. In sub-Saharan Africa, one of the world's poorest regions, 13 out of 39 states' Parliamentary seats are filled with at least 15 percent women.⁽²²⁾ In other words, some 'poor' countries currently have more women representatives in government than some 'rich' countries do.

The economic condition of a country is, however, an important factor in women's access to the political sphere. Due to the fact that women are often solely responsible for the management of households, any adverse economic fluctuations impact them directly. Preoccupation with fighting for survival negatively reduces women's interest in competing for elective office.

A final, yet significant factor to consider when deliberating women's access to political leadership is culture. Patriarchal thought in particular limits opportunities for women, especially in the political sphere where patriarchy deems subordinate and unsuitable

for positions of leadership. An egalitarian culture fosters women's involvement in electoral politics, but hierarchical culture impedes it. How favorably or unfavorably the society views women's involvement in politics depends on where its culture lies in the egalitarian-hierarchical cultural spectrum. Women experience greater obstacles toward political office in societies where traditional attitudes reign, but modernization, value changes and the fading of cultural barriers, results in younger generations of women in post-industrial societies experiencing less resistance to entering political offices.

Political or institutional variables are perhaps the most important to consider when exploring female political leadership. Yoon argues for the importance of contemplating the role of party system fragmentation, electoral systems and gender quotas. Multi-member, proportional representation electoral systems have proven to be the most encouraging towards allowing women governmental positions. This electoral system has proven to be the most successful in welcoming minority groups into Parliament. The likelihood of women to be nominated is higher in a party system with a small number of large Parliamentary parties because large parties are likely to have safe seats in which they can place female candidates. African politics, however, are characterized by fragmented and ineffective opposition parties; which makes the likelihood of women begetting official seats even more unlikely. Norris and Inglehart add a country's level of democratization as one of the most important institutional factors to consider when explaining female, political leadership. In general, the transition and consolidation of democratic societies can be expected to promote widespread political and civil liberties, including the right of women to vote and to stand for elected office.

Finally, analysts view gender quotas as the most certain way to further female political leadership. Sub-Saharan Africa uses two different types of quotas: the system of reserved seats established by national legislation (as used in Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania) and quotas voluntarily established by political parties (as seen in Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa). Some consider gender quotas as 'discrimination and a violation of the principle

of fairness', but others view them as "compensation for structural barriers that prevent fair competition". Despite the efficiency of gender quotas in ensuring political equality, quota systems are said to violate principles of fairness, competence and individualism

3. The case of Uganda

3.1 The Opportunities available for Women to effectively participate in political leadership

United Nations Report (2001) recommends institutional changes to establish gender equality in basic rights as the cornerstone of greater equality in political participation and voice. Similarly, policies and programmes that promote equality in education and access to information including legal literacy can strengthen women's urgency and their capacity to participate in the political arena.

Internationally, the legal framework CEDAW to which Uganda is a member through Article 7 (a) and (b) and strategic objective (GI) of the Beijing platform of action all geared towards effective participation of women. In Uganda, through the 1995 Constitution, Articles 32(1), 33(2), 22(3), 33(4), 33(5), 78 (1) (b) all encompass affirmative action seats for women. More so National Objectives XV and VI also encompass affirmative action which objectives led to the establishment of the equal opportunities commission. The Local Government Act 1997 through section 180 (2) (b), Article 205(2) (b) has the potential to strengthen women's participation in Local Government decision making. The Electoral Commission Act 1997 mandates the commission to organize elections and cater for women's quotas, the Political Parties and Organisation's Act 2005, the Press and Journalists Act and the Electronic Media Act prohibits negative reporting on women that stand for political posts. These laws help to enhance women's active involvement in political leadership. Women's organisations like UWONET in a bid to enhance women's participation drafted the 2006 women's manifesto and some other organizations for instance FIDA, supported women financially to participate as candidates (UWONET Report, 2007).

3.2 Securing female Parliamentary representation in Uganda

Female representation in Uganda's parliament is to a large extent secured through the separate women's elections. In the current 9th Parliament, most of the women are elected through separate women's elections. The Ugandan way of including women, by having introduced reserved seats, is very much an "add-on" procedure as the women are elected in addition to the constituency MPs who are elected on a 'first-past-the-post' basis (the representative with the majority of votes is elected). Each of the districts in Uganda elects one District Woman Representative to Parliament. Each district consists of an average of three to four counties.

