

CCE Report No. 8



GENDER IN EAST AFRICA:

Women Role Models in Uganda

Gender Report 3

Alicia Fentiman and Molly Warrington

October 2011

Women Role Models in Uganda

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WOMEN ROLE MODELS IN UGANDA

This report focuses on research undertaken on 'WOMEN ROLE MODELS' in Uganda. It describes the background of the project, its aims, methods, and analysis. Another report that will complement this report is a study on WOMEN ROLE MODELS in Kenya; the findings from that study will be reported separately.

Background

The Ugandan women role model project was devised in connection with another research project on 'What keeps Girls in School Against the Odds' (See *Gender in East Africa Reports 1 and 2* in this series).

The women role model project was aimed at identifying women in contemporary Ugandan society who have achieved prominent positions and who are recognised as 'role models'. The aim of the research was to record a detailed life history and to see how each woman was able to achieve, and to explore in depth the factors or circumstances that allowed her to become a prominent and revered woman in Ugandan society. Geiger (1986: 338) illustrates the importance and richness of data generated through life history research which 'provide an exceptional resource for studying women's lives at different points in their life cycles in specific cultural and historical settings'.

The context in which the women grew up over time needs to be taken into consideration when discussing the women's life experiences. Earlier narratives of women in Uganda depict the limited choices that were available to women in strict kin based, polygamous societies (Winter, 1959). For many of the women in our study, it was a time of important historical, social, political and economic transformation and reforms. Uganda received its independence from the British in 1962 and over the years a variety of political leaders rose to power such as the brutal military dictatorship of Idi Amin to be followed by the return of Obote (who was ousted by Amin) and then the long reign of Museveni (since 1986). The 70s and 80s were a time of harsh economic crisis. It was also a time where there was no Universal Primary Education (UPE). Indeed, Heyneman (1983: 410) describes a situation of 'pedagogical stalemate' at the end of the decade 1971-81, with no way to improve the 'obviously inadequate educational system without an improvement in available

classroom resources'. In a sample of six schools in 1981, Heyneman found one chair for every 8.8 pupils!

Deliberate action to promote girls' education occurred after the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took power in 1986 (Kabesiime, 2010), and in 1996 UPE was introduced and implemented in 1997; as a result access to education increased. Uganda's tertiary education has also seen dramatic growth: at independence all tertiary education was exclusively provided by the government at Makerere University; by 2008 there were 26 universities, 5 public and 21 privately owned (Mugisha Baine, 2010). Baine describes the way in which attempts have been made to 'indigenise' education over the years, resulting in a considerable increase in the number of Ugandans, and women in particular, accessing education at all levels.

Why focus on women?

Despite greater numbers of women participating in education, and notwithstanding the affirmative action programme incorporated into the political structure by the NRM after 1986, Pankhurst (2002: 125) claims that Uganda's gender relations remain 'highly unequal by any standard measure'. As Rosemary¹, one of our interviewees commented, 'generally in Uganda women's rights or equality is more talked about than is a reality at different levels'. Within education, women's participation remains below that of men, with a net enrolment rate of only 21% of girls in secondary school (UNICEF, 2011). Not surprisingly, therefore, in university education women have remained a minority as students and staff, and most especially as academics and managers (Mugisha Baine, 2010). The women who took part in our survey have grown up in a country where in all regions, as Kasente (2003: 2) points out, 'men have a clear advantage over women in access to and control over resources while cultural practices also bestow men with more power than women in different aspects'.

There is a vast literature on constraints to education in sub-Saharan Africa, and the reasons why girls drop out of school are well researched (see Hunt, 2008, for a review of the literature). The aim of this report, however, is to shed light on a sample of women who *have* made it 'against the odds', to explore the circumstances in which they grew up and the

¹ Some of the women quoted here have given permission for their names to be used in this report; others have preferred pseudonyms. We have also used pseudonyms for those women we have been unable to contact to verify their contributions. No names have been attributed where topics are particularly sensitive.

various factors which have influenced (and in some cases hindered) their journey to become a successful role model. In addition, it is important to see what they are currently doing to advocate or to help other younger women to achieve in contemporary Ugandan society. Each case study is unique but we can draw on the similarities and differences throughout their life cycle.

Methodological Approach

Selection of women role models

In order to identify women for the study, collaborative partnerships were established with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWEU) and Makerere University. In particular, we are indebted to Martha Muhwezi, Head of FAWE Uganda, Professor Alice Merab Kagoda, Faculty of Education, Makerere University, and Emmanuel Kamuli, Education Specialist, UNICEF Uganda, for assisting us and for their help in identifying key women to interview. Our collaborating partners provided us with initial introductions to the women and helped us secure interviews.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

A preliminary interview guide was devised during a gender workshop meeting in Nairobi in 2010 with the CCE research team and invited representatives from FAWE Regional Office, Makerere University, and Nairobi University. The interview guide was refined and modified in Uganda during the initial field research.

The aim of the guide was to record a detailed life history of each woman including family background which provided the 'context' of the culture and household in which she grew up; specific questions included the parents' educational background, her siblings' education, and her educational history (from primary to tertiary), cultural environment, the challenges she experienced in her education, her career history, her personal history including both achievements as well as failures. The interview also examined the factors which put the woman against the odds – including childhood factors and challenges continuing into adulthood; these included the community or 'cultural' expectations, conflicts over the demands of family and career aspirations, discrimination in the workplace, and personal relationships. In addition, the interview probed to see how achievement has been

possible. For example, what were the roles of education, role models and peers which may have contributed to their achievements? It also examined the part played by the family and extended kin members, the role of key figures in the workplace and the individual personal characteristics that contributed to success. Lastly, the interview examined the impact these role models have had and are still having in Ugandan society; in particular, the role they play in mentoring and advocacy for women today.

In depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 18 Ugandan women from a wide range of communities and backgrounds in April 2010 in Kampala. The interviews were fully transcribed and analysed by the researchers using a common data analysis tool. The main findings of the interviews are discussed in detail below.

Who were the Women?

The women were aged from their twenties to their sixties. They came from a diversity of ethnic groups throughout Uganda, and they were predominantly from rural backgrounds. Significantly, all the women interviewed had completed primary and secondary school and some form of tertiary education - in the form of diplomas and degrees. Several had obtained successful qualifications over time, working first to obtain fees before undertaking further study. A total of 13 had completed a Masters and three of the women had PhDs. Half of the women had studied abroad, in Europe or North America. Their occupations varied from an MP, to teachers and lecturers, government employees, employees in non-governmental organizations and entrepreneurs. Irrespective of age, ethnicity and socio-economic status each woman had a unique story to tell about how she was able to achieve and how she became what she is today. Their life histories provide vivid detailed accounts of the various challenges and achievements the women have encountered during their lifetime.

We would like to record our great thanks to all those women who cheerfully and willingly made time during their busy schedules to talk to us: Jane Afoyocan, Sarah Bunoti, Margaret S. Ejotu, Monica Emiru Enyou, Alice Merab Kagoda, Ruth Kavuma, Noreda Bashabe Kiremire, Winnie Lawoko-Olwe, Grace Bantebya Myomuhendo, Jane Malemwa, Margaret Muhwezi, Martha Muhwezi, Grace Nanyonga, Mariane Natyang, Joy Ndibirwe, Susan Oke, Rosemary Akech Oyollo and Consolata Tumwesigye.

Main Findings: Women Role Models in Uganda

Analysis from the interviews showed that the women came from a diversity of backgrounds. In some instances they were from well-off privileged homes, though the majority came from much poorer socio-economic backgrounds, growing up in sometimes remote rural areas in homes lacking electricity, water and sanitation. They came from a wide range of ethnic groups throughout Uganda and their cultural background, in many cases, played a significant role in trying to prescribe or dictate the 'gender' expectations of what it meant to be female in that society. However, despite the variations, there were many commonalities that all women shared throughout their life cycle and these included traumatic personal experiences, such as the death of a parent or parents, mistreatment abuse or discrimination (throughout their education and in the workplace), the conflict between career and family life, and, more positively, the desire to give something back to their communities. In many cases the women have used their own personal experiences to advocate for better understanding and for creating fairer opportunities for Ugandan youth (female and male).

Despite the many challenges they faced, all women in the study showed a zeal for education, a resilience to learn from the past, to advocate for the equality for women, and for creating a better understanding for fairer opportunities for Ugandan youth. The women have used their own personal experiences to help shape not only their lives but also the lives of a new generation of Ugandan society.

Challenges Affecting Women Over Time: The Life Cycle

Childhood Factors

Poverty Most of the women came from poor rural communities and several were brought up in polygamous households with numerous siblings and extended kin members. For the majority of the women it was a time when primary education was not free, so as children they had to find ways to contribute to the household economy and also to find ways to pay for school fees. Jane A, for example, started her first business in Primary 3, collecting and selling firewood at the roadside in order to buy books and other equipment for school. Later she bought milk and made tea to sell to passers-by, and once in primary 6, she began brewing alcohol to earn more money for the increasing demands including buying food for the family. Orphaned at the age of 14, Mary began roasting chickens to sell on the streets,

later expanding to include fish, which became the basis of a successful business she still runs today.

Some of the women grew up in very deprived, remote geographical areas that were prone to drought and poverty. Growing up in the harsh region of Karamoja as one of 11 children, Christine explained that ‘we were a struggling family, really struggling. Sometimes you could have breakfast but miss other meals.’ She had no shoes, what clothes she had were provided by the church, and she lacked all the basic equipment for school. For Jane A, life in Nebbi was similarly hard: ‘you go to school without anything, because there would be no food in the house. You don’t come back for lunch because there’s no lunch at home. Even when I came back at 4 there would be no food’.

Communities placing little value on female education In most of the communities in which the women grew up, female education was not ‘valued’ or taken as seriously as boys’ education (Subrahmanian, 2005). Women’s place was viewed as being in the home, with marriage as the sign of success. In fact, several women commented on being unusual or even unique within their village in continuing with their education through to secondary school: as Brenda said, ‘In the community I don’t think there was any girl who ever went ahead to secondary school. I think I could be the only one’. Traditional cultural practices such as early marriage, dowry and the expectation of a woman to live with her husband’s kin were given as reasons for not investing in female education and not prioritising girls’ participation in school. However this was not the view of all and as will be shown later in this report some fathers, mothers, and kin were ‘enlightened’ and DID see the value of education for girls. However, for the majority this was not the cultural ‘norm’.

