

Gender Specialists Court Government on Policy Reviews for Women Economic Empowerment

The School of Women and Gender Studies on 13th January 2023 held a symposium on Women's Economic Empowerment and Women groups in Uganda to increase awareness on the need to build evidence and a community of practice on women economic empowerment and women groups in Uganda.

The one day symposium held at the Senate Conference was intended to popularize evidence-based research approaches that support knowledge translation for relevant policy making and best practices in the field of women's economic empowerment.

The specific objectives of the symposium were to enhance the awareness of the importance of fostering Women Economic Empowerment and using innovative solutions to improve the evidence base and increase information storage and uptake.

The other was to facilitate opportunities for networking, collaboration and exchange of ideas with government and NGO leaders and experts in evidence-based practice and education on women empowerment, and to reinforce the focus on the implementation of information exchange with policy makers to increase the efficiency of evidence-based decision making.

Women Economic empowerment defined

Delivering her key note address as chief Guest, on the status of women economic empowerment the Commissioner, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development Dr. Angela Nakafeero decried that the work was still huge in terms of women achievements economically.

Recognizing the school for supporting the ministry in terms of technical capacity for gender equality and policy, Dr. Nakafeero said the ministry has banked on the schools evidence to inform the legal process and policies including the design of programmes.

Nakafeero reiterated that an economically empowered woman is one with the ability to succeed and advance economically and at the same time, with the power to make decisions and act on these economic decisions not wishful thinking but with commitment, working hard and having a vision of where she wants to be.

“It is about making investments. Yes, we earn salaries on monthly basis, but how much are we able to save, reinvest to earn the extra income in the next years? Are we making investments and creating wealth for ourselves, families and for the country and advancing the quality of life?

We are not advancing if we are investing in aspects that are not going to enable us earn an extra income tomorrow. So, we need to question ourselves what investments we are making. If u are not earning an income from your investment, that is not economic empowerment”, Nakafeero explained.

Women economic empowerment according to Dr. Nakafeero entails having skills of making more money and investments, resources required and the ability to compete in the open labour market where goods and services are being exchanged as well as having fair access to economic institutions .

Nakafeero decried the pullback attitude of women fearing to get loans from commercial banks saying, that is where government puts their money. She observed that programmes that have succeeded in putting

women into the economic arena are those curved out for women empowerment expressing the need for competition and mobilization of women to compete in order to benefit from government programmes and opportunities.

She also queried whether women can sustain the status of their needs and time after work. She called on women to start making bold investments to sustain economic benefits and gains and ensure the benefits cut across generations. Nakafeero implored participants to be wise and focus more in building asset base and not building liabilities that can be carried on across generations at an individual, group but also collectively as women of Uganda.

Indicators for women economic empowerment in Uganda

Reflecting on Indicators for evidence based policy formulation and implementation for women empowerment in Uganda, Nakafeero reported that currently, women own 31 % of land in Uganda while men hold 48%. This According to her is a celebration since at one time, women only owned 7% of the land but more can be achieved if they are proactive by transforming land ownership norms and practices.

“As you pass on your land to your sons also pass on to your daughters because they are proving to be very important in our older lives. Women have to start buying land and registering the titles in their names because if it is registered in their sons or husbands name, legally it is not your land.”

Percapita income according to the commissioner has improved over time including household income. Most of the households in Uganda on average earn shs. 460 000 with differences between women and men headed households.

The average earning wage by sex was also reported to have improved. Currently, women in Uganda are earning shs.110 000 compared to shs.222000 for men implying that where incomes are low, economic opportunities are also undermined. The unemployment rate by sex currently among women is 13.1% while for men is 5.8% so women double unemployment as compared to men.

Still, the amount of time spent by women on unpaid work is as twice as that spent by men out of the gender division of labor which is associated to social communities and this has far reaching implications for women’s economic empowerment. If all what women are doing is spent on work that is very important and giving an income, women would not be as poor as they are, Nakafeero said.

“We need to advocate for technology that can reduce the amount of time women spend as part of economic empowerment but also transforming the socialization aspects and start sharing roles and responsibilities among girls and boys especially unpaid care work.

