A Joint Study by the Center for Women in Government and Civil Society, Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany and Nkumba University

Mapping the Substantive Representation of Women in the Ugandan Parliament

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this study are solely those of the study authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the U.S. Department of State.
Foreword

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This groundbreaking report studies the 8th and 9th Parliaments in Uganda and the dialectical interplay between numerical and substantive representation of women in parliament. It sheds important light on the impact of women’s representation in parliament. The report argues that “numerical representation is only one variable that can facilitate the success of a woman’s agenda, but does not, on its own, ensure this positive outcome.” Further, the report states that “studying the dynamics of the [two] Parliaments […] deepens our understanding of the forces that need to be present to propel substantive representation forward.”

This study of the Ugandan Parliament provides a critical analysis of the one-third reservation of parliamentary seats for women. Thirty-four percent of the 9th Parliament in Uganda was comprised of women, placing it 17th in the world. Despite this critical mass of women in the 9th Parliament, more gender specific bills were passed during the 8th Parliament when there were fewer women in power. One of the reasons for this shift was because while the 8th Parliament dealt with women in need of protection (victims of trafficking, domestic violence, FGM), the 9th Parliament tackled issues of marriage and divorce in which women were portrayed as equals and which often pitted the interests of women against the interests of men.

The report shows that the participation and representation of women in formal governance must be augmented by the capacity to influence policy making on behalf of other women. Political representatives must be held accountable for delivering policy outcomes. This landmark report showcases that quotas must exist side by side with other factors to have a significant impact on policy, especially gender sensitive policymaking.

The women in the Ugandan Parliament acknowledge that the affirmative action policy has allowed them to exert more influence, and their success has helped shatter stereotypes. However, the authors argue that to prevent quota systems from creating “a separate and parallel system that stigmatizes women,” it is necessary to build partnerships with women’s movements, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions and to develop training opportunities for women to run for office.

Around the world, quotas have had a profound effect on increasing the number of women in parliament. In 2011, out of the 59 countries that held elections, 17 of them had legislated quotas. While in those 17 countries women gained 27% of the seats on average, in the countries without a quota women gained 16% of the seats on average.

On paper, Uganda has made enormous strides in achieving gender equality in legislative bodies and in public service. Section 87(1)(c) of the Constitution states: (a) Out of ten representatives of the Uganda Defense Forces, at least two shall be women. (b) Out of ten representatives of workers, at least one shall be a woman. (c) Out of five representatives of workers, at least one shall be a woman. (d) Out of five representatives of persons with disabilities, at least one shall be a woman.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, the use of electoral gender quotas has changed national legislative bodies. Rwanda leads the world in women’s representation in a single or lower house of parliament, and following the 2013 election, it has 64% women in its Chamber of Deputies. More than 12 countries in the sub-Saharan African region have more than 30% women in their parliaments. Political transitions in post-conflict often led to these transformations. The adoption of new constitutions and electoral laws and the rising influence of women’s movements revitalized by the political transformations helped catalyze new quota laws to these countries.

In 2008, South Africa launched its multiparty caucus with the following aims: promoting the discussion of women’s issues in parliament; introducing a women’s perspective and focus in parliamentary activities, including the programming of debates; engaging in developmental and empowerment issues with women in political structures outside Parliament and women internationally; and considering any other matter referred by the House of Parliament within its mandate. The impact of the caucus hinges on its receptivity to women’s organizations.
Women’s increased presence in parliaments is examined in terms of descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation effects. While descriptive representation refers to the numbers and kinds of women elected, substantive representation refers to the form and content of policy making. It has been argued that although quota systems utilizing the fast track approach have proven to increase the number of women in elected positions, this has not always translated into better policies for women. Quotas are not necessarily the solution to the problem of limited policy influence. If parties and party policy are still dominated by men and society is still hostile towards powerful women, then increasing the number of women will not necessarily have the desired effect of improving women’s interests.

Research based on qualitative case studies examines the ways in which women in parliament are impacting political culture, lawmaking, and social change. One study of Tanzania found that women’s greater participation in parliament improved the culture in parliaments, helped the formation of a women’s parliamentary caucus, improved training for women members, heightened invocation of women’s interests in parliament, increased women’s contributions to parliamentary debates, and led to modest increases in women’s appointments to cabinet positions. In Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda, the increase in women’s representation in parliaments has resulted in the promulgation of new laws, in particular in the areas of gender-based violence, family law, and land rights. There has also been an increase in the use of a ‘gendered perspective’ in the legislative process and the use of a ‘gendered lens’ to analyze and monitor national budgets. In some countries, the increased presence of women in parliament had a more subtle impact: the change of people’s attitudes towards women, the creation of a trans-generational effect, and the formation of a new political culture that accepts women as political leaders.

The report begs the question whether the mere increase in the number of women in parliament has a direct correlation with substantive representation. In the final analysis, the ability of women in parliament to influence the policy agenda hinges on multiple grounds: strong civil society groups, strong women’s groups, and parliamentarians’ connections to these groups. Additionally, the use of a gender lens and informed gender perspectives among parliamentarians is as Anne Marie Goetz states: a “critical precondition for political action.”

In 1995, the Beijing Platform of Action of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women urged the international community to commit to a 33% target for women in decision making and to advance knowledge gathering on women in politics including gender disaggregated data to examine women’s engagement in decision making.

This study on the Ugandan Parliament is an important contribution to scholarship on the impact of gender quotas in parliament. The report is critical to addressing a paucity of research on the impact of women’s leadership in Uganda as well as shedding light on the broader issue of how women's leadership can have an impact on public policy and governance. Against the backdrop of the Beijing +20 and the upcoming Post-2015 Development Goals, the report provides valuable insights in defining the determinants of women’s leadership in public policy and political office. The Women in Public Service Project is proud to partner with the Center for Women in Government and Civil Society at the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy and the University at Albany and Nkumba University and hope that this report will be a catalyst to accelerating our goal of full and equal participation of women in political and public life.
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INTRODUCTION

Proponents of the critical mass theory have long argued that as the number of women in legislature increases, the opportunities for these women to form strategic coalitions and promote legislation in support of women's rights similarly increases, especially in cases when quota policies provide for reserved seats for women. In those cases, it is expected that female elected officials will feel an obligation to promote the interests of women. Substantial evidence, however, refutes these assumptions for a number of reasons (Celis, Childs, Kantola & Krook, 2008; Childs & Krook, 2009; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; and Vega & Firestone, 1995):

- Women are not monolithic. The essentialist argument that all women are similar and that they will always act and behave in support of a feminist agenda is misleading. Women's class, age, ethnic background, and party affiliation may hinder the formulation of a collective legislative agenda. Having gender consciousness, rather than just being female, is critical with respect to women's interests and in working towards feminist outcomes. Gender consciousness is the common denominator among female (and male) change agents who believe in, and desire the advancement of a woman-friendly policy agenda. Lack of such consciousness hinders the ability of elected officials (both male and female) to advance a pro-women agenda.

- Even when women have the will to advance a woman-friendly agenda, their actions do not always materialize into successful outcomes. Contextual factors within and outside the legislative chambers may hinder the behavior and actions of female change agents. The persistence of patriarchal values, absence of support networks, and lack of an enabling political, economic, and cultural climate may adversely affect the effectiveness of female change agents, and stifle their abilities to support policy issues that are of importance to them. Internal and external contexts may limit women legislators' abilities to translate priorities into policy initiatives. Rules and norms within the legislature and biases towards men's experiences and authority often paralyze attempts to include women's concerns and perspectives into policy making. Women may feel pressured by the gendered process to conform to positions taken by men and so silence their voices. An increase in the number of women legislators does not always lead to their empowerment and ability to freely express and advocate for issues of concern.

- Additionally, a rise in women's numbers may trigger a backlash and yield contradictory outcomes. While an increase in women's numbers may force male legislators to pay more attention to women's issues, it may also lead male legislators to employ a range of tactics to obstruct women's policy initiatives and keep women marginalized and outside the circles of power. It may also lead to the marginalization of women representatives in legislature by propagating a common misconception that women earned entry into the legislature based on their gender and not on their merit.

Despite these drawbacks, quotas remain the most effective tool in paving the way to substantive representation through shattering stereotypes about women's competence and abilities and challenging women's relegation to separate spheres. Constitutional mandates in Uganda have increased women's descriptive representation. The Ugandan legal framework mandates quotas to ensure balanced representation of women in its national legislature by creating a somewhat separate and parallel system of Affirmative Action. Uganda is divided into provinces. Each non-Affirmative Action Legislator represents a constituency and is called a “Constituency Representative”. Constituency Representative Seats are open to both males and females, who can contest freely. Parallel to this system is the Affirmative Action system, whereby the Affirmative Action Laws created 112 district seats reserved for “Women Representatives” who contest exclusively against other women. Upon election, Women Representatives or District Representatives (used herein interchangeably) are responsible for a district. A district consists of multiple provinces. Hence, Woman Representatives are responsible for a larger geographical district than Constituency Representatives. This means that each province has a Constituency Representative and a Woman Representative (who is also responsible for several other provinces). Finally, there are other Affirmative Action seats reserved for special interest groups including the Uganda People’s Defense Forces, Youth, People with Disabilities, and Workers. There are seats reserved for women within each of these special interest groups. Therefore, a female MP can either be a Constituency Representative, a Woman/District Representative, or a Special Interest representative.

