

## **By Victor Ndyabagye & Joseph Oketcho Omalla, GIZ Uganda**

*“Wherever women are deprived of their rights and freedoms, wherever they are humiliated and abused, development is invariably limited,” Angela Merkel, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, at global leaders’ meeting on gender equality and women empowerment.*

Gender equality, sexual equality or equality of the genders, is the view that all sexes, including men and women, should receive equal treatment, and should not be discriminated against based on their gender. This is enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Constitutions of Nations, which seek to create equality in law and in social situations, such as in democratic activities and securing equal pay for equal work. Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same, but that their opportunities and life chances are equal. In a nut shell, Gender Equality means that women and men enjoy the same status. When you have women or men who are left out of or mistreated by their societies, those societies are less stable, less secure, certainly less democratic. Gender-based violence significantly hinders the ability of individuals to participate fully in and contribute to their families and communities – economically, politically, and socially. Gender Equality is not only the right thing to do: It’s also smart economics and vital to ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity around the world.

### **Overview of Gender Equality in Uganda**

- According to a 2007 Pew survey, 65% of respondents believed that men and women were equally capable as political leaders.
- Women in Uganda like most African countries have the same rights to vote and stand for election as men in Uganda.
- The Constitution of Uganda upholds women’s rights to have access to property other than land.
- Drafted in 2003, the Domestic Relations Bill attempted to address these issues, but failed to pass.
- Under the Marriage Act, widows have the right to inherit 15% of a deceased husband’s property; however customary law dictates that women do not have the right to inherit.
- Under Section 3 of the Employment Act (2006), women are entitled to sixty work days of paid maternity leave at 100% of wages paid for by their employer, although leave can be extended in the event of illness of the mother or child.
- Recent developments in processing land titles for customary land has left women more vulnerable and limited their access to land.
- Many forms of Violence against Women VAW, such as trafficking in women and forced prostitution are often conducted by organized criminal networks operating in Uganda and the Middle East.
- Discriminatory customary practices persist in regard to women’s land rights, despite the government’s recent adoption of a the Land Act of 2004 drafted to improve women’s access to land and grant them the right to manage their property.

## Gender Equality Issues in Uganda

1. **Domestic violence:** In Uganda women are more likely to be victimized by someone that they are intimate with, commonly called "intimate partner violence" or (IPV). Women are much more likely than men to be murdered by an intimate partner. Instances of IPV tend not to be reported to police and thus many experts believe that the true magnitude of the problem is difficult to estimate.
2. **Dowry violence:** The tradition of dowry, which is common in Uganda and the rest of Africa, is the trigger of many forms of Gender Based Violence, GBV. Bride burning is a form of violence against women in which a bride is killed at home by her husband or husband's family due to his dissatisfaction over the dowry provided by her family. Dowry death refers to the phenomenon of women and girls being killed or committing suicide due to disputes regarding dowry. After separation, the woman's family is required to pay back the dowry.
3. **Acid attack:** This is the act of pouring acid onto the body of a person with the intention of disfiguring them out of revenge. The most common types of acid used in these attacks are sulfuric, nitric, or hydrochloric acid. Promoters of these attacks pour acid on their victim's face damaging skin tissue. Acid attacks are often connected to domestic disputes, including dowry disputes, and refusal of a proposition for marriage, or of sexual advances. Women are the victims in 75-80% of cases.
4. **Forced marriage:** Marriage in which one or both of the parties are married against their will. A forced marriage is often the result of a dispute between families, where the dispute is 'resolved' by giving a female from one family to the other. The main contributors to this practice are bride price and dowry.
5. **Sexual harassment:** Sexual harassment is abusive, uninvited and unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature, typically in the work/studying place, which may include intimidation, bullying or coercion of a sexual nature, or the inappropriate promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favors. It can be verbal or physical, and it is often perpetrated by a person in a position of authority against a subordinate.
6. **Human trafficking & forced prostitution:** Human trafficking refers to the acquisition of persons by improper means such as force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them. Many Ugandan women have been recruited by employment agencies in the Middle East and South East Asia only to find themselves victims of human trafficking and forced prostitution.