Elections for women can be traced back to the establishment of the National Resistance Council (NRC) in 1989. In this election affirmative action measures for women were introduced, and 34 women were elected to "women's seats". Some women were also elected on the "regular" seats and in total women constituted 17% of the NRC (41 seats) (Tripp, 2000:39, 71). During the 6th Parliament (1996-2001) there were 39 districts in Uganda, accordingly 39 women were elected as female district MPs. When the 7th Parliament (2001-2006) was elected, Uganda had introduced 17 new districts, securing women with at least 56 seats in Parliament.

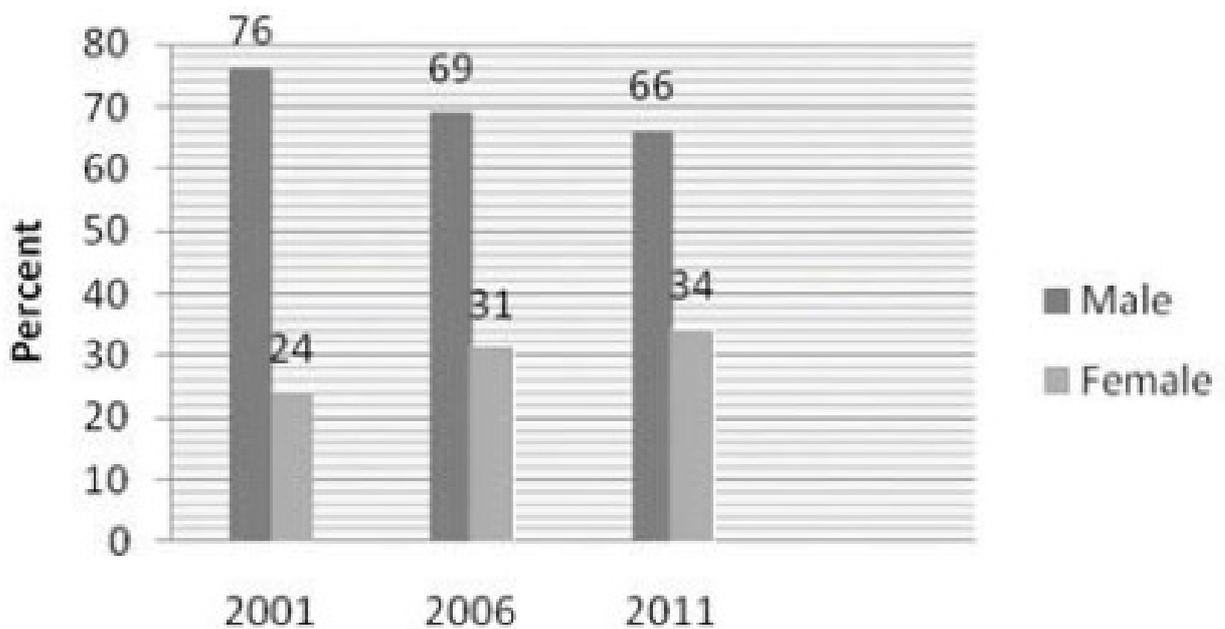
The 8th Parliament of Uganda comprised of 217 Constituency Representatives, 10 Uganda People's Defence Forces Representatives, 5 Representatives of the Youth, 5 Representatives of Persons with Disabilities, 5 Representatives of Workers, and 13 Ex-officio Members. Out of the total number of members of Parliament, 99 were women, 79 of whom were District Women representatives, 14 directly elected women parliamentarians and 6 special interest representatives. This constituted 31% of female representation in the 8th Parliament. .

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by the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. However, the numbers of women MPs who competed with men fell from 16 in 2006 to 11 in 2011; and of the 129 women MPs, 112 represent districts as a result of affirmative action. This shows that women have not yet broken through the barriers of competing with men for a political position. While many women had hoped that this seat would be a training ground for more women to enter Parliament, those that gain the seat find it safer to keep it than to compete with a man even after two or three terms.