There are a total of 133 female MPs in Uganda’s 9th Parliament (34.3%). This places Uganda 17th in the world. One-third of local government councils seats are also reserved for women. Women have thus reached a critical mass in the Ugandan Parliament. Given the lack of movement in the 9th Parliament of Uganda on critical women’s bills, there is

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1 Descriptive representation is when an elected official’s personal characteristics (i.e. gender, race, age, ability) match those of the people he/she represents. In this case, women legislators share the same gender as the women they represent.
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a sense that the increased descriptive representation of women legislators has not consistently led to a significant improvement in substantive representation. While a number of pro-women legislative acts were passed by the 8th Parliament (including the Equal Opportunity Commission Act of 2006; the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2009, the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons in 2009, and the Domestic Violence Act of 2010), this trend did not continue in the 9th Parliament whereby the Marriage & Divorce Act was “shelved.”

This study’s hypothesis is that the descriptive representation of women in Ugandan Parliament has not automatically led to substantive representation due to other factors at play. An increase in the number of women in a legislative body must be complemented by several facilitative conditions to produce desirable policy outcomes for women in society; numbers alone are unable to produce substantive representation. In other words, numerical representation is one of many variables that can facilitate the success of a woman’s agenda, but does not, on its own, ensure this positive outcome.

Research Questions

Analyzing the process and outcomes of substantive representation is critical to understanding the conditions under which substantive representation of women occurs.

The study provides a deeper understanding of the contextual factors that bolster or hinder substantive representation of women in the Ugandan legislature. The study examines the following research questions:

• What are the contextual factors under which substantive representation occurs? How, when, and why does substantive representation fail or succeed?
• Under what conditions do female legislators feel empowered to advance a women’s policy agenda?
• What are the leverage points in the Ugandan Parliament that promote the successful substantive representation of women?

To answer these questions, we have analyzed interactions between descriptive and substantive representation of women; legislative contexts; legislators’ identities, interests, behaviors and attitudes; policy-making structure and political institutions.

Study Methodology

To explore the interaction of institutional structures with female legislators’ agency, the study adapts the conceptual framework advanced by Childs & Krook (2009) to guide our empirical analysis, and used the following process:

• Created a representational profile of women and men in the Ugandan legislature. During this phase, we assessed legislative members’ demographic and personal characteristics, party affiliation, length of service, political ideology, and voting records.
• Examined legislators’ attitudes and interests, and identified their definitions of a “women-centered agenda,” what it entails, and their levels of commitment to such an agenda.
• Analyzed features of the legislative context, explored institutional norms, and assessed the extent to which legislative institutions may be gendered and how they affect the behavior and actions of legislative members.
• Mapped the policy-making process by identifying the procedures required to formulate, debate, and pass policy. This mapping exercise painted a broad portrait of the legislative process and makes it possible to track successful and unsuccessful attempts at women’s substantive representation at different points in this process.
• Assessed the impact of gender in the broader external environment, and examined gender attitudes in the broader society.
• Identified female change agents within the legislature and examined the process and outcomes of their efforts to ensure women’s substantive representation.
• Identified leverage points within the political institutional context that can be utilized to strengthen the process and outcomes of substantive representation.

Data was collected using the following methods: a survey of legislative members, review of public records, analysis of Parliament’s discourse on women-centered bills, media coverage, in-depth semi-structured interviews with female

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2 Substantive representation is defined as a member of the legislator advancing the interests of the people he/she represents. Substantive representation of women is an increased attention to women’s policy concerns by female MPs. It is a dynamic and interactive process that involves individual and collective definitions of what constitutes “women’s interests,” and of prioritizing those interests because of an obligation to represent the group to which he/she belongs.
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change agents within the legislature, and a videoconference with male and female legislators to identify actions to address challenges legislators face in trying to advance a women’s agenda. Data was collected between January 2013 and June 2014.

Fifty-eight completed surveys were returned. Eighteen semi-structured interviews were conducted. Fifteen male and female legislators participated in the videoconference held on June 20, 2014.

In addition, studying the dynamics of the 8th and 9th Parliaments in Uganda provided an opportunity for the research team to examine the interplay between the descriptive representation of women and substantive representation as process and outcome and deepen understanding of the forces that enable substantive representation to move forward.

BACKGROUND

A Parliament with Rising Access to Resources and Decreased Performance: A Paradoxical Phenomenon

Parliament members have gained tremendous power since 1989. They have consistently demanded more resources and succeeded in having complete autonomy from the executive in setting their own budget. They have consistently demanded increases in salaries, government contributions to their pension, and transportation allowances, even demanding that the government purchase four-wheel drive vehicles for each Parliament member. Such demands, which united all Parliament members across party lines, have made them beneficiaries of the highest pay structure in Uganda. They have also successfully secured higher Constituency Development Funds, as well as additional office space and other organizational resources. These demands have been negatively portrayed by the media, which characterized Parliament members as selfish, unpatriotic, and greedy (Odongtho, 2012; Kakaire, 2014).

Ironically, as personal and organizational resources of Parliament members increased, performance declined, as indicated by fewer initiatives of oversight of the executive and decreased debates and deliberations as well as absenteeism from committee meetings.

A number of factors led to such paradoxical phenomenon. A high turnover rate in Parliament created uncertainty among members (males and females) that led them to turn their attention from the work of Parliament toward self-serving efforts to secure their personal and professional future. Several members of Parliament were actively involved in pursuing further studies and personal professional development in Uganda and abroad, which in turn led to high levels of absenteeism from Parliamentary sessions (Mugerwa, 2013).

Women in the Ugandan Parliament

Article 78(1) of the Constitution of Uganda states that Parliament shall include one Woman Representative from every district. There are currently 112 Districts in Uganda. Article 8 of the Parliamentary Elections Act of 2005 stipulates the composition of the Parliament. The composition of the 9th Parliament is as follows:

There are a total of 395 MPs who have served in the 9th Parliament. There are currently 388 MPs in Parliament:

• 238 Constituency Representatives, 10 are women;
• 112 District/Women Representatives elected by all voters on a special ballot in each district (open for female candidates only);
• 10 Representatives of the Uganda People’s Defense Forces (UPDF), 2 of whom must be women;
• 5 Youth Representatives, 2 are woman (the stipulation is that 1 must be a woman);
• 5 Representatives of People with Disabilities (PWD), 2 are woman (the stipulation is 1 must be a woman);
• 5 Representatives of Workers, 2 are woman (the stipulation is 1 must be a woman);
• 13 Ex-Officio members, 3 are women.

Women currently occupy around 34% of the seats in the Ugandan Parliament. Women Representatives make up around 29% of total MPs in Parliament and 84% of all female members of Parliament. Within the Parliament, almost 8% of women are in Constituency seats. Women also have a sizable share of Cabinet, State Minister and Shadow Minister appointments. Women make up around 32% of Cabinet Minister Positions, 30% of State Minister seats and 30% of Shadow Minister Positions. Women occupy almost 30% of Parliament’s leadership. Among all MPs who currently hold a position in a Cabinet or State ministry, 23.7% are females while 76.3% are males. The leadership representation for this particular position is 10.1% females and 17.5% males, while for Shadow ministries, 29.0% are females and 64.5% are males. The average age among Woman Representative MPs (114 of them) is 39.47 (s.d. = 9.24), while the average age for constituency MPs who are female is 44.61 (s.d. = 8.36). Among the MPs with some
experience in Cabinet, State or Shadow ministry, 11.59% of females and 21.81% of males have some previous ministry experience.  

### Women in Ugandan Society

The Ugandan Constitution includes anti-discriminatory statements prohibiting customs that contradict the human rights of women. Uganda ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1989, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and the Rights of Women in Africa in 2010. In practice, however, the Human Development Index places Uganda 161st in a list of 187 countries (African Union, 2010). Uganda is also placed 116th in a list of 146 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (UN Development Programme, 2011), partly as a result of customary laws that are at odds with constitutional laws (Knoz & Millci, 2007). Theoretically, civil laws should prevail if customary laws violate constitutional provisions; yet patriarchal traditions are deeply entrenched as evident by the following:

### Economic Empowerment Issues

- Customary laws hinder women's inheritance rights (Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 2000).
- Customary laws restrict women’s access and control over their own property and resources (Knox & Millci, 2007). Although women are the primary actors in the agricultural sector, customary laws deny women rights to land. Their right to control, own and transfer ownership of land is restricted. Banking institutions require spousal consent for land transactions (USDOS, 2010).
- Seventy-five to eighty percent of women are engaged in subsistence agriculture and are limited to food production. Practices commonly discourage women from growing cash crops (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2006).
- While women are the main producers of agricultural products, the middlepersons involved in marketing and selling these products are men. Therefore, women do not receive the income they could otherwise receive. They are also constrained because they cannot engage in business negotiations, both because they have limited access to information about market trends and because of the risks of sexual harassment they would face in participating in such negotiations (FOWODE, 2011; World Bank, 2009).
- The vast majority of women work in the informal sector and have no job security. Much of their work is neither recognized nor valued (FOWODE, 2011). Women face discrimination when seeking employment in the formal economy. Women end up working in lower-paying jobs, the non-profit sector, and the public sector (USDOS, 2010; ILO, 2009).

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3 Cabinet Ministers are appointed by the President with the approval of Parliament. Ministers are selected from among members of Parliament or persons qualified to be elected members of Parliament. The total number of Cabinet Ministers do not exceed twenty-one except with the approval of Parliament. The President may, with the approval of Parliament, appoint other Ministers to assist Cabinet Ministers in the performance of their functions. Shadow ministers are members of the opposition, chosen by the Leader of the Opposition. Shadow ministers are in charge of closely examining the work of the government and individual Ministers.
• Women face difficulty in accessing loans. Microfinance programs targeting women exist, but are limited in size. A lack of information available to women about the programs and high interest rates restrict access.
• Women face a number of bureaucratic hurdles when they attempt to launch their own businesses. The lack of networks and restricted access to information about registering a business disadvantage women.
• Bride wealth customs require payment of assets to the bride’s family upon marriage, and mandate that women return these gifts when seeking divorce. The lack of access to resources to pay back the bride wealth keeps women in oppressive and undesirable relationships.