Lack of education in the family Many of the women’s mothers were only educated up to primary school level, and three had received no formal education at all. In some, but by no means all of these instances, they did not see the ‘value of education’. Interestingly, most fathers had received both primary and secondary education, with only two who had not completed primary school – though this did not mean that they supported education for their daughters. Maureen’s father, for example, even though he was a teacher, believed that it was ‘only the boys who can manage life and education’, and therefore refused to pay her school fees, leaving her to depend on NGOs.

Personal trauma Several of the women experienced personal trauma during their childhood which included the death of a parent or parents. Patience's mother, for example, died in childbirth when she was 3-years-old, so her 4-year-old sister, 1-year-old brother and the baby went to live with a grandmother in the village. Brenda's father died when she was four, and after her mother died when she was ten, her five siblings were divided among relatives, and she and her 4-year-old brother went to live with grandparents in a very remote area away from home and friends, but her grandparents were so old that she ended up with the responsibility of caring for them as well as her brother, whilst also attending a school 7 kilometres away. She remarked, 'Sometimes when I look at the road map of my life I even wonder how I have made it here'.

Others grew up during the brutal regime of Idi Amin and their families were directly affected, especially their fathers who were targeted as political opponents. Ruth's father was imprisoned for several years, while Gloria recalled how her father was picked up in the night: 'We went to bed and he was there, and in the morning we woke up and he was gone, and that was it, we've never seen anything that relates to him again'. In another instance, Winnie's father was arrested for over eight months and had to flee the country in order to escape 'with his life', returning in 1979. In 1986 he moved to Sweden to join other family members, following a politically motivated hatred incident. These three examples vividly portray the political situation of the time during their youth and the devastating impact it had on their childhood.

HIV/AIDS Significantly, two of the younger women role models had their lives altered by losing a parent or parents' to HIV/Aids. One woman described how her mother, a policewoman, had died of AIDS and she did not know who her father was. Another woman, became a 'double orphan' when both parents died of AIDS. As the eldest child, this left her with the responsibility of looking after and raising seven siblings. The high prevalence of HIV/Aids had a significant impact on Ugandan society in the 1980s-1990s and the responsibility of many extended family members was to look after relatives' children whose parents had died of HIV, often bringing with it stigmatization and exclusion (Evans, 2010). (The impact of HIV on family structure is also evident in the current research we are undertaking in Kyenjojo, Ntoroko, and Nebbi - see Uganda Pilot Study Report, CCE Report No.5).

Mistreatment by kin members (step-mothers) Mistreatment by step-mothers was a factor affecting family life. In one instance, a step-mother deliberately destroyed a will left by the father so his daughter could not inherit. Another woman described how her step-mother, jealous of her academic success, paid a man to rape her as she approached the end of primary school, in the hope that she would become pregnant and drop out of school. Another depicted a stepmother who ignored and deliberately mistreated her step-children and would make them go hungry during the day.

Political insecurity A few women who were interviewed had suffered socio-psychological trauma in their youth due to the impact of the political instability in Uganda in the 1970s and 80s. Maureen, for example, found her education disrupted by the Uganda Bush War (1981-86), a tough period 'when we didn't have people to guide us'.

Child labour and gender specific tasks As Kasente (2003: 5) points out, 'existing social relations of gender that structure women as providers of reproductive labour also affect the girls who are socialized as apprentices of their mothers so that they can play similar roles in future'. All the women took part in 'gender specific' tasks during their childhood irrespective of being in a rural or urban area. Female tasks included sweeping, cooking, looking after siblings, fetching water and assisting in economic activities such as farming, selling foodstuffs, and trading. Most of the women were 'working' children, and child labour was viewed as the norm and part of their socialisation process. As Gloria explained, 'Every day we would have to fetch water, and sometimes firewood, and also help with the cooking, washing up and cleaning. Then we would do garden work'. They had to combine these tasks with going to primary school, and most, if not all, lived in areas without electricity so homework was done in the evenings with a kerosene lantern after the domestic chores were completed – though Gloria also recalled trying to read by the light of the fire as she was cooking, because there was no money for paraffin. Some recounted having to work on the family farms in order to raise money for school fees. Agnes, for example, described how 'we used to grow cotton and I went to farm when I was very young ... I would wake at 5-ish, pray, go to the garden with a bucket, draw water, home, wash and then put on uniform and go to school'.

Puberty and Adolescence

Factors which affected the women during adolescence included menstruation management, cultural expectations of early marriage, gender-specific subjects in school, rape/defilement, and teenage pregnancy.

Menstruation management Several women mentioned the problem between schooling and menstruation. The majority did not have access to sanitary pads and some talked about the ways they tried to deal with their periods as best they could. Patience described the hardship and said, 'We grew up when Uganda was suffering from the economy - no sanitary towels, just look for old rags and use them as sanitary towels, and soap was not available ... my daughters today do not have to go through this'. Agnes also recalled how 'male teachers would complain – you are smelling.... The teachers said that no-one should ever see your blood – Never! My mother also said that no-one should ever see your pad. Some girls did not come to school during periods – maybe they only had one piece of cloth. When I was in secondary school (boarding) the girls would tease me and say, what are these pieces of cloth and they would touch my waist and tie – maybe you are a witch?'

Teenage pregnancy In a context where school drop-out because of pregnancy is high (Hunt, 2008), teenage pregnancy was a challenge for some of the women: some came from strict backgrounds where parents and teachers instilled fear into the adolescent girls; they were very protective and would 'warn' their children/students not to get pregnant. The following excerpt from Agnes's interview helps to illustrate the fear instilled in a young girl: 'If I got pregnant it would be "fire" and I would get in trouble. I would sit at the house - as children we never went out, we were fenced in by wire mesh on the veranda. We were children who were treated like chicken in the wire mesh. Even my big sister who became a teacher said to me, "if you get pregnant, you will become my house-girl".'

