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Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms

'One step forward and two steps back': narratives of change and resistance in confronting discriminatory gender norms in Uganda

Carol Watson and Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo

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Tables and boxes

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACFODE	Action for Development
ALIGN	Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil society organisation
FGD	Focus group discussion
FIDA	Uganda Association of Women Lawyers
FOWODE	Forum for Women in Democracy
GBV	Gender-based violence
IDI	In-depth individual interview
IGI	Intergenerational interview
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRM	National Resistance Movement

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ODI	Overseas Development Institute (UK)
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USE	Universal Secondary Education
UWONET	Uganda Women's Network
UWOPA	Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association.

"While the windows of opportunities remain open, the doors stay closed and even locked and guarded. Women are getting out only through the windows – and some just squeezing through the grates at the tops of these windows. Other women, meanwhile, remain stuck in the room. And even those who have gotten out are sometimes smashed against the wall outside." (In-depth interview (IDI), professional woman)

Cover photo: A grandmother and her grandson in Kampala, Uganda. © Arne Hoel / World Bank

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Key messages

- **Uganda has seen a number of positive changes in discriminatory gender norms and practices over the past 40 years or so.** Rising levels of education for women and girls reflect shifts in parental attitudes on the value of the girl child, recognition that education is important for both girls and boys, and a vision of female potential that extends beyond marriage and family alone. Marriage practices and expectations have also shifted towards greater agency for girls in choice of spouse, more flexibility around bride wealth payments, and delayed marriage. Economic empowerment has included women's entry into professions previously reserved for men, while women's participation in political spaces is now more accepted and more common.

- **These positive changes have been brought about through a combination of factors.** These include expanded educational access and opportunities for women; progressive policies backed by law; increased availability of services; mass awareness-raising efforts; and political will that has valued women's voice and representation. Many of the positive changes are interconnected and have generated synergies. For example, greater access to education is leading to expanded economic opportunities for women; stronger political voice has contributed to more gender-equitable policies; and more women in positions of leadership are serving as role models to encourage the younger generations.

- **Women's agency – both individual and collective – has been critical in challenging discriminatory gender norms.** Women have provided the vision and models for what gender justice entails and for what women can be and do; women have also helped establish the laws, policies and processes needed to effect and safeguard transformative change. Agency is sometimes borne from opposition, but is also nurtured by supportive families and communities, strong collective institutions, ideas and inspiration from both national and international women's movements, and from the political space provided for women's empowerment, voice and action.

- **Progress in changing discriminatory gender norms and practices is not linear.** Change does not always move forward at a steady pace, nor does positive change at national level necessarily affect all groups or categories of women equally. The process in Uganda – though on an early upward arc – has been dynamic and ever partial, with twists and turns as well as current backlash and reversals that require constant action and attention. Many gains are fragile and may be eroded under changing circumstances that could weaken the enabling environment and allow a resurgence of patriarchal norms.

- **'Sticky' norms persist in a number of key domains.** Discriminatory gender expectations and power relations within marriage, the family and household have proven to be highly resistant to change and continue to impede progress for women and girls. These revolve around issues of son preference and the continued devaluation of the girl child (including customary expectations about marriage for girls, unequal access to education, and discriminatory inheritance and property ownership practices) as well as the unequal gendered division of labour, the double burden on women, and women's restricted autonomy and decision-making authority within the household. They also

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include limitations on women's economic empowerment and the persistence of domestic violence, with the rise of new sources of marital discord coupled with the emergence of new forms of abuse and gender-based violence against women and girls.

- **Obstacles and resistance to transformative gender norm change are seen to arise from the power and persistence of 'patriarchy'.** The norms, attitudes and practices associated with patriarchy as a system continue to operate at all levels of society and through all institutions, serving to reinforce discriminatory gender norms and thus maintain male power and privilege. They are deeply rooted in broad-based socio-cultural norms of the male-dominated organisation of the household and family; they are transmitted through discourse and socialisation processes in both public and private domains; they may change in shape and intensity in different contexts; and they are often backed up by law and other institutions such as religion, politics and education, as well as by force or intimidation at both the individual and societal levels.

- **Strategic priorities for moving forward require sustained and integrated action on a number of fronts.** This entails: reinvigorating and further supporting the women's movement for enhanced collective agency through strengthened political representation and alliances, nationally and internationally; a refocus on the grassroots; and mobilisation around priority themes that both build on or reinforce and expand gains already achieved. Priorities include further expansion of quality education for all; continued reform and development of gender-equitable laws and policies coupled with intensified efforts to ensure adequate implementation and enforcement on the ground; and ongoing advocacy and sensitisation efforts through both traditional and social media, as well as transformative education and socialisation processes at all levels. Study participants suggest that it is the combination of these factors, working in tandem, which is most conducive to sustainable changes in norms and practices aimed at women's empowerment and gender justice. Without such concerted actions, norm change may remain merely partial or transitory.

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Introduction

Study background

This report presents findings from a qualitative study undertaken in Uganda as part of a History and Change research series of the Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN) project. ALIGN is led by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It seeks to further knowledge-sharing and innovation to ensure that evidence and learning on norm change informs more effective policy and practice in promotion of gender justice and women's empowerment.

The History and Change research seeks to pull together and draw lessons from personal narratives and analyses of change and resistance in gender norms, expectations and behaviours as these play out against a backdrop of broader social, economic and political processes. The overall aim is to enhance understanding of factors that enable or challenge positive norm change as these are perceived and experienced through the lives of individual women at national level, as well as through intergenerational discussions with selected participants.

ALIGN defines gender norms as the implicit, informal rules around the behaviour of women and men, and boys and girls, which most people accept and follow. They are influenced by belief systems, economic contexts, and sometimes by the perceived rewards and sanctions for adherence or deviation. Gender norms often reflect and reinforce unequal gender relations – usually to the disadvantage of women and girls and men and boys who do not conform to the prevailing ideals. As norms are embedded in formal and informal institutions and produced and reproduced through social interaction, change can only come about when enough people choose to act (or are compelled to act) in a different way, creating a new norm.

The research has been guided by the project's conceptual understanding of gender norms – both how they operate and how they either change, or resist change. It is also underpinned by current thinking around gender justice and entitlements, and has been informed by the capabilities approach to human development, which posits that progress across the life cycle in a number of key domains is critical to the empowerment of women and girls and their equitable attainment and exercise of full capabilities. Narrative investigations have therefore covered norms around: household and family relations; education; physical integrity and health; psychosocial well-being; and political and civic participation.

Research in Uganda

Fieldwork was carried out over 10 days in Kampala in August 2018, with 55 study participants – 49 women and 6 young men. The sample captured women (senior women, middle-aged women, and younger women) who are or have been active in: politics and the law; in government and policy-making; in civil society; and in academia, as well as a mixed group of recent university graduates. Study participants were selected on the basis of their knowledge of and contributions to national efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Research activities included: 16 in-depth individual interviews (IDIs); four intergenerational interviews (IGIs); and two focus group discussions (FGDs) as well as a literature review. Participants were asked about their own experiences of gender norms over their life course as well as their perceptions of broader changes, progress and constraints over time in gender equality and women's empowerment.

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Study participants ranged in age from 15 (in an IGI) to 89 (one of Uganda's historical woman leaders). While all are currently based in the capital, they came from different regions of the country with different socio-cultural backgrounds; most were Christian (Catholic and Protestant). All but the grandmothers in IGIs were highly educated and constitute what might be considered the intellectual elite, who are among the 'movers and shakers' of the women's movement in Uganda. While their personal experiences cannot be considered representative of those of Ugandan women as a whole, their broader reflections on progress and obstacles to progress in changing gender norms for women in different contexts and socioeconomic settings contribute to our expanded understanding of the situation more generally.

National context

Uganda has, in many ways, been a trail-blazer in the development of gender-sensitive national policies, processes and structures for the empowerment of women and girls, and has much to offer in terms of lessons learned in confronting discriminatory gender norms and practices. The country has made significant progress in efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly since the current regime took power in 1986.

Progress has been made possible through the expansion of educational opportunities for both girls and boys, the opening up of political spaces to women, and the creation of a ministerial structure dedicated to gender justice and equality (the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development) as well as the rise of a vibrant women's movement in civil society. The 1995 Constitution stands as a hallmark of gender-sensitive legislation, and a plethora of progressive national laws, policies and programmes have been developed to foster equitable and inclusive development. Indicators of women's empowerment and well-being have, for the most part, improved significantly over time (see table 1).

Table 1. Overview of progress and constraints in gender equality and women's empowerment in Uganda

Progress	Ongoing constraints
A national priority in successive development plans, Uganda has made significant progress in poverty reduction overall (from 25.5% in 2009/10 to 19.7% in 2012/13), along with a rise in employment – including in professional, technical, and managerial sectors, with positive effects on women	Women still have unequal access to economic resources and assets (only 31% own land or a house alone or jointly), and face discrimination in the workplace (73% of women vs 92% of men employed in 2016; 50% women vs 35% men employed in the 3 lowest-paying sectors; a 39% male–female wage gap in the private sector)
Gender-sensitive Constitution (1995); Local Government Act (1999); and Presidential Elections Act (2000) with affirmative action (including 30% reserved seats) contributing to ground-breaking levels of women in government at all levels (proportion of women MPs up from 18% in 2000 to 35% in 2012)	Women continue to face gendered stereotypes of political leadership and obstacles to the exercise of power, including sexual harassment and aggression, negative portrayals and trivialisation in the media, and lack of required resources and skills
Girls' education promoted through policies of universal primary and secondary education (UPE/USE), a National Strategy for Girls' Education (2014–2019) and affirmative action for university	Transition to secondary school remains low for boys and girls alike (24% and 22% respectively), with continued high drop-outs among girls due to early marriage or teenage pregnancy, gender-insensitive

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entrance (1.5 point advantage over boys in admissions criteria) contributed to doubling the median number of years spent in school for girls since the 1990s (from 3.0 to 6.3) and gender parity at primary level	teaching and learning environments, parental investments in education favouring boys, and continued regional, urban–rural and socioeconomic disparities
Improvements in women's sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care services have contributed to a decline in fertility (from 7.1 in the 1970s to 5.4 in 2015) and a reduction in maternal mortality from 687 to 343 per 100,000 live births between 1990 and 2015)	Maternal mortality still high, along with teenage pregnancy and childbirth (25% of women give birth by age 18), an unmet need for family planning, and disparities in access to SRH information and services
Protective laws, policies, and programmes (Penal Code Amendment, 2007; Domestic Violence Act, 2010; National Gender-Based Violence Policy and Action Plan, 2016) accompanied by extensive mobilisation contributed to a decline in women's experiences of physical violence (from 59.9% in 2006 to 51% in 2016) and in societal acceptance of domestic violence (from 77% to 49% among women and 64% to 41% among men) between 2000 and 2016)	Violence against women and girls remains widespread (more than 1 in 5 women aged 15 – 49 have experienced some form of GBV), while access to justice is limited due to lack implementation of laws and policies on the ground, lack of awareness of rights, and high opportunity costs in bringing cases to court. Decades of opposition to a proposed Marriage and Divorce Bill leave women without protection of equal rights within marriage
A number of government institutions established to promote gender equality and non-discrimination along with a plethora of civil society organisations (CSOs) devoted to promoting the rights of women and girls	Gender not a priority in most sectors; public institutions on the whole suffer from weak public management, under-staffing and under-resourcing; and the space for CSO activities has been shrinking

Sources: Matembe, 2002; Tripp and Kwesiga, 2002; Republic of Uganda, 2015; Republic of Uganda et al., 1989; 1996; 2001; 2007; 2012; 2018; Bantebya Kyomuhendo et al., 2014; UWONET, 2014a, 2014b; Among, 2017; FOWODE, 2017; Oloka-Onyango and Ahikire, 2017; Aciro Lakor, 2017.

Nevertheless, progress has been uneven, with important disparities. Significant obstacles and continuing challenges remain in all of the critical domains that affect the roles and status of women and girls in Uganda, and the opportunities open to them. Recent gender assessments and key national documents identify shortfalls in progress against international benchmarks and commitments (FOWODE, 2017; WEF, 2017; Republic of Uganda et al., 2018). Some explicitly point to negative gender norms as an obstacle to gender equality and women's empowerment (CEDAW, 2009; Bantebya Kyomuhendo et al., 2013; MGLSD, 2014; OECD and UBOS, 2015; UNDP, 2015; UNFPA, 2017; Watson et al., 2018).

Narratives of growing up and coming of age

Reflecting on childhood experiences

A number of study participants described unstable home lives growing up and early personal encounters with discriminatory norms and gender inequality. Others reported very supportive home environments where they felt their parents treated sons and daughters equally. In the face of gender inequality experienced in childhood, many of the older or middle-aged women in our sample found that they either had to accept things as they were, or had to 'rebel' in some way against societal norms in order to fully exercise individual agency. *'It is only the rebellious women who have excelled. They have had to rebel in some sense and know that they are seen as weird or as prostitutes – loose women'* (IDI,

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professional woman). The younger study participants – daughters of the professional women in our sample – seem to have faced fewer restrictive norms in their natal families, as their parents consciously strove to create more gender-equitable home environments; though even those girls found that expectations of 'proper' behaviour began to change as they approached adolescence (see box 1).

Box 1. Encountering gender norms in childhood

- **A grandmother now approaching 70 years** explained that, 'Growing up in a rural farming family of three girls and two boys, the girls' tasks were to collect water and work in the gardens; boys would herd the cattle and goats, collect firewood. We never minded about boys and girls doing different things because that was our nature. The boys would play football or play, but a girl never had the chance of going to play as she was occupied with chores all the time – she would not have time to roam around. And you would get used to it. We did not question, no! And all the people in the community knew about that.'

- **Another grandmother in her 80s** reported that, 'At home, the girls would do the farming, cooking and other house chores… Land was always for the boys. And these assets were often given to the boys.'

- **A professional woman in her 60s**, now working in government, was born into a farming family and reported how her father took on additional wives to have sons after her own mother produced only daughters. He favoured her step-brothers in education and still now, when she herself is caring for him in his old age, refuses to give her and her sister land, because, he says 'It is not in our culture'.

- **Born as the fifth of seven children in a rural family** in which the father was a government worker, a professional woman in her 40s now working in academia reported that her parents showed no specific favour for either boys or girls in terms of household chores. But she did resent restrictions on her movements as a girl, for while the boys could regularly go out to the nearby trading centres, 'the girls were only allowed to go to water points next to the house'.

- **A civil society activist in her 50s** resented that she and her sister were expected to learn how to cook and clean while their brothers were out playing. She always preferred playing with boys, including climbing trees. This was forbidden for girls as it was said that it would cause the tree to dry out: 'But when I observed that my climbing had no impact on the tree, I began to question this!'

- **A young professional in her late 20s** reported little differentiation between boys and girls in her younger years, but around the time of adolescence (age 12 or so), 'You begin to see the boys no longer doing the dishes and the girls will be in the kitchen!' She also noted that gender-differentiated behavioural expectations would set in around that age: 'Of course, with the girl, they expect you to be more composed, calm. You shouldn't talk roughly, or bark out loudly in a rude way. They expected you to be calm and settled, compared to the boys. You really wouldn't have to question much. You just had to live with it.' It was also around that age – around the time of menstruation – that her mother explained to her that 'Now that you have started menstruating, you know that you can get pregnant and you have to be careful.'