Education Issues

• Women have less access to education and lower literacy rates than men (World Economic Forum, 2011).
• The educational system reinforces gender stereotypes by representing women mainly in reproductive and domestic roles (FOWODE, 2011).
• Dropout rates for girls are higher than for boys: 42% of girls actually complete primary school vs. 55% of boys. Only 17% reach secondary school.

Human Rights Issues

Women in Uganda still suffer basic human rights violations and lack awareness on their rights (Pew Research Center, 2007).

• Polygamy is legal according to customary and Islamic laws (Struensee, 2005).
• Obtaining a divorce is difficult for women even on the grounds of adultery (USDOS, 2010).
• Although laws prohibiting violence against women have been enacted, enforcement is lacking. Domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment remain rampant and underreported. Women significantly suffer from gender-based violence. Studies indicate that sexual slavery, violence meted on women in armed conflict, wife beating, and sexual and psychological abuses are often not reported (FOWODE, 2011; Arrieff, 2009; USDOS, 2010).
• Female genital mutilation is outlawed but enforcement is lacking (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2006).
• Women with special needs are the main victims of human rights violations; they have limited access to educational tools that suit their needs, are more prone to sexual abuse, have less access to social security and protection, have much more limited access to employment and, worst of all, are stigmatized in society (FOWODE, 2011).
• Although the legal age of marriage is 18 for women, there is a widespread acceptance of underage marriages. Customary laws consistently undermine constitutional and civil laws. Even when pro-women laws are passed, there are a number of challenges that deny women the protections of these laws. Enforcement remains limited, especially in remote areas that are far away from enforcement agencies (The Independent, 2010). Law enforcement officials are often part of the problem. Women are often made to feel uncomfortable by law enforcement officials when reporting violations. Religious institutions tend to reinforce traditional and repressive gender norms that exacerbate women’s plight and preserve the status quo. Public education campaigns to educate women about their rights are limited.

POLICY PRIORITIES AND SUCCESS

To understand the extent to which women’s issues are addressed in policies, especially by female MPs, members of Parliament were asked if they were successful in advancing their policy priorities in the previous year. A total of 65.5% of respondents answered “yes,” that they were successful. There was a gender disparity in responses, with 73% of all male respondents citing success as compared to only 56% of female respondents.

When asked about the factors that contributed to the success of their policy priorities, both male and female MPs listed a range of factors, the most common of which related to parliamentary and committee procedures, including committee participation efforts, contribution and debate on the floor of Parliament, the rules and procedures of parliament, and shared interest among MPs. The second most frequently mentioned factor pertained to the availability of objective research and information. The third most frequently mentioned factor was the importance of networking and building relationships. When asked about obstacles to success, MPs attributed failure to a variety
of reasons. The most notable factors, from most mentioned to least mentioned, were (1) party inclination, self-interest, and bias, (2) bureaucratic government procedures and parliamentary process, (3) lack of resources, and (4) lack of time and difficulties with prioritizing among competing issues.

When asked which of their policy agenda priorities were most successful, 40% of respondents mentioned Education Policy; 35% noted Health Policy unrelated to gender including expanding the presence of health centers, recruiting health care personnel and improving their remuneration, and improving malaria prevention; 26% noted success in Human Rights issues including passing the Anti-Torture Act and curbing human trafficking; and 16% cited Women’s Rights issues such as the Domestic Violence Act of 2010 and gender-responsive budgeting in Parliament and at the level of local government. Finally, 10% mentioned having been successful in promoting women’s health including safe motherhood.

**THE CLIMATE WITHIN PARLIAMENT**

To understand the disparity between males and females in parliament in terms of their perceptions of their own success, it is important to understand the climate of parliament in which they operate.

**Women-Friendly and Respectful to Women**

Members of Parliament were asked about the extent to which they agreed that the climate of Parliament was respectful and women-friendly. The results showed that an overwhelming majority of both male and female MPs believed that the climate was respectful and woman-friendly. A greater percentage of males than of females strongly agreed or agreed, and a greater percentage of females responded neutrally to that statement. It is possible that male MPs felt more strongly because of their perception that it is their own responsibility to ensure that the climate is women-friendly.

In fact, some female MPs who were interviewed, when asked whether male MPs are respectful to their female counterparts, responded that male MPs respected strong females who carried themselves with dignity and self-respect.

**IN THEIR OWN VOICES**

“Women’s leadership is valued, actually more valued than even the men… people tend to put more trust in women…. they know women when they are determined to push an issue.”

“Women’s leadership is really valued… most of the committees are being led by women.”

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<th>Factors Contributing to Success</th>
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<td>Parliament and Committees Procedures</td>
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<td>Objectivity, Research, and Information</td>
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Female MPs who were interviewed believed that women’s leadership was valued and acknowledged within parliament and, in some instances, more valued than men’s leadership because women have been outperforming men. The general agreement was that once females attained leadership positions, they were respected and their contributions were appreciated. Several interviewees pointed to the fact women are heading key ministries such as the Ministries of Finance, Education and, previously, Health as a reflection that female leadership is valued.

Voicing Opinions and Positions on Equal Footing

The survey asked MPs to agree or disagree with the following statement, “I believe both men and women members engage equally in vocalizing their positions.” A majority of MPs agreed or strongly agreed (91% of males and 64% of females), and 8% of females responded that they were neutral versus 3% of males. No females disagreed, while 3% of males disagreed.

While there is still some disparity in terms of equally voicing opinions, such as the order in which MPs get to speak, in general, it is agreed that the climate in the Ugandan Parliament allows for males and females to voice their opinions equally, that there is space in Parliament and in committees to debate freely, and that parliamentary mechanisms to support equal participation have been improving.

Sense of Empowerment

The responses to the survey question asking MPs whether they felt empowered to introduce and move forward the policy priorities of their constituents were surprising. A majority, 84% of the female MPs agreed with the statement, while 12% were neutral, and 0% disagreed. Meanwhile, a smaller percentage of male MPs (76.6%) agreed, 6% were neutral, and 12.1% disagreed. Whereas the general expectation is that female MPs are less empowered than male MPs, this result could be due to a difference in how males and females define empowerment and what they use as their benchmarks. Female MPs may value smaller accomplishments more than their counterparts do or feel empowered simply by virtue of having been able to get a seat at the table. In addition, the policy priorities males and females may be trying to introduce and pass vary and some may be more difficult than others to push forward, which could reflect on how empowered an MP feels.

Equal Opportunity

When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “I feel that the Parliament’s policies, protocols, and structure allow each member an equal opportunity to influence what is placed on the legislative priorities of Parliament,” 72% of females strongly agreed or agreed,
12% were neutral, and 12% disagreed. Similarly, 66.6% of males strongly agreed or agreed, 9.1% were neutral, 15.2% disagreed, and 6.1% strongly disagreed.

Many female MPs spoke highly of Affirmative Action as a policy that has allowed them more influence. They feel that they are able to participate in any position in which they are interested, especially when designating committee chairpersons. Female MPs also noted that structures in Parliament, such as the Uganda Women’s Parliamentary Association (UWOPA), allow them to exert more influence.

Factors Contributing to a Women-Friendly Climate

1. Affirmative Action

Affirmative Action mandated by the Constitution normalizes the presence of women politicians. Several female MPs cited the importance of Affirmative Action in providing them with the ability to be influential in policymaking; “the Affirmative Action in the constitution makes us very proud in such a way that… whenever we are getting any appointments we normally ask, where is our 30% in that party? So we have the law, which is very supportive.”

2. Women’s Unity and UWOPA

UWOPA is a forum in which women MPs are able to discuss issues amongst themselves, share their experiences, and develop ideas on how to enhance female participation and effective leadership across a number of areas. It also allows the women to work to improve the gender-responsiveness and sensitivity of the legislative process and to network, mobilize resources, and disseminate information.

In their interviews, several female MPs emphasized the importance of UWOPA in bringing women MPs together to collaborate on common causes despite their differences in party ideology; “we have a strong umbrella… UWOPA; UWOPA is strong in terms of coordination and mobilization of… activities as women. It’s a link between us and the public outside and then also within here it brings us together.” The female MPs derive a sense of unity from UWOPA because when an issue arises that concerns women, they organize a workshop to discuss how to advance their perspective as a united front.

MPs also cited UWOPA’s role in providing women with the training opportunities that they need. One MP even pointed to the fact that UWOPA empowers women so much that it sometimes acts a gateway for getting appointed.

IN THEIR OWN VOICES

“It is now accepted… it is an accepted factor that women can be politicians that it is okay for women to be politicians and go to parliament… we have broken through that barrier.”

“One of the achievements is… the women’s caucus. We have our own party women's caucus led by members of the opposition ….our women’s caucus is very, very strong and very focused.”

“UWOPA has helped women and, as women, we have used this forum to air out issues.”

“We all have different interests when we come here, but what brings us together is a common women’s agenda, and when it comes to an issue of women, women rally together.”

“We agree that when it comes to issues of women, let us be one, let’s put aside our political differences.”

“We represent women, we want to see policies which can favor a woman.”