However there were examples of women who did get pregnant in their teens, but who had enlightened and supportive parents who would not let pregnancy get in the way of their daughter's education. One woman recalled getting pregnant but not really knowing about it until she was about to give birth. Her parents helped her after she delivered and persuaded her to continue her education. The following example illustrates their support: 'I gave birth to a premature child and my mother decided to take one year off work to look after the child, and my father gave me all the support ... I went back to school'.

Sexual and physical violence In their recent study, Wagman et al (2009) describe the widespread acceptance of sexual coercion, which they argue is deeply embedded in community culture in Uganda. There were a few examples in our study of women who encountered sexual violence during their adolescent years. One woman who was very poor accepted a lift from a truck driver and he raped her on the way to Kampala. News of the rape reached her home town and the reaction was not one of sympathy but one of ridicule for the woman. Two women who did not have fathers reported being regularly beaten by relatives; one was sexually abused by her guardian, but had to put up with it because there was nowhere else for her to go.

Early marriage – going against cultural norms Echoing Kabesiime (2010), marriage during the teen years was the ‘norm’ for many of the women in our study and the pressure of the community for women to marry young was rife. In fact, several of the women’s sisters dropped out of school to marry. Agnes described girls leaving primary school and marrying very young in order to get a dowry. She also recalled uncles asking her father, ‘why take them to school? Let them get married!’ After the death of her father, Gloria’s mother came under pressure from the clan to marry Gloria off to get some cattle (dowry) in order to educate the boys. Noreda was also put under a great deal of pressure to marry as she approached the end of secondary school. Even though her father was by that time fully supportive of her education, his brothers (her uncles) at one point told her they had found a man for her and wanted to meet him. Relatives were constantly telling her that girls her age or younger were married and had children, and kept asking what was wrong with her.

Teasing, humiliation and gender-specific subjects Some of the women recalled being teased and bullied during their teens by both males and females. A few women remembered being teased because they were poor and from rural backgrounds and they did not have the material items of the wealthier, urban school girls. In some instances they were also teased by their teachers. Patience’s example reflects this: ‘The boys loved teasing us so much and when I left the boarding school I was timid and shy: these Kampala boys would tease. I didn’t have shoes on, I couldn’t speak English, and the teachers did not speak well and they used to punish me if I didn’t speak English. They would put a piece of potato or a bone around your neck if they knew you were speaking vernacular and not English’.

In addition, several women who excelled in mathematics or science at school were often teased by their peers and discouraged by their teachers. Charity recalled how 'in secondary school, the males were very jealous of me because I was in mathematics. There was a lot of harassment in the class and they didn't like it – they would say to me, 'what are you doing here? This class is only meant for boys!' They did not want to share with me and so I was isolated. The girls in the arts classes also looked at me as strange - both ways I had no support or encouragement, I felt lonely and that I was in the wrong class and wrong subjects'. Even in primary school Emily recounted that science was treated as a boys' subject, especially by female teachers who would discourage the girls. Later, 'I remember in my Senior 4 I performed very well in sciences, but I never had any real guidance, and when I was in College I struggled very hard with the mathematics because somehow I knew this is for the boys, and everybody was saying, "oh, you're going to fail"'. Like Emily, Magarita was discouraged by male science teachers, and despite performing well in those subjects, left them behind to pursue arts subjects.

Adulthood

All of the women in the research went on to tertiary education and these qualifications included diplomas, degrees, Masters and PhDs. However, the discrimination girls had experienced at school continued at university, and the interviews illustrate how difficult it was to be a woman studying the sciences. Several of the women excelled at physics, chemistry, botany, but these were not regarded as 'female subjects'. Women in the sciences therefore experienced challenges at University in relation to 'gender-specific subjects', sexual discrimination and sexual harassment. For some it was a long journey with disruptions along the way.

Gender Discrimination What is perhaps particularly astounding about the discrimination experienced by young women studying science is that their male lecturers refused to acknowledge that they were doing well. Lydia reported how she was called aside by a male lecturer who said, 'Lydia, you have done brilliantly, but this course that is offered to you, no woman has ever entered it and you just won't make it.... Women simply don't have the capacity to measure up to this very, very tough course'. In response, Lydia stuck to the course against their advice and graduated with a 2.1 degree. As the only girl in the physics class at university, Ruth said that her fellow students would always look for her marks at the

bottom. Even subsequently she found some fellow MPs not believing that she could ever have studied physics and mathematics. In the social sciences Magarita's experience was similar. At the end of her first year, one lecturer had not even registered that she'd attended his classes when she went to get her grades, saying 'I don't see you, I don't know you'. He could not believe the high grades were hers, arguing that 'those grades would not be associated with a lady'.

Sexual and Racial Discrimination Lydia and Magarita both studied in the UK, Lydia at Belfast and Magarita at Cambridge, and both experienced racial discrimination. When Lydia did very well in her Masters, she decided to upgrade to a PhD and was offered some teaching, but the response of the students was, 'How can you give us a black student to teach us? A woman at that?' Fortunately the lecturer in charge called a meeting and told them Jane was in charge, and that if they continued not to attend their classes they risked failing their degree. Magarita's experience was not dissimilar. She described how someone asked, 'how did you come here?' When asked what he meant, he replied, 'but women don't study, especially women from Africa'. This was Magarita's first experience of gender and racial discrimination, and her awakening with respect to gender inequality.