- **Our youngest study participant, still a schoolgirl in her teens,** felt that there was a slight difference in the way she and her brother are treated at home – but mostly in her favour, as her parents are stricter with her brother (her elder by four years) than they are with her: 'My parents treat me gently, but in primary school if my brother didn't do his homework, our father would cane him, while if I had problems he would not.'

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Diverse experiences in accessing education

All of our study participants recognised that quality education offers a pathway to empowerment for women, both individually and collectively, and therefore have striven to stay in education at all costs – at increasingly higher levels (see box 2). While some participants indicated that their parents supported the education of sons and daughters in the family, others spoke of having had to fight for their right to education or to find allies to support them in the context of prevailing norms favouring boys The struggle often started around school fees at primary or secondary level (before the policy of universal education) and would continue over the desire to continue to university, as well as over the choice of study streams deemed most appropriate for women. Those who attained a certain level of education themselves – often against considerable odds – thereafter served as role models and paved the way for their younger sisters to go on to study with less resistance from within the family.

Education had proved a critical factor in the lives of the older women, born during the colonial period, who served in senior political roles as early leaders of the women's movement in Uganda. It gave them the skills and standing to engage in technical and political activities, and channelled and chiselled their understanding of gender issues and discrimination such that they could engage with these in their professional lives and address what they increasingly saw as structural imbalances and social injustice. It has served much the same function among women of the younger generations – opening up both awareness and professional opportunities that have allowed them to engage directly with individual and collective efforts to combat discriminatory gender norms.

Box 2. Pursuing equal education opportunities against prevailing norms favouring schooling for boys education

Senior women leaders

- **One leader now approaching 90 years old** noted that her father, who had been a page in the court of the local Bugandan kingdom, 'loved education, which he didn't have' and promoted education for his children – including her own education at one of the most prestigious Anglican girls' schools in the country whose graduates 'were the real founders of the women's movement in Uganda'.

- **Another woman leader in her 70s** spoke of the 'generational shift' between her mother's day and her own. Her mother had been taken out of school at age 15 to marry her father, a magistrate. 'She came home from school for the holidays and found there were cows [for bride wealth] in the compound brought by the husband selected for her, whom she had never met. It was forbidden to return the cows, so she accepted.' But it was later her mother who insisted that her daughter be allowed to continue schooling, as she realised fully its importance and was herself 'a great leader and a powerhouse, in spite of her lack of education'.

- **Still another woman leader, also in her 70s,** reported that while her parents were supportive of her education, there were limited options in her day: 'Girls became either nurses, teachers or secretaries', so she chose teaching and later became a leader in education.

- **A leader in her 60s** who had grown up with her father and his second wife (her stepmother) explained that her father paid her school fees up to Junior 2 (eight years in all), but stopped after one term at secondary, even though she was a good student and had been made a prefect. He was influenced by

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her stepmother who had married at age 15, and who therefore proclaimed, '"This girl is ready for marriage"'. 'So I grew up with a sense of exclusion', she said. She later gained a scholarship on her own for commercial school and her father and stepmother were happy, particularly because the position came with a stipend: 'Their attitude changed because of the stipend!'

- **A historical leader, now in her 60s**, reported that 'As I grew up, I personally experienced discrimination, particularly vis-à-vis my older brother.' Her father was enlightened in that he sent his sons and daughters to the village school, 'which wasn't the common case' at the time. However, when household finances were tight, fees would be found for her brother only, while she would stay at home until more money was available. She was also expected to miss classes twice a week to care for her younger siblings while her mother was busy. 'So I questioned, and these questions were within me. I was feeling bad and feeling that it was unfair.' And although she was a better student than her brother, her parents withdrew her at senior level, planning to enrol her in teacher training. 'But I wondered why? I was brilliant, making it, going straight through and they don't want to send me through the higher levels?' But as she continued, 'These injustices and hardships make you sharp. I heard about scholarships for orphans and vulnerable children and at age 14 went to the district educational officer' and within two or three days 'I had the scholarship, finished and went on to senior secondary school.' She was accepted into law school in Kampala, but again faced obstacles from her father, who considered only nursing or teaching as proper subjects for girls. 'But we must resist these detractors and hold onto our own dreams and the vision that shapes us and directs our lives. I said no... and told him that since I had already been accepted, he would have to go there himself and tell the chancellor why I was not enrolling. He who had never even been to Kampala!' So she went to law school. 'Do you see resistance? I defied him!'

- **Another leader now in her 70s** noted that it was her paternal uncle, with whom she was staying, who provided her with a firm basis in education at a prestigious Christian missionary school. Her uncle was educated – unlike her own father – and knew the value of education. She gained a place in a first-class secondary school in Kampala. However, her father then intervened and sent her instead to a lesser-ranked school near home so that she could care for her grandmother. 'The problem was that I had gotten into a first-class school but because of gender expectations had to attend a third-class school as well as combine my studies with time-consuming household chores at my grandmother's house such as fetching water. Nevertheless, I was lucky because by that age, all of my sisters had been married off – I was the only one to get an education.' She advanced up through her doctorate – the only girl in her family to do so – and later supported her two younger sisters in their education. 'It is rare for a girl who is exceptionally good and bright not to have someone lending a hand'.

- **A grandmother in her 80s** reported that her widowed mother was able to send her daughters to school very much against the prevailing norms of the time: 'We were all girls in my family, but we all went to school – all of us studied and finished! When people saw a girl going to school they would say "She will just get pregnant". Therefore people would think that she would just waste the father's or mother's money and would not want to take their daughters to school. So there were very few girls. People used to laugh at my mother and warn her that we would get pregnant and drop out, but with God's grace we all went to school and studied. One of my sisters was the first one to become a prison warden and I was the first person in my village to build a house with iron roofing! It was a Catholic girls' school and we paid 150 shillings per year, and some of us – like me – were studying

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free of charge because we had passed with good grades.' She later trained and worked as a school teacher.

Middle-aged professional woman

- **Born out of wedlock,** to a mother who afterwards struggled in a violent marriage and was preoccupied with her own problems, a professional woman in her 50s reported that she did not start primary school until age 10 – staying at home before then to help out on the banana plantation and with household chores, collecting water and firewood. She enjoyed her primary school years and was very bright, but it was hard, as she was staying with various relatives at the time, with little support from her mother who eventually pulled her out of school so that she could help with her petty trading activities. It was her uncle who stepped in and took her to his village where she was enrolled in a government boarding school (of rather low quality) for the first years of secondary school. There, she distinguished herself as one of the best students and was sent on to a better school for remaining years of secondary school. Before she could finish, however, her uncle withdrew his support (he had paid the fees), so she turned to the headmaster on her own, explained the situation and managed to get a government scholarship targeted at orphans and vulnerable children, which enabled her to complete secondary school and later go on to university.

Young professional woman

- **A young civil society activist in her 30s**, the eldest of seven children in an up-country family, noted that she had to struggle for her higher education even without realising all of the gender issues at stake: 'Earlier, I had fought even though I didn't know exactly what I was fighting'. On completing her secondary education up to 0-levels, her father insisted that she train to become a lower primary school teacher. Relatives at the time were saying to her parents 'These are just girls – let them stop at Senior 4, do a teaching degree, and start teaching, since girls are just going to get married'. But she wanted to continue on to do A-levels for university. Her father took her for an entrance interview at a teaching institute in Kampala – a 7-hour journey from home – but she refused to participate. So, at an impasse, she sat at home for a year while the dispute went on until her paternal uncle came to her aid. As an educated man who had sent all of his children – boys and girls – to school, he told her father that, 'If you don't educate your children, they will never sit at the same table as my children when they get together, as what would they discuss?' Her mother also tacitly supported her, as she herself had been forced to stop at Senior 4, becoming a school teacher, but explaining that 'If I had studied, I would be headmistress by now.' So with the help of her uncle and mother, she was able to go on to university, becoming a trailblazer in the family and paving the way for her sisters to attend university as well. Now her father is himself a champion of education for the girl child and, as an opinion leader in his community, is promoting this, saying that ' For me, I have four degrees at home and they are all girls', referring to his daughters.

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Encountering gendered norms and expectations within education

Once in school, our study participants reported having had varying experiences of education (see box 3). Many of the women leaders and professionals in our study got their start in church-based schools, which, from their perspective, offered superior education to that of public schools – primarily because they had more resources and maintained higher standards. Many participants had their characters forged in all-girls schools, where leadership skills were honed; others gained their skills from mixed schools, where competing equally against boys could bolster a sense of confidence and equality. But mixed educational environments, at both secondary and university levels, could also sometimes transmit discriminatory values and behaviours; they were moreover seen by some – particularly by parents – to be fraught with perils for girls who risked unwanted pregnancies (see box 4). While this was particularly true in earlier days, when access to modern contraceptives (particularly for girls) was unheard of, and when the onset of puberty was in any case seen to be the signal for marriage, it remains a strong concern for many parents, who perceive schools as risky environments for girls, particularly as they advance along the educational cycle.

Box 3. Gendered experiences of education: mixed vs all-girls environments

Mixed versus all-girls' schools

- **A senior leader in her 70s,** who later went on to academia, suggests that mixed schools may have certain advantages, for 'Once you prove yourself equal to men in the classroom – competing with them as equals, while you may fight and argue with men, you will never thereafter be subject to gender oppression because you have proved yourself on that terrain.'

- **A lawyer in her 50s** was educated in a Catholic setting – a boarding school run by nuns, noting that in such an all-female environment, taking orders from the sisters, 'I got accustomed to female power.' It was not until she got to university that she began to experience the force of gender norms. 'At Makerere I found a culture where girls would immediately slot themselves into positions of subservience – acting as if they had no knowledge, though we had all passed Senior 6! Also pairing up – looking for boyfriends and performing wifely roles in the boys' residences – cooking, etc., while the boys sat there studying.'

- **A professor in her 40s** attended a mixed college but found that many of her peers were focused primarily on finding boyfriends and had no real aspirations for higher education. Teachers did not always take girls seriously either and some were even dating girls and marrying them, 'and this was considered "normal"!' The matron of the dormitory would be complicit as she would get money, sugar or meat from the male teachers coming to pick up their girlfriends. 'Only since the Constitution in 1995 and the growing awareness of women's rights has the idea of teachers having sex with girls stopped being seen as normal.' She herself was not interested in getting married at that age: her mother was the one who helped her withstand peer pressure and a female teacher was the one who encouraged her to have confidence and spurred her to compete with boys. She also considers herself 'a product of affirmative action', as it was with the help of the 1.5 point advantage – 'just that little boost' – that she was able to gain admission to university.

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- **As a child in primary school, a civil society leader in her 40s** was articulate and the head of all the debating clubs. She would always push back and question why. At secondary level, where she experienced both a mixed and all-girls school, she found each conducive to honing her leadership skills in different ways. In the mixed school, one of her teachers encouraged her to become the head of the debating club – the first ever girl at the school to hold this position – and this gave her a platform to compete and hold her own with boys, overcoming any timidity in front of them. This, she feels, also helped her ward off unwanted sexual advances, as the boys respected her as an equal. In the all-girls environment run by nuns, a clear sense of discipline was instilled, but also the basis for revolt, as she rebelled against taking the home economics courses that were part of the curriculum. In her early teens, her auntie would say, 'You are so beautiful. If you went to a nursing school, all of the doctors would die for you.' Or 'Oh dear, after O levels (S4) you should go to teaching institute, to become a teacher of small children.' But, as she said, 'Much as I love children, I knew I could not stop at Senior 4.' And so she pursued her path to higher education.

- **A university professor in her 50s** who attended an all-girls Catholic school felt that single-sex schooling helps girls become more assertive than mixed schools, 'as there is space to do things that are usually reserved for boys such as taking on leadership roles, doing male dances, and even singing alto!' She feels that the nuns were not really modelling them to become housewives – 'primarily because the sisters themselves didn't really know how to do this' – but rather to be responsible and good women. Interaction with boys was restricted and the sisters would warn them about sex and impress upon them that their well-being was primarily up to them; they should take up this responsibility and value themselves. Coming into university on a government sponsorship from this earlier, tightly controlled environment was quite a shock, as suddenly there were no rules, and also some aggression from boys who would say to the girls, 'All of you are ugly – otherwise you would have been married by now.' She also saw that some male lecturers would pick boys to speak in discussions and this would be intimidating – silencing girls, including herself. It was, moreover, somehow impressed on her earlier that sciences were not appropriate subjects for girls to study.

- **Younger professional women in their late 20s and early 30s**, having attended girls-only church-based boarding schools at secondary level, felt that the quality of education they received was high and that there were fewer 'distractions' in terms of boys, 'so you could concentrate more and there was no one saying that you are bad at math because you are a girl. Which meant that if you were bad at math, it is simply because you are bad at it – not because of your gender. The school gave girls a chance to thrive.' They also noted that their teachers encouraged girls to set their career aspirations high, affirming 'that being a doctor was not only for boys and that girls can also be engineers'. Nevertheless, some still observe that female teachers are still mostly teaching the 'softer' subjects – but not things like science or math, and wonder why this is the case.

- **Our youngest interviewee, still in secondary school** at a prestigious Anglican church-based all-girls boarding school in Kampala, was very convinced about the benefits of attending such a strict, single-sex school 'because I don't think I could handle it as a teenager at a mixed school'. One of the things she appreciates about being around all girls is that 'people are confident with no boys around. You can be who you are. At times, we girls can pretend not to like food when boys are around, but with just girls we can eat what we want'. She also likes that they do not have to worry about their appearances or to be afraid if their period leaks during the day: 'In mixed classes, what would boys do? Laugh? You would be so embarrassed and feel insecure, like everything about you is not perfect – they would make fun of you, bullying, etc. The fear of that makes you want to go to a single-sex school.'

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Box 4. Ever-present fears of pregnancy linked to girls' schooling

- **A grandmother in her 80s** described the social environment prevalent in the village where she grew up, where the onset of puberty for girls was reason for withdrawal from school and early marriage so as not to risk unwanted pregnancy. 'Parents at the time, and even in school, would tell us not to get intimately involved with boys, and we listened. Parents would start counselling us and would say "Please do not shame us." Getting pregnant meant no more education for girls, 'So the girls had to protect themselves and say no, even if a boy came to seduce them. But if you recklessly lived your life, then the next stories would be all about how you got pregnant and dropped out of school. And then the girl would lose her market value. The people from your village would start talking volumes about you. It was a very shaming thing and you would fear shaming your parents.'

- **Another grandmother approaching 70 years** cited herself as a cautionary example of what can happen when a girl is not careful in mixed-school settings: 'When I completed primary (P7), I dropped out of school. I was not all that bright and I was not doing well in class truthfully. I was always repeating classes and got fed up when I reached P7. It is also when I got pregnant with my first daughter. The father was a teacher at the school. Those days they didn't get that time to tell us about things like pregnancy – even our school mistresses. I didn't know about pregnancy – I had no idea about what was taking place. But when you discover you have not got your period, then you know. In our culture it was the custom for women who had children out of wedlock to be thrown off the cliff with the child. So when I got pregnant, I disappeared from home and went to my other relatives until I gave birth. Yes! I ran away ... You could not sit there at home with your relatives and other people laughing at you because some had hope in you, so I ran to my distant relatives, gave birth and later came back with my baby.'

