

Gendered Economic Gap in Uganda: Education Attainment and Women's Access to and Land Ownership in Bunyoro Sub-region

¹Barongo E. K., ²Busingye J. D., ³Tom Mulegi and ⁴Lubaale G.

¹Department of Development, Peace and Conflict Studies Kampala International University, Uganda.

²College of Education, Open and Distance Learning Kampala International University, Uganda.

³Department of Public Administration, College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

⁴Department of Development, Peace and Conflict Studies. Kampala International University, Uganda

Email: ¹eleanor.barongo@kiu.ac.ug; ²dvcfa@kiu.ac.ug; ³tom.mulegi@kiu.ac.ug;

⁴grace.Lubaale@kiu.ac.ug

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the role of education attainment in women's ownership of land in Bunyoro sub-region, Uganda. The study adopted a descriptive research design and a qualitative approach in data collection. Accordingly, 25 key informants comprising of community leaders, educationists, CSO officials and women residents of Bunyoro sub-region purposively selected by the researcher were interviewed while another 15 women from Bunyoro sub-region participated in focus group discussion (FGD). The study findings show that education plays a crucial role in women's access to and ownership of land in Bunyoro sub-region, thus an improvement in female education will greatly empower them to own land and other productive resources. In addition, it was observed that apart from education, culture, discriminatory attitude and poverty also affect women's ability to access and own land in Bunyoro sub-region and in Uganda.

Keywords: Economic Gap, Education, Women, Land and Ownership.

INTRODUCTION.

Uganda has undertaken a series of ambitious legal and policy reforms with regard to property rights and resource governance since 1995, with the intention of bringing about fundamental reforms in rights, tenure management and control of land. The 1995 Constitution, the Land Act of 1998 and the 2008 National Land Use Policy provide guidelines for effective use of land for development. Land, by virtue of being the main productive asset and means of wealth accumulation for the majority of Ugandans, dominates the discourse on asset rights in the country. Evidence on gender inequities in asset ownership, particularly land, helped in

reaching legal reforms that protect women's right to own, use, and transfer land and other assets, such as the 1998 Land Act and the pending reform of the Succession Act. The draft National Land Policy prescribes specific strategies to ensure that constitutional rights and obligations with regard to gender equality, particularly around reforming customary laws and practices are upheld [1]. Despite women playing a significant role in agricultural production in Uganda, only about 16 percent of them own land in their own right [1]. Regarding ownership of registered land, women own only about 7 percent [1, 2]. In relation to

housing, which is considered a combined asset with land, particularly in rural areas where customary law takes primacy, men also overwhelmingly dominate the sphere [1]. The implications for Ugandan women of the primacy of customary law is that their rights over land and housing depend significantly on the quality of their personal and social relationships, primarily with their intimate partners and to a lesser extent with other kinship groups [3].

Land is the basis of income, sustenance, and identity for most Ugandans [4], accounting for 80 percent of export earnings and employment [5, 6]. Approximately, 87 percent of Uganda's population is rural with 85 percent

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Liberal Feminist Theory. The theory has its roots in the 19th century first-wave of feminism and is primarily associated with [9]. It emphasizes women's suffrage, access to education and gender equality through political and legal reform within the framework of liberal democracy. The proponents of the theory hold the opinion that gender inequality is created by lowering access for women and girls to civil rights and sustaining gender imbalance in the allocation of social resources such as education and employment [10]. The theory proposes that the socially constructed ideology of patriarchy perpetuates inequality between the two sexes. Thus, Liberal feminists advocate for equality of men and women through political and legal reform, without altering the structure of the society [11]. It centers on the core ideas of autonomy, universal rights, equal citizenship, and democracy [12]. The theory is mainly concerned with gaining freedom through equality by diminishing men's domination over women (Marilley, 1996). As such, women should have the same rights as men, including the same education and other socio-economic opportunities. According to [9] gender disparity is not inherent; it was fabricated or inflated, hence inappropriate for determining rights and roles. To

involved in subsistence agriculture [7]. Specifically, 90 percent of Uganda's rural women are agricultural workers producing not only around 90 percent of food but also contributing 90 percent of all labor for food production [7]. However, due to increase in population and value of land, there is high competition for land in Uganda, which leaves women at a disadvantaged position [8]. Thus, agriculture is the back bone of Uganda's economy, echoing the need to strengthen women's access and security over land. The study therefore examines the role of education in women's land acquisition and ownership in Bunyoro sub-district, Uganda.