A few other women have joined Parliament as representatives of special interest groups such as persons with disabilities 25% (1 out of 4), the army 20% (2 out 10) and the youth 25% (1 out 4)

Fig 1: Percentage of women in Uganda’s Parliament 2001-2006, 2006-2011 & 2011-2016



Source: Parliament of Uganda website: <http://www.parliament.go.ug>

Women’s strong numerical presence in Parliament has had some positive effects in Uganda. First, it has led to one of the most gender sensitive constitutions in the world in

the sense that it contains articles directly affecting women in particular. Second, together with the civil society, the women in Parliament have been important in passing legislation important for women.

3.3 Women's caucus and a gender sensitive constitution

After 1986, with the introduction of the Movement political system, and for the first time in modern history, women in Uganda have been well represented in decision making bodies , and they have been able to stand together in issues important for women, leading to Articles in the Constitution that specifically take women's rights into account. These Articles act as a strong foundation for fighting for legislation important for women.

In 1994, the Constituent Assembly (CA) was elected to draft a new Ugandan Constitution. In the CA, the women elected formed a women's caucus to better enhance the interests of women. Out of 286 delegates, 52 (18%) were women – and most of them participated in the women's caucus. (Tripp 2000:77). The women's caucus turned out to be effective and the women were able to talk with one voice and raise common objectives, turning the women's caucus into the most coherent caucus (Tripp: 2000:77, Women's Landmarks: 15). The women's caucus did not take a stand on the debate on the country's political system, since it was non-partisan. It did not establish a relationship with the multiparty caucus called The National Caucus for Democracy (Goetz, 2002:560).

The support the CA delegates got from the women's movement was important, if not decisive, in the process of fighting for the provisions in the Constitution concerning the status and participation of women in Uganda (Oloka-Onyango, 2000:11, Tamale, 1999:117). During the CA, a Gender Information Centre was created which was organized by the National Association of Women's Organisations in Uganda. The information Centre soon turned out to be an important meeting place for the electorate, delegates, as well as NGOs focusing on women (Women's Landmarks, 19). The caucus,

in co-operation with the women's movement, was effective in implementing Article 31 (on the family), Article 32 (on affirmative action) and Article 33 (on the rights of women) of the Constitution. In contrast to the two previous constitutions, the 1962 Independence Constitution and the 1967 Constitution, the 1995 Constitution has Articles which specifically take women's rights into account. Despite the fact that the Ugandan Constitution acts as a fundament basis for discussing issues important for women, it needs to be backed up by laws in order to secure women rights in every-day life. The tactic that has been used by the women's caucus, right from the CA to the present, is to lobby and get the support from gender-sensitive male members of Parliament. In controversial issues, the caucus persuades some of the male members to argue their cases, and as a result alliances are made with 'gender friendly' male colleagues.

3.4 Women in Cabinet

Uganda has a fair share of female representation at cabinet level. There is an increase in the number of women in the cabinet, from 16 (25%) in the last cabinet to 23 (28%), although it is still below the parity standard set by the African Union. Of the 30 senior ministers, only 10 (33%) are women. It must be noted that women have been appointed to head key Ministries, namely, Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Education, Health, Energy, Trade and Industry, Water and Mineral Development. Of the 32 junior ministers, 13 (29%) are women.

3.5 Women in the Local Councils

The affirmative action in the Local Government Act (1997) provides for one-third women's representation at all local council levels. While each district council is comprised of at least 30% women, regarding top leadership in districts, (Chairpersons, Speakers and Chief Administrative Officers), the numbers of women dwindle. For instance, from the general election of 2011, out of the 112 Chairpersons of districts, there are only 2 (1.7%) women, out of 112 Chief Administrative Officers, 28 only 11 (9%) are

women. One encouraging statistic is that Dokolo district, a typical post conflict rural district and one of the CEWIGO's²⁹ women's leadership development program core program areas in Northern Uganda, not only achieved 50% representation of women in the district council, but also has a woman Deputy Chairperson, a Woman District Speaker, and three women district secretaries out of five (60%). This shows that it is possible to have many more women in top political positions and that society's attitude towards women in politics is changing.

3.6 Women in Political Parties

The issue of the inclusion and active participation of women in the different political parties, however, remains problematic because there are very few women holding positions in party executive decision making organs and structures at all levels. Political party leadership in Uganda is male dominated. Although the major political parties commit to specific indices of women at each level in the structure, (NRM 30%, FDC 40%) the reality is different. The NRM for example has only 5 (25%) women out of a total of 20 members at the national executive committee (NEC), the highest organ of the party. Looking at one district of Mitooma, the district NRM structure has only 2 women out of 10 executive members. And this is because only one position is actually reserved for women and the rest have to be competed for with men. Many women do not have the confidence to compete with men for such positions. They still lack the courage to compete with men. The situation can therefore only change if there are quotas that are more equitable such as the constitution provides for Parliament and Local Councils, because political parties are the first glass ceiling that women have to break to get into political positions.

