

IMPACT OF SUSPENSION OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION ON WOMEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PARTICIPATION

February 17, 2021

1.0. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1: Background

The novel corona virus (COVID-19) is a rapid spreading virus that has taken the whole world into a whirl wind where people are torn between staying at home and follow health guidelines to keep the virus at bay and going out to work in search for the daily bread. A virus that first surfaced in a Chinese seafood and poultry market in the late 2019 manifesting pneumonia like symptoms currently knows no borders.¹ As of 5th February 2021, Uganda's COVID-19 case count stood at 39,735, including 14,310 recoveries and 327 deaths.²

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The pandemic has had biting effects on a number of sectors and while other sectors are striding the recovery road,

Education sector is yet to start its own. On 18th March 2020

through a public address the President of Uganda ordered for the closure of schools in attempt to prevent the spread of corona virus³. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), on March 20 2020, affected closure of about seventy-three thousand (73,000) education institutions nationwide with more than fifteen million learners (15,000,000); five-hundred forty-eight thousand teaching staff (548,000); and one hundred and eighty-eight thousand (188,000) non-teaching staff being directly affected.

For six months, the learners were at home undertaking home learning through the printed and distributed materials, radio and televisions and other online platforms until 21st September, when President of Uganda during his COVID-19 nation's address confirmed that the cabinet had approved the re-opening of schools for candidates and finalists on October 15, 2020. This left the majority of the learners and teaching and non-teaching staff out of school and employment respectively. In February 2021, the ministry of education unveiled the phased reopening plan for the non-candidates.

1.2: Introduction

The Education Sector Policy of Uganda recognizes pre-primary education as the first level of education in Uganda under four programmes; daycare centres, home based centres, community centres and nursery schools. The Government recognises the fact that Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) under the Childhood care and education policy of 2018 as a foundation for quality education as it encompasses a critical phase in children's physical, mental

1 Ministry of Health, <file:///C:/Users/Personal/Downloads/MOH%20Confirms%208%20new%20Covid-19%20Cases>

2 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/uganda-students-back-to-school-university-in-march/2134912>

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_Uganda

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and psycho-social development. The Education Act (2008) pronounces the management of pre primary education under the management of the private sector.

However, On 5th February 2021, in a press address by the Minister of Education and Sports, Janet Kataaha Museveni informed the general public that government had suspended pre-primary education until the Covid-19 pandemic vanishes from the country. The suspension is based on the assumption that young learners cannot observe the SOPs to contain the spread of the virus including wearing face masks and that there are numerous interactions between pupils teachers and parents even when there is a high incidence of upper respiratory infections among this age. She reduced early education to play-learning that can easily, conveniently and effortlessly be handled by parents at home until their children are at least five years of age and ready to start primary one. This pronouncement has since attracted dissimilar reactions from the general public, PLA is inclined to examine the impact of the suspension on working mothers in Uganda.

Platform for Labour Action (PLA) is a national Civil Society Organization that was founded in 2000 with the sole aim of promoting and protecting the rights of vulnerable and marginalized workers in Uganda. PLA's target groups are the vulnerable, marginalized workers, majority of who are women, youth and children. We are focus on informing legal and policy frame works for the vulnerable and marginalized workers to ensure their protection and enjoyment of human and workers' rights as well as decent work; promoting human rights and accountability among communities and duty bearers on the rights of vulnerable and marginalized workers; strengthening social protection initiatives for our target groups through education, skilling, livelihood support; Research and knowledge management.

2.0. IMPACT OF SUSPENSION OF PRE-PRIMARY TEACHING ON WOMEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Increased gender inequalities in the labour market; Gender inequality has been identified as the most significant and persistent of all inequalities and women are not reaping the same benefits and returns as men from the country's strong macroeconomic performance.

According to the Uganda National Labour Force Survey (UNHS) 2016/17, Uganda has over 18.8 million working age group population majority 52.3% female. However, more men (5.5 million) than women (4.4million) make up the labour force⁴ thereby men taking the largest share of 61.2% labour force participation rate compared to female 44.9%⁵. Overall, 19.5% of the working population is in paid employment⁶ with more men 26.1% in paid employment than female 13%. This is because the formal sector employs 56% male employees compared 44% female counterparts⁷. Reports further indicates that even in the informal sector, more male 52% than females 48% are employed in the informal businesses with 54% male paid employees compared to female 60% dominated the category of contributing family workers⁸. Statistics further reveal that there are more female workers (71%) who are agricultural, forestry and fishery workers than males (58%).⁹ This means that women account for more own account/self-employed workers (79%) compared to males (67%).