contextualize this perspective, [9] argues that the prejudice on educational expectation from the different sexes, whereby men are expected to perform better than women was unjust and created less productive female citizens with artificial weak characters. She emphasized that both sexes have the capacity to reason, and as such should be given equal opportunities to benefit society. Similarly, [13], sex roles as a sort of caste system that undermines women, places them at a lower status, and curtails their capacities. Like Wollstonecraft, Mill believes that patriarchy constraints women's moral development and dampens their motivation to achieve self-realization. The profound argument of liberal feminists is that differences between women and men are primarily based on biological reproduction, which is not enough to perpetuate women subordination to men. According to [14], women and men are more than the sum of their sexual nature. As such, he holds that, many differences between sexes are either a product of sexism and not sufficient to justify differential social roles. Perhaps, the proposals of liberal feminism may be difficult to realize in patriarchal societies, but it carries a message that, although women are biologically different from men, they are in fact not inferior [15]. Liberal feminists

believe that women subordination is rooted in customary and legal factors. Therefore, to raise the status of women in the society, there is a need for legal and social policy changes, as opposed to challenging the existing social structures. Liberal feminism advocates for women's freedom in a liberal democratic society, while criticizing practices that deny women equal protection under the law. This study adopted the theory, given the fact that it broadly looks at the impact of education attainment on the economic empowerment of women, and specifically, at the impact of education attainment on women acquisition and ownership of land in Bunyoro sub-region, Uganda. Evidently, the theory supports the notion that

Review of Empirical Literature

Gender inequality in land access and ownership is a major factor affecting women in different parts of the world. Despite the fact that the United Nations and other development institutions and agencies consider land as a crucial factor for development, there is often a gendered-unequal access to and ownership of the same. In Africa, land is mainly controlled by male household heads, while women are granted only access rights [14-18]. Women's limited access to land stretches beyond Africa. At the international level, women constitute only 20 percent of land owners [5]. In South Asia, few women own valuable land [19-20] while in India, even with legal rights to land ownership, women do not usually purchase land [21 -26]. According to [5] Saudi Arabia has the lowest women's land ownership rate globally at 0.8percent. This sense of deprivation of such a vital asset may be responsible for low levels of women economic empowerment, an aspect that might negatively impact on other areas of community wellbeing [27-32]. In the recent past, development practitioners have shifted attention to challenges and factors affecting women's access to productive resources such as land [33-38]. It was observed that in patrilineal society, land is usually bequeathed to male members of society [8]. Culture was

education is the key to value addition and the overall human development. Thus, an educated woman is an empowered woman. Further, the liberal feminist theory is appropriate for the study in that, the study is not advocating for a challenge in the existing relations between men and women in Bunyoro sub-region, rather, it seeks to establish whether education attainment significantly affects the economic empowerment of women in the sub-region. The study believes that with the same educational and civic opportunities, women would become active partners with men in productive work, have less children, and engage more in public life.

determined to be among the major factors affecting women's access to and control over resources [39-41]. For example, women's access to land in Ecuador is dependent on marital regime [22] while in Southern Nigeria, traditions restrict women from inheriting land, thereby limiting their capacity to own and control land [22]. In Tanzania and Ethiopia, land is either owned by the village, or held by the village for the state, which gives men advantage over women in terms of access and ownership [25-27]. In Kenya, a culture of women subjugation and gender roles assignment restricts women from having the same access to land as men [28]. Similarly, the predominant customary system of land ownership in Uganda gives land control and management rights to men. For example, upon death of a spouse, land is shared among male relatives of the deceased [28]. [29], notes that even within countries that operate house-property systems, patriarchy continues to limit women from enjoying economic autonomy. Besides patriarchy, discriminatory attitudes and practices is another major aspect of culture that explains low levels of women land ownership in Africa and elsewhere. Across varying regions, women face unfavorable social norms and attitudes regarding rights to access land and financial services. In Uganda, one in three people

believe that women should have less access and control over land and financial services. For example, 54 percent of people in Mid-Northern and 43 percent in South Western Uganda believe that women should not have equal access to, and manage land as men [30]. The central region of Uganda faces the highest level of discriminatory attitudes against women's economic rights and empowerment opportunities. [20], report indicates that only a tenth of people in the eastern region believe that women should not have equal rights to land with men. This means that social norms and attitudes affect economic opportunities as they influence gender bias in productive assets and resources distribution. Accordingly, women's access to land and economic opportunity in Uganda is affected by discriminatory attitudes and norms. Scholars have associated lower levels of women's land ownership to gaps in access to property rights [30-32]. Property rights give women opportunity to own land thereby enhancing their social status, economic security and ultimate empowerment [31-32] while denial of ownership of land and property rights constrains sustainable development in various sectors [30]. Land ownership offers a holistic benefit to women; it is a major driver of economic empowerment of women and sustainable development [31]. The important relationship between land rights and development warrants a deeper review into the dynamics of women and land rights in various parts of the world. Property rights that protect women's interest are critical for development. There are positive effects of property rights on women's control over business shares, labour market earning, and credit [33]. For example, owning a titled piece of farm land can enable women to raise