- **A civil society leader in her 60s** spoke of herself as an 'outlier' in the rural area where she grew up, as the first girl to attend secondary school from a village where girls normally left school at the age of 12 or 13 to prepare for marriage. As the first-born of 12 children (boys and girls) in a very strong and strict Catholic family, she was expected to behave and perform well when she went off to boarding school. Her father admonished her with the words: '"Don't embarrass me. People will laugh at me and say I am taking you to a place where you might get spoiled." And this to someone who had not even had her first period yet!' Nevertheless, whenever she returned home between school terms, her mother and aunties would examine her carefully for any sign of pregnancy! She excelled in her studies and also learned to enjoy herself – 'I became myself in school' – though her education increasingly set her apart from other children back in her home community. On school vacations, boys would sometimes waylay her, trying to beat her, saying 'You and your father think you are too proud – we have to teach you a lesson.'

- **A young civil society activist in her 20s** reported that senior women teachers would come into their classrooms at higher secondary level 'to tell us about sex' and particularly to warn them about their behaviour: 'In school, it was mostly about abstinence'. She and her classmates observed some of the girls at this level getting pregnant and dropping out of school; they had internalised the negative attitudes towards these girls held more widely within society: 'We took them to be spoilt – we would say that she had been playing around with boys, so she got pregnant. So we didn't want to associate with such a person – because she was a bad person – a bad girl.'

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Narratives of marriage and family

Exercising agency against discriminatory norms in marriage and the family

Among all of the women we interviewed, getting married and having a family were considered essential, socially sanctioned steps in their life trajectories and thus central to their lives and identities as women. Many, however, insisted on entering into this on their own terms, and in this way going against prevailing gender norms. Examples include: delaying marriage and choosing their own spouse; refusing or only symbolically acquiescing to the practice of bride price; contesting religious injunctions on the wife's submissiveness in marriage; insisting on property rights within marriage; managing reproductive expectations; and standing up against domestic violence.

Some credited their husbands with standing up for them against the gender-inequitable social expectations of in-laws and the wider community about the 'proper' role and demeanour of women in the household; others admitted that the husband needed to be 'trained' in this first! Many spoke of the challenges faced in combining their professional lives and their roles as mothers and wives, highlighting the importance of supportive spouses, extended family arrangements for childcare, and the widespread practice of engaging household help or maids, as well as the ability to take advantage of boarding schools for older children. A number of respondents explained that they were using more gender-equitable parenting practices as a means of further chipping away at traditional gender norms within the family. Older women also commented on their struggles to maintain dignity and independence in widowhood (see box 5).

Box 5. Resisting gender-discriminatory norms and practices in marriage and family life

On contracting marriage

- **A government officer in her 40s** who worked for several years in community development in Kampala saw first-hand how some women were suffering in bad marriages; she also saw how poorly her married sisters were faring back home in her village where 'the husbands were subordinating them and they were trapped and couldn't get out'. So she resisted her relatives' efforts to marry her off and refused men who presented themselves to her. She held off marrying until the age of 29, which was deemed quite late at the time, to a colleague in the same government department.

- **Younger professional women** generally think that the late 20s or early 30s is a good time to get married. They realise that 'When women are younger in marriage, they have more difficulty negotiating … It is important for her to get a job first – this helps her in her decision-making ability in the family.' Still, they have to be strong to resist social pressure: 'That pressure to get married is there – even within you yourself – it may not be external pressure, but you as a girl, when you have reached 28, you feel that there is a systematic way life has to go, like you have to go to school, finish school, get a job and get married. That is how it is supposed to be. That is the way of life … So when you are done with school, everyone is like, "So where is the man?" Or an aunt or a friend will say, "Your friends are getting married. What are you waiting for?" I always tell them that the person will come – God will give me someone, so I do not have to rush. But that pressure is there.'

- **Two professional women in their 50s** took marriage negotiations into their own hands – refusing the bride price set at 10-20 cows and insisting instead on the symbolic exchange of one cow. One of the

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women, now a professor, explained that 'I did not want to be sold – I didn't think it right that my worth was being calculated in cows.' The other, a civil society activist, reported that 'I refused to be the object of negotiation'. Later widowed, at the time her own daughter was ready to marry, she insisted that this be without bride price as well, countering arguments from the groom's family that this went against culture with the explanation that 'I have created my own culture'. She also walked her own daughter down the aisle in usurpation of the traditional role reserved for the uncle.

• **A younger civil society activist in her late 20s** says of bride price: 'I think it is crap because you can't put a price on someone when you get down to it'. So she intends to marry without bride price. She and a colleague the same age echoed the common view that when bride price is paid – particularly in rural areas – the girl is taken on as property: 'They own you. They bought you so you owe them – children, submission, etc. It's like buying a servant.'

• **A grandmother in her 80s** explained that she got married without bride price 'because sometimes men would beat their wives because "they had paid for them" – they would treat you like a donkey. So everybody from my clan came and said they did not want anything in terms of marriage payment because they did not want anybody to disturb me in my marriage. Many people in the village were like this – they would actually say that they could not sell their children like goats.'

• **A civil society activist in her 50s** married into the Anglican Church, though a Catholic herself. When she and her husband went in for the marriage preparations and lessons on proper marital behaviour, however, she found the Reverend telling her that she must be submissive to her future husband. On hearing this and seeing how upset she was by it, her husband-to-be told the Reverend that he would divorce her if she was ever to become submissive, and 'Thereafter we refused to attend these pre-marriage instructions and got someone else to officiate at the ceremony!'

Within marriage

• **A civil society leader in her 60s** recalls how she initiated the search for suitable plots of land for her husband and herself to build their house. But when they went to the owners to sign the deed, she found that it was made out in her husband's name only. So she refused to sign, which greatly angered and embarrassed her husband. They went home that afternoon without concluding the deal and spent three days in silence – no talking ('which means also no sex', she confided!). Finally, he came to her in a jolly mood – using that special nickname he would use for her when he would come to her for affection – and said 'Tomorrow we will buy that land' and agreed to go back and sign both their names on the deed.

• When the in-laws of **a civil society activist (now in her 50s)** criticised her early in her marriage for wearing jeans, she tried to comply with social expectations by wrapping a kanga (cloth) around her legs. But her husband came and said, "What's this?" and removed it, and ever afterwards her in-laws have just shrugged, treating her like a 'musungu' (white person) who does not have to conform to local norms. A few of her sisters-in-law have taken on some of her mannerisms and have said, "I wish I had become rebellious earlier". Her sister, on the other hand, married to a more 'traditional' husband, is expected to behave and dress like 'a real woman'.

• **A young professional woman in her 30s** reported that after staying home with her first child, she started working with a civil society organisation that requires fieldwork. She and her husband (five

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years older than she and working in the private sector) now share roles and responsibilities such as picking up and dropping off their children at school. But this, she confides, was an evolving process; she had to do much to convince him that since they were both working and contributing money, they should share roles at home: 'I have trained him that sharing roles is important to moving forward – if not, it wouldn't work'. Now, when she is away on fieldwork, both he and the housemaid care for the children and some of her husband's friends express amazement that he allows her to travel on her own like that.

- **A professional woman in her 40s**, previously working in community development, reported that her husband started drinking and having extramarital affairs, and resented her for the work she was doing. He would say things like, "Don't bring me your 'district officer' into the house. In the home you are 'Mrs'." But when he beat her, she took him in to the police and he stopped. He also stayed in the marriage; he didn't leave her because he knew she was a good mother.

In raising and caring for children

- **A civil society leader in her 60s** reported that she had started her family when she was teaching and at first had no maids and no other helpers. Her husband didn't help her either – he was the last born and was used to having people (women) cater to him and so expected that of his wife. In fact, the very day they got back from the hospital with their first baby, he lay out the mattress for her and then said "I'm hungry!" She replied, 'I'm hungry too!' He then asked her why she hadn't arranged for a friend to come over to help out, and she retorted, 'Well, you should have done that!' And so she had to ask her friend to come out at first before she worked out the system with maids and with members of the extended family.

- **A government official in her 60s** raised all of her children to cook – and is now facing the unexpected problem of a daughter-in-law who does not cook or even fully participate in childcare. Her son is the one taking his children to and from school and she (as the mother) is telling him that he has to work this out!

- **A civil society activist in her 50s** prides herself on raising her sons to be respectful of women, as 'I cannot accept to groom a boy to grow up into a bad man who will fight women, so I insist that they have to know how to treat women'. She also made sure – against the objections of her husband – that all of her children learned how to cook. Her own son-in-law is very accepting, flexible, staying with the kids, taking them to vaccinations, etc. 'This is something new', she says. She also counsels her daughters that 'They should lay out the rules from the start with their husbands-to-be – rather than pretend to be "the good African woman".'

- **A young professional in her 30s** practices gender-equitable childcare and parental modelling, making sure that her three children see that both mother and father are working and have money to do things and make choices on their own. She prohibits her son from riding up front in the car – making him sit in the back with his sisters, despite his protests that his dad allows him to do so. She buys cars as toys – no dolls – and no pink and blue. Now when asked about their aspirations, her son says 'I want to be a dad, drive a car and be an engineer' while her four-year-old daughter says 'I want to be a doctor and a teacher' and never mentions motherhood!

In widowhood

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- A civil society leader in her 60s lost her husband to a sudden illness when her children were still young. She found strength in friends and women's groups and associations, along with family support. After her husband's death, she travelled to his home village across the lake for his burial – 'the longest journey of my life, full of misery'. On arrival, she found that the male elder in charge of the arrangements had not even put her name on the programme to speak. She asked 'But where am I?' And he replied, "You have no energy to speak – we will speak on your behalf." She said in a loud voice, 'I dare you to not allow me to speak. If I can't speak at my husband's funeral, nobody will speak.' Around her all of the women of her husband's clan – stunned to hear a woman talk in such a way – clapped. And so she spoke at the funeral. And thereafter, at other clan functions, she has also been welcomed to speak, establishing a new tradition.

An experience of oppression

Such narratives of resistance and increasing autonomy within marriage voiced by our professional women study participants stand in stark contrast to other situations of male dominance and oppression. One such situation was recounted by one of our older participants – a grandmother who dropped out of school when she got pregnant and was later married to a man selected for her by her uncle's wife after she gave birth (see box 6). It may be that education, tied into the exercise of a profession that brings both independent income and heightened status, can help women to maintain more equality and autonomy within the household.

Box 6. Counterpoint case study of oppression in marriage

'You know, when you have given birth alone you eventually get fed up. And if you are from a poor family, you are motivated to find your way out. My uncle's wife is the one who came and told me that a man wanted her to get him a wife, so I accepted before I even saw him and I went with my daughter to live with him after he paid a quarter of the bride price. He already had another wife, so I was the second.

During my marriage, it was my husband who used to do all the decision-making. The woman had only to be hard-working and someone who could go for farming, fulfil all her duties at home and not let the family die of hunger. While my husband did not have a lot of riches, it was up to him to buy the things we needed for the house. Everything was bought by him – I didn't buy anything: everything found me at home. I could not get money to buy anything and he insisted that I not sell any of our garden produce on the market – even if there were extra bananas. He would say "What do you want money for?" So I was very poor then.

My husband used to beat me, and to be honest, I had never been beaten by my parents. Yes, this man was tough. I don't know why he wanted to beat me. His other wife used to have sex with other men, so maybe it was that – he beat her too. But whenever we went to the authorities/village heads, there was no one to hear our cries. In those days, women beaten by their husbands would be chased away from home and made to sleep outside. They were even chased away from the land but if you reported to others – like the clan heads or neighbours – they would not do a thing. They would say, "No, you go and solve your issues alone, we have nothing to do for you."

Later, the first wife decided to quit the marriage and went away. But for me to quit was difficult – I was giving birth annually. At that time, we did not know about family planning and this man would in any

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case not allow me to move anywhere, even to the market. If I needed a dress, he would get measurements himself and later bring the dress in the evening. I was blind to the price of items sold in the market – I felt like I was in prison behind bars. He brought everything, even the babies' medication. So how could I know about family planning materials?

I finally quit when I got pregnant again and did not want to sleep with him. So he brought another wife as my co-wife, and when a man marries another wife, he tends to forget you. So I started questioning myself, because I could not withstand that situation. I thought that, if I go, it will be my children to suffer; if I stay, it's me to suffer. Divorce wasn't common then because it was a sign that you had failed at marriage. There was no refund to the bride price if the woman quit the marriage because they were tired or couldn't stand the situation anymore. And usually in those days, the children would be left behind with the man, because you could not afford to keep them, and even your parents would not allow it, unless you could support them yourself. But when I finally left him and returned to my home, I brought my daughter with me.'

Intergenerational interview, grandmother approaching 70 years

Narratives of professional engagement and collective agency

Awareness stirring commitment to act

Some of our study participants recall very early stirrings of awareness of discriminatory gender norms and a desire to combat them, and to work towards the fulfilment of women's rights, while others describe more gradual 'awakenings' later in their young adult lives. This was sometimes as a function of higher education that opened their eyes to new ways of analysing and processing gendered experiences that they had hitherto considered 'normal'. The opportunity to study and travel abroad was mentioned by a number of women as a particularly powerful gateway to heightened understanding and awareness of the way gender norms shape attitudes, expectations and behaviours in their own country.

Some women had to contend with restrictive norms within their own families, while others were inspired and supported by activist parents who worked for social justice. Role models of all sorts were significant in shining a light on what girls and women could strive for and become, with positive images conveyed through media providing encouragement.

The different pathways to such personal realisations and subsequent professional engagement around women's rights in Uganda reveal a combination of: early visceral reactions to what are clearly perceived as personal injustices through one's own experience; growing observational awareness of injustices occurring around them; and more gradual intellectual 'enlightenment' gained through education or travel (see box 7).

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Box 7. Evolving awareness of gender inequalities motivating women to challenge norms

Through early experiences or observations of injustice

- **A senior leader in her 60s** emphasised that her early experiences of restrictive gender norms growing up in her rural family and community were essential in forging who she became and what she was able to accomplish in later life as a historical leader in Uganda's women's movement: 'It is my background that takes you to my whole story…'. As a child: 'I observed women coming to the church and sitting with my mother, who was a church leader, and discussing intensely and crying, though I didn't know why. I also noticed that my aunt – my father's sister – was married to a vagabond who would disappear for months and she would come for help from my family. My father would turn against her, saying "You stupid, useless woman, go home. That is why you have failed in marriage." And she would reply, "I am not useless. I brought cows into this home [her brother's] and have produced sons for that man [her husband]." This is what disturbed my mind and intrigued me – the idea that this woman's value was tied to bride price and producing sons. So I grew to understand that girls are not valuable expect in terms of what they bring in, and that knowledge was killing me. One day, a man was killed in our village and people said, "That's ok, he will get a 'pleader'". I asked what this was and learned that it is a lawyer who pleads for people. So that is what I decided to do. I learned that to become a pleader you had to study the law and I determined that if the law was saying the wrong thing I would shout and get women to see this and refuse and change the law… For me, I am pursuing a God-given purpose in life. That is why I am different from others. I live a life of resistance; my experience of injustice made me – that is what modelled me into what I am and gave me a vision.'

Through role models, examples and early exposure

- **A lawyer in her 40s** recounted drawing inspiration from her parents who both worked on issues of social justice and modelled for their children what a principled life could be.

- **A civil society activist in her 50s** noted that it was through observation of gender dynamics in the family that she aspired to be more like her father than her mother. As a child, she had observed that when she misbehaved, her mother would say that she was going to report her to her father, 'which to me indicated that the father was the one who had power in the home'. She loved to read and would sit with her father reading the newspapers, 'which my mom took as a sign of trying to dodge chores!' Growing older, she refused to cook, saying that she would never marry a husband who would treat her as a house girl or hired help. She aspired rather to be just like her dad, a professional man, 'For why aspire to be like the cook rather than like the one who eats?'