One interviewee experienced sexual harassment, with sponsorship being withheld for a whole year because she refused to enter into a sexual relationship.

Mature students There were many examples of women who continued their education later in life. A few began studying for a degree for the first time after working for some years to save money, or after marrying and raising children. Patience, for example, gained a 2.1 degree at the age of 40, and is currently studying for a PhD. Others embarked on a higher degree, sometimes leaving children behind with their husbands, sometimes for several years. Magarita described the dilemma of whether to leave behind her six-month old baby in order to take up a scholarship to Cambridge as 'the most difficult decision I ever made in my life, but I was convinced by everybody that this was a golden opportunity, so I took it'. When another woman decided to enroll for her PhD in her late 40s after her children had finished secondary school, her husband said, 'How about if I get another woman while you are away?' She responded, 'that would give me a good reason to divorce you'.

Discrimination in the workplace Some of the interviewees had experienced discrimination in their jobs. One was denied promotion because her marriage had not then been formalized in church because her husband was a political exile at the time. Others talked about lower levels of pay, of not being taken seriously or not being credited with good ideas, of a male subordinate refusing to accept a woman being in charge and making things difficult for the woman, of men being given more interesting jobs out in the field while women were kept behind in the office, and of women being bypassed for promotion. One talked about losing her job because she raised the issue of corruption: she felt that it would have been easier to fight for her rights and be listened to if she had been a man in the same position, 'but they know they can do whatever they want with a woman'. Rosemary mentioned a job interview where she was asked, 'Let me ask you a *simple* question, because you are a woman'.

Juggling a career and personal life The women we interviewed were very open about their adult lives and the challenges of trying to juggle their career and the various expectations that they faced within their personal lives. Margaret E, for example, talked of the difficulty of balancing family life and teaching, and having at times to get friends to look after her children so she could teach. On her husband's suggestion she took a less demanding job for a while, 'but I was missing something, I needed to come back to class work. I love the children – they make you alive, teaching, you know, it rejuvenates you'. Meanwhile, for 8 consecutive years, Patience was a full-time student, wife, mother of 4, and a full-time tutor at a teachers' college, as well as earning money from tailoring and raising pigs and chickens.

Given cultural expectations about women's domestic roles, a number spoke of the crucial importance of time management in their daily lives. Christine talked about not wasting time at the office and doing a full day's hard work, so 'although you never do enough, at least you have done enough to make you comfortable to go home'. But despite high levels of organization, some women felt they had not spent as much time with their children as they would have liked.

The personal lives and experiences of the women varied significantly, and there were examples of women who never married, women who did not have children and women who only wanted one or two children. These were viewed in many instances as going against or deviating from cultural expectations or norms. Agnes, who had two children, said that 'the

culture does not accept only 'two children' and as a career woman I do not believe a woman should be treated like that'. Another woman said, 'I personally have been able to juggle it, but I do recognize the pressures, I never married. I have always been a single parent and I know the challenges that others face. The challenges – the natural role you have to play as a mother and the cultural role you have to play – either as a wife or a sister - whatever, you cannot get out of that culture'.

During the interviews, there were examples of women who had experienced other difficulties in their marriage such how hard it was to become a 'stepmother'. There were also examples of women who had unhappy marriages, including one who lived with an abusive husband who was a heavy drinker, and others who had to be the sole breadwinner of the family because the husband had died or lost his job. One couple had separated because 'you know how the men still live as men, and when you're a bit too powerful they just feel you're too powerful to live with'. Rosemary's husband, though very supportive, got a great deal of criticism from some colleagues for 'allowing' her to be educated up to his level.

Others told of the challenges in managing the extended family, because, as Gloria pointed out, 'in Africa it is as if you are married to everybody'. One woman's husband had died suddenly when she was out of the country at a seminar, yet not only did she have to cope with her own grief and that of her children, but also comments from his family 'who were saying if he wasn't married to an educated woman he wouldn't have died in the house alone'. Some relatives even blamed her for his death.

Overcoming Challenges and Factors Contributing to their Success

All of the women were able to overcome a wide range of challenges, and this report now considers what made that possible. Here we discuss three key factors: the role of family members and others in giving support and encouragement at various stages in a woman's educational and professional career; the role of education and educators in the formal settings of school and university; and the personal characteristics and qualities of the women themselves in taking them to where they are today.

Role of family members

One of the major contributing factors to the women's success was the key role played by the family. About half of the women cited the support and encouragement they received from their father as a significant factor in their success. Others talked about the role their mothers played in encouraging them; this was especially pertinent in the rural areas where mothers did not have the same opportunity as their daughters, but were nonetheless invariably supportive. A few examples help to illustrate how the women perceived the influence of their family members.