“When it comes to budgeting, women make sure that the issues have to be pushed because they concern women… The women legislators said that we cannot pass this budget, not until the budget has been questioned somehow, because the reason was that the maternity Health Bill has to be facilitated.”

“The one (bill) on water, when it came to the house, women pushed it and said no, water cannot be taxed, when you tax water, you are affecting mothers…so, I agree, when it comes to legislative policies (affecting women), women pushed for them.”
3. Speaker Kadaga

Every woman MP who was interviewed recognized the importance of having a female speaker in allowing female MPs greater opportunity to voice their opinions by making sure women were given a chance to speak on the floor of Parliament. Speaker Kadaga has also understood the issues female MPs deal with such as work-life balance and was the one who agreed on a day care center at parliament. In addition, an MP noted that her excellent performance has improved the status of female leaders and her competencies have encouraged both men and women to appreciate their own positions.

4. Women’s Performance Shatters Stereotypes

One interview revealed the fact that since the speaker and female MPs, in general, have outperformed men as leaders, this has helped reduce the likelihood that female MPs will be viewed as sexual objects. One interviewee said that stereotyping in parliament has been eliminated because female MPs have been able to prove their capacities to perform well.

5. The Female Advantage

Several MPs referenced some form of female advantage in their interviews. Some felt that women MPs were able to get more sympathy and favorable treatment because of their gender. In addition, some interviewees suggested that they have been able to appeal to gender in order to be heard. In addition, some MPs pointed the fact that constituents are more likely to approach female MPs with their problems because they perceive them to be more empathetic, passionate, and truthful and tend to speak from the heart.

IN THEIR OWN VOICES

“Having our speaker has also helped...when she thinks an issue is a very critical...she will ...push ....for an issue she believes in.”

“The speaker has played a very big part... she has pushed for more women to be leaders.”

“Kadaga as the speaker has really helped women members of Parliament and has really helped us to... build our capacities”

“Traditionally women are considered of low class, not about to lead. Interestingly when I go to Parliament, I realize that women have the same potential as men and they do very well in their legislative work.”

“The speaker has outdone all the other speakers that have been there before in terms of performance, so there is no question about our performance as leaders.”

“I think the appealing behavior and motherly dealings that a woman has makes men attracted to support (her) issues; the way (she) presents (her) cause makes you really appreciate her and sympathize.”

“The advantage we have is that sometimes we gain the favor even when you've not perfectly done your work. Sometimes people think because she's a lady, a weaker sex, so you tend to be given some bit of consideration compared to men.”
CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN MPS

Despite the fact that there was an overwhelming agreement that climate within the Ugandan Parliament is respectful of women and of their leadership, female members still face challenges that hinder their ability to effectively perform their roles as members of Parliament.

Lack of work-life balance

Female Parliament members repeatedly voiced their frustration over the “heavy luggage” they have to carry in a society where gender roles in the private sphere have not kept up with the changing roles of women in the public sphere. Women’s domestic roles have not changed and the household division of labor has remained intact, placing a burden on women.

The need to improve gender sensitivity of Parliament

Parliament as an organization remains a workplace that is traditionally structured based on the paradigm of the sole male breadwinner. The work structure, operations, and work hours overlook the realities of the lives of female Parliament members who struggle with balancing family and caregiving responsibilities, for which they are solely responsible, with their responsibilities as members of Parliament. Working conditions have not kept up with the needs of women. This hinders women’s full participation and impedes their effectiveness.

Lack of sufficient access to information and credible, timely research

Competing demands on their time places women at a disadvantage and make them less able to conduct research and engage in information gathering, networking, and advocacy to advance their policy priorities, compared to their male counterparts who do not “work the double shift.” Female Parliament members pointed out that since men are not obligated to “partition their time between family, children, constituency and office”, they have much more time to conduct research and gather the information needed to inform their work at Parliament.

Limited access to opportunities to lobby, influence and advocate

As opposed to their male counterparts, competing demands on their time and a gendered culture prohibits women from critical opportunities to formally and informally network for the purposes of lobbying, influencing, and advocating for their policy priorities. Female legislators stated that because of their difficulty in balancing work and family demands, women end up adopting the views of others, rather than doing their own independent research. Additionally, cultural constraints placed on women often exclude them for being able to participate in informal meetings after hours.

IN THEIR OWN VOICES

“Many have failed to balance their public and private lives and some female legislators have ended up in divorce or separation because of their double roles and the shift in power relations in their homes.”

“Balancing their home responsibilities with the work is a big challenge…as a mother, as a married person, and also the marginalization is still there.”

“It’s very hectic, in a way… You divide it (time) between family, constituency, and the office, Parliament; so it is quite challenging.”

“The biggest challenge for me has been managing my career vis-à-vis managing the other roles which have not changed: the role of being a mother, the role of being somebody’s wife, the role of being somebody’s sister.”

It is “a struggle for women. For you to excel in your political career here, you have to work three times harder than the men.”

“Parliament has not yet made parliament interesting and attractive for women who are mothers.”

“Parliament is a male institution, not only dominated, but it is a male structured institution even in terms of time for the work. They don’t consider that you are a mother you have to go home.”

“Female MPs in most cases retire from legislative work and head home immediately. This denies them opportunities for networking and information gathering that their male counterparts obtain from evening gatherings in bars and other social venues.”
Undue burden placed on Women Representatives

In addition to being burdened by a lack of work-life balance, Women Representatives elected through the Affirmative Action system face a profound structural problem. Women Representatives are elected from an all-female list of candidates that both men and women vote for. There is a Woman Representative for every district and multiple Constituency Representatives, one for each province. They are thus responsible for a significantly larger geographic area than their counterparts elected through the direct Non-Affirmative Action system (Constituency seats) occupied mostly by males.

A larger geographic representation poses a number of challenges for Women Representatives in Uganda who make up the overwhelming majority of women in the Ugandan Parliament. Women Representatives are allocated the same amount of “Constituency Development Funding” as do Constituency Representatives. These funds are used by MPs to support development projects in their communities; including paying for children’s school fees, building health centers, and contributing to a multitude of charitable projects requested by their constituents. There is a widespread misunderstanding among constituents that a legislators’ performance is measured by how much they contribute in funds to their constituents. A legislator who contributes less is deemed ineffective. Hence, a system that provides Women Representatives with a geographic area that is 3-4 times larger than their counterparts, yet the same amount of funds for development sets Women Representatives up for failure and places an undue burden on them. With greater demands, Women Representatives’ performance is seen as less effective, and they are ranked lower than Constituency Representatives with respect to constituency accessibility.

The lack of understanding of the role of a legislator clouds public perception and perceptions of many legislators. Legislators' effectiveness is measured not by the extent to which they hold the executive accountable and advance responsive legislation, but by the size of the aforementioned contributions they make to their constituents. Many legislators find themselves unable to keep up with constituents’ demands and resort to using personal funds, incurring significant personal debt to meet expectations. Studies documented the fact that many legislators spend most of their time on constituency work rather than on the work of Parliament (Iyamuremye, 2013).

While both female and male legislators face this challenge, the challenge Women Representatives face is compounded by the fact that they have to respond to the financial demands of larger constituencies. Lacking resources traditionally concentrated in the hands of men, they become indebted, vulnerable, and at risk of turnover.

IN THEIR OWN VOICES

“Most of the women in the Parliament of Uganda cover bigger constituencies than men and that is a big challenge, and yet when it comes to salaries, allowances (constituency development funds), we almost earn the same.”

“The terrain that a woman represents has to be equal to what the man (represents) and then the responsibilities that women are given have to be of course equal, because now when we do everything in the district...you are expected to go everywhere, it's not possible. You can't be effective.”

“You (are) a woman over the whole district, if there’s any way you are supposed to be effective, you have to do it 3 times your counter male. He will have a smaller portion. For a woman you have to go to all of them with almost meager resources.”

“The public thinks we have a lot of money, as MPs, but that money is not ours, it just goes back to the way it is, reinvested, because if you look at our messages, our phone calls, it is about money, money, money. Politics has been highly monetized to the extent that the people expect you to do for them everything [that] government should be doing by the way, but the MPs are the ones doing service provision. Let the voters understand the roles of MPs, because we don't tell them 'no,' just because we want to come back, but we are aware that those are not the primary roles you are going to do in your district.”

“Our roles must be told to the people who send us... The public should be more sensitized on the importance of women being in the legislative assemblies.”

“There is no special consideration to Women Representatives but yet there is a lot expected of them.”
Cultural attitudes toward women and gender biases

While there was wide consensus that Parliament is women-friendly and respectful of women's leadership, there are still remnants of a patriarchal culture that was alluded to by the female MPs who were interviewed. Female and male members of Parliament who participated in the videoconference pointed out that cases of sexual harassment and stereotyping are isolated, and that they tend to exist in every culture and every organization. However, the absence of policies against sexual harassment and due process that facilitate the right of women to submit grievances is of concern, especially given the position of women as newcomers to the political arena who also occupy a subordinate status in society outside of Parliament.

Stereotypical perceptions of women still abound outside parliament. Many female legislators interviewed and male legislators who participated in the videoconference pointed out that patriarchal culture still dominates the private and public lives of women and impacts them negatively in a number of ways. Culture limits women's education and experiences. Women's socialization is blamed for some women's inability to lead effectively in Parliament's debates. Some women members chose to remain silent in order to conform to cultural expectations of how women are supposed to behave. While training and experience ultimately free women from the shackles of harmful socialization, they lose critical time and opportunities to influence policy making.