- **Two young professional women**, daughters of a women's activist, spoke of their early exposure to what was happening in the news such as the development of the Constitution, 'when we saw women on TV, talking about land issues, lack of inheritance, etc. and mom would explain' or when there was an incident of an under-aged girl – Naku – who was to be married by the King of Buganda, and women were organising against this and 'the issue of the girl child came up and so we began to understand that this thing of gender discrimination was real'. They were also taken at an early age to demonstrations their mother was participating in: 'So we were forced to understand why we had to wake up early on a Saturday morning, put on a T-shirt and march in the street! We knew it was something to do with women.'

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- Professional women in various fields echoed this woman's comments, that 'Young girls see a woman minister and speaker – they have models before them'. Another said,'Before, young women had no one to look up to or admire, but now "the admirables" are many and willing to hand-hold.' A young professional reported that 'When I was growing up, we were hearing a lot of people advocating for girls to go to school, saying "Let the girl stay in school." It was everywhere, even on TV, you would listen and watch and I think that is why things have changed.'

Through education

- **One senior woman now in her 60s** credited her doctoral study abroad on women's studies as opening her eyes to 'the power of patriarchy', and from that time forward, all of her work in government and academia focused on how to fight back and transform this. Prior to that, she admitted somewhat sheepishly, she too had accepted patriarchal processes as 'normal'.

- **A lawyer in her 60s** who studied abroad and encountered racism made the connection between women's subordination and other forms of oppression, noting that once she got that 'Eureka moment, she knew she had to engage. For her, 'The normalisation of women's inferiority is like racism – I had to fight it… It is extremely insulting and offensive to my intelligence to tell me that I am inferior based on either my skin colour or sex, backed up by pseudo-science, religion or whatever.' And in her studies abroad she gained more recognition 'that law is one of the formidable tools that the patriarchal state relies on to create and maintain its power and inequality' and so she has devoted her subsequent career to addressing this.

The power and excitement of collective agency

Through their diverse political and professional activities, research participants have contributed in multiple ways to combating discriminatory social norms and advancing the agenda on gender equality and women's empowerment. Some have pursued political activism as Members of Parliament or as leaders of CSOs devoted to women's rights. Others have moved up through the civil service to play key roles in government ministries. Still others have devoted their lives to research and university teaching in subjects such as gender studies and law – thus preparing future generations to take up the struggle. All have demonstrated the power of collective agency and have rich reflections to share on their experiences as these have unfolded over time in Uganda. They offer, in this way, unique perspectives and a number of lessons learned.

Many of our study participants have been active participants and leaders of the women's movement in Uganda, identifying the excitement in the air from the mid-1980s, when a confluence of factors – internal and external – sparked a massive mobilisation and activist engagement among women for gender equality. At international level, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was in the process of being ratified and the global women's movement was brought home to Africa through the Nairobi Conference in 1985 (the third in a series of world conferences organised through the United Nations and civil society). At national level, the advent to power of Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) in 1986 – after a five-year 'bush war' – established the foundations for democracy and opened up political space for heretofore marginalised groups, including women, with an affirmative action quota system established for women's political representation.

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Together, these formed a conducive environment for the burgeoning of new ideas and new possibilities of organisation and participation for women working for social change in Uganda. A period of intense and hopeful collective activity stretched through the late 1990s, reaching a high point in 1995/96 with the development of the new Constitution and, after several participants attended the fourth world women's conference in Beijing, described by one of the participants as being *'very empowering and providing massive exposure'*.

Our study participants took full advantage of this fertile period and beyond too, seizing the opportunity to organise and act on issues of importance to women and gender equality (see box 8). Collectively, they strengthened women's voice and helped make women more visible on the national scene. They participated in political processes for women's advancement and civic representation, joining politics at all levels; they contributed to the development of the new, progressive and gender-sensitive Constitution; they helped change national laws and enact policies and legislation designed to counter harmful norms and practices; they developed mechanisms to redirect and 'engender' national sectorial budgets to ensure that women's priorities were addressed; they initiated a new programme of gender studies at university level and engaged in transformative research; and they created new institutions dedicated to working for women's rights and gender justice. They also developed linkages with women at the grassroots and helped promote women's economic empowerment and render women's work more visible.

Box 8. Change-makers 'spitting fire': the high points of the women's movement in Uganda

The passion of new ideas and solidarity

- 'The period 1986–1996 was the high point – women were spitting fire! We were looking at issues that fundamentally affect us.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'The passion and commitment were really there – you could feel it and the women's movement was very vibrant.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'There was a new conversation and re-politicisation in feminist terms – not just women's rights for the sake of women's rights. At the time, we did not have the advantage of social media – so it was just networking among women's groups that gave a sense of solidarity and solidity. Energy was high, with hope for real changes happening.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Women had a common purpose – to free themselves from bondage and discrimination.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- There was 'a strong and vibrant woman's movement, and the passion of individual, purpose-driven women willing to spearhead the cause. We were wild – moving forward. We were burning with fire. The climax of the women's movement was the decade from 1986 [with the new government] and around the time of the Constitution up until around 1996.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'In the late 80s to mid-90s, when women were the most influential, you could feel the vibe – women speaking to power, engaging with processes and being listened to – with many things to show for it' (**IDI, professional woman**)

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Political openings and Constitution-making

- 'When the NRM came in, it came with the women's question high on the agenda. It was like opening a cage where the dog is caged all this time. When I got out, I was unstoppable. I wanted to climb up a mountain and shout out to women to refuse. If not for Museveni in 1986, we would not have been able to move forward. He called for women to join: "Women, where are you? Women, come sit."' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- The Chairman of Parliament was gender-sensitive and both favourable to and supportive of women's issues – also his vice chair [one of our study participants] was a woman. That is why we were able to capture around 40 gender-specific issues in the Constitution. This was the most important thing in my life. I had wanted to change the law since I was a girl, but had never believed that I could actually influence this master law!' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- The Constitution and the political will at that time brought women's issues to the fore – buttressed the movement. Whether or not this was for political reasons, it was a big push factor.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Women were appointed to ministerial positions; space was given to women to engage; a deliberate effort was made to ensure that when there was an issue, women were consulted and their issues put into processes' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Some of us felt that we had been empowered to compete with men ... and we also wanted to increase the number of women in Parliament.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'The issue of political will is very important for effective women's participation and gender empowerment ... Without that, you cannot go out and teach people about these things and mobilise.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'In the early days (early 1990s) it helped to ride the wave where gender equality was strong because it was new and fresh. It was a moment offering opportunity – both internally and externally. Also politicians at the time felt this brought political mileage: affirmative action for women in politics – 30% of posts, etc. The new Constitution was very gender-sensitive, with protection of women's rights. There were high women leaders in government and the first woman vice president in Africa.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

New civil society organisations for women's rights

- 'There was a lot of excitement in the air. This was one of the first times in Uganda's history that there were organised women's groups, with a lot of caucuses formed around women's rights, children's rights, disability ...' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'Women's NGOs [non-government organisations] have done a lot of good work and sensitised the masses about the issues, analysing the situation and finding a way forward.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- When Action for Development (ACFODE) was established: 'This is when we really took off. Before, there had been no single organisation bringing women of all kinds together, with the only criteria for

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membership being a woman. We came up with fire! This is the first time I found people speaking my mind ... When I attended that first meeting, I said to myself "These people! This is where I belong!" I had dreamed of having a platform on which to stand, but now in 1989 I had three! ACFODE, as the chairperson; MP for my district; and appointed by the President for the Constituent Commission. Three powerful platforms from which to articulate and espouse the cause of women's empowerment.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'The Ugandan Women's Network (UWONET) has contributed to uplifting the political, social and economic status of women through its work of amplifying women's voices in the public domain ... The cohort of women and men that UWONET has groomed over the years are changing the discourse towards gender transformation and empowerment.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

Enhanced linkages with the grassroots

- 'Grassroots associations have been critical. Women have more control in their communities, particularly through women's groups, which have evolved from supply groups to demand groups as well as self-controlled groups.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- The consultative processes undertaken for the development of the new Constitution raised awareness of the condition of women in rural areas: 'I was shocked by the poverty, by the violence against women, girls not going to school, women dying in childbirth, HIV affecting women ... I was heavily traumatised. I hadn't travelled around before and hadn't been exposed to all of this.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Moving around to different regions and seeing differences' leads to 'an understanding that what you thought was something "natural" is actually something structured by society – like women/girls not being permitted to ride bicycles.' (**Young man in FGD with recent university graduates**)

- Community development activities have 'educated rural people in things like adult literacy and women's handicrafts and provided a space to meet and listen to talks and awareness-raising sessions about different things ... I wanted someone to feel that I have made a difference in their lives.' (**IDI, currently active professional woman**)

- Women's groups in villages 'give women a sense of purpose and a reason to go out of their houses and can also provide emotional support ... and offer women a space to lead and to live lives outside of the home, contributing to a sense of identity. They also get information about different programmes and opportunities through participation in such groups and draw strength from them. Women's groups are "a ground for opening up". Men's groups, on the other hand, revolve mostly around drinking.' (**IDI, young woman professional**)

- An agro-economist in a government ministry popularised the concept of back-yard gardening, using local vegetables and locally produced seeds and promoting activities through which women could have more control in their communities, based on her experiences in the field: 'I would call women for meetings but they couldn't come, as they were always working and rushing around. So I began home visits – where women were also distracted – and prepared food demonstrations with them and the like. The Ministry of Agriculture had given inputs – hoes, etc. but on home visits I found that women were not using them – they did not have access. "Why?" she would ask. The responses: "My husband

got these but we are three wives and he gave it only to the youngest." Or "My husband sold them for beer money." I also saw that the children were malnourished. There were chickens around that might even belong to women, but the cock is the husband's and women cannot kill or cook chickens or buy or cook eggs to feed the children without the husband's permission. Yet I also saw many gomesi [women's dresses, rather expensive] hanging on the lines and when I asked about this, the women said, "Well our marriages are unstable, so in case of divorce, we stock up on clothes, which would at least be property that we could retain if we have to leave." (**IDI, professional woman**)

New laws, policies and procedures

• 'You can do a lot of work down there [at the grassroots] but, without policies, nothing will change.' (**IDI, currently active professional woman**)

• Organisations such as the Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA) provided an avenue for legal reform and protection: 'It was my first inkling of using law to help those less fortunate to access it through education or litigation, and that has broadened out to social justice, constitutional rights.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

• Some study participants were involved in significant policy changes affecting girls' education, including the introduction of universal primary education (UPE), which expanded opportunities for boys and girls, as well as the affirmative action measure providing a 1.5 point advantage to girls in university admissions in 'an effort to right historical imbalances and boost enrolments to achieve gender parity'. (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

• Gender-budgeting took off: 'At district and sub-county level we [women] would attend the budget meetings, but the problem with that is that it was an analysis after the fact – after the budget was already passed. So we then said we need to be part of the budget process itself and we started galvanising MPs, getting academia, civil society groups and women in government ministries and the Uganda Women's Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) to address these issues right at the start of the planning and budgeting process, In 2014, we took the bill to Parliament at the same time as the Ministry of Finance was reforming the public finance management system. This was taken as an opening for gender issues as an integral part of the revised Public Finance Management Act that was discussed and approved by Parliament.' (**IDI, currently active professional woman**)

Research, scholarship and teaching

• 'I looked at the labour statistics on Uganda produced by the UN Statistical Division and found that women were not featuring – they were absent. I said, "This could not be accurate" and determined to go back and correct it. I wrote a proposal and the Statistical Division supported it. The project ended up establishing a women's resource centre in the Ministry of Gender (1989) and also examined the statistics from the 1987/88 census of civil servants which showed that women were mostly at the lower levels and very few at the top. The report of findings was very influential and was at the genesis of affirmative action in education – the 1.5 point advantage given to women at university, since women who were not educated at this level could not take up these positions. My analysis also showed that Ugandan women were very active in agriculture.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

• 'Teaching law through a critical gender lens is a way to show students that law is one of the formidable tools that the patriarchal state relies on to create and maintain its power and inequality...

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exerting influence from the four walls of the lecture hall rather than through the halls of Parliament... When I am in front of the lecture hall, I am doing politics – working to shift conversations, give a new lens to analyse the law ... There are young women who are extremely articulate and vocal in the women's movement who went through my hands. Also MPs who will say that what they are doing is a product of the gender and law class. So instead of a lone voice, you see your influence in others. This may be a slow way to transform, but I can see concrete results and influence. These are small changes in small ways and hopefully will be transformative in an incremental manner. Transformation, of course, takes time.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'In my work as a professor [in the School of Women and Gender Studies], I see myself as a mentor/counsellor – also opening up the eyes of my students to the situation, breaking stereotypes, etc. I challenge them to re-examine things. And I then see them moving forward and see that I am having an influence (getting unexpected feedback here and there). In my own research, I am focusing on an analysis of masculinities that I hope will also have a big impact. Looking at the frustrations, lamentations and challenges of men vis-à-vis their wives and marriage, hoping to disseminate the results and get them to see that there is a cost to these things.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

Confronting and overcoming resistance

The tasks undertaken were not always easy, and resistance was encountered all along the way, but women's agency – both individual and collective – found ways to move forward in spite of obstacles during this period of what seemed like boundless possibility. In politics, for example, exercising political voice and assuming leadership positions demanded courage as this entailed breaking clear socio-cultural norms against women's assertiveness and visibility in the public domain, which was likened derisively to the phenomenon of 'hens crowing' (Tamale, 1999). But the energy and openness of the time along with strong commitment and perseverance allowed women to power through. Some women learned the ropes of politicking in the Constituent Assembly:

> **"It was a real fight [on the Constituent Assembly]. When they refused to pass the things that I wanted, I would threaten to stand on the table until they were passed. One provision that we put in was removed when the women representatives were absent from the room – that was the time I insisted that I wouldn't move forward without this."** (IDI, senior woman leader)

> **"I learned that on some issues you have to keep your mouth shut; on some you have to shout; and on some you have to give warnings. You have to master and manage all these tactics and tricks of politics. For example, prolonging discussions until time runs out and people will just sign off."** (IDI, senior woman leader)

Many have had to battle against perceptions that they were acting like 'Westerners' and accusations that promotion of ideals of gender equality betrays the values of their own society (see box 9). As one senior woman leader notes, *'There is an idea of feminism as Western and the perception that you are angry, unreasonable, and difficult'*. Many people would say to this woman, *'But you can't be a feminist – you are a nice person!'* So she would explain that feminism is actually just about human rights. She did not attack or defend, just took them through reality, looking squarely, for example, at beating (intimate partner violence) and asking: *'Is being against this foreign?'* (IDI, senior woman leader).

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Others suffered more vehement public attacks but were able to maintain their strength of character and determination to carry on. Standing up to institutionalised patriarchy took courage. One woman activist who has raised her voice against the patriarchal thrusts of religious interpretations had a *fatwa* issued against her at one point and reported that pastors are '*obsessed*' with her and her '*satanic ways*'. She observed wryly that one year she was voted the '*worst woman of the year*' in a national newspaper, alongside Joseph Kony (leader of the notorious Lord's Resistance Army) as the worst man. But she states that she wears this as '*a badge of honour*' because it means they are taking her seriously: '*I am a threat to their ideologies ... If you are rocking the boat, of course you will be attacked. I would be disappointed if not*' (IDI, professional woman). This illustrates that efforts to change prevailing norms will undoubtedly encounter opposition from significant institutions within society that serve as the gate-keepers and enforcers of those norms.