Occupational segregation is still high as women are often restricted to low-skilled and lower paying jobs and continue to earn less than their male counterparts. According to the National Labour force survey, the median nominal monthly earnings for women is estimated to be UGX. 110,000 which is half the median nominal monthly earnings for men (UGX.220, 000)¹⁰. Disturbingly, the majority of women in paid employment do not earn enough to move out of poverty, the 2014 Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) findings reveal that close to 20 percent of the women are classified as the 'working poor'

In April 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that 3.8 million workers were at risk losing their jobs temporarily while 625,958 risk losing their employment permanently if the pandemic and its associated measures persist.¹¹ Women have been disproportionately hit by the job and income losses resulting from the sharp reduction in economic activity during the nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of the virus. The G20 Employment Working Group indicates that the impact of Covid-19 has been greater for women on several fronts and risks pushing back some of the gains towards greater gender equality in the labour market that have been achieved over the years.¹²

Prior to COVID-19 outbreak, 37% and 29% of the public and private sector employees were women respectively¹³. However, it is important to note that Women make up the majority of the employees in the pre- primary education. The resultant effects of COVID-19 have adversely affected the employment in pre-primary and given the continued suspension on the pre-primary education, it is only fair to note that all those women who derived their livelihoods have since lost their employment.

⁴ UBOS National Labour Force Survey 2016/2017

⁵ UBOS National Labour Force Survey 2016/2017

⁶ Ibid

⁷ UBOS Manpower Survey Uganda 2016/2017

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Id

¹⁰ UBOS National Labour Force Survey 2016/2017

¹¹ The Uganda climate index conducted the Economic Policy Research Centre, April 2020

¹² Women at Work in G20 countries: Progress and Policy action since 2019, Prepared for the G20 Employment Working Group Saudi Arabia's G20 Presidency 2020 available at <https://www.ilo.org>

¹³ Uganda National Housing survey report 2016/2017

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In Uganda, 71% of women operate in the informal sector in retail business, market vending, street vending, petty trade, etc due to the realities such as poverty, low levels of education, lower access to financial facilities given the fact that majority of women are not credit worth. Most women find their participation in the informal economy as an opportunity to enhance their economic independence since it is the only source of income available to support their households¹⁴. Majority of ventures undertaken by women in the informal sector require daily activities to earn an income. According to a 2015 assessment by the Institute for Social Transformation, the market women decried lack of designated play and safe areas for their children while other markets had stopped market vendors from coming with children below the age of 5 years.

The pronouncement by the Minister of Education and Sports on 5th February 2021 that children will now have to start school in Primary One at least 5 years of age, leaves no hope of return for the workers majority of whom women and actors within the pre-primary education sector. On the other hand, the Minister's pronouncement further sends children between 0-5 to remain at home until they are eligible to join to primary one; indirectly sending women back home. Reports indicate that presence of young children in the household aged between 0-5 years reduces Women's productivity by 40% and 79% for full time employed and self-employed women respectively further increasing the risk of work place gender inequality and disparity.

Reduction in women's economic participation; In Uganda like many African Countries, women are regarded as natural careers and their predominant role in providing unpaid care work shapes their ability to undertake paid work, as well as the types of paid work they can do. According to the Uganda National Labor Survey, 2016, the average Ugandan woman spends 11 hours a day on domestic care work activities and accordingly more women 17% engage in family work than men 11%¹⁵. Overall, work burdens of women, when domestic tasks are taken into account, have a direct, and negative effect on women's economic opportunities, productivity and participation as women's role in the labour market is intertwined with burden they bear of unpaid care work.¹⁶ Key of the resultant effects of COVID-19 health crisis has been the increased unpaid work burden on women due to closure of schools and day care centers.¹⁷

According to objective XV of the National objectives and directive principles of state policy under the 1995 Constitution of Uganda, the state is mandated to recognize the significant role that women play in society. This duty is reinforced under Article 33 (1), (2), (3) and (4) which provide that women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men, provided the facilities and opportunities necessary to enhance their welfare to enable them to realise their full potential and advancement, protected

¹⁴ SIHA Network The invisible labourers o Kampala 208

¹⁵ UBOS Men and Women. Facts and Figures 2016

¹⁶ Danish Trade Union Development Agency Analytical Unit Labour Market Profile, Uganda 2019 <https://ulandssekretariatet.dk>

¹⁷ Women at Work in G20 countries: Progress and Policy action since 2019, Prepared for the G20 Employment Working Group Saudi Arabia's G20 Presidency 2020 available at <https://www.ilo.org>

taking into account their unique status and natural maternal functions in society and given equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities. In addition, parliament enacted the Equal Opportunities Commission Act¹⁸ which promotes gender equality and women's empowerment.