As we celebrate the improvement incomes by women, we discovered that there is a lot of economic exploitation among rural and elite women. . According to UBOS, Women willingly give their incomes to their spouses with some factors behind. Women work so hard, negotiating for productive work but when it comes to actual benefits out of that income, most women are not enjoying the benefits”, She said adding that:

“Once you make that income, you should be able to make the decisions and have control over the income and that is economic empowerment, but not being selfish but also contributing to the betterment of homes, communities and country at large”, the commissioner advised.

Uganda has also done well in terms of financial inclusion as the difference between men and women is no longer huge.

Women economic empowerment thus require a lot of work right from the family community and national level.

Role of MDS in advancing women economic development

Nakafeero said the ministry is trying its best by:

- Domesticating international and regional commitments on women's empowerment and formulating laws and policies at the African, East African level and others.
- Running right from the constitution, the country has come up with a number of policies. As a ministry been reviewing the Uganda gender policy and women's economic empowerment has been prioritized at the level of cabinet for adoption this year.
- Played a significant role in the development of the NDP111 where women economic empowerment is prioritized.
- Thinking about reducing unpaid care work, a lot of research been put into this area, and advocacy of how to improve financial inclusion.
- Leading in community mobilization and mindset change to discuss women empowerment and investing gainfully, taking the parish model as a strategy of community mobilization.
- Promoting positive norm change and tackling persistent discrimination and negative social norms, practices and violence against women.
- Championing male engagements as allies but not competitors to get support and working with social, cultural and private sector to promote integrated support services to help women and girls advance economically.
- Designing and implementing special programs and projects for advancing women economic advancement.
- Recognized the potential and contribution of women in economic empowerment and advancement of the country.
- Implementing the Uganda women entrepreneurship program for the grassroots women starting from zero so that they can participate in the market economy.
- Many groups have been created across the country and GoU has put in over 114 bn in this program
- Implementing the youth livelihood program focusing on young people because unemployment among young people is still high. Young women have benefited at a level of 46%.
- Have a programme on social assistance grants for empowerment of older persons to grow a culture of looking after the elderly to ensure they are able to live a life of dignity.
- Have a special grant for people with disabilities' and groups are provided money to start income generating activity.
- In the Parish Development Model, 30% of the funds and services are targeting women, 30 % young people 10 % older persons and 30 % PWDs and 20 % men
- Within the digital world, the ministry is also implementing 650 million women's peak initiatives by AU aimed at ensuring women enterprises are able to operate and benefit from the digital space.
- The ministry is advancing cross cutting issues, networking partnership building for womens economic empowerment to perfect work
- Created platform where women collectives and information is put on line to inform the design of new programs generating growth opportunities for women

Representing the Principal CHUSS Dr. Eric Awich underscored the need for women economic empowerment as they constitute the majority of the world's population.

“Also when you come to Makerere University, we have seen over the years that the number of women graduates outnumber the men between 1-3% points. And to me that's a significant contribution that the University is making improve the gender landscape in this country”. Awich said

Dr. Awich however noted with concern the level of dropout among the girl child is very high with less than 30% of girls that joined in primary one sit primary 7 examinations. He also noted that women graduates still suffer under their husbands who don't allow them to practice their profession.

Dr. Awich appreciated the government of Uganda which has over the years had affirmative actions in enhancing women empowerment, recognized the leaders that have worked over the years trying to improve the gender landscape in the country and improve women empowerment as well as the founders of women gender studies which have displayed a beautiful role in enhancing women social studies.

“We really want to try as a University to try on the evidence based not only for academic purposes but also quality decision making and of course going back to the school of women and gender studies which play a key role with the different people running it, you have done a lot of work producing knowledge about women empowerment we salute you all”, he said

He reported that In the past few weeks the university had decided to acquire the UNDP gender seal to ensure that the gender landscape in the university goes in line with the new Makerere University strategic plan.

The Dean School of Women and Gender Studies Assoc. Prof. Sarah Ssali welcomed all to the school of gender studies and appreciated all the people who have made this possible adding that the meeting was to increase awareness on the need of evidence and practice on women empowerment.

“When this journey started, we were really trying to evaluate. These groups have been on for a very long time but what have they really achieved and where do we really go especially when the government is going at a much lower level and as you have heard it's about raising the importance of these groups initiatives and these strategies” The Dean said.