Fathers In a context where, as Kasente (2003) points out, the father holds a key role as head of household and decision maker, and was more likely to be the one with economic power, his decisions over his daughter's education were crucial. As Emily said, 'My father was unique because, unlike the attitudes of other men in the rural area, he treasured education and he valued education for all his girls'. Several fathers were important in inspiring their daughters and building up their confidence. Women talked about their fathers making sacrifices so that they could study, of encouraging them to work hard, of promoting and believing in them. For some, their fathers were role models whom they wanted to emulate: Rosemary, for example, saw that her father was respected in the community as a teacher and later District Education Officer, and wanted to be like him. Some fathers had high ambitions for their daughters. Lydia, for example, said that she owed what she was today to her late father: 'One of the things that really shifted me was my father's belief in me as an individual and my capacity ... [he] talked about Dr Josephine Nambose, who had been the first woman medical doctor in East Africa. Now Professor Nambose's father was known to my father, and so my father also used to say, 'if that little girl (very slim) can operate on her own father, how about you?'' Similarly, despite initially being vehemently against girls' education, Noreda's father began to promote her when he realized she could do well, encouraging her: 'You can do it. You can do it. Don't allow boys to put you down. Don't allow. Stand, and speak for yourself'.

Mothers While fathers were often able to provide financial resources to enable girls to study, mothers were frequently described as playing an important role in the background, supporting and quietly encouraging, and thus, as in many other parts of the world, there was evidence of mothers being engaged in extensive and intensive emotional caring to support

their children's education (O'Brien, 2007). Mothers often became more assertive, however, in situations where the father had died, or was imprisoned, or where the existence of several wives and many children meant that children effectively grew up with single parents. Christine, for example, whose father had ten wives, recalled the unstinting support of her mother who was uneducated but still encouraged her children to succeed: 'My mother was very instrumental in my education. She never went to school, but she made sure all of us went to school. She really struggled. We could see her do all sorts of businesses to provide for us.... My mother was really strong. I really attribute my success to my mother because she was strong, she encouraged us, she always talked to us, she provided'. Winnie's mother was determined that her education did not suffer when her father was in exile: 'The major inspiration was that with education the sky was the limit, and for her she would go all the way to ensure we had the education.... She made it look like if you worked hard and if you believed in what you were doing you are able to achieve it'. Gloria's father had died when she was six, and it was her mother who provided her inspiration and motivation: 'She kept on challenging us and saying, 'I am a primary school teacher, but you, you have to go higher. Your father was a medical doctor, and I want to see all of you going up there'.

Other kin members A wide range of kin members often assisted the women at different stages in their lives and these included grandparents, uncles, brothers, sisters, and cousins. In some cases, an educated kin member would encourage the women to continue with their education and would assist in paying school fees. For Hannah, it was an aunt in whom she confided when her cousin, with whom she was living, over-burdened her with domestic tasks. This aunt 'was influential in my life. I would open up to her and tell her life was hard', but the aunt's response was, 'don't say life is hard. What is it that you don't have? Don't open your mouth and complain: as long as they're not denying you food, they're not beating you, just be patient, just endure. Because if they don't pay the fees you won't study. It's only when you study you get your freedom'. For Gloria, it was her grandmother, 'who would talk and talk and talk about education and about why we shouldn't rush to marry', who was very instrumental in her decision to remain in education.

Husbands Despite the prevailing culture which saw women's place as in the home and the husband as the head of the family, several of the women cited their husbands as being not only supportive, but actively encouraging and enabling them to continue their education and

further their careers. Hannah, for example, talked about her husband being 'able to wake up what I didn't know was in me', while Noreda's husband even drove her to women's meetings where she learnt about feminist issues. The women recognized how fortunate they were to have such support, to have someone who, as Agnes put it, was 'liberated from the culture'. As Magarita explained, 'I think you need a very supportive spouse because there are a number of women I'm working with who are really having problems with their spouses, and it's very, very difficult for them to concentrate and do anything, so many women don't seek promotion in order to keep sanity in the home'.

Several husbands took on the role of main carer of children while their wives studied overseas. Rosemary said that her husband's support was 'the reason why I still have ambition'. When she finished her bachelor's degree he went overseas for his masters; on return he told her, 'you need to go for your masters. I can stay with the children, meanwhile you've got to study'. He continued to support her despite the criticism he received from colleagues who tried to convince him that 'a woman should not be educated up to your level, or above your level, because she may end up not respecting you, and eventually she can even divorce you'.

Other key figures

Some women received practical help in furthering their education from people in their local community or from further afield, or from key figures in the workplace. As an orphan, Mary, told of people who gave her a home, helped her to get sponsorship for her education, assisted her with building up her business and generally supported her. Both Gloria and Jane A talked about a senior woman at work who pushed them hard to fill in forms to get a scholarship to do their masters, discounting all excuses and encouraging them to seize opportunities that might not come again.

Other support was less tangible, with several women modeling themselves on the successful women they came into contact with. Brenda, for example, spoke of working with university women's organizations and actively 'looking out for role models to inspire me'. She also read about successful women and their experiences, and was impressed by the commitment of Ugandan women activists who spoke out for women's and children's rights. Noreda chose a woman activist and MP as one of her role models: 'she's very clever, she has

a family, she has a husband, and she's a Christian, so she's my role model – and I know she is not corrupt'.

Education and Educators

Some of the women attended good secondary schools where they were actively supported, praised and encouraged in their academic pursuits and their personal careers. As Margaret E said, 'I would look at the school I was in, and the kind of people it had produced, and I would want to be like them'. Ruth also talked about looking up to her deputy head teacher, and wanting to emulate her: 'She was a real role model to me. In her I saw somebody I could look up to, because we only had British head teachers, and I thought, if she can be deputy, then I can'. Ruth subsequently became the first African headteacher of the school she had attended, and later followed her role model's career path into parliament, where she continued to receive her support. Jane A aspired to be like an older student 'who was very committed to her education: you would see her striving and so when she reached senior 6 she actually made it. Then it was not so common to find girls passing senior 6 and going on to university. That inspired me a lot. I also committed, and I followed her to university and then on to a master's'.