money needed for higher agricultural yields and enhance greater control over agricultural income [34]. Also, land property rights reduce women's economic vulnerability in either old age, or separation from a spouse [35]. Overall, property rights play a great role in women's economic empowerment, however, unfavorable land holding patterns applicable in most African nations and elsewhere, poverty, disempowerment, and human rights violation constrain women's access to land rights [27]. Education plays an important role in women's ability to control land [30]. The role of education in promoting women's access to and control over land has been well documented [6]. In Eastern Nepal, only 2.45 percent and 7.3 percent of women in Nawalparasi and Surkhet respectively, were aware of their land rights [36]. Also, it was observed that limited knowledge on property rights constrained women from co-owning property obtained in marriage in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa [8]. Illiteracy is a key factor for women's low access to and ownership of land in sub-Saharan Africa [8]. The above submission was collaborated by the [9] report, which highlights educational attainment as a determining factor for the differences in access and control over land for rural and urban areas. Women's access to land and productive resources is a pertinent issue. As such, any attempt to economically empower women especially the rural cohort, should address the various barriers in their path, to land ownership and control. Land ownership increases women's bargaining ability in the society and reduces vulnerability [37-41]. This review of shows that women's limited access to, and ownership of land is a global concern necessitating a review of the various factors for its prevalence.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design. The design was adopted because the study was primarily interested in describing relationship between education attainment and land acquisition and ownership among women Bunyoro

sub region in Uganda. A qualitative approach was employed in data collection and 25 key informants purposively selected were interviewed, while another 15 women participated in focus group discussion (FGD). The study participants

comprised mainly of adult women living and/or working in Bunyoro sub region at

the time of the study.

Table 1: Respondents' Category and Sampling Procedure

Category	Population	Sampling Technique
Community Leaders	05	Purposive
Educationists	03	Purposive
CSO Staff	03	Purposive
Women Resident of Bunyoro	14	Purposive
Total	25	

Presentation of Findings

The study adopted a qualitative approach in data collection, whereby some of the study participants were interviewed and others participated in focus group

discussion. The transcript of the interviews and FGD are presented and analyzed below

Item 1: Do you think that there is gender disparity in land acquisition and ownership in Bunyoro Sub-region?

All the key informants agreed to the fact that there is a gender disparity in land acquisition and ownership in Bunyoro sub-region. As a follow up question, they were

asked to explain the reasons for the disparity and below are some of the excerpts from their responses.

Item 2: If your answer is yes, can you explain the reason(s) for the disparity in access to and control of land between men and women in Bunyoro Sub-region?

In my opinion, the main reason for gender disparity in land acquisition and ownership in Bunyoro is the process of land ownership. Here in Bunyoro land acquisition is mainly through inheritance. Land mainly belongs to the family and is often inherited by the male child. This has given men advantage to own land more than women. For example, a man may have one son and three daughters, when he dies the son will inherit all his lands, while the daughters will not inherit any of his lands. This situation is the main reason for the disparity in land acquisition and ownership in Bunyoro (Kiryadongo, 17/11/2020). The reason for the gap in gender ownership of land in Bunyoro and other parts of Uganda is obvious. In Bunyoro, we have community land and for cultural reasons, women are not given community land. It is believed that when they get married, they co-own the land that their husbands inherit. However, the problem is that even though they co-own

land with their husbands, they don't have absolute right over the land in the sense that they can't sell the land or transfer ownership of the land. In this case, most women in Bunyoro are practically land users, but not land owners (Kibaale, 19/11/2020). There are combinations of reasons for the disparity in access to and control of land between men and women in Bunyoro Sub-region. One is because in our culture, women cannot inherit land, which limits their access to it. The second is that many women here are poor and uneducated. They don't have the money to buy land of their own so they rely on their husband's inheritance. Even, in some cases when a woman has money to buy land, some members of our community frown at selling land to women. In my opinion these factors are the main reasons why women rarely own land in Bunyoro (Masindi, 24/11/2020). From the above answers provided by the key informants, it was deduced that there is gender disparity in

land acquisition and ownership in Bunyoro Sub-region. The Bunyoro land is owned mainly by men and the reason is due to the cultural practice of land inheritance. In the sub-region, land ownership is mainly through inheritance, of which women are not permitted by culture to inherit land. It is believed that women will partake in her husband's inheritance when she marries. This practice has placed women at a disadvantaged position in terms of land ownership and resources mobilization.

Item 3: Do you think that education plays a role in women's capacity to acquire land, access labour force and own and manage a business in Bunyoro Sub-region?