Culture subjects women to double standards and a restrictive definition of gender roles and behaviors. Public scrutiny of women's dress and behavior restricts them and complicates their ability to perform their roles effectively. Women spoke about their experiences running for office and being compelled to change the way they dress and the way they act to be accepted by their communities and endure the insinuations that they will leave their husbands and become promiscuous.

Women often feel the need to censor themselves when it comes to advocating for women's issues for fear of being labeled as abandoning their culture. When women rise in the ranks of leadership, their success is attributed to reasons other than their own merit.

Women often face an uphill battle to run for office. They are often rejected in the district where they were born under claims that they should contest in the district where they are married, and vice versa. Unmarried female candidates are often persuaded to marry before they seek office. They have limited or no access to resources compared to their male counterparts when they run for office. They are often forced to incur significant debts to pay off funds borrowed to run for office.

Patronization by the parties

The rise to power of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in the 1980s ended the multi-party system and instituted a no party system where Parliament members in Uganda contested their seats based on individual merit. In 2005, the 1995 Constitution was amended to restore the multi-party system. The return of the multi-party system, coupled with a widespread
phenomenon of Parliament members’ indebtedness (due to prohibitive campaign costs and constituency demands), made members vulnerable to patronage by the party to which they resorted for help. Such patronage undermined the independence of the legislators and their ability to pursue independent action regardless of party position or preference.

At a June 2014 meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Seminar in Tanzania, Rebecca Kadaga, the speaker of the Ugandan Parliament, expressed her frustration over the control exercised by the parties over Parliament members. She stated, “in the House, some Members of Parliament are afraid to speak until the party whips have ordered them. I wish we would revert to the old system where a Member would be free to express their views. If we had no parties, I think we would do better” (Imaka, 2014).

A widespread culture of patronage also led to an explosion in the size of Parliament in numbers, through the ballooning of the number of districts from 34 in 1989 to 112 in 2011. District remapping served to provide additional positions to political actors and supporters of the ruling party. Party allegiance and cultural attitudes underscoring patronage and political loyalties became entrenched. Both female and male parliament members are affected by this phenomenon. However, women’s unity and their ability to form a cohesive bloc is seriously compromised by party allegiances. Party patronization divides women and hinders their ability to strengthen their substantive representation.

**Media bias against women**

Female interviewees noted their dissatisfaction with how women legislators are portrayed in the media and how their performance is always subjected to close scrutiny. Media coverage challenges women legislators and subjects them to unfair and biased assessments, from which it spares their male counterparts.

**Insufficient public education campaigns**

The quota system imposed from above was introduced without sufficient preparation by the masses. The notion that the introduction of women legislators would improve governance and ultimately lead to social and economic equality in society needed to be nurtured by public awareness campaigns to educate citizens at the grassroots level about why women’s equal representation and equal participation matter and why the underdevelopment of women translates into the underdevelopment of the nation.

The lack of a grassroots-level effort ultimately has resulted in an undermining of women’s leadership within and outside parliament. The failure to advance the Marriage and Divorce Bill in the 9th Parliament provides evidence of the limitation of quota systems imposed from above and unaccompanied by genuine preparation of the populace about the role of women beyond the rhetoric of political speeches.

**IN THEIR OWN VOICES**

Somehow our unity is killed by the party spirit. Party spirit kills our unity.”

“No, we are afraid. Many women are supported and elected on party tickets and that affects their loyalty to the cause of women when in the house.”

“There are expectations of those that help fund the campaign process who can later… use such assistance as a forum for controlling the representative when they are in office… [equivalent to a]…hostage life”.

“So I can say that multi-party politics has also affected the performance of woman. First of all, I need unity… collectiveness of women. We need time to sit as women and see what our problems …it means just being away from our parties. The only unfortunate thing is that we are not strong enough on the ground because we are also still learning and therefore you feel you are right on the back of the political party, therefore you feel you must follow the do’s and don’ts.”

“Change begins with political parties.”

“I have waited for the media to release a report on men’s performance since we came to parliament; it has never come. But it is only the women. It is only female legislators’ performance (that is subjected to scrutiny).”

“They look at you as an intruder in their arena which does not belong to you.”

“The parties are very chauvinistic… This Affirmative Action has been used to capture women in state structures and patronize them and then they are intimidated and they are scared.”

“The big presence of women in the legislature has not had exact impact. The influence is very little. We seem to be having women in power without power.”
A legal quota system that accelerated descriptive representation, yet explicitly disrupts substantive representation

The current Constitution mandated Affirmative Action policies to increase the number of women in Parliament. The policies created reserved seats, designated for “Women Representatives”, one from each district in Uganda. This separate and parallel system to the existing system where “Constituency Representatives” are directly elected per province, was created. The Affirmative Action system was perceived as a temporary provision to help women access positions within Parliament in the short term, with the understanding that in the long term, they will be able to contest for Constituency seats on equal footing with men.

This separate and parallel system has created huge disadvantages for “Women Representatives”. First, few women were able to use their seats as Women Representatives to launch successful bids for Constituency Representatives. While Women Representatives felt an obligation to represent women's concerns, they also felt obligated to serve everyone, men and women, who voted for them. Unlike Youth and Disability Representatives who are expected to have both descriptive and substantive representation, Women Representatives are expected to serve everyone neutrally and equally. Yet, when women choose to contest directly for non-Affirmative Action Constituency seats, they face widespread resistance that they are taking “men’s seats” while they should be running for the “Women Representatives” seats instead.

Affirmative Action is limited in its framing. It is a narrowly defined strategy to allow women access to Parliament only with the expectation that once experienced and “trained,” they will contest directly for “Constituency” seats. It is not designed to improve representation of all women, who have been otherwise underrepresented, by MPs who are best equipped to understand the experiences of women. In the interviews, female MPs point out that Women Representatives, while being conscious of their gender identities and responsibilities as women, recognize that they serve everyone, per the legal mandate. Without a clear designation of their role as providing substantive representation of women, women MPs feel they must actively water down their advocacy and check their gender at the door, for fear of being judged negatively by colleagues as being biased.

Hence, the Affirmative Action policy, in its current state, dilutes women’s substantive representation. While descriptive representation normalizes women’s political participation and leadership and dismantles stereotypes, substantive representation is critical so that these laws serve women in Uganda and not merely the elite few. Balanced membership in Parliament, and having representatives who are best equipped to represent women, by virtue of their experiences as women, is critical to the health of the representative democracy, public trust and sense of legitimacy. Yet the quota system relegates women to separate spaces, while mandating that they serve everyone. With an absence of a voluntary party quota system, such a system risks undermining women’s position and reinforcing stereotypes about their competencies.

IN THEIR OWN VOICES

“Every woman in Uganda says, ‘Wow we have arrived.’ That is stupidity that silences. People say you have women in finance, in agriculture, so what do you want. But I want to ask, ‘Have woman accessed water? Do women swim in finances, now that we have a Minister of Finance?’ So this tokenism causes complacency.”

“They are choosing women who are not knowledgeable or not capable and appointing the ministers. When they have no experience at all, (it) destroys the whole issue of gender equality. If you pick people who were not competent and capable, then when they don't perform they say, ‘No wonder they are women.’”

“When a woman is given a ministerial position, the question will be who is she sleeping with her, who has helped her to get this position. They don’t look at her capacity as a woman. So when a woman does something extraordinary, what they will be interested in is to find out which man helped her.”

“The challenge is to balance between the interests of all the voters who voted for you, including male and female, vs. narrowing your interests to women’s causes vs. your maintenance of your constituents, for that matter.”

“The affirmative seat (is) supposed to (be used) as a training ground for the woman MP. If you are learning politics, you come as a woman MP, the second time you should be already venturing with men. Women should seek affirmative seats for one term, (and then) move to Constituency seat, because you are already exposed, you are already trained. Give the seat again to another woman, but for you to come and stay in this seat for 5 terms, 5 years, 10 years, like I’m doing, I think it is wrong... We are not allowing others to train.”

“If every time you have to speak in parliament you are saying nothing but women, women, women...they will judge you (by saying), ‘oh she’s going to talk about women.’”
NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

A number of other factors in addition to issue-framing led to the success of substantive representation in the 8th Parliament, including (a) the ability of women to work across party lines through UWOPA, (b) the ability to mobilize male allies in Parliament who voted positively on women-friendly bills and joined the Women’s Caucus in large numbers, (c) the ability to work effectively with civil society organizations, and (d) support for the Caucus and women legislators by the international donor community.

Evidence shows that female MPs have pushed for a women’s agenda despite of the constraints placed on them. They faced multiple challenges and utilized several strategies to advance personal and collective agendas.

Strengthening alliances with men

Female MPs have recognized that men are still numerically dominant in Parliament and to advance a women’s agenda, they need to build alliances with men. Women have used a timed-tested strategy to promote men’s ownership of women’s issues. They have asked men to lead sponsorships of women’s legislation, as they knew that male sponsorship would more likely garner support from other men, even though, as mentioned earlier, women were more likely to build alliances with men when they were viewed as the “weaker sex” and when they were not seen as “overzealous” as described by a male MP who participated in the videoconference.

Mobilizing women across party lines through the Women’s Caucus (UWOPA)

UWOPA was identified as the most powerful driver of women’s unity in the study. UWOPA’s ability to bring women together and compel them to stand together in support of a women’s agenda, regardless of party divisions and political ideologies, was repeatedly credited by the members interviewed. UWOPA’s influence extended beyond women members as evidenced by the increasing membership of men in the Caucus.

Responsive leadership

The strong leadership of Rebecca Kadaga as Speaker of Parliament was also repeatedly cited as a strategy that women relied on in moving the women’s agenda forward. The speaker’s influence and the fact that she had a high level of gender consciousness and supported women’s issues encouraged women’s agency in Parliament.