Box 9. Strategies to overcome opposition to gender norm change

'I was called many names, including "This English-influenced lady". But nothing has been achieved in this country without clear strategies. When men would say, "But you are fighting only for women," I would reply, "Well, I am fighting for your sister, your daughter, your aunt. I agree that it is my responsibility to cook, but it is also my right to sit at the table and eat comfortably and not be chased away. Yes, women should make the bed, but they should also have the right to sleep there." I was very clear on separating these two.

In my constituency work they would say, "This is a cantankerous woman who has copied the mannerisms of white women and is destabilising society, breaking our families." So I would call them all together – men and women – and say, "Look at what is happening. Do you want your daughters not to go to school? Your women to be beaten?" So everyone would be crying and they would say "Oh yes, you are the one who is going to save us" because they have all had these experiences.'

I was against the norm, contesting for political office where I was born and not where I was married. There was really no one natural constituency for women, because there is no place for women. In our natal village they would say "You were not born here to rule – you left us to marry" and in our husband's village they would say "You came to marry, not to rule." So in the end there is no constituency for women. But I told the constituency in my natal home that I was coming in to serve them in thanks for paying my school fees [she had received a district scholarship when young] and I won them over. I first went to my constituency nicely dressed, but the second time I was wearing trousers and people were horrified. And in Parliament, rules were passed on "decent" dressing, and when I came in trousers the next day a point of order was called. But I argued that trousers were decent. In the face of arguments about such things I would say, "Why do you raise issues of the thighs when I am talking of issues of the head?"

In my work, I would call members of the Rotary and ask them what society thinks about women (getting all negative answers) and about men (all positive answers). I would then ask them to tell me what women actually did in society (getting many positive answers) and what men did (getting very few things) and then lead discussions of the difference between what they thought about women and who they really were. I thus won over men as allies and worked together to foster change.'

IDI, senior woman leader

Analysis of progress in moving forward

Positive changes in gender norms and practices

Looking both within and beyond their own personal narratives and bringing in other voices, study participants agreed that there have been many positive changes over time in Uganda overall (see box 10). These include: rising levels of education; greater representation and participation of women in politics and government; growing economic empowerment and autonomy; and improved SRH rights and conditions. Participants have also witnessed or experienced some changes in marriage practices, relations and expectations as well as changing attitudes towards gender-based violence.

Many study participants also highlighted a new sense of self-confidence, awareness of rights, and assertiveness on the part of girls and young women, who – as a combined result of higher educational levels, increased economic participation, and expanded information and services available to protect them from rights violations – no longer feel the need to conform to traditional norms of the meek, submissive, and silent female. They are thus more prepared to voice their concerns and to take action.

Box 10. Positive changes in critical capability domains

Education

- 'In those days, we didn't have time for homework – you would leave your books at school and the next day that is where you would find them, because we were too busy with housework and chores. But now children read through the night – they don't waste time doing work or chores.' (**IGI, grandmother**)

- 'The value of the girl child has changed and there are now more options for her than just marriage. Higher education is also possible – at university the student body is now 50% female.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Before it was thought that the girl child should not go to school because girls will just get married, so this was a waste of time – but no longer.' (**Young man in FGD with recent university graduates**)

- More girls are also turning to subjects once considered the realm of boys only: science, engineering and mathematics; and also entering into vocational training – carpentry and plumbing, for example, which 'builds trust in capacities' (**FGD, professional woman**).

- 'More spaces for interaction between men and women helps men realise that women have potential. Before, relations/interactions were only through male dominance in the household, but now they are sharing ideas.' (**Young man in FGD with recent university graduates**)

Political voice, governance and leadership

- 'Back then, it was the men who used to stand in politics. I never saw women stand during our youthful days – that has just come now. Before, the woman would just give the men the votes. During that time, women were not yet empowered to know what was happening – they had not studied, they did not know the law. So they didn't bother about politics. Also back then a woman had no time to go into politics. But now they can stand up – they have studied, they know what is happening around them. Right now, the men are also supporting their women: when a man's wife stands for political office, he

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is happy about it. The women do it themselves – they don't have to ask for permission. Even in the village, the woman can decide to stand out of her own liking'. (**IGI, grandmother**)

- 'Back then, who would even look at a woman? No one would allow a woman to give him instruction on what to do. They would say "How can a woman come and order me to do these certain things?" But now, women have taken up positions. These things came in after the women had attained education. When they started acquiring an education, then the people in the community started listening to them without disrespect in any way. They also see that women work much better than men.' (**IGI, grandmother**)

- 'In politics and public decision-making, more women embrace politics, get involved and take up rights.' (**FGD, professional women**)

- 'Women have come up to where decisions are being made. In my time, there were 40 women in Parliament – now there are 120. It has made a difference.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'The public space ... has opened up for women.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- Women have gained 'more visibility, more voices and more women in decision-making'. Now, 'women are in politics and can be elected and can even hold positions as speaker' whereas before, 'It was always thought that it was always supposed to be a man to chair everything'. (**IDIs, professional women**)

- 'In the old days, women were not supposed to take up leadership positions, but I see now that women can be even greater leaders than man and do much better.' (**Young man in FGD with recent university graduates**)

- 'Women have excelled at accountability and transparency. They are not digging their hands into public funds as much as men do – they are not as corrupt or involved in embezzlement. This may have to do with their cultural upbringing ...' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- In governance and decision-making at all levels, 'there has been a shift from the consideration of "manels" (all-male panels) as being normal to a current understanding that this is unacceptable'. (**IDI, professional woman**)

Economic empowerment

- 'Today, when you see a girl, you might think she is a boy, because they do all of the same things. In my time, there was work that was meant for boys and work that was meant for girls. This is because people are now civilised. Yes they are! During our times, they were blind, but now they are open-minded – they know what is good. Just like seeing a girl driving a car now. During our times, in that era, a car was driven by a man – women could not drive cars. Also, many women are now building houses for themselves, something that was done by men during our time. So now there is a big difference and a lot of change.' (**IGI, grandmother**)

- 'In the old days, it seemed that there were clear jobs for the women and others for the men, but now, it's all a mix. Today, women are not afraid to get into jobs that are considered masculine – like taxi driving' (**IGI, young professional woman**).

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- 'By now it is no longer a mystery that women are in markets, in banks, owning cars, driving ….'(**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'More women owning resources today than 10 years ago'(IDI, professional woman). This is seen to be a sign of growing 'economic justice'(**FGD, women professionals**).

- 'Before [in land transactions], the wife just signed as a witness and it was even worse in cohabitation, but now women are more aware that they should also sign as buyers.'(**IGI, young professional woman**)

- These changes can be seen at the grassroots as well as at national level'(FGD, professional women). 'Women [in rural areas] are now doing small businesses in the market – whereas women were not there when I was growing up'(IDI, senior woman leader). 'In villages, women are working very hard to earn income. They have moved out of the domestic sphere and are now earning income. Growing up, it was not so usual to see women in the markets'(IDI, professional woman). 'Women have more control in their communities, particularly through women's groups, which have evolved from supply groups to demand groups as well as self-controlled groups.'(**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Managers fear being seen as discriminatory' so there are more even-handed employment processes. For example: 'Jobs with benefits would only provide those benefits for men – not for a woman (who was assumed to benefit from her husband): also medical insurance is now for everyone whereas before it was assumed that the woman would be covered under the man's plan.'(**IGI, young professional woman**)

Reproductive and sexual health

- 'Before, delivery was through traditional herbal medicine and practice – now it is by modern means.' (**Young woman in FGD, recent university graduates**)

- These days, for childbirth, women go to the hospital and they even go under operation. But in our days, not many people would rush to the hospitals to give birth: while hospitals were there, there were women in the village who used to help women in labour and they were trusted more. For me, I mostly never gave birth in the hospital.'(**IGI, grandmother**)

- 'Women increasingly control the number of children they have, and teenage pregnancy – though still a problem – has actually been declining, according to the DHS [national Demographic and Health Survey]. This is partly a result of more girls in school.'(**IDI, professional woman**)

- There is also more reproductive health information available now and attitudes towards the desired number of children are beginning to change in some places, as a combined function of the economy, improved services, and education such that 'you wouldn't really want to have very many children or a big family nowadays'. (**IGI, young professional woman**)

Marriage practices, relations and expectations

- 'Back then, women would get married at the age of 15, 16, and 17… The important thing was if a girl got her first period - that meant she was grown up. Now girls get married when they are mature and they know what to do. Now parents counsel their children, advise them and try to show them which path to

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follow. For a woman to get married, she first needs to work for herself and should not get married to a man who has nothing. If a woman gets married when she has something and the man also can afford things, it helps to build a family. Or if you later have some misunderstandings in the marriage, the woman can still stand alone to build a life for herself. Also, nowadays, if you divorce, you share and divide the properties, or else, one looks after the children.' (**IGI, grandmother**)

- 'At the time of my parents, there was a lot of early marriage – my mother married at age 13 and dropped out of school. But I am now studying at the university and at age 26, am double the age of her mother when she dropped out!' (**Young woman in FGD with recent university graduates**)

- 'Arranged marriages have faded out actually – I no longer hear of these. I wouldn't accept such a marriage arranged for me by my mother.' (**IGI, young professional woman**)

- 'Women can now sit down at the same dining table with men, whereas before she would just prepare the food and lay a mat down for her husband to eat.' (**IGI, young professional woman**)

- 'I used to feel all household work belonged to women; now, with the image of positive masculinities, I have learned how to cook and am an expert! My relatives also feel confident leaving their small children in my care, as I know how to look after them.' (**Young man in FGD with recent gender studies students**)

- 'Women are also making decisions in the home and doing this better than men.' (**Young man in FGD with recent university graduates**)

- 'Before [when women found themselves in a bad marriage], they didn't have a choice – how could they leave their home? But now, if you are not happy in it, you don't have to stay there and suffer. If you can't tolerate it, then you tell him and you opt for a divorce.' (**IGI, young professional woman**)

- 'Before, only the boy child could inherit, but now girls can – my father has promised me that I will inherit along with my brothers.' (**Young woman in FGD with recent gender studies students**)

Individual agency, assertiveness and awareness of rights

- 'Back then, women were very shy, they were quiet and feared to be seen, but now women do things without any fear. They do whatever they want – what they love to do – without anyone to reprimand them. Now a woman can do whatever she can, without even seeking a man's decision, and he leaves you to do your thing alone. If you want to construct your own house or you want to buy a plot of land, you do it, because you have your own cash.' (**IGI, grandmother**)

- 'When I was growing up, shouting and playful, my parents said "You are a girl – you should not do or say these things." But now I have learned that I have a right to shout' (young woman in FGD with recent university graduates). 'We have inherited our mothers' resilience, but not their silence, with many women even calling into radio stations to air things that were once kept quiet' (IGI, young professional woman).

- 'More women are talking out about what is hurting them and lots have a prepared fall-back position. More women are willing to stand up and fight for their rights whether in marriage, relationships and the like. They increasingly have their own identity and are more autonomous ... Self-esteem has gone

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up throughout the country. Now women can look after children on their own and are increasingly taking decisions about their lives. Women are more aware of their rights – even on inheritance – and will fight for these. They also realise that they themselves should not be inherited [practice of levirate]. Women are more confident – they are not scared to occupy any space. Girls are also increasingly making decisions and exercising agency here in the capital, though not so much in rural areas.' (**FGD, professional women**)

Physical integrity

- 'Men overall are not so proud of violence against women, so in this way, things have gotten better – also in terms of respect for women. Men used to be proud to beat their wives, and the women themselves would say that if the man doesn't beat you it means he doesn't love you. A man who didn't beat his wife would be ridiculed, so he would go out to get drunk to gather courage to beat her and later apologise. Now with the change of generations, men who beat women do it in secrecy. Some say "Museveni has made our women rebels, we cannot even beat them"' (**IDI, professional woman**).

- 'No one wants to be known as a wife beater.' (**IDIs, young professional women**)

- Civil society organisations have 'broken the silence' on an issue that heretofore was considered 'normalised, private and not to be brought to the public'. (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Women now know that they actually have a right to report and know that when they report, something will be done. And that also instils some fear in the man who would have violated someone's rights.' (**IGI, young professional woman**)

- Women now feel empowered to say no to domestic violence 'and can take the decision to leave a bad marriage or relationship as a sign that things are moving forward. This is the level of empowerment that is needed for all women.' (**IDI, young professional woman**)

Key enabling factors

Participants explain that such positive changes have been brought about through a combination of factors, including progressive policies, expanded availability of services, and political will – all undergirded by both individual and collective agency. Many of the positive changes are connected and produce synergies. For example, greater access to education is leading to expanded economic opportunities for women and thus an expanded vision of women's potential roles in society. Stronger political voice has challenged deep-rooted norms of male dominance in the public sphere and has contributed to the development of more gender-equitable policies.

Education is seen to be both a positive gain in and of itself and a catalyst for other gains in gender equality and empowerment for women and girls. A conducive environment favouring democracy and the political will to open up spaces for collective voice provide the essential foundation for women's empowerment. Collective agency and the vibrant women's movement in Uganda have been critical in carrying priorities forward, including at grassroots level. The connection with international streams of thinking about and activism around women and gender equality and opportunities to travel, in the region and internationally, to share ideas and compare ways of being with other women around the world have helped enlarge and strengthen the collective force for change in discriminatory gender norms.

Progressive laws and policies, starting with the 1995 Constitution onward, have served as essential conduits for further change in the direction of gender equality. Affirmative action for women – in both political participation (reserved seats for women) and in education (university entrance favouring women and specific national programmes to promote girls' education) – is seen by most to have been a critical springboard into opportunities hitherto denied to women. Specific laws and policies to protect and promote women's rights and well-being have been critical in a number of areas, including around education, economic empowerment and gender-based violence. Information and awareness-raising activities have contributed to a heightened awareness of rights that has, in turn, supported individual agency and activism as a critical ingredient in the struggle. Role models in the form of fearless women leaders have provided powerful stimuli and inspiration for individual action, while mentors – coupled with support from family members – have provided guidance and encouragement for a new generation of women activists to emerge.

Analysis of obstacles and constraints

Uneven progress and backlash

In spite of the acknowledged progress, many study participants described the current situation as '*stagnant*', '*limping*', with '*erratic progress*' and only '*marginal transformation*' (FGD, professional women). Some spoke of '*critical reversals in the gender domain … Things we thought we had overcome 20 years ago are now becoming the norm again and in a more powerful manner*' (IDI, professional woman). Many, therefore, feel that progress has been '*a mixed bag*', characterised as '*one step forward and two steps back*' (FGD, professional women). One woman suggested that '*there seem to be two parallel streams of progress and regression, or maybe it goes in and out – some changes, some persistence. It is often insidious*' (IDI, professional woman). '*Dismantling these structural forces is complex – you are up against the gender division of labour: the mother's role vis-à-vis the father's role; the wife vis-à-vis the husband … those traditional, structural issues that affect women everywhere*' (IDI, professional woman).

A large proportion of study participants clearly identified 'patriarchy' in all its forms and shifting shapes as a pernicious force that continues to operate at all levels of society and through all institutions to reinforce discriminatory gender norms and thus maintain male power and privilege. They suggested that: this is deeply rooted in broad-based socio-cultural norms of the patriarchal organisation of the household and family; it is transmitted through discourse and socialisation processes in both public and private domains (through which both boys and girls/men and women internalise its precepts); and is often backed up by law and other institutions such as religion and politics, as well as by force at both individual and societal levels. Emerging trends are seen to be part of a backlash by men who feel threatened and will do anything to maintain power and privilege, with the principles of patriarchy invoked in different guises as a means of maintaining control (see box 11).