She reported that the school made 30 years last year and largely, it was established to help government with its main streaming agenda and that makes Makerere strictly a key partner with government and government initiatives that have shaped the kind of teaching and research and to have an impact on policy relevance.

The Dean implored participants to use this moment to tease out the evidence to question out the research team whether, what they saw is what is being seen.

Associate Prof. Grace Bantebya, also the head grants administration management support unit of Makerere University and the recently elected president Uganda National Academy of Sciences said one of the key interests of economic empowerment is evidence.

Many times, Bantebya said they would go to campaigns to raise policy issues and would be asked where the evidence was.

She said having this event focusing on evidence of economic empowerment especially women groups was so crucial and central in understanding women groups as they are the key structures.

“Women’s Savings groups offer a space where women can learn to engage better and be able to associate and improve on their wellbeing and that of their families.

Unpaid care work has made the women not involve in many activities and right now we are engaging on studies on how that burden can be shifted. So am glad we are having this that without evidence we cannot do much”. Prof. Bantebya noted.

She recognize all the partners and we are promoting evidence based research and reminded members that the university was celebrating 100years whose vision is a research led University.

The program leader Dr. Tabitha Mulyampiti described women empowerment and gender equality issues as central particularly for this symposium.

“It’s very central not only for the Government of Uganda but also globally. It’s really a topical issue across the world and am glad we are part of this meeting. I would like to extend special thanks to our partners. This symposium is as a result of collaboration between the women of gender studies in Makerere University with American institute of research. All these lie around the generous grant from bill and Melinda gates foundation”, Dr. Mulyampiti appreciated

In a special way Mulyampiti appreciated Thomas who has been the principal investigator for fulfilling his pledge to generously share ideas, mentor researchers, transfer skills from the North to the South and be able to make universities stand on their own in terms of providing reliable data that can be used to inform policy making.

“A systematic approach to building evidence of gender equality and women empowerment is a more important useful way of making the bread that policy makers need to take the nation into a transformed and justice society. Decision making in itself is a process that relies on structured and quality oriented approaches. We in universities are more convenient to provide these.”, she explained.

Dr. Mulyampiti thanked the team at the American institute of research for being the cheerleaders in trying to build evidence around women empowerment. She also recognized Care, Ministry of Finance Planning And Economic Development, the Uganda Micro Finance Regulatory Authority, partners with the Centre of systematic reviews and knowledge translation based at the College of Health sciences and Brac international for steering research on village saving groups which is still ongoing.

She equally recognized the colleagues from the school of women and gender studies and the college for the support as well as the student team that helped in organizing this event,

Mulyampiti also appreciated Dr. Stella from the Czech Republic as part of a new teammate of collaborators to engage with deeply, the Islamic university of Uganda female campus, the Principal Investigator Dreams project and other many invited guests for honoring the invitation.

Themes and panel presentations

The symposium was organized around two themes and panel presentations

Theme 1 titled: *Improving Evidence on Women's Economic Empowerment* had four panelists presenting on

- The National Policy Regulatory Program Support (NPRPs) as model for evidence-based policy development by Edton Babu, Programme Director CARE International
- Methodology on the Evaluation of Women Economic empowerment outcomes in SACCOS and Saving Groups by Assoc. Prof. Fred Matovu, School of Economics, Makerere
- The Role of the National Operation Guidelines on SGs in paving way for women's economic empowerment by Nelson Mutatiina, Directorate of Supervision, Uganda Microfinance Regulatory Authority, UMRA
- The graduating to resilience project by Derrick Nsibirwa and Innocent Cwinyai (AVSI-Uganda)

Theme 2 titled, *Measuring women economic empowerment: some new directions* had four panelists presenting on

Scoping study on the Evidence Synthesis of Women Groups in Uganda by Dr. Eve Namisango, the AfricaCentre

- The role of Evidence Consortium on Women Groups in fostering evidence-based research on WEE and SGs. Some new methodological directions, By Dr. Thomas de Hoop, Managing Economist, the American Research Institutes, **key note address 2**
- The Role of the National Policy Framework on SGs in strengthening pathways for women's economic empowerment by Prof. Isaac Nkote Nabeta, Makerere University Business School, MUBS
- Improving Evidence on Women's Economic Empowerment: the VSLA Women and Leadership Brac Methodology by Christine Nabulumba, Senior Research Associate, Brac-UG

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