Leveraging international conventions

International conventions that Uganda ratified represent another tool for women MPs to push for change and advance a women’s agenda. International pressure has also been a strategy that has been leveraged to promote universal human rights.

Harnessing Civil Society as a Resource

Although civil society organizations in Uganda have been operating under capacity, women MPs have relied on them as a source of information.

IN THEIR OWN VOICES

“Whenever there is anything discussed on the floor of the house and women stand up and say ‘yes,’ we also get a number of men support our issues and they have always been behind us.”

“We have men who sympathize with us… Men that register in our forum of women and participate very actively, they contribute and they help.”

“We have to lobby the men to support us so that issues go through. “

“I think because of the appealing behavior and motherly dealings that a woman has you know makes men attracted to support their issues The way they present their cause makes you really appreciate her and sympathize.”

“There is definitely gender identity. We normally sit down and caucus as the women’s parliamentary association and we vote along those lines. Where issues of women are concerned, we go beyond political boundaries, party lines, and we unite because we are fighting for the same cause, be it a position, be it the ruling party; you are a woman. You know what affects a woman, so we work together.”

“We work together to identify issues concerning women, and when there’s a problem, we come together, and organize a workshop so that we unite to drive our points.”

“The speaker is the patron of the Uganda Women’s Parliamentary Associations, so whenever we see anything that affects women, we run to her and ask for her support as a woman and normally she's very effective and responds positively.”

“The international treaties and protocols on women, some commitments which every government has signed with international agencies, international organizations and so on, we have not been able to carry out.”

“They were overwhelmed by the international view, condemnation (of) this western media.”

“The civil society organizations, the NGOs… they can help. They can help also in trying to strengthen the efforts which are right now already in existence.”
Mapping the Substantive Representation of Women in the Ugandan Parliament

SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION BY WOMEN MPs

Nothing elicits more vigorous debate on political representation than the introduction of gender quotas in political governing bodies. Proponents use arguments of justice, differentiated citizenship, experience, and representation of unique and often contradictory interest to advance their case. They argue that it is only fair for 50% of the population to be represented by 50% of any governing body, that women bring different experiences to the table and that women may have conflicting interests from those of men that need to be voiced and addressed. Critics, on the other hand argue that the quota system defeats the very goal it is intended to address. It leads to stigmatization of women as undeserving and under qualified (Chowdhury, 2002; Dahlerup, 2002; Nanivadekar, 2006; Tripp, 2003). They point out that quotas impose a psychological ceiling on women’s advancement (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). Critics also argue that quotas assume that women share similar experiences and point out that painting all women with a uniform brush ignores the diversity among women and the intersection of class, race, ethnicity, and geography with gender in their lives (Celis & Gent, 2008).

Regardless of the contention between proponents and critics, however, there is no doubt that quotas have brought millions of women into political spaces that they may not have had access to if it not for the quota system. However, did the increase in numbers (descriptive representation) lead to successful substantive representation, produce policy transformation, and meet the elusive dream of gender equality within and without those spaces?

There is little agreement on the intent of the quota system itself. Is it designed to provide access to equal opportunity for women in political spaces or is it intended to promote gender equality for female constituents by having representatives who “look like them” and are better able to speak on their behalf and advocate for their interests? What is the stated goal of the quota system in Uganda? What are the principles and discourses behind the introduction of quotas in the Ugandan National Parliament? What is the dominant rhetoric about its role for women?

Going back to the 1980s, women participated alongside men in the National Resistance Army’s Guerrilla War and liberated areas had a secretary for women’s affairs appointed on the rebel council. There was recognition that women made substantive contributions and deserved representation. When quotas were instituted through the constitution, President Museveni pointed out, “women… are the producers of wealth in the countryside, (and) so it was a must the we empower 51% of our people.” Elected to Parliament in 1996, Beatrice Kiraso declared, “women are the main instruments of modernization in Uganda. We are also leading the way for women in Africa… Quotas helped women gain confidence in themselves and society in turn has gained confidence in women, opening up even more avenues” (Simmons, 2000). If the quota system was intended to empower 51% of the population, address the exclusions of women who will “modernize Uganda,” then one would expect that the quota system would bring about the “mandate effect” (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008); that quota women have the obligation to be substantive representatives of the interests of diverse women in their constituency.

At the heart of this debate on whether the increase in numerical representation of women brings about transformative policy change or substantive representation for female constituents, are assumptions about political representation and the role of politicians. What does the concept of representation mean? Do quota women represent the interests of a group (women) similar to geographic representation or do they represent the interests of everyone? Is the quota instituted to provide equal opportunity for women to access political spaces or is it instituted to enable equality of results for all women (IDEA, 2002)?

The effectiveness of quota systems and the character they assume are functions of their interaction with the institutional context and social norms and rules. In other words, they are dependent on the soil in which they are transplanted and the political forces and political rhetoric that gave birth to them. While there is evidence that women’s participation in the liberation movement won them recognition as partners in leading the nation, there is no doubt that the quota system in Uganda was introduced without sufficient domestic mobilization and clarification as to the intent of the quota. The top down introduction of the quota failed to produce a strong “mandate effect”. Most quota female representatives in this study were quick to point out that they represent both men and women and distanced themselves from the assertion that they have a mandate to represent women. While Women Representatives expressed concern about threats to the quota system that might remove them from power, they did not express a great sense of obligation to prioritize the needs of their female constituents. This is consistent with previous studies that emphasized the limitations of top down quota systems that are introduced without sufficient cultivation of the landscape both in and outside of Parliament. Domestic mobilization of female activists outside of Parliament and their engagement in the discourse on the role of Women Representatives would have created a sense of responsiveness and expectations to prioritize the interests of their female constituents and decreased the “Label
Effect”; i.e. the harmful effect of stereotyping that makes Women Representatives distance themselves from women’s and feminist issues and ghettoize these issues (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008).

While this study shows that there is widespread acceptance of the presence of women in Parliament and evidence that women feel respected and empowered within the walls of Parliament, institutional norms still hinder the process and outcomes of their substantive representation. The perception that women were “very aggressive” in advancing their positions was voiced by a male representative in the videoconference. This pointed to gendered institutional norms that punish women for certain behaviors that when displayed by their male counterparts are perceived favorably.

Nevertheless, an analysis of the discourse on pro-women bills in Parliament revealed that most female representatives are a powerful force in Parliament, leading the effort in raising issues of concern for women. Still, many see their role clearly as advocates for women and are not apprehensive about using a wide range of strategies. Two cases of Parliamentary debates demonstrate female Parliament members’ substantive representation:

In September 2013, a debate in Parliament ensued in response to a motion presented by the Vice Chairperson of UWOPA for a Parliamentary Resolution on the Compensation and Settlement of the Women Affected by the Proposed Government’s Plans for the Construction of the Oil Refinery in Buseruka, Hoima District. The motion addressed the issue of women being excluded from the compensation process for selling land, deprived of their source of income as primary users of the land for family sustenance, and intimidated and barred from the decision-making process by agencies hired by the Ministry of Energy. In defense of their positions, several women and their male allies invoked values of equity and fairness in the distribution of compensation among women and men for land acquired for construction of the oil refinery; appealed to the rights of children; emphasized the value of motherhood and the role of mothers as caretakers and providers; underscored the need for the Gender Equity Certificate to ensure gender-sensitive resolutions; appealed to the female speaker’s gender consciousness and her leadership as a woman, pointing out that affirmative action was created to provide a woman MP who can bring in a woman’s perspective and “can speak for a woman”; engaged the opposition forcefully; and cited the constitution as providing equal rights and equal treatment for women (Parliament Proceedings. 26 September 2013).

On the other hand, a long debate on the Marriage and Divorce bill that spanned several sessions provides another window into gender relations, the constraints and barriers women face, and women’s substantive representation. The main issues that were challenged in the Marriage and Divorce Bill were property rights in the case of the dissolution of marriage and cohabitation and making bride gifts (bride price) non-refundable. As in the previous debate, there was a clear gender difference in responding to challenges to the Bill. Women advocates for the Bill and their male allies faced a wide range of challenges including the Bill being described as a law that would lead to the “commercialization of marriage”, an increase of violence in the family, instability of marriage, “disappearance of families”; “impinging on the right of the family”; discouraging of marriage; and “an exploitation of men by greedy women”. In challenging the Bill, Representatives used words and phrases such as “controversial,” “mechanical,” “emotive,” “unacceptable;” “associated with the dotcom men and women and not the traditional women we have had in the past;” and a law that will have “very serious repercussions in the village” (Parliament Proceedings, February 7, 2012). Women advocates for the Bill addressed these challenges through a variety of strategies including clarifying the intent of the bill, refuting misleading claims and misunderstanding about the bill’s intent, emphasizing the gender neutrality of the bill, confronting women who had made gender-insensitive statements, appealing for the rights of children as beneficiaries of the bill, arguing for fairness to women whose household labor justifies property sharing, and calling for a balance between modernity and religious traditions, reminding members of the slippery slope they can be created once religious arguments enter Parliamentary debates.