Intertwined with (and often underpinning) discriminatory norms in other domains are aspects of deep-seated cultural beliefs, customs and laws that influence attitudes and practices. These are backed up and/or accompanied by institutions such as the Church, which may be purveyors of 'traditional' notions of male dominance and female submission or may reinterpret such notions to back up patriarchy. Other stereotypical or harmful images of women and girls are conveyed in common sayings and/or communicated through media of different forms. Together, these have helped fuel cultural resistance to women's empowerment and gender equality and feed male backlash against efforts to move forward.

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Box 11. Constraints and obstacles to progress

Pervasive patriarchy in society and institutions

- 'Something is simmering below the surface and it is patriarchy.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Patriarchy is reflected in and supported by all institutions – the law, religion, culture, education, the media ...' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Patriarchy changes shape as women get empowered, enlightened, or move out of the traditional shape of things.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- Emerging trends are seen to be part of a backlash by 'men who are threatened and will do everything to resist' (young man in FGD with recent university graduates): a 'form of resistance on the part of men'. (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Customary laws as reinforced or reinterpreted through colonial ideologies largely favour men. All of our cultural norms are steeped in patriarchy.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- Religion and patriarchy are brothers ... The Church has joined patriarchy in making women feel it is their duty to fulfil expectations in the family as a wife – this is their duty. This is new. Where there is a lot of gain for women, the Church feels it is losing control and that is why it is purveying rules and regulations around things like women's dress – decent or indecent. When it comes to women's rights, all churches are the same. As the saying goes: "The only time the Pope agrees with Muslims is on women's rights".' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'The men in the pulpits are the ones who interpret the holy word to justify patriarchy.' There has been a 'rising religious fundamentalism' over the past five years or so: 'It is as if the messages are framed so as to negate all the efforts for women's empowerment' teaching that 'God gave the commandment for women to submit.' 'The Church does not want women to speak their minds. So we are moving one step forward and two steps back'. (**IDIs, professional women**)

- 'Patriarchy is at its worst in schools' where boys continue to impregnate girls, leading to high female drop-outs: in some regions, 'It is very unusual to find girls in school beyond P4'. (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- What is being taught is a clear example of 'patriarchy in institutions ... In primary school, for example, they teach that the head of the family is the father – even in female-headed households.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

Silencing and stereotyping women and girls

- Parents fear that 'No one will marry a girl if she is empowered and speaks up. Women should talk softly and bend low.' (**IDI, young professional woman**)

- 'A woman speaks, but a man can easily switch off, saying "What does a woman have to say to me?" You see this everywhere, in both urban and rural settings.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

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- Women's early foray into politics was often ridiculed by men in the community and likened to 'when hens begin to crow'. (**IDI, professional woman**)

- Girls and women are socialised 'not to speak too much or to reveal too much'. And to sit like a woman, which means 'almost disappearing'. (**IDI, professional woman**)

- Some people draw on misinterpretations of the Bible 'to keep these ideologies intact – exhorting women to be humble, patient, not to climb trees or speak out loudly, which is "unwomanly"'. (**FGD, professional women**)

- 'Women politicians are depicted in the media, but with many accompanying stereotypes, such as introducing her as the wife of someone or depicting her kneeling before voters – all to present her as a respectable married woman who shows respect – things male candidates are not required to do.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- Some media is seen as 'a tool for keeping unequal gender norms in place at family level': participants point to some 200 FM stations as 'preaching submissiveness and exhorting women to accept male infidelity – saying that it is women's role to please men.' 'The media is also a voice-piece for pastors with their gender-insensitive preaching.' (**FGD, professional women**)

Growing gaps and disparities

- 'Progress is positive, but lagging in rural areas.' (**FGD, recent university graduates**)

- 'Those of us who have grown up in the city have gotten used to things like gender equality and women's empowerment, but back in the village there are these patriarchal norms.' (**Young man in FGD with recent university graduates**)

- A young woman returning to her village from university is told: "Don't expect what you learn in school to be the reality on the ground", with her aunt adding "You can be educated, but you still need to behave". (**Young woman in FGD with recent university graduates**)

- 'I see more girls than boys at school in Kampala and so think the problem is solved, but then I go upcountry to Lira and find more boys. The headmaster explained that when a girl reaches P5, there is no need to continue because she is ready for marriage and once married, some of the bride wealth will be brought to the school.' (**Young man in FGD with recent university graduates**)

- 'In the eastern region, girls are still doing all the farm work and combining this with school – giving them no time for studying.' (**Young woman in FGD with recent university graduates**)

- 'I also found in one district that women and girls are doing everything, including washing the brother's clothes. How weird is that?' (**Young man in FGD with recent university graduates**)

Continued devaluation of the girl child

- 'In the north, if a man gets married to a woman and the first born is a girl, the wife will be chased away. There are a lot of cases like this' (young man in FGD with recent university graduates). 'If a woman gives birth to a girl in my community, she can be killed' (**young woman in FGD with recent university graduates**).

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- A young woman professional – a mother with three young daughters – gets constant questions on "What about a boy? You need an heir" and warnings that her husband may run away "to try elsewhere" if she does not produce a son. (**IGI, young professional woman**)

- In a survey conducted in rural Karamoja, an impoverished region in the north-east, a woman reported that she had six children, and as the data was being input, she added as an afterthought, 'The rest are girls'. (**IGI, young professional woman**)

- A young man from the rural north was warned by his father – a clan head – that he would be considered 'an enemy of progress' if he raised questions about inheritance for his sisters, telling him that: 'In our culture, women do not inherit – women get married and enjoy the husband's land. If you want, maybe you can give your sisters a plot from your land.' (**Young man in FGD with recent university graduates**)

Social norms that women and men have internalised

- 'Social norms have held women hostage – even when they appear liberated. They are worried about "What will people think?"' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'You see social norms reflected in our graduation gifts – a girl will get gifts of plates and cups whereas we boys get suits, i.e. office wear!' (**Young man in FGD recent university graduates**)

- 'We are trying not to dismantle the source of our own identities, in adherence to norms to be properly married, with children, with certain traditional norms such as not challenging men or challenging them quietly – not openly, for if you do, they will squeeze you against the wall ... Maybe as activists we have never unlearned what we learned when we were young [socialisation], while men have never even seen a need for unlearning, because it benefits them. I myself am ashamed that if I were to take a plane and hear at take-off that the pilot is a woman, I would want to jump out of the window. I am also questioning myself when I look at female students and judge their sexy dresses with shock. Maybe we were all just talking but not making deeper changes. Gender is so personal – so deep-rooted.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

Critical sticking points

Study participants highlighted in detail a number of critical 'sticking points' in discriminatory gender norms and power relations within marriage, the family and household – norms that are highly resistant to change and continue to impede progress for women and girls (see box 12). These are seen to revolve particularly around issues of son preference and the overall devaluation of the girl child. They include customary expectations about marriage for girls, unequal access to education, and discriminatory inheritance practices; the unequal gendered division of labour and the double burden on women; and women's restricted autonomy and decision-making authority within the household. They also include the persistence of domestic violence, with the rise of new sources of marital discord coupled with the emergence of new forms of abuse and gender-based violence against women and girls.

Partly as a result of increasing tensions at the household level – which get magnified in the community at large – but also as a continuation of deep strains of violence against women and girls present in some traditional norms and practices, gender-based violence (GBV) remains a critical concern at all levels. It takes different forms, including domestic violence and rape or incest by family members as

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well as other forms of violence and economic or psychological abuse. GBV persists despite laws, policies and programmes to address the problem – including its criminalisation and establishment of structures for reporting. So while some attitudes towards GBV may have changed – with more people now acknowledging that it may be 'wrong' – violations of women's right to bodily integrity and a life free from violence continue. Some hold that attitudes have not changed much, and that national surveys, which report reduced acceptance of domestic violence against women, do not reflect reality. Moreover, new forms of economic and psychological violence are arising at all levels of society, particularly among the professional classes.

In spite of advances in economic empowerment, more equitable access to resources of different sorts, and higher levels of participation in managerial and supervisory positions, women still struggle to achieve gender equality in the economic sphere. Fierce debates have taken place over issues of land ownership, in a context where customary land tenure practices sit alongside more formalised systems – both of which consider men as primary owners of land. Women still face discrimination in the workplace as well as constraints in access to credit. Women's dual needs as mothers and workers are not adequately taken into consideration in work and employment legislation and practices, and their inequitable situation vis-à-vis men who control the means of production leaves them struggling for autonomy.

Box 12. Identification of key sticking points

Growing tensions, contradictory expectations and domestic violence within the household

- 'At household level, women are really struggling – men are neglecting families and no longer providing. That is one way of positioning women to do what society expects them to do and to be. Even if the woman has taken on new roles, the man supervises to see that you continue to maintain your household roles – not openly at times. That leads to marital breaks, GBV and domestic violence – in spite of laws and policies. A woman will be judged if she brings the complaint and asked, "Well, why didn't you prepare the food?" Those institutions like the police don't guard or promote gender equality. It is at the family level where the problem starts – there are so many questions ...'(**FGD, professional women**)

- 'Patriarchal ideals around the family have fractured somehow, but still women are subordinated to men.'(FGD, professional women)

- 'In the household, not much gender equality has penetrated, yet people keep up the pretence of having a perfect household. The men are trying to inhibit women from progressing and things are breaking down.'(FGD, professional women)

- 'My aunt says to me when I go home that "You can be educated, but you still need to behave ... You people who have gender are going to end up being single".'(Young woman in FGD with recent university graduates)

- 'The sticking points are in power relations within the family. Men do not want to see women – their wives – as more empowered than they are, and want even empowered women to be subservient.'(IDI, professional woman)

- 'There is not much change in power relations at household level – women are making food, cleaning, etc. while the man is just hanging out like the male lion.'(FGD, professional women)

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- 'People still have the fallacy that you can separate the private from the public – but what we do and experience in the private domain carries over into the public. It is a big problem – even among those at top policy level – for whom there is always a lot of 'negotiation' going on at household level.' (FGD, professional women)

- 'They want to keep women as caregivers – women should not have the opportunity to define their own needs; these are defined by others. For example: "You can't own land because you are married". Men want you to play your role in the background – behind, while they make decisions; they are overly critical in order to keep you under control' (FGD, professional women). As part of the wedding ceremony in one culture, 'The man says "I speak twice, you once" and then slaps the woman.' (IDI, currently active professional woman)

- If there is instability in terms of social/family structures, women who have gone to school are seen as destabilising social norms' (FGD, professional women). 'They are calling us educated women "marriage breakers" because we refuse to hand over our salaries to men.' (IDI, currently active professional woman)

- 'We see a high rate of divorce across the board – younger women cannot accommodate what we have accommodated – they say "No, I am not my mother or my grandmother".' (FGD, professional women)

- 'The man demands respect even if he earns nothing or is uneducated because society gives him that mandate. That is why even as a woman minister, you leave your ministerial portfolio at the doorstep when you come home. It is like a backlash. Women say "We have potential". Men say "OK, if you are a politician – go make the laws there, but not at home." So women are kings without a kingdom. Now, if women don't like it, they can leave, but then they have the stigma of being considered prostitutes – the idea that you are leaving your husband to go out to get sex elsewhere – going off to sleep with many men. The household setting and conditions are therefore critical. You might want to jump out, but you are trapped by all sorts of things – what will my neighbours say? The Church? What will happen to the children? The household becomes like a prison with no walls. This is an aspect of socialisation.' (IDI, professional woman)

- 'Men's expectations of marriage haven't changed. They want their wives to be like their mothers, but they forget that their wives are like them and also working. This leads to conflicts, tension, violence and rupture.' (IDI, young professional woman)

- Even a woman in charge of running a business as the top head has to run home to attend to the household, with no help from the husband; when she hires help, she is criticised for relying on this help.' (FGD, professional women)

- 'Young marriages are also affected by moral institutions, with churches contributing to maintaining girls in abusive relationships, combining religion and culture to create "good moral people".' (FGD, professional women)

Economic empowerment in question

- 'The concept of gender equality has become distorted and misunderstood. Now that we are earning, we are equal, but a lot of the additional household expenditures are being taken on by women only – for

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example, school fees. As soon as we begin earning, the men no longer contribute.' (FGD, professional women)

- 'There is an increased tendency of male partners to relinquish roles to women in terms of the economic needs of the household. They have abandoned their duties and are just "having a party". They are "jealous" of us and when we talk of empowerment and equality, they say, "OK, you can therefore take up these roles yourselves".'

- 'Women may be becoming "empowered" politically and economically. But those "empowered" women say their husbands do not support them. So as these women advance, there can be discord at home if the man does not support them. Or the man supports only in hopes of profiting and when that does not happen, he can turn against his wife ... For example, the spouses of women empowered through participation in village savings and loans associations are leaving all household responsibilities to these women – to pay school fees, buy food, and the like'. (IDI, professional woman)

- 'Now with women's savings groups or catering groups at community level, some of the money earned has to be given to the husbands. Also, women MPs have to tell their husbands in advance what they, the husbands, will get out of this – men can control the accounts.' (IDI, professional woman)

- 'Is the work women are doing liberating or not? It is very evident that men are withdrawing – at all levels. Maybe they have found a new identity. Provisioning has been demystified – it is not a source of power. In my day, man was the provider – to eat meat, this had to be provided by men. Now men are no longer doing this and seem to be enjoying the status quo and might be taking on a new sense of identity. But they somehow still remain in charge. So women are paying school fees but men demand that you take the children to a certain school. One way men are retaining control is by using all of the women's money for household needs; they can then use their own money for enjoyment (drinking) or investment (maybe buying land that they hide from you).' (IDI, professional woman)

- 'Women MPs at a meeting recount some horrible things that they are going through – husbands taking on new wives to care for the home and then asking the women MPs to bring back money to support them'. (FGD, professional women)

- 'Men say: "I have allowed my wife to work and have given certain conditions, but if she breaks them, I am withdrawing her from work." Or sometimes, when the wife works, the man will take her money, because ownership of property is also seen to be a male prerogative. The husband may also not allow his wife to associate with others. These things have not changed. Even for us [professional women], who do these things, our men are not happy.' (FGD, professional women)

- 'Professional women are now more stressed – they have made the transition to earning, but their partners have not made the parallel transition in the assumption of equal household roles. The man still expects to be waited upon – his psyche still has this picture in mind of women serving men. The psyches of men have not changed with the changing realities – they cannot stop you from working/earning, but they can leave all of the household responsibilities and expenditures to you!' (FGD, professional women)

- 'Social norms that keep women in the inferior spaces are transported into both the political and economic realm s'... (IDI, professional woman). In the workplace, 'Women are given less because they think women are being taken care of by others – are catered for. So this enters into the human

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resource discussions of pay. There are no laws on equal pay – only a paper for discussions.' (IGI, young professional woman)

Sexualised views of women, and new and old forms of gender-based violence

- 'Where changes may not be so evident is in attitudes – male attitudes that still consider women less than they are and as sexual objects. You can see this issue in the dress code policy in the public sector where women must dress decently and in attitudes that the way you dress makes you responsible for rape. Another example is the anti-pornography bill. Everyone is up in arms about women's body – restricting what she can do or not do, how she can move or not move.' (FGD, professional women)