Unfortunately the policy makers and the different work place in Uganda have had little awareness and progress in creating the friendly work life balance policies that balance parenting, employment and productivity of women at work¹⁹. In Uganda, apart from the Parliament of Uganda and very few private entities have provided day care centers for its workers, it is not currently a legal requirement for work places whether formal or informal to provide child care facilities.

In the current circumstances, women will pay a high price in the new working environment of more working hours and in fewer opportunities.²⁰ Therefore, the Minister's suspension of the only avenue that has enabled and facilitated women strike a balance between work and unpaid care is decision taken without any due consideration of the severe impact it bears on women's economic participation. Women will be forced to adopt negatively including having to reduce their hours of working to tend to the education needs of their children, forfeiting working part-time or quitting temporarily, hire outside support/ tutors for those who are privileged to afford the service and others being forced to completely quit working. Women therefore are headed for more labour constrains and time trade-offs in income related activities.

In addition, this pronouncement frustrates the gains so far registered and the continued successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Uganda. Since adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, Uganda has been steadfast in adopting and domesticating the Sustainable Development Goals. It is estimated that up to 76% of the SDGs targets are reflected, integrated and adapted in the 2015/16–2019/20 National Development Plan to match the national context. In fact, the SDGs have further been integrated into the plan of various Local Governments, national sectors and MDAs. As part of efforts to operationalise the national SDG Coordination Framework, the President appointed the Minister in charge of General Duties in the Office of the Prime Minister as Cabinet Focal Point Minister in charge of SDGs. A fully-fledged national SDG Secretariat has been established to support the SDG Coordination architecture to ensure that Uganda stays on track in implementing the SDGs.

The pronouncement by the Minister will therefore directly affect Goal 8 states should promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; Goal 1 on ending poverty in all its forms; Goal 5 which aspires to achievement gender equality and empower all women and girls and

¹⁸ Laws of Uganda 2007

¹⁹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264236204_Factors_Affecting_Retention_of_Female_Employees_in_Organizations

under target 5.5, states including Uganda committed to Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

The pronouncement further breaches Uganda's commitment and obligations under the different ratified UN and African Union Conventions and Protocols.

Uganda ratified conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1985. Article 11 of the Convention requires states to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular the right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings and the right to the same employment opportunities; Article 3 of International Convention on Economic, social and cultural rights which Uganda ratified in 1987, advocates for the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights. Furthermore, Article 7 recognizes the right to work and the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work.

In July 2010, Uganda ratified The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). In accordance with the provisions of the protocol, Uganda committed to among others to integrate a gender perspective in its policy decisions, legislation, development plans, programmes and activities and in all other spheres of life²¹; adopt and enforce legislative and other measures to guarantee women equal opportunities in work and career advancement and other economic opportunities²²; Create conditions to promote and support the occupations and economic activities of women, in particular, within the informal sector²³.

Last but not least, in 1995, Uganda was one of the countries that supported the adoption and flagship of the Beijing Platform for Action. The action embodies 12 key areas where urgent action was needed to ensure greater equality and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys. It also laid out concrete ways for countries to bring about change. Women and the Economy is one of the key areas. It was agreed that whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, or through unpaid domestic or care work at home, women make enormous contributions to economies.

21 Article 2 of the Maputo Protocol

22 Article 13 of the Maputo Protocol

23 Article 13 (e) of the Maputo Protocol

3.0.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Government should re-consider the decision taking into consideration the impact on women's economic development and participation. In addition government should clearly and carefully base the decision on the available empirical data on the virus and children. Currently there is no study undertaken to provide data on whether corona virus affects children, how it affects them among others
2. Government should fast-track the procurement of the COVID-19 vaccine in order to bring to an end rising tensions between itself and the education sector.
3. Nursery schools should be opened and children can learn in shifts to reduce on the congestion of classes. Before opening establish whether;
 - a) The schools should have a schedule for regular cleaning of the preschool classrooms and environment daily, including toilets, with water and soap/detergent and disinfectant
 - b) Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, tables, toys, supplies, lightswitches, doorframes, play equipment, teaching aids used by children.
 - c) When feasible, staff members should wear face coverings within the preschool. Face masks for
 - d) Educate young children about COVID-19 prevention- this includes appropriate and frequent hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, as well as symptoms of COVID-19 children can be aware of

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