In addition to the debates on both bills discussed above, female members of Parliament led the effort to bring forward issues that affect women disproportionately. On February 7, 2012, for example, the Chairperson of UWOPA demanded that Parliament address the issue of the lack of implementation of the Domestic Violence laws that were passed in 2009. She made several demands for the development of regulations to implement the Act. She emphasized the need to inform and train members of the local council system, set up special units at the police to deal with domestic violence, strengthen the system at health centers to assist victims of domestic violence, and train magistrates, judicial officers, and legal personnel to adjudicate. Her direct demands were made to the Ministry of Gender to “immediately” develop and issue the regulations for the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act; set up social services for the survivors; install toll free phone numbers for police and medical emergencies; establish social and rehabilitation centers; and develop and disseminate a training guide for different public officials dealing with survivors. Several female representatives voiced their support by alluding to the seriousness of the matter and requesting demonstrations of Parliament against domestic violence on a quarterly basis.
Another exchange provides additional insights into gender dynamics among members. When members discussed the report examining progress made by local governments with respect to the promotion of gender equity and equal opportunities, a female representative asserted that “gender mainstreaming is not anywhere in those local councils…” So, if we are going to help this country on issues of gender mainstreaming, this Ninth Parliament should not finish its term without passing a law on gender equity certificate. If we do so, we shall have helped this country.” In a similar vein, a male member emphasized problems related to the marginalization of the Ministry of Gender; “the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development is always considered last. When you go to the districts, the line Department of Community Services also comes last to the extent that, sometimes, it is given zero budget” (Parliament Proceedings, November 5, 2013).

A closer look at the 8th Parliament (2006 – 2011) reveals that several women-friendly laws were passed during that period, including the Equal Opportunity Commission Act of 2006, the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2009, the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons in 2009, and the Domestic Violence Act of 2010. This trend was halted in the 9th Parliament whereby the Marriage and Divorce Act was “shelved” by the Speaker after widespread popular opposition from within and outside Parliament.

The questions that arise include, why were women unable to move the women’s agenda forward in the 9th Parliament, even when they use the same debate strategies? One of the main factors seems to relate to how bills were framed and to the nature of topics addressed by the bills.

The bills passed in the 8th Parliament depicted women as victims and utilized a victim discourse. Whether trafficked, subjected to domestic violence, or forced to undergo female genital cutting, the victim discourse proved to be effective in moving the agenda forward. The bills appealed to stereotypical notions of women as victims who need the intervention of sympathetic men to be rescued from the injustices and violence to which they are subjected. The bills were framed to appeal to institutional prejudices and stereotypes about women as the passive and docile victims. The victimization rhetoric may have driven the successes of women rights bills in the 8th Parliament because the demands proposed by those bills maintained power relations between men and women and did not disrupt the discursive apparatus of superior and inferior. The demands fit within the constructs of stereotypes about what it means to be a female.

In the 9th Parliament, however, the Marriage and Divorce Act introduced notions that pitted the interests of women against those of men. Women were portrayed as equals who should share marital assets built collectively within marriage or cohabitation if and when their relationships end. It demanded that women and their families are relieved from returning “bride price” since the essence of the practice is not to provide compensation for the acquisition of property and since the obligation to return bride price keeps many women shackled in abusive relationships. Additionally, the provision that deemed marital rape illegal flew in the face of men’s sense of entitlement to women’s bodies. The inability to phrase the provision of the Marriage and Divorce Act in subtle terms less threatening to males arguably led to the demise of that bill. Moreover, the language of the bill created a false dichotomy between traditions (African) and modernity (Western). It was viewed as a threat to the religious identities that rejected divorce and cohabitation. It threatened traditional African identities by providing for equality between women and men in the sharing of marital property and the possible empowerment of women through allowing them better access to resources. The disruption to African traditional identity led to a backlash to uphold rigid patriarchal notions of gender relations. When discourses of equality were used, the women’s rights projects failed. Women pushing for reforms using equality discourses were marginalized, discredited, and accused of Western influence. This indicates that advocacy strategies must be customized to each topic. Using the same strategies to push women’s issues forward may not always be equally effective for different topics, especially when the cultural landscape is not ready for the proposed changes and when there are other problems that may need to be addressed first. Once the landscape for a change is ready, a policy change that benefits women may no longer appear threatening to men.

Progress in advancing substantive representation of women has so far succeeded only when bills were framed by the discourse of women as victims and when women took a back seat, and failed women pushed for advancement, framed issues in a confrontational manner, and used equality discourses that threatened male power. However, the discussion of contentious issues such as the Marriage and Divorce Bill would never have happened had it not been for the efforts of these representatives. Thus, the failure of the Marriage and Divorce Bill only means that substantive
representation as a process was present but was never materialized as outcome. The efforts in this study to map the substantive representation of women in the Ugandan Parliament revealed what earlier studies have shown, (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008), that there are three different stages of substantive representation as follows.

**Stage One: Gender Consciousness, Beliefs, and Attitudes as**

Beliefs and attitudes are not all equal. Gender conscious representatives range from beliefs in:

(a) Preserving the status quo in gender roles and relations, yet enabling women’s traditional roles as mothers and wives. These representatives focus mainly on “Women’s Issues” and believe in improving the quality of life of women and their families. While holders of these belief systems may advance substantive representation and may feminize the legislative agenda, the results of their representation will likely lead to cosmetic structural changes and will keep in tact the foundation of gender inequalities.

(b) Leveling the playing field so that equity in women’s social, economic and political participation is achieved. This cohort of representatives are more likely to initiate transformative policies that are capable of instigating the types of reforms needed for macro economic, social and political developments that are needed in Uganda. They are the types of belief systems that would create feminist substantive representation and advance the interests of different women in a patriarchal, agrarian economy of Uganda. They are more likely to challenge inequitable realities on the ground and advocate for fast tracking developments.

Both levels of gender consciousness were exhibited by women in this study.

**Stage Two: Gendering the Policy Agenda**

In this stage, representatives “act” on their gender consciousness, beliefs and attitudes by introducing bills, networking with female and male allies to strengthen position, debating positions formally and informally, and advocating for passage of bills. Factors shaping substantive representation as a process in this study included the ability to overcome the “Label Effect” and create cross gender alliances.

**Stage Three: Gendering Policy Outcomes**

Substantive representation as outcome occurs when enabling conditions inside and outside Parliament are present. The failed substantive representation of women in the 8th Parliament and the impasse on the Marriage and Divorce Bill demonstrates that efforts need to target structural changes including secularization of the policy agenda and the adoption of universal standards of women’s rights.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

There is no doubt that the Ugandan government has taken concrete steps toward addressing gender imbalance in Parliament by introducing the quota system. The numerical increase in the number of female Parliament members and the rise in leadership of many women within Parliament has accelerated a cultural change in Parliament. The overwhelming agreement among the members of Parliament surveyed and interviewed for this study that Parliament’s culture is respectful of women and that women members feel empowered supports the conclusion that strides were made in making Parliament gender sensitive. There are, however, numerous challenges that hinder women’s substantive representation as process and as outcome. Some of these challenges are structural and need to be addressed through interventions and reforms that target mainstreaming gender considerations in institutional norms, policies, procedures, rules, and regulations.

The Ugandan experience exposes the limitations of top-down reforms that are confined to a limited space and fail to influence and transform the cultural landscape to benefit all women, instead of being limited to a few elite women. While fast-tracking women’s access to Parliament through quota systems is critical to achieving parity, equity outcomes can be limited when restrictive gender roles and relations in the world outside Parliament remain intact. A fundamental reform in how Uganda thinks about Affirmative Action is needed to ensure that reforms implemented at a legislative level can have concrete and substantial impact on transforming the world outside Parliament.

The Affirmative Action/quota system instituted in Uganda, while designed to guarantee election of women regardless of the outcome of the election, has created a separate and parallel system that overburdened women. The argument in this report is that the quota system through which Women Representatives are elected is a flawed system that undermines women’s potential to break away from quota systems and contest independently (as intended by the designers of the system). The system, as it is currently structured, unintentionally cements the “training wheels” and makes it very difficult for women to break loose of this support. Overburdening women with a larger district with more responsibilities and fewer resources, coupled with the public perception that women should confine themselves to “their” women’s seats, has unintentionally marginalized women’s representation.

Instead of conceptualizing reserved seats as “training wheels” for women and perpetuating the stereotypes and the stigma that women need such supports to make it in Parliament, a broader and more valuable conceptualization of Affirmative Action policies is warranted. Numerical representation is both an end in itself and a means to a more valuable end. On the one hand, an equal numerical representation of women in Parliament ensures the presence of female leaders in the public eye, which contributes to slowly changing cultural attitudes about women, eliminating notions that women belong in the home and not in leadership positions and that they are inferior to men. However, equal numerical representation does not alone ensure equitable representation. There is a misconception that female MPs, in order to be fair to all their constituents, are required to leave their gender at the door. Yet, male MPs are not asked to leave their gender at the door, MPs with business backgrounds or medical backgrounds are not asked to rid themselves their perspectives that are based on their expertise, and Youth MPs are not required to contribute to discussions without their youth perspectives. All MPs were elected by a diverse set of constituents; men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, medical professionals and business men and women, teachers and students, and elderly and youth. There is an acceptance and an appreciation for the fact that different MPs view the same issue from different lenses because of their backgrounds, expertise, and experiences. This diversity in gender, age, background, and experience ensures that all constituents are represented and all their voices are heard in parliament.