By all means, education strongly influences women's economic lives. When a woman is educated, her chances of getting a job increase and if that happens then her capacity to own land through purchase and own a business will sharply increase. I am in agreement that education plays a role in women's capacity to acquire land, access labour force and own and manage a business in Bunyoro Sub-region (Masindi, 12/12/2020). My answer to this question will be in the affirmative. Education is fundamental for success in today's world. Then, considering the cultural practices that consider women to be inferior to men, education is the only key to unlock women potential in Bunyoro. Not only does it play a role in their capacity to acquire land, access labour force and own and manage a business in

Focused Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussion was pertinent to this study due to its enhanced flexibility, freedom of expression, ability to get direct and first-hand information, sharing

Item 1: Does think that there is gender inequality in land acquisition and ownership in Bunyoro Sub-region?

All the FDG participants agreed that there is unequal ownership of land in Bunyoro sub-region, whereby men are favored. They revealed that men had a higher control and access to land. For example, while one participant said that her brothers had been given land by their parents to farm, none of her female siblings had been given any. Another participant revealed that in her ancestral village, all the clan lands had been

Also, it was also found that usually women are not the preferred buyer when a land is up for sale in Bunyoro, community members prefer to sell land to men instead of women, which further widens the gender disparity in land acquisition and ownership in Bunyoro Sub-region. The implication is that women are limited in resources and assets mobilization, which reduces their capacity in terms of collateral needed when sourcing for capital.

Bunyoro Sub-region, it supports the overall emancipation of women (Kiryadongo, 17/11/2020). The data gathered from the respondents indicates that education plays a critical role in women's economic empowerment, by broadening their capacity to acquire land, access labour force, as well as own and manage a business. Education actually takes the center stage in women's empowerment. However, for long, most women especially in the rural areas such as Bunyoro sub-region have been denied education and thus, undermine their capacities and potentials. Education empowers women and girls to achieve more in their social, career, economic and family lives. Therefore, in the absence of education, women tend to face multi-faceted challenges.

of experiences, ideas and feelings by the participants. The excerpts from the FDGs are presented below:

divided amongst male relatives, who had gone ahead to build their homes there. A third participant explained that women in her village were only allowed to use the family land for growing of temporary crops like beans and potatoes which grow fast and are quickly harvested while her brothers could plant trees on the family land. Focused Group discussions revealed that more men than women access and

own land in Bunyoro sub region (Kibaale,

10/01/2020).

Item 2: What could be the underlying reasons for the unequal ownership of land between men and women in Bunyoro Sub-region?

The majority of discussants attributed the gender disparity in access to and control of land in Bunyoro sub region to culture, female illiteracy, and poverty. They explained that Bunyoro sub region is patrilineal and this puts authority and control of family resources in the hands of men. It was also reported that the inheritance system in Bunyoro gives boys more opportunities to own land. Another participant noted that while Universal Primary and Secondary Education policies have given both girls and boys in Bunyoro more chances for schooling, many girls drop out of school for many reasons like early pregnancy and the perception that women should be care takers and nurturers. Because of this, many of our girls lack the required skills for getting well-paying jobs. Yet other participants cited poverty as a contributing factor to women's lower ownership of land in Bunyoro sub region (Kibaale, 10/01/2020). Results from Focused Group discussions indicated that gender disparities in land acquisition and ownership in Bunyoro Sub-region are due

to cultural norms, inheritance system, low female literacy, and poverty. Overall, the study findings show that education significantly influences women's access to and ownership of land not only in Bunyoro sub-region, but also in other parts of Uganda. Given that agriculture is the backbone of Uganda's economy, constituting the major means of livelihood for Bunyoro sub-region, land is a major source of income for the people of Bunyoro sub-region and most rural women in Uganda. Therefore, gender disparity in access to and ownership of land in Bunyoro sub-region and most parts of Uganda has a far-reaching negative implication for women empowerment and development in the region. Primarily, it places women at disadvantaged position in wealth ownership. For example, land is used as collateral for credit and an avenue for income, which means that women cannot match their male counterparts in accessing credit and income generation due to the imbalance in land ownership.

CONCLUSION

The study's revelation of the crucial role of education attainment in women's access to and ownership of land suggests that improvement in female education will greatly empower women's access to land and other productive resources. This is because education provides knowledge, skills and values that empower a person to triumph over a wide range of obstacles to development. In the context of access to and ownership of land in Bunyoro sub-region, improving women's education will empower them to understand their land

rights and improve their capacity to earn sufficiently to be able to acquire land. Though education attainment has a significant impact on women empowerment in Bunyoro sub-region, it is not the only factor affecting women's access to and ownership of land. It was observed that apart from illiteracy, culture, discriminatory attitude and poverty also affect women's ability to access and own land in Bunyoro sub-region and in Uganda in general.

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