Some women attended schools where the quality of education was poor, with few resources and untrained teachers; as a result, several failed to get into university at the end of secondary school (going on later to attain first and higher degrees). Nevertheless, all the women, even those whose educational experiences had not always been positive, and who lacked formal mentors and explicit encouragement at school or university, could point to informal mentoring and to role models among older and former students, senior teachers, university supervisors and academic figureheads. This kind of informal mentoring, as Magarita said, 'is very critical for many women, because really men also have it, although they don't call it mentoring'. So although, as already discussed, many women, particularly those studying in science faculties, experienced significant gender discrimination, there were also examples of lecturers who went out of their way to act as informal mentors and give extra attention. Margaret E, for example, studying in Dar es Salaam, mentioned a Botany Lecturer and Research Supervisor who took her to the beach in her own car to look for plants, and an education lecturer who helped when she had personal problems. Brenda also talked of the support she received from her undergraduate research supervisor when she

had a miscarriage: 'I saw the feminine first in the professional, in the intellectual battle of it. That so much inspired me'.

Through such encounters the women saw the kind of women they wanted to become: women who were academically and professionally successful, but who could combine this with qualities of compassion and empathy. At the same time, their role models were women who could also combine work with marriage based on mutual respect, and also, for most women, motherhood. Sometimes the values they learnt were imparted through school clubs which set out to develop life skills. This appeared to be the case particularly for those women who had attended single-sex convent schools. Christine, for example, felt that clubs such as the YWCA and Pioneer Club, organized by her convent school, provided girls with a strong foundation from which to go on to university. Rosemary talked about drama and debating clubs which made girls' issues high profile. Lydia also felt that nuns at her school gave her a strong foundation and the ammunition to challenge the discrimination she encountered at university.

In other instances there were teachers, not necessarily female, who explicitly talked about the dilemmas women faced. One of Gloria's teachers regularly spoke to a group of girls who were doing well at school, saying that he wanted them to be successful, and giving them a definition of success: 'A successful woman has to work very hard and study and finish her studies, and then she gets a job. Of course, the ideal is that you get a job, and then after you've got the job I also want you to marry properly. It's time for education now, so deal with education and forget about everything else; concentrate on this. You should be able to look after yourself: don't go running to this man because he has money and he is going to be able to look after you – you should be able to have your own money'. Winnie also talked about her male head teacher who gave his pupils self-confidence and who 'brought in a different angle of learning and teaching', not always focusing on academic performance but on promoting other strengths.

Personal characteristics

It was very clear that the women we interviewed, despite the challenging circumstances in which they grew up, had particular attributes that had helped them to succeed, often against the odds. Obviously their success was motivated by a desire for self-fulfilment, but important for several women was also the determination not to let down parents and

teachers who believed in them. For Hannah, it was the knowledge of the disappointment her mother would suffer if she had to drop out of school through pregnancy that kept her focused: 'In my heart of hearts I would always remember how my mother was suffering back in the village, and I would always imagine how her heart would be broken if I went back home because I am pregnant'. Margaret E was also motivated by her mother, though in a different way, because, as much as she loved and respected her mother, she saw her, having had little education, over-burdened with domestic work and 'always waking up to go to the garden, whether she's sick or not'. She, therefore, aspired to a different kind of lifestyle, with a professional job. Others worked hard in order to challenge those who did *not* believe in them. As Noreda said, 'I had so many, many people try and tell me you will not finish, that I became determined to do so'. In fact, for several women, it was discrimination itself that drew from within them a determination to succeed and show those who were putting them down what they were capable of achieving.

Patience summarized the personal characteristics that had helped her to achieve the level she had reached: determination, perseverance, hard work, discipline and co-operation and relating with others. This self-determination was highlighted by Jane A, whose very difficult childhood experiences conspired to keep her out of school, yet, 'despite everything, I had this heart that I must keep at school; I did not think at any one point that I should leave school'. Maureen too was determined to make up for the poor quality education she had received at school, believing that 'when you're focused and confident, you'll achieve what you want'.

Lydia added assertiveness and self-confidence as the important foundation to her achievements, particularly in relation to handling gender discrimination at work. This was echoed by Noreda, who described herself as a fighter within a male-dominated university faculty where 'I received so many insults just because I was trying to fight to fit in with the boys'. Noreda's self-determination in fact was evident very early in life, when her father refused to allow her to attend school, and she began to learn by listening outside the windows of the school and making notes on banana leaves on her way to and from delivering her father's lunch to him at work.

