

PARLIAMENT OF UGANDA



11TH PARLIAMENT

GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS

As drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world

145th IPU Assembly, Kigali, Rwanda

October 8 – 15, 2022

September, 2022

Gender equality concerns women, men, girls and boys with regard to bringing about changes in attitudes, behaviors, roles and responsibilities at home, workplace and the community. It means expanding freedoms and improving overall quality of life, without sacrificing gains for males or females (USAID 2012).

A gender-sensitive parliament is one *'whose structures, operations, methods and work respond to the needs and interests of both men and women.'* It is founded on the principle of gender equality – that is, that both men and women have an equal right to participate in its structures and processes, without discrimination and without recrimination. The sensitivity of a Parliament towards gender concerns could be observed in its effectiveness at gender mainstreaming, operational procedures and its institutional culture.

Steps taken in Uganda

Uganda has domesticated the relevant international treaties, which is central to the achievement of women's full and equal participation in all aspects of life. Enactment of laws that are gender sensitive has also promoted gender equality and makes it possible to institutionalize gender equality and the empowerment of women as the Constitution guarantees.

Through Affirmative Action policies, Uganda is among the first African countries to involve women in political decision making. Article 32 of the Constitution addresses groups marginalized for the purpose of redressing imbalances which exist against them. Affirmative action, provided for under the Constitution and the law, has made it possible for women to be

represented in Parliament in a significant number (173 women sit in Parliament out of 529 seats, representing 32.7%, and putting Uganda among the top 20 countries in terms of women's parliamentary representation).

This is attributed to the increase in the number of districts from 80 in 2006 to 135 since each district must have at least one woman MP in accordance with affirmative action policy. However, only 14 women MPs (8.1 percent) are directly elected, meaning women empowerment is still, a far cry in the politics of Uganda and a lot needs to be done, to enable equal competition between men and women for political office regardless of gender.

In addition, there has been a relative increase in the number of women occupying high-profile positions in the public sector, Cabinet, the Judiciary and the private sector. Despite this encouraging trend, women continue to suffer inequalities compared to their male counterparts. The social construction of gender roles negatively affects women's participation in decision-making processes in the public sphere.

The Parliament of Uganda's representation role has been greatly boosted by a growing number of women legislators which has consequently improved the prospects for gender-sensitive legislation for example;

- the law establishing the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in 2007 with the aim of eliminating discrimination and inequalities in society on several grounds including gender;
- The Domestic Violence Act, 2010;
- The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2010;
- The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010;

- The Children (Amendment) Act, 2015;
- The National Social Security Fund (Amendment) Act, 2022,
- The Succession (Amendment) Act, 2022 etc.

Furthermore, there have been amendments to several laws for example; the Land Act and the Mortgage Act were amended to give spouses and children a say on land transactions, especially on matrimonial property. The Penal Code Act was equally amended to provide for stronger punishment for defilement of children.

Parliament's annual function of budget scrutiny, approval and appropriation has presented another opportunity for gender mainstreaming. A major milestone was achieved with the enactment of the Public Finance Management Act, 2015 that makes it mandatory for all departments of government at presentation of their budget estimates, to carry a Certificate of Gender and Equity compliance before Parliament considers them for appropriation.

The Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) was also established to amplify the voice of women in Parliament through facilitating research, skills development, lobbying, advocacy, mentorship and peer support. This Association is open to male participation, so as to allow better appreciation of gender issues.

Additionally, Parliament facilitated the implementation of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP), through the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, to ensure its implementation across the country to support women economic empowerment.

3.0 Proposed way forward for Parliaments

a) There is need to recognize that crises affect women and men differently: hence the critical importance of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in promoting peace, preventing crises, enabling sustainable recovery and building resilience.

b) Monitor and anticipate gender biases in the access of vulnerable groups to services: Women's effective access to relief is often restricted by differences in social power, social esteem and physical mobility. Gender-specific needs and traditional work patterns have to be recognized.

c) Support positive gender-related changes that may have occurred in the labour market: The "window of opportunity" for social change after a crisis can expand non-traditional work for women and men, with long lasting positive consequences.

d) Deal away with stereotypes of portraying women, men, girls and boys: this includes paying attention to not portraying women as victims, per default and to always also identify and influence their high potential, contributions and capacities in various areas and at all levels.

e) Address gender inequalities and strengthen women's empowerment: Participation and leadership cannot be done by working with and for women only. There is need to include men and working on gender and patriarchal norms in an inclusive way is critical to achieve positive and sustainable change.

f) Viewing men's and women's roles in crises as adversarial should be avoided: there is need to communicate the benefits of women's empowerment and implement a strategy to gain men's support for such empowerment.

g) There is need to give due consideration to the inter-connectedness of conflict, environmental degradation and climate change, together with gender inequality: to ensure interventions leverage the mutually reinforcing dynamics of gender, peace and resilience.

h) Development of technology and transfer is crucial capacities for building resilience to climate change, adapting to its inevitable impact and reducing gas emissions: Sustainable solutions that take into consideration climate impacts, and new societal needs should be developed to optimize the use of energy and resources.

i) Increase the number of women in Parliament and achieve equality in participation: equality of participation can be both a catalyst for implementing gender-sensitive changes and an important outcome of successful gender-sensitive changes.

j) Strengthen gender equality legislation and policy: Parliaments can serve as a model for society by championing gender equality through the implementation of gender-sensitive strategic policies, action plans and operational and supporting policies.

k) Mainstream gender equality throughout all parliamentary work: Commitment to gender mainstreaming and creating opportunities by Parliaments to incorporate a gender dimension in all areas of work is key.

l) Encourage political parties to be champions of gender equality:

There is need to involve political parties in pursuing the legislative agenda, with respect to the achievement of gender equality.

m) Improve gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary culture:

Parliaments should serve as a model for society by upholding principles of gender sensitivity, through the provision of family friendly policies and infrastructure.