### What we have done to promote Gender Equality:

1. We have participated in the US Embassy Kampala's 16 Days Campaign to prevent Gender-Based Violence in Uganda. The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign is a time to take action to end violence against women & girls from, the face of the earth. Personal testimonies collected by the UNDP highlight the role played by violence in increasing HIV infection among at-risk women, including married women, sex workers, and women who use drugs. These compelling testimonies are published one by one over a period of 16 days every year.

2. We attended the Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) Conference in partnership with the GIZ Uganda showcasing the achievements of the Gender Equality Movement over the last 30 years. FOWODE is a Women's rights national non-partisan organization established in Uganda in 1995. It promotes Gender Equality in all areas of decision making through capacity development, community empowerment, policy engagement and strategic partnerships.
3. We have attended GIZ Sponsored awareness seminars where invited guest speakers like Dr. Miria Matembe, FIDA shared their experiences with the GIZ fraternity.
4. We have followed the work of the United Nations Development Programme on Twitter @UNDP social media.
5. We have rallied friends to raise money to support a female entrepreneur with a small business in the slums of Kampala. We borrowed the idea from Catapult, a crowdfunding source for girls and women. Through a few clicks of a button Catapult connects you to hundreds of projects taking place around the world and allows you to contribute to the one(s) that you believe in.
6. **We have Tweeted for change:** #EqualityMonday dedicates one day of the week for sharing stories, facts, pictures and/or statistics connected to gender equality. The UNDP promotes many hashtags to inspire people to use their online presence for social change. Developing a set of core values that your organization adheres to and displaying them in the office for all to see is a great start.

#### **Partnerships that work**

- ✓ A shared vision with GIZ Uganda Colleagues
- ✓ Stakeholder involvement with FOWODE
- ✓ A shared vision with the US Embassy, Kampala, Uganda
- ✓ Long-term commitments on avoiding discrimination and Gender Empowerment policy by GIZ

#### **Impact of promoting Gender Equality on GIZ Employees:**

- I. **Stand up and be counted:** As a GIZ employee, I am more likely to stand up to issues like harassment, bullying and gender-based violence since it is made clear that these are not tolerated in the GIZ world.
- II. **Equal opportunities to all employees:** GIZ employees have equal and fair access to a variety of jobs, training and promotion. GIZ is able to retain loyal workers and does not have to put as much effort and money into recruitment.
- III. GIZ Policy of Gender Equality fosters a sense of team cohesion through team-building activities monthly meetings, guest speakers on the topic of gender equality. Gender Equality brings together varied perspectives, produces a more holistic analysis of the issues GIZ faces and speeds greater effort, leading to improved decision-making.

#### **Impact of promoting Gender Equality on GIZ as an organization:**

- I. **Good Reputation:** Implementing Gender Equality has significantly improved and maintained the reputation of the company around the country.

- II. **Business Growth:** Since GIZ employees are given equal opportunities, they work towards maximizing their potential, thus leading to the growth of the organization.
- III. Promoting Gender Equality in all its projects has helped GIZ, Government of Uganda and civil society dismantles prejudices between groups creating peaceful coexistence among communities.
- IV. **Integration of Women in Peace and Security Building:** Gender Equality advocacy in programmes like the Civil Peace Service makes GIZ a true partner for governance and adherence to human rights; a fundamental principle for Ugandan-German development cooperation.
- V. **Empowerment of Rural Women:** The livelihoods of rural women, which are threatened by the negative impacts of inequality, have been transformed due to the emphasis of Gender Equality in all GIZ projects. The majority of employed women in Uganda, between 75% and 80%, work in the agricultural sector as unpaid subsistence laborers, and previously were unable to acquire the documentation or collateral necessary to obtain a bank loan.
- VI. **Promoting Women's Political Participation and Leadership:** GIZ is able to see how driven each employee is and what motivates them. This proves important when selecting leaders and managing the general workforce. This approach acts as a role model for many organizations. This drives socioeconomic development in Least Developed Countries.
- VII. **Huge Talent Pool:** Building a workplace that is equally appealing for women and men provides GIZ access to the entire talent pool in Uganda and around the world. Companies with gender equality perform better.
- VIII. **Empowering Local Partners:** Promotion of Gender Equality policies by GIZ, Government of Uganda, and other International partners like USAID, DFID employing more women has improved the employment situation in Uganda both quantitatively and qualitatively enhancing productivity and sustainable economic development.

## References

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