- 'There is still restriction of movement, and little breakthrough around women's bodies.' (IDI, professional woman)

- 'It is obvious how the law is keeping women in a subordinate status, particularly around sexuality – abortion, sex work, etc. – where there are blatant double standards on men and women's sexuality.' (IDI, professional woman)

- 'Now people know that gender-based violence is considered an abomination, but they don't really think it is. The man still thinks he has the right to slap, but fears being reported. It is not about feeling that she doesn't deserve beating, but the fear of the law. Men still feel it is justified to beat their wives – but not their mothers, daughters or sisters. Sensitisation and laws have had an impact, but still only vis-à-vis the mother, daughter or sister – not the wife ... Once you become a wife, you become something else.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- At a marriage introduction ceremony, 'the guys were singing a song to the girl about if your husband hits you, smile and thank him ... There were few audible gasps, so at some level, this is still somewhat normalised.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Gender-based violence is high among both the urban, educated classes and the rural ones ...'Maybe this is also part of the backlash. The egoism and machoism of men are threatened by women in high positions.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Even highly educated women are beaten by their husbands and cannot leave because of public face.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'There is a rising culture/lifestyle of drinking, spending beyond their means, etc. among men. Men are also trying to hang on to old norms. That explains some of the rise in violence. The social norm as men as heads of household remains in theory but not in practice as women have taken over and men are not supporting the household and that is leading to a rise in violence. This change in lifestyle ... men want to live beyond their means – drinking a lot, drug abuse ... especially among youth.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- Forms of psychological violence may be rising for women in the middle classes 'who are providing but are emotionally tortured, coping somehow in the homes and putting on a public face which they want to maintain, so they are bearing all of this'. (**IDI professional woman**)

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- 'Women are more burdened than we think – but they have no platform. And it can be even worse if you were an executive director and your husband was beating you at home and you had to hide it and "cry alone" because you don't want people to know. The only good thing is that in your position you can decide to leave. In addition to violence, there are examples of new forms of subordination: the husband will not allow you to use your money for buying a car or land (as investment) but rather have you use it all for daily needs of the household, while he on his side saves his money for investments in his name. Also, men are relinquishing their responsibilities at home so the mother has to assume all of these. These are disguised forms of subordination that only the pillows know. These women cry but cannot say anything. The elite woman with an elite man cannot speak out if he is a monster or goes with other women. So she suffers in silence.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- A public lawyer notes that new forms of psychosocial and economic violence are emerging – particularly in urban areas: the man refusing to provide at home, insisting that his wife take out a family loan for his profit, refusing to eat the food his wife cooks: 'There are so many ways you can punish a woman without beating her … But the court will not take this seriously, saying "He his buying the food, not beating you, so where is the problem?" They tend in this way to trivialise things and make the victim look bad in the face of others so that she will not report … Society has not yet come to appreciate issues of economic or emotional violence as much as physical.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- Provisions against marital rape in the proposed Marriage and Divorce Bill were among those issues that turned men against the bill – including male local councillors and MPs – because 'they feel that marriage confers the obligation of the woman to give sex and the entitlement of the man to have sex'. (**IDI, professional woman**)

Erosion of the enabling environment and collective agency

Many study participants described the current moment in Uganda's political history as one of retrenchment, diminishing democracy, and a closing down of space for civil society, which have dashed some of the high hopes of women activists and political leaders who had revelled in the early days of the movement towards democracy and gender justice starting from the mid-1980s. The environment now is, according to these women, '*hostile*' to their interests and is getting worse (see box 13). They also voiced a sense of frustration with current women political leaders whom they accuse of increasingly '*buying into*' the male power system of '*patriarchy and patronage*' and not speaking with one voice to focus on critical concerns for women. This has led some to question the benefits of the affirmative action system, which had been based on the premise that ensuring a '*critical mass*' of women representatives would be enough to provide the '*tipping point*' for moving forward (see box 14).

As a combined result, most also concur that they have lost the sense of a 'movement' that had generated so much excitement and propelled so many women forward when they were just starting out. In the current political environment, the strong collaboration that had existed between women in politics and government and women in civil society is seen to have broken down. Some participants also highlighted a growing disconnect between urban women in the capital and the realities at the grassroots. Government agencies charged with advancing gender equality and CSOs working at different levels are both starved of resources and often competing for external funding, which is

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usually tied to donor interests and time limited, rendering a long-term and cohesive vision difficult to articulate and move forward (see box 15).

Box 13. An increasingly hostile and restrictive environment

The closing off of space for civil society

- 'Civil society space is shrinking – the government is ensuring less and less breathing space for them because they have been in power so long and have become paranoid. Government sees money for NGOs to do their usual work as laundered or money going to the opposition. There are more and more raids and break-ins on women's organisations … Space is definitely shrinking and there is a sense of fatigue – people are tired. The economic situation also contributes.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'These things are interwoven with the nature of political power. Maybe we expect too much from governments (with their quasi dictatorships, militarism and personalised power and institutions). Why, in fact, would we expect them to deal with these issues? Just let them deal with things like education, health, etc. Transformation will never come from engagement with such a state. That is why some give up on policy advocacy and say instead, "let us change society and that will create headway for change in politics and policy".' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'When the government became undemocratic and women – mainly in the NGO world – were fighting against inequality and injustice, they were no longer seen as allies; now women are in politics because they are patronised by the government and they cannot raise these issues.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'For women today – once you start criticising the structure [of government], you are put out' (**IDI, professional woman**).
- 'The opposition party is considered to be some type of disease, and anyone not speaking for or like the government position as well. You cannot criticise even one issue in government without being labelled as opposition.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Even advocacy – you have to do it carefully for fear of this raiding of offices. It is a time of fear – you have to be on your toes. Also, government doesn't appreciate us – they think we are against them. Even in Parliament where we had hoped that women would advance women's agenda, we are not seeing this. Maybe CSOs have to identify women who can talk. But Ugandans feel like under siege – frightened.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'We are raising people's consciousness – think Arab Spring. And when people are enlightened they can do anything. Before, CSOs and the government were together. Now, this collaboration is reducing, unless you are doing service delivery. It is like you are the enemy.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

Increasing resistance to challenges and questions

- 'Today, the issues may be the same, but the magnitude of questioning power has moved. We've moved from the basics. We are not just saying that girls should go to school, but asking why aren't they there? Why don't they stay? Why is the quality bad? Also, in health, why are women dying?' (**IDI, professional woman**)

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- 'Politically, the earlier engagement was for a specific purpose and in a specific period: The women's movement was the in-thing on the global map, and governments had to be seen to put it on the agenda. This influenced the legislation that came out at this time. Strategically – given the history of turmoil and suffering that people had gone through, with many women left as widows with orphans to look after in poverty – in order to be a legitimised government, you needed to appeal to women – to give you a mandate, ensure longevity. And women were a soft target of government/politics as the government positioned itself as a pro-woman government, the protector and provider. Also, if you think of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: at that time, women's needs were basic – they were not challenging power – they needed food, clothing, water ... What we are asking for now is not what they were asking for then ... The earlier context was totally different. Only when women start challenging power has this become a problem – it means you are questioning authority. It brings fear and what comes back is male leadership – male power ... Citizens are responsible for participating in government processes, but the government says "Who are you to question?"' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Before, it was more open because the women's movement had not gone into the core doctrinal issues that challenge patriarchy – the qualitative aspects of gender relations in terms of culture, religion, etc. Also, at the time, the regime was just finding its feet out of crisis, the guerrilla movement, etc. and girls' education as a topic was not that controversial and so they were amenable to such discussions. But now the terrain has changed as you move into the period we have now. Women's education does not push doctrinal laws. But once you push into those doctrinal norms around marriage – the last host or enclave of patriarchal power that is neatly woven into how people define themselves – this terrain is guarded jealously. But only once you shatter this one, can you move.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

Box 14. Rising numbers but diminishing influence and continued resistance to women in politics

- 'Social norms that keep women in the inferior spaces are transported into both the political and economic realms: in the political realm there is tokenism, affirmative action – make a few women feel comfortable and the other will think it's ok.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'We are not talking about the numbers of women in Parliament but what they are doing there and in which positions? These are discomforting questions ... Looking at the numbers, the trajectory is going up. Looking at influence and impact, it is sloping downwards.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'The issue of numbers of women in important positions/political positions vs what is actually happening, which can be seen as a form of tokenism – taking women who won't rock the boat.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'The numbers of women in Parliament are increasing, but we are still struggling with quality – for 20 years there had been a non-party movement system and elections on merit, but in 2005, with multi-partyism, the quality of MPs is going down – we are not looking at capabilities but at parties. Also, the NRM no longer wants vocal people, but people who toe the line. Women are shifting towards this because they cannot speak openly and they fear. Quality is degenerating – just like it is something that nobody really cares about. There is no passion – people are there [in Parliament] for the money and to do what the President wants.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

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- 'The presence of women in Parliament has not shown that it is dealing with the development of women. They concentrate too much on political party beliefs and how they can get on well with that political stand no matter whether that stand is in the interest of the country, let alone women … There are still early marriages, defilement cases, and school dropouts. All of these should not happen at the rate they are with all of these women MPs now (around 120) plus others representing constituencies. Their job should be to ensure that girls get an education and move on. They have not taken enough trouble to see that the women in the community are taken care of in order to create a good society. They do not understand what women mean to a stable society and also don't understand politics as a system that must be steady for everyone. There are too many poor and uneducated girls and women, so the country cannot move forward. Before, there was a connection between politics and the rights of women, but not now. Why? Now, the numbers outweigh quality and many women join politics just to get wealthy.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'There are more voices in decision-making/politics – we have the quantitative critical mass in Parliament, but what types of women are in Cabinet positions or in Parliament? Are they making any difference? Is there a feminist agenda? It is a disappointment in how much they are more beholden to the NRM caucus than to UWOPA [the women's parliamentary association]. Having a critical mass doesn't guarantee feminist thinking; there are structural impediments and some women representatives can unwittingly or wittingly endorse patriarchy. The power of patriarchy is so formidable that you have to be very organised and systematic in even forming cracks in that wall. And that is lacking in women's leadership. There are a few voices, but most toe the line.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Progress on women's political voice and representation? Yes and no. Women have been pushed in. But sometimes these are just the little girls who will dance for the President and not rock the boat – just to show that Uganda is doing well. The substantive contribution of these women in politics now is not commensurate with their numbers. Just a matter of political correctness vis-à-vis the outside world and donors. Where you get strong women, these are looked at as the opposition.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Women in Parliament are mostly there on the affirmative action posts reserved for women – not like me, who stood against men. They have failed to realise that the woman's seat represents a 'soft landing' for them and they have not played their part to make womenfolk benefit.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'Men (and the population as a whole) resist when women want to contest an open seat, saying "You have your seat – this one is for men." They use abusive language to intimidate and scare you such that you have to be very brave to stand for that seat. They even say things like they will put stones in your ears.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Women are buying into the patriarchal norms and discourses in order to be acceptable, and this is more evident than it was 10 years ago. If you map power, some is visible (in infrastructure, accoutrements) but there is also other real power within the political arrangements – and women have not managed to break into this. This is because our parties are not real parties. Women manipulate to get into that political domain – like kneeling for Parliament and making blatant statements that one considers retrogressive. They are playing the patriarchal politics that requires

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them to gain some mileage. They don't have direct routes to power so they are using these means. At the moment, these may work, but they are definitely short term and not long term. Like an indirect coping strategy.' **(IDI, professional woman)**

- 'Some of the challenges we face are back in the social norms. If a woman goes into the public domain, you are venturing into areas where you should not be. It means you are not a good wife, woman, mother, conforming to norms. There is fear. Also, once in this position, you are still held back by these same norms of how to act.' **(IDI, professional woman)**

- 'When a door has been opened for one person, that person should put her foot down to ensure that others can enter. But the women leaders today have not done enough.' **(IDI, senior woman leader)**

- 'Women legislators have not come out, out of fear of men's power in Parliament and so never dare to speak in front of male MPs. Why can't they overcome this socialisation that makes them fear and feel like they should disappear in the male space of Parliament? Some women keep quiet because they want to be seen as "good women" – not upset or challenge the status quo. This contributes to men's complacency.' **(IDI, professional woman)**

- 'We are living in a society – patriarchy – where people see men as the leaders ... dictating what women should do, and this is transmitted through socialisation. Because of socialisation, even women think that men are leaders. In some cases, men in the community reject female candidates, saying "We have well-educated men – why should women boss us around?"' **(IDI, senior woman leader)**

Box 15. A de-energised and fragmented women's movement and growing gaps

- 'It started as a movement – coming together, having a mission, and this is no longer the case. The mission was social justice for women, which would bring peace and happiness for children. But to have this mission, we must come together on that – not to talk only of the political party stance, no matter if the women in the village have no water or education. True, we may have many women in Parliament, but there is no mission by those women to improve the position of women in the country. They lack a mission. I don't want to be pessimistic, but I can't see any particular woman who might lead on this.' **(IDI, senior woman leader)**

- 'Things started going down in the early 2000s. We had a lot of energy, but no real breakthrough – not many things were changing ... So we need to build stronger coalitions like the older generation of women who did break through, but got mixed up with politics and shattered and we have never regained this.' **(IDI, professional woman)**

- 'Women in academia had thought of themselves as the academic wing of the women's movement – there to guide them and provide concrete evidence, etc. and also preparing intellectual presentations. We had worked a lot with those historical leaders who would ask us to supply research, etc. But the new generation hasn't asked so much ... So as academics, we started withdrawing from civil society.' **(IDI, professional woman)**

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- 'We have "technicalised" gender – moved away from activism to expertise … The idea that anyone can do gender is you study it; also the idea that gender does not mean women. So mainstreaming is sort of mechanical, except for those of us who came in as activists. It's become like a checklist approach without the passion. Where is women's empowerment?' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'There is a gap between women up here and down there. Policies come from the top, without looking at the grassroots. When the women's movement started, it started at the grassroots. But now it has been hijacked by these women who are making policies from top-down. But when I am an MP – as a modern woman, how can I make appropriate policies and programmes for women down there? In my time, we were more in touch with the grassroots and community-based rural organisations. The women who have made it now have lost contact with women at the grassroots. They see being in Parliament as their own promotions but the linkage with the grassroots – with women at the base – are fading away. They don't have time to sit down on the grass with these women – the woman who does not know she is being oppressed by culture, who has no money for food, who is cooking over the fire with wood. If they do go there, they speak in English – not in the local language – look sophisticated, wearing trousers and the grassroots woman remains where she was 20 years ago … The gap is growing wider. Even in CSOs there are the same [elite] women from the urban areas, so how much do they know about the women down there? They have studied, travelled around the world, but how much do they know? Even my children, raised in the city, in a middle-class home, when they go back to their village the communication is not easy.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

Obstacles and setbacks in the legal and policy spheres

Study participants acknowledged numerous constraints and frustrations in moving forward with some key legislative and policy priorities such as the Marriage and Divorce Bill and the Succession Act. They also identified ingrained biases in the legal domain overall, which is seen to privilege male power and control, and highlighted operational difficulties in actually implementing new laws or policies on the ground, with access to gender justice a continuing concern. Despite efforts to mainstream gender into national planning processes and all sectoral development plans and programmes, study participants reported that this remains an ongoing struggle. '*The integration and analysis of gender have not yet become systematised – it still requires individual efforts by women*' (IDI, professional woman).

