BALANCING CHORES: MEN NEED TO TAKE PART

BY LILLIAN N. MAGEZI

For Ugandan women to advance in their careers and other aspects of their lives, men ought to do their fair share of domestic work.

“Many societies in Uganda, domestic work, which includes house chores, such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of children and other family members, is majorly a responsibility for women. Such work, which is unrecognised and unpaid consumes a lot of women’s time and energy, thus hindering their participation in other aspects of life, including work. In addition, since the women do not get any reward for domestic work, it hinders their economic empowerment,” Kristina Vlahovicova, a researcher with Promundo-US, said.

Promundo is a global organisation that seeks to promote gender equality and create a world free from violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls. One way through which they achieve their mission is through conducting research that builds the knowledge-base on masculinities and gender equality. Other ways are through developing, evaluating, and scaling up high-impact gender-transformative interventions and programmes. They also carry out national and international campaigns and advocacy initiatives to prevent violence and promote gender justice.

Vlahovicova notes that when men get involved in domestic work, it means women are left with more time to do more paid work, which increases their earning power. She emphasises the fact that in Uganda unpaid care is one of the major factors leading to gender inequality.

She made the remarks at the launch of the results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), which was carried out in central Uganda.

The results for the study, which was carried out in 2017 were launched to the public in Kampala in May 2019. It involved 1,008 men and 1,008 women between the ages of 15 and 49. The researchers explained that the study was done in central Uganda because it is inhabited by people from different parts of the country. They added that the results got from Central Uganda can be generalised for the rest of the country.

The study was conducted by Promundo, the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) and Uganda’s Ministry of Gender.

According to Bernard Atiku, the MP of Ayivu County, the survey marks a milestone in the Government’s commitment towards realising Sustainable Development Goal five, which is concerned with the promotion of gender equality.

Atiku notes that the results of the survey will bring to light potential areas for promoting gender equality, in addition to helping in the development of interventions aimed at challenging inequitable gender norms and practices that tolerate violence against women and children.

Uganda doing badly

Findings of the survey confirmed earlier studies that showed that Uganda is doing badly as far as achieving gender equality is concerned. Gender inequality is one of the major issues affecting Uganda’s development.

In addition to women having to do most of unpaid work in the home, Atiku notes that the other major manifestation of gender inequality is through violence against women and children. He notes that the study showed that in central Uganda, there is a high prevalence of violence against women and children, despite established legal protections from violence for women and children.

The most recent evidence from the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (2016) and the Violence Against Children Survey (2018) show that, in spite of regulations, one out of every two ever-married women report experiencing physical or sexual violence from their spouse. In addition, about two out of every three girls and boys experience physical violence during their childhood and over one out of every three girls and almost 20% of boys experience sexual violence before age 18. In addition, in the IMAGES report, it was noted that violence is considered normal to men that they might not even see it as wrong. Risk factors for men perpetuating violence against their spouse include older men and those who grew up experiencing violence. Atiku notes that violence begets violence, for example, when women suffer violence, they also become violent to their children, while children who suffer violence also become violent. That noted, Atiku urged women to stand up against violence, in addition to standing up for their rights and equality.

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WOMEN ARE KNOWN TO BE TOLERANT

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When it comes to leadership, people believed that women who participate in politics or leadership posts cannot be good wives and mothers, women are too emotional to be leaders and that men make better political leaders than women.

In addition, the study showed high rates of intimate partner violence and the violence against women is normalised with many of the respondents believing that women should tolerate violence to keep the family together.

Men perceived existing domestic violence legislation negatively with three quarters saying that women were using these laws to dominate men.

**Recommendations**

Researchers urged that inequities between men and women must be tackled to make progress on important development outcomes. In order to promote gender equality and development of women, Vlahovicova, Atiku, Dr Cleopatra Mugyenyi, the director of ICRW-Africa regional office, and Gary Barker, the President and the chief executive officer of Promundo, recommend that:

- Unpaid care work should be redistributed among family members, both men and women.
- Men should appreciate the principles of feminism and equality, and look at things with a sensitive mind when dealing with women.
- Men should change their attitudes and get involved in childcare at home and other domestic chores. The benefits of men doing care work are also felt by them and the children. For instance, if a father is involved in child care, there is bonding between father and child. Men’s caregiving will also promote and sustain gender equality as it is expected to contribute to empowered daughters and more equitable sons. And the change is translated to generations as empowered women also change men.
- Men and women, plus, boys and girls should be engaged to strengthen existing positive norms and behaviours that promote the protection of women and children from abuse.
- There was need to engage men in the fight for gender equality so as to bring about change.
- There is need to change some beliefs and social norms when raising boys, for example boys should be encouraged to participate in domestic work.
- Men and boys play a huge role in maintaining and dismantling gender inequality.

**Did you know?**

- Uganda is ranked 126 of 160 nations on the 2017 United Nations Development Programme’s Gender Inequality Index, putting it in the bottom quartile of countries in terms of the negative costs to human development of gender inequalities (UNDE, 2017).
- The 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey found that over half of married women in Central Uganda lack the autonomy to make decisions pertaining to their own health care, major household purchases, and visits to their family or relatives.
- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to which Uganda is a signatory include targets around eliminating violence and harmful practices, recognising and valuing unpaid care, ensuring women’s participation in leadership and public life, and guaranteeing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (Goal five).
- Attitudes and norms about gender – ideas about what is appropriate or typical for men or for women – shape and influence men’s and women’s daily lives.

**Public perceptions on gender equality**

A study was carried out in 2017 with the results launched to the public in May 2019. It involved 1,008 men and 1,008 women between the ages of 15 and 49.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believe that women are too emotional to be leaders</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe that men make better political leaders</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Think that changing diapers, giving baths to children, and feeding children are the mother’s responsibility, not the father’s</td>
<td>77.05%</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
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<td>Believe a woman’s most important role is to take care of the home and cook for the family</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
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<td>Think a man should have the final word about decisions in the home</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<td>Feel their community expects men to dominate household decisions</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Men perceived existing domestic violence legislation negatively with three quarters saying that women were using these laws to dominate men.