3.7 Fighting for legislation important for women

When the all-inclusive NRM finally gained power in 1986 the number of women's organisations increased for various reasons: The country stabilized, the availability of donor funds increased, as well as the retreat of a state which proved to be unable to

provide services like taking care of orphans, elderly and the sick. Especially the AIDS pandemic has placed new burdens on women, as it has always been women's responsibility to care for children and sick people in a community. But, perhaps more importantly, the NRM government's language on the empowerment of women has encouraged many women to become members of NGOs (Tripp, 2000:115-122).

4. Challenges to Women's participation in leadership in Uganda

4.1 The negative cultural attitudes and beliefs

Women are perceived as possessions and known to be wives/mothers/caretakers and Uganda being one of a patriarchal society, men are dominant in decision making. Women who strive to take part in leadership are ridiculed as wanting to be "men", money minded, ambitious, immoral and unruly; women are shy, lack confidence and have a low self-esteem. Men do not allow their wives to attend meetings as they fear that women are being lured into relationships with other male leaders.

4.2 Women's workload at home

The other aspect which affects women's political empowerment is the triple workload which women carry and particularly the unpaid care services. The workload can have some negative impact on women's horizontal mobility if it impacts the time they have to invest on political activism or even time to relax.

4.3 Low Levels of Education

The literacy level of aspiring women political leaders affects their capacity to comprehend and engage in technical processes which the government engages in. In spite of good government policies to promote education for all and UPE and USE, a good number of women of leadership age are still of low education.

4.4 Inadequate Resources

Women do not have ownership of productive resources e.g. land and property. In a bid to meet the household responsibilities, women are engaged in food supply with agricultural labor, informal employment and all these are characterized by high workload and unpaid Labour. This leaves them with no funds and time for politics or any other leadership position.

Most women leaders in Uganda lack negotiation and lobbying skills. This undermines their capacity to compete favorably with their male counter parts. They lack confidence.

4.5 Women's biological roles and responsibilities

Some men feel that women may not serve well when they are engaged in child bearing. As a result of their domestic roles, some women leaders always find it hard to keep time or hit deadlines at the work places and this results in poor participation in the decision making process. Girls therefore cannot hold positions of leadership in a community because they sooner or later get married and go to another community, so they are not elected to leadership positions.

4.6 Low levels of political influence

While women in Parliament have used their numbers to lobby and get gender sensitive legislation passed, the women have not used their numbers to influence resource allocation to critical areas such as maternal health, and sectors like agriculture where the majority and poorest of the population who are largely women eke a living.

5. Conclusion

Uganda has made tremendous progress towards gender equality over the last 20 years. The country has one of the most gender sensitive constitutions in the world, has many laws and policies in place to address gender imbalances and women's empowerment. The challenge remains at the implementation level. Because many government

bureaucrats do not really appreciate gender issues, planners do not adequately provide for interventions that specifically address women's needs in sector policies, in sector plans and budgets. The result is that the well-meaning laws and policies largely remain on paper. Government priorities for post-conflict areas continue to focus on physical infrastructure even as the dignity and bodily integrity of the woman continues to be violated. As such, government continues to focus on physical infrastructure such as building of schools while the school drop-out rate for girls continues to rise in post-conflict areas. Uganda has also made great strides in ensuring women's participation in leadership and decision making. The provision of a woman MP for each district, and for 30% women's representation in Local councils has brought many women into positions of leadership, the hitherto invisible have become very visible, and as a result society is gradually accepting the inevitable; that women make as good leaders as men.

While affirmative action both at the level of parliament and local government has increased numbers to a critical mass of women, the expected social transformation has remained elusive. In a number of cases, appointment of women to leadership positions is perceived as doing them a favor for which they should be grateful. On the other hand, women's activism for 'political space' has been more reactive than proactive. There is more emphasis on capacity development to get more women for empowerment to participate rather than supporting them to be more assertive and to reclaim what belongs to them by right.

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