Furthermore, in spite of a host of progressive laws and policies, implementation remains weak on the ground: the systems, standard operating procedures, resources and capacity for implementation are lacking. Policies such as universal primary and secondary education have boosted enrolments but are not addressing issues of quality. Service provision overall in Uganda faces challenges linked to inadequate central budgets and lack of capacity at local government level. Health and education services – both critical to women's empowerment – have suffered as a result (see box 16).

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Box 16. Gaps in laws and weak implementation

Resistance to laws affecting the family, household, and control of assets

- 'The Marriage and Divorce Bill has been decades in the works. The main problem is the patriarchs in Parliament and in power who view the issue of equitable share of matrimonial property as a threat to their own power. Ownership and control of resources are central to patriarchy – they don't want to recognise women's contributions as they see these as taking away their resources. At the core of the fight against the Domestic Relations Bill, then the Marriage and Divorce Bill, were Muslims, and now the bottom line is about sharing of property. That is what patriarchy is all about – ownership and control of resources.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'The issues of co-ownership of marital property, cohabitation, and marital rape were among the most contentious issues in the Marriage and Divorce Bill, yet these three things are the ones that would change the status of women in marriage.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'There are deep-seated issues related to power (when you are talking about land, you are talking about power) but also about culture (women are not supposed to own land in most Ugandan cultures). Also, marriage is taken to be so private and personal, so why do you want to legislate? And religious and cultural leaders had been against it – the issue of divorce among Catholics who believe 'Until death do us part', so the bill conflicts with religious and cultural values. In the conversations around the Marriage and Divorce Bill, people would rather continue with unequal relations because people saw that bill as giving too much power. On the issue of bride price, for example, people were saying "It is only prostitutes who give it away free."' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Many MPs had not even read/understood bill the and had biases, and they were the ones to consult with the populations, but they misled them' (IDI, professional woman). 'Even women have resisted the co-ownership clause as if they have land and die, the children of the man's other women/wives may come in to take it over – "second-hand" women and children coming to claim the property.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'The issue of land as property belonging to men only lingers on, though women are fighting back. Men want to earn/reap where they have never sowed' (IDI, senior woman leader). In constitutional debates over land ownership and control, 'The chair put himself into the narrative as a husband because we ourselves – the women in the caucus – had cast the narrative as wives. And once the dominant narrative is constructed as one that casts women as wives who want men's land, you cannot make headway. If we had talked of mothers, daughters, sisters, it would have been different. But wives have a different structural position as strangers in their land. So as soon as we construct the narrative within those marital relations, it will never work.' 'Even the President has said "Women, you can ask for anything else, but not my land."' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'So law perpetuates women's subordinate status and there has been feet-dragging going on for decades.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

Significant challenges in implementation of laws and policies on the ground

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- 'The other frustration is that we have passed very many good laws, but the biggest challenge is implementation. This needs political will to give adequate resources to allow effective implementation.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'There is a distinction between law on the books and law in practice, or living law.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Overall, on many issues – yes, we have the laws, but the new battle has become the budget and implementation – this is the slower fight.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'If a woman is beaten and walks to the police – what happens? If a woman divorces her husband and tries to claim land – what happens? What energy does it take to get justice for women? It is the budgets, the attitudes of the service providers at the service points, the judges and magistrates, the training needed as civil servants who change all the time so you have to start all over with new ones … This is very slow work. A change in the system includes the attention to these nitty gritty details on the ground. It includes attitudes and accountability.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- In cases of gender-based violence, accessing justice is a long and uncertain process: 'Would a girl who was 14 at the time of the incident but is now 19, with a boyfriend, want him to know that she has been abused? They do not want to come forward.' Moreover, some parents would rather have money from the perpetrator rather than have the perpetrator in jail, 'which doesn't sound like justice to them'. Even the judges need further sensitisation and training, but 'I sometimes look at female and male judges and – under their robes – see women who are victims who do not want to admit this and men who are perpetrators.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- Clan systems have informal dispute-resolution mechanisms but these are not recognised formally, and –generally speaking – 'the clan system is biased towards the man, as this is her husband's clan – the married woman is considered a foreigner'. (**FGD, professional women**)

- 'There is continued high fertility as a result of social norms. There is resistance to sex education for fear of spoiling children and conflicting messages on this – politicians say one thing; those who used to provide counselling no longer do.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'There are a lot of progressive policies in the education sector at all levels, including a specific gender policy, grants to construct teachers' houses, and the policy of extra points for girls for higher education, which has revolutionised education for girls. There are many partners and organisations that are working on these issues. A lot of positive things are happening, but still with big constraints. There is also a failure to discuss policies that are not working.' (**FGD, professional women**)

- 'Through UPE [universal primary education] and USE [universal secondary education] teachers are underpaid and quality of education is not good – competing with private schools which are run as businesses so of better quality. Fathers then tend to send their boys to private schools and maintain their girls in public ones. At UPE schools, parents do not even provide lunches, so in rural areas, children are disadvantaged – child marriage is also on the increase and leading to dropout. We need to move toward rural areas and focus attention there. Most students at Makerere come from private schools – not UPE, where dropout is high, nor USE, where they do not get the grades needed. UPE needs to be reviewed for higher quality.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

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Conclusions and recommendations

What we have learned

This study has given voice to different generations of women who have been and are still prominent in the movement for women's rights, gender equality and empowerment in Uganda. The poignant life histories of study participants attest to the impact of discriminatory social norms on individual lives, but also highlight the importance of individual agency in resisting and overcoming societal constraints and expectations. Many of our study participants were true 'rebels' from an early age, exhibiting tremendous courage and focus in their pursuit of equal rights and gender justice. They have also been dedicated professionals, exerting their activism through law-making and policy development, through political mobilisation and the exercise of voice, through transformative teaching, and through development at the grassroots. And most have drawn both inspiration and power from the collective agency of the women's movement, which they themselves have helped to shape and lead.

We can learn much from the collective wisdom of these women, who have clearly touched upon all of the key domains posited in the study's conceptual framework as critical to the full development of girls' capabilities and the empowerment of women. These include: the transformative functioning of education as a springboard to the realisation of other opportunities and rights; the importance of supportive household and family relations and family policies protective of the rights of women and girls; clear measures to promote economic empowerment and access to resources; laws, policies and sensitisation measures to combat gender-based violence and promote both physical integrity and psychosocial well-being; and openings for political and civic participation as an enabling environment for women to exert agency and voice. All of these are essential ingredients for transformative changes in the discriminatory gender norms and practices that impede progress and equality for women.

However, study participants also pointed out that significant obstacles and constraints remain in the struggle against such norms and practices. Progress has been uneven and remains fragile, with critical 'sticking points' around gender roles, responsibilities and expectations in the household, gender-based violence, and economic equality and autonomy. Participants stressed that the formidable power of patriarchy, its ability to shift its shape and to re-articulate itself through different periods and institutions calls for strategic re-positioning and tactical deployments of women working to change the bases of the inequitable gender norms and the gender injustices these throw up. In this regard, study participants recognised that constant vigilance and continued activism will be needed for some time, at both the personal and the political levels.

The way forward

Study participants had clear and concrete ideas on the strategies needed to advance the struggle for gender equality and women's empowerment in Uganda (see box 17). Recommendations aim both to build on gains already achieved – through intensification of the kinds of efforts that seem to have worked best – and to confront new challenges arising within the changing environment and period of backlash that many have identified. Women activists noted that '*Gender issues keep changing face and we have to be prepared to deal with the changes*'. And that '*It takes a certain kind of fighting spirit to keep pushing*'. This requires a reinvigorated women's movement to support collective efforts.

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While the required focus in both action and advocacy is seen to remain on women – both individually and collectively – study participants recommended that some of the greatest gains might accrue from a focus on the younger generations. They also suggested that renewed attention be paid to men and boys (to bring them into empowerment efforts as allies) and opinion leaders in religious and cultural institutions. Finally, they suggested the need for deeper action and analysis at the household level, where many of the most constraining and 'sticky' gender discriminatory norms and practices are seen to reside.

A clear cross-cutting theme and strategy for all thematic priorities is the need to continue work on the legal and policy environment – filling remaining gaps – while strengthening efforts to implement laws and policies on the ground and establish operational systems that are gender-sensitive and promotive. *'In general, we are blessed with good policies – we can use them to cement coherence and move forward around women's issues including economic empowerment, violence and voice'* (IDI, professional woman). All suggest that integrated approaches are critical for addressing multiple sources of inequality and the underlying norms that support them in the social, economic, political, and ideological domains.

Box 17. Strategic priorities moving forward

Reinvigorating the women's movement around a common mission: Participants stressed the continuing importance of taking action against discriminatory gender norms, attitudes and practices through a reinvigorated women's movement that can re-harness the force of collective agency to address key structural issues of gender injustice.

- 'We need to bring back that integrated vision and awareness of women's rights as well as a system of working together.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'We need to bring it all together to move forward on the big things. These women's issues are structural in nature so they cannot be addressed in piecemeal fashion. We need to influence systems …' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'We need dialogue at all levels to identify our values, principles and bold leadership humble enough to admit that we are in this together.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'Women's solidarity and organisation are the strongest weapons to challenge and change inequalities … We need to recognise that we all need each other to work in complementary ways and need to have a meeting point. We need to revive the solidarity and energy. We need to get back to that vision, reorganise and re-strategise and look at the new forms of inequalities and injustices that are arising.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

Reconnecting with the grassroots: With acknowledged gaps in progress on gender equality and women's empowerment, greater efforts are needed to bridge the gap between the urban elite and rural communities, rooting strategies in clear understanding of different contexts, and nurturing voice and participation at local levels.

- 'So women who have broken the glass ceiling need to go back to where they came from and find out what are the grassroots issues now – for example, fetching water and the burden on women of responsibilities for this, the distance to boreholes … The government needs to encourage appropriate

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technology so that women can cook easily – not seeking firewood or spending hours cooking meals. They need to provide better health services closer to home and new technologies to preserve and store food so they don't have to go to the garden every day planting beans. Women up here should now work for those changes to lessen the burden on women so they are a little free and can take on other development opportunities. We need to look back at these women who have come up and refocus on the grassroots to get the voices of the other women to come up.' (**IDI, senior woman leader**)

- 'The women's movement needs to be broadened into a grassroots movement rooted in people and not dependent on a few women leaders – mainly in NGOs. We need movement-building for collective power and voice. This needs to be coupled with consciousness-building and citizenship-building ... Once this can be done collectively, it will continue to spread.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

Expanding education and reinforcing its quality at all levels: Education, with its numerous 'multiplier effects', is seen as both a right in and of itself and as a critical enabling factor for further progress in combating discriminatory gender norms, attitudes and behaviours. Policy and implementation must address both supply and demand obstacles to girls' education and focus on quality as well as access.

- 'Education must be the prime agenda for the country and should be the prime agenda for everyone – especially girls' (IDI, senior woman leader). 'In investing in education, the more silent those [discriminatory] social norms become.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'We need curricular change to transmit new images – as early as primary/pre-school where children are taught as a matter of course that the man is the head of household – even those children who come from female-headed households and have never seen their fathers and who are beaten if they say that a woman is the head of their household!' (**FGD, professional women**)

- 'We need more gender-sensitive teacher training so that the teachers who come out will be imparting gender-equitable messages and modelling gender-equitable behaviours.' (**FGD, professional women**)

- 'We must address continuing barriers to girls' education such as adolescent pregnancy – which calls for life skills education to combat lack of knowledge.' (**FGD, professional women**)

- 'We should realise that all education is positive – even at the basic level, and that not everyone needs to go to university.' (**FGD, professional women**)

Adopting integrated approaches to protect and promote physical integrity and combat gender-based violence: Laws, policies, sensitisation, and early gender-sensitive socialisation processes are all seen as essential in the sexualisation of women, norms of male control over women's bodies, and gender-based violence in all of its forms.

- 'All things are intertwined. Community sensitisation is not enough – people will just go back and sleep. Laws, and how effectively they are applied, will help determine attitudes. Law is a very effective element in this.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'The police need to be engaged more and held accountable for protecting the rights of women and girls, along with local councils and the clan system. This demands community-based engagement and work.' (**FGD, professional women**)

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- 'From the beginning, the girl is taught that her body is dirty and that she is seductive. We need to change that narrative and teach girls about their bodies at both home and school. Young men also need to be groomed early on that women's bodies are their own and that "no means no".' (**FGD, professional women**)

Enhancing economic empowerment and inclusion: This must start within the household to address the unequal division of labour and traditions of patrilineal inheritance and reach into all economic sectors and professions with strengthened laws and policies, training and mentoring, and investment in specific economic empowerment programmes for women.

- 'We have to look beyond education and link it with economic empowerment – equipping girl pupils and women students to navigate the environment of masculine spaces that they are negotiating into – the masculine files. Girls who come into this get a shock.' (**FGD, professional women**)

- 'Women need to learn how to negotiate better around payment scales. They need to be bold and start to speak out – insisting on good pay, adequate maternity benefits, etc. We need to prepare women to value themselves and to speak out about competencies … On interview panels, women still have difficulty articulating what they want to earn.' (**FGD, professional women**)

- 'We must address the social norms and cultural issues that have a huge bearing on what we do and who we are in all spaces we are in.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

Expanding advocacy, communication, and sensitisation efforts to change ideological messages, attitudes and discourse: Participants noted the importance of ongoing advocacy and sensitisation efforts, including through both traditional and social media, established institutions, and the family.

- 'We can never stop the work of attitude change.' (**IDI, professional woman**)
- 'We must create a gender-sensitive media … It is important to train young journalists on gender-sensitive reporting and the challenges of talking with women who are often too shy to talk.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'We need to occupy institutional spaces [such as the Church] from within – it is naïve to think you can leave such spaces unoccupied and think you can transform from the outside. If you are outside, you will only repel them. It is easier to explain and convince them from inside, like in a workshop.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'We can try to reach into our own idioms and cultures to see how women have been protected … This can come from proverbs, stories – telling our own stories, reaching to new and old.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

- 'The household is an important site for resistance as well as transformation and change – we have to therefore adopt an ecological model of intervention and intensive interaction at all levels.' (**FGD, professional women**)

- 'We need to look holistically at the family structure, including husbands, wives, in-laws … Starting with the family makes a lot of sense in changing gender norms.' (**IDI, professional woman**)

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- 'We need to help men think about negative social practices and the impacts on the community and also to articulate positive aspects of how they would like to make a difference in the community. Because if you empower women and leave the men behind in their lives, you are bound to get backlash' (IDI, professional woman). 'More male involvement and engagement on these issues is needed at a very early age.' (**IDI, young professional woman**)

Participants recognised from long experience that there is *'no magic bullet'* – that part of the strategy will simply be intensified efforts to mobilise around all of the issues that remain pertinent: *'We need to keep plugging on all the different fronts. Many battles are needed to win the war'* (IDI, professional woman). Since everything is intertwined – the economic, cultural, political and social – everything remains a priority. Some expressed dismay at the current state of affairs, but also voiced a determination to continue the struggle, keeping the longer-term goal in mind:

> *"Maybe we expected too much change too fast and didn't realise that the journey is so slow, personalised, and deeply rooted in what we have been socialised into. But the more we see the bad effects of not changing these norms, the more we are encouraged to move forward; inspired also by the fact that so many things are no longer the norm – even the earlier sense of power and maleness and entitlement. The time needed for change is important – for change in something so deep-rooted. But at least we now know that we can move forward, and this will never change."* (IDI, professional woman)

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