It is necessary to make a distinction between equality and equity. Approaching issues and policies with the biases that come with gender and experience may compromise “equality” theoretically, but leaving these biases behind compromises equity, which is the more important goal; neutrality preserves the status quo and reinforces prevailing conditions that protect structural inequalities. Ensuring that everyone’s needs are met equally means that those who are more advantaged in the society will continue to be more advantaged. Specifically, working to be “neutral” in pursuing women and men’s needs equally in a climate where women continue to suffer historical neglect and discrimination is unfair and inequitable. For example, one participant in the videoconference pointed out that gender-neutrality in implementing development programs especially in rural areas excludes women. This distinction between equality and equity needs to factors into the definition of the goals and intents of the Affirmative Action laws. If the intent of Affirmative Action remains confined to ensuring access to Parliament by a few women who are strictly obligated to equally and neutrally represent women’s and men’s interests and who are, as a result, stigmatized and judged when they focus heavily on women’s issues, equity will remain an elusive goal.
A key theoretical foundation to the quota system is to incorporate two equal and intersecting goals for Women Representatives: (a) addressing the gender imbalance of Parliament’s membership; and (b) strengthening Uganda’s representative democracy by having representatives who understand the experiences of their women constituencies and are able to effectively formulate policies that are responsive to those experiences. The second objective can only be achieved when women representatives understand that their gender provides them with a unique lens with which to view and work on any policies. This will de-stigmatize women’s intensified focus on women’s issues.

In her research, Cecilia Josefsson (2014) argued that the shift from Women Representatives being elected by an electoral college to a direct election system in 2006 have resulted in the election of Women Representatives who are less likely to state that they are interested in gender issues than their predecessors who were elected through the electoral college. They tend to be more loyal to the regime than other male and female members of Parliament (Josefsson, 2014). This trend suggests, as Josefsson explained, that Women Representatives might be moving farther and farther away from being authentic representatives of their female constituents, or representing them substantively. The trend may be attributed to the increased entrenchment of party politics and it may also be due to the stigmatization women feel when they publicly affirm an exclusive interest in gender issues.

This study reveals the conditions under which substantive representation has succeeded or failed.

- Substantive representation of female Parliament members succeeded when women were able to come together in a collective bloc and to prioritize the needs of their female constituents over party loyalties and political ideologies. Equally important was having an organizing caucus that brought women together, created a sense of urgency and obligation to their female constituents, and supplied the information they needed to take a united stand and argue their case.
- Substantive representation also succeeded when women were able to form alliances with men across party lines and used the leadership of men to advance women’s initiatives.
- Ironically, however, substantive representation also succeeded when women advanced legislation that portrayed women as helpless victims who need to be rescued. It failed when women’s demands threatened men’s dominance, control, privilege and entitlement; when men perceived women’s demands as an encroachment on their “rights”; when women’s agency posed a danger and a threat to traditionally held beliefs; when women’s emancipation meant opposing religiously held ideologies; when women aggressively pursued their agenda; and when their demands meant elevating women to the ranks of men.
- Substantive representation failed when women did not sufficiently mobilize their constituents, both women and men. Substantive representation by women on behalf of women fails when Women Representatives choose party loyalties over loyalty to their women constituents.

A powerful women’s caucus that united women across party lines and strengthened their collective advocacy was consistently credited for female Parliament members’ sense of empowerment in the study. Older age brings liberation from the constraints of reproduction and related work-life balance challenges that set women back as Parliament members. Experience brings confidence and effective performance that shatter stereotypes and force respect and acknowledgement from peers and constituents.

Recommendations

Our study reveals that descriptive representation by women in the Ugandan Parliament does not automatically lead to substantive representation. With the above conclusions in mind, we offer the following recommendations to strengthen women’s substantive impact in Parliament.

1. Redefine the Goals, Objectives, and Design of Affirmative Action Seats for Women

There is a need to re-conceptualize women’s numerical representation as a means to the end of producing gender equity outcomes in the larger society. For Women Representatives to be able to work without reservations to advance the interests of their female constituents and alleviate the impact of historical neglect, marginalization, and exclusion requires a reframing of the primary objectives of Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action policies, as they are currently configured, are under threat. Many feel that they have accomplished the intent of these policies and so women can now run directly against men for Constituency seats. Many women expressed their fear that Affirmative Action will be abolished. “There are male MPs saying, ‘Now we think women have been empowered enough, so women MPs should not be there. If you want to be an MP, compete with the men.’ Now you can imagine what will happen, the women will all go home, the men will take these positions.”
Mapping the Substantive Representation of Women in the Ugandan Parliament

If Affirmative Action remains confined to providing a few women with access to seats in Parliament, rather than providing balanced representation for all women in society, it will be an easy target for extinction. Reframing the objectives of these policies would place emphasis on Affirmative Action that serves all the women of Uganda and not the elite few. It will underscore the unfinished business of empowering all women.

Suggesting that women MPs should have an obligation to represent the interests of women, instead of checking their gender at the door, is in no means a mandate to make women conform to monolithic thinking or that women should adopt a uniform perspective or similar worldviews. Women need to feel beholden to the community of women, to have a strong mandate to truly represent the diverse needs of different women, to advocate on their behalf and advance their interests. The “Women’s Agenda” does not need to adopt a uniform view of how women’s interests ought to be addressed, but need to reflect an understanding that to address historical exclusions and subordination of women. To ensure equitable representation of all constituency members, there is a need for Women Representatives to bring their gender-related experiences to the table, provide a woman’s perspective, and emphasize the interests of women.

2. Gender Tailor and Gender Mainstream to Address the Needs of Women in Ugandan Society

Female MPs interviewed for this study alluded to their efforts to mainstream gender considerations within every policy decision that is made by Parliament. “We have a proposal that we have been pushing where we’re asking that we pass what we call a Gender Equity Certificate and that certificate will be given for every bill, for every policy or any other issue that comes to the floor of Parliament… that it should go through, it should come with a certificate…. The Committee of Gender should be responsible for vetting all the legislations that come.” Mainstreaming approaches have proven effective when applied in other legislative contexts since they ensure that every policy passes the test of having an equitable impact on both men and women.

Mainstreaming approaches, coupled with tailored interventions for women that promote universally accepted human rights standards are needed. These tailored interventions should target improving female participation in education and labor force, as well as women’s economic security and welfare in Ugandan society to address historical marginalization and exclusion and level the playing field.

3. Frame Positively and Emphasize the Collective Character of Benefits

Framing women’s rights bills in non-confrontational, non-threatening manner, and using arguments of collective/national development are critical. Emphasizing that the empowerment and protection of women is not a zero-sum game; the reforms that women gain from also benefit men. Highlighting this fact disarms and neutralizes resistance to change. Underscoring the connection between women’s rights and economic, social, and political development for the nation will offer a greater opportunity for the success of a woman’s agenda, and will create the space in the long term for policies that now seem controversial.

4. Introduce Voluntary Party Quotas

Parties are still sites of gender inequities from conscious to unconscious biases against women. We suggest considering instituting electoral reforms that introduce voluntary party quotas. Several countries in the region have done so with promising outcomes. This will increase commitment to numerical representation as well as the number of women in Constituency seats. Accompanied by a reconceptualization of the role of Women MPs, numerical representation will increase substantive representation. Enforcement will always be an issue, as is true for any voluntary system. However, media and civil society groups can help hold parties accountable.

5. Implement Public Awareness Campaigns

Top-down cultural change in any social movement can be limited in its effectiveness unless it is accompanied by bottom-up change. The unsuccessful movement on the Marriage and Divorce Bill provides a powerful evidence of the limitations of attempts to enforce positive top-down change and its impotency in the face of a restrictive cultural landscape. More interventions are needed to lay the groundwork at the grassroots level before change is introduced.

6. Secularize Public Policy, Promote Universal Rights and Separate Religion and State

History provides ample evidence that public policy that are built on theocratic grounds will always fail to meet universal standards of human rights. The principle of separation of public policy from religious institutions has proven to be the only way that policies become neutral, objective and do not trample on the rights of any groups. We recommend emphasizing the character and identity of the Uganda as a secular and diverse nation that respects ratified universal human rights conventions. This approach will go a long way in protecting religious freedoms of every citizen.
7. Reform Internal Policies of Parliament

While Parliament has made strides in making the institution gender sensitive, there is still work to be done in the area of work-life balance and gender relations. Women in many parts of the world remain the primary caregivers. A paradigm shift is needed to reframe the family care issue as a national policy priority that is not a “women’s problem,” but rather everyone’s problem. There is a need to explore arrangements that can facilitate work-life balance, such as telecommuting, gender-sensitive scheduling, and flexible hours. Sexual harassment, although isolated (as members have indicated in the videoconference) needs to be curbed by instituting preventive policies and procedures. There is a need to provide formal and informal spaces for women to network with colleagues and deepen interconnections that could benefit decision-making and information sharing. There is also a need to consider an equitable, gender-sensitive process where members of Parliament can speak on the floor, without waiting to be recognized by the speaker and trying to “catch her eye.” The current process may not adequately serve many women who are newcomers and are still “learning the ropes,” and who may be intimidated and less assertive than their experienced counterparts.

8. Build Partnerships with Academic Institutions

The lack of access to reliable information that is rooted in rigorous research and facts hinder the ability of female MPs to present and argue their case. “We don't do a lot of research and, because we don't do a lot of research, you find that some people stand up with half-baked information.” Academic institutions can provide a logical source not only to fill the gap in knowledge but also to conduct policy analysis and frame arguments needed to advance a women’s agenda. Building on existing resources for women, such as UWOPA, to build partnerships with academic and research institutions can prove very valuable.

9. Facilitate Training and Development

Female MPs are less experienced than their male counterparts. The majority are newcomers who may, as a result of socialization and limited experiences, be reluctant to participate vigorously on the floor and have less access to information, despite their larger constituency. It is critical that training remains an integral part of MPs introduction to Parliamentary work and that such training is tailored to the needs of MPs to perform effectively. Trainings and development opportunities lead to improved self-confidence and enhanced competencies.
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