Important, too, was having a vision of the future. Early on in her secondary school career Magarita decided she wanted to become the professor she is today, and wrote 'Professor Magarita' on her exercise books (for which she was punished!). She said that, 'in

my heart of hearts I've always wanted to be someone, even as I was growing up I think I wanted to be someone important'. Gloria too, despite not attending a particularly good school told how 'I am this determined person. When I say that I am going to do this, I am going to achieve it. It's only when I reach the impossible, that's when I stop. At school I decided I have to go to university, and from that time on that was my focus. And it didn't matter I missed by 0.2, I still knew that one day I would do it. And I did it, yes'. Positive thinking was therefore important, as was ambition, as Rosemary pointed out: she decided early on what she wanted to be, and worked towards that, persisting despite missing a good deal of schooling when she was ill over three years at secondary school. Similarly, Christine reached a point towards the end of secondary school when she realized that 'if I don't put in my personal ethos my life is nothing. I really have to. I became self-motivated in whatever I was doing. I ask myself why I got so far. I wasn't the brightest after all. I was not so strong, you know. I was also shy and knew my limits. I didn't want to show off. I'd always just read my books. So I realized that motivation is the best thing'.

Achievements and Giving Something Back

All the women in the study irrespective of age and experience felt they were in some way role models for young women in Ugandan Society. All were role models within their own extended families, especially those who were the first in their family and community to proceed through secondary to tertiary education. Many also financially supported younger members of the family. Some have been in positions at work or in voluntary organizations which have brought them into contact with young people and enabled them to engage in informal mentoring of the kind they themselves had benefited from. Others were involved in formal mentoring activities, and many were also members of Uganda FAWE, campaigning and advocating to open up education and opportunities for girls. The following are simply a few examples from the many we heard about.

The extended family

Besides bringing up their own children, all the women were in some way directly involved in the upbringing of other young people, such as step-children or half brothers and sisters, or children of family members who had died. Some women had also 'picked up' young women outside their family who were in need of practical help to enable them to continue their

schooling. One talked, for example, about continuing to bring up her husband's two children from another relationship after his death, in addition to their own three children, while simultaneously being involved in the upbringing of 'many other children', including a colleague's seven daughters following the death of his wife.

Taking opportunities at work

The women who worked in schools or universities acted as role models for female students, particularly in contexts where the proportion of women teachers is still low. Ruth's growing awareness of gender issues 'enlightened me about issues that I had taken for granted, so I re-looked at the textbooks I was using – very, very simple things, very easy – but when you analyse it you actually know'. Margaret E always encouraged the girls sponsored by FAWE in the school to work very hard, 'and those girls consulted me before making decisions in their studies and at times, their lives in general'. Furthermore, her involvement with FAWE not only raised her own awareness of gender issues, but as a deputy head teacher she began to promote gender-sensitive approaches among her colleagues: 'I started seeing the gaps, what we needed to do. I started to notice those things, and in the staff meeting we started to discuss them'. In her position at the Ministry of Education, Charity brought together key stakeholders to discuss the improvement of girls' performance, particularly in science and mathematics. Hannah's position as Dean of Students obviously brought her into daily contact with young people, where 'I think I am an encourager. I like speaking to young people and finding the things inside them that could propel them, build self-esteem'. Noreda also spoke of bringing in girls from her home village and talking to them about being at university, encouraging them to withstand the pressure to marry until they had completed their education.

Working with particular communities

Many of the women were dedicated to assisting and helping young women overcome hurdles which they themselves had experienced as they grew up in particularly disadvantaged areas. Some worked in culturally specific areas and campaigned for female education in places where there have been serious setbacks. For example, Winnie, an Acholi woman, had given up a lucrative job in Kampala to help young women (and boys) in the post-conflict area in Gulu/Lira and to try to encourage them to rebuild their lives. Maureen,

from Karamoja, was helping FAWE implement a programme in the deprived area where she was born. She recalled that 'the young girls were very excited. I was giving myself as an example, telling them that as much as you may be having problems, it is still good to have education'. Her role involved mentoring young women and visiting homes and schools, stressing the importance of role models within the community so that children could see someone to inspire them to follow in their footsteps. Her community has been very encouraging of her work, saying, 'Our daughter is coming back, that's good. That is why it is good to let our daughters go ahead so they come back and teach the rest'. Brenda had a similar experience when she was engaged in social work in a very remote rural community, where people were impressed that a woman could attain such a position. Local leaders invited her to visit schools to talk to girls who could not believe that she herself had come from such a village: 'when you go to talk to them you really see them wishing to listen and hear much more about you'.

Brenda talked about wanting to reach out to vulnerable people, to make an impact, particularly on women and children and to influence policies and decision-making in those areas. Rosemary too had been drawn back to her home area of Karamoja, asking as a young teacher to be transferred there because there were no trained teachers in her former school apart from the head and deputy. Later, as District Education Officer, she organized sessions for girls to discuss with them what support could be given to encourage them to come to school and help their learning, and she would then raise those issues with teachers. Such sessions were continued on a voluntary basis in her spare time.

Some women had become involved in practical projects. Christine spoke, for example, about how 'I put up a small building and other things' to make a contribution to her community. Agnes and her husband had set up a school. Meanwhile Noreda, having never forgotten the death of a woman and her baby in her village as she gave birth, 'promised God that if I get a salary, like the first two months I will put it, and see what I can start to do with the village'. Consequently she had liaised with her local church to build a maternity ward in her village with two delivery beds, a facility that had developed through time to treat malaria, with regular visits from a doctor. She also began a saving scheme for widows to start their own businesses.

Other voluntary activities

A number of the women, as already mentioned, were members of FAWE, and were part of its mentoring scheme, working with young women to support them through their education, while Magarita was involved in mentoring through the International Women's Forum. Several women used their skills within other voluntary organizations. Margaret E, for example, is currently on the local church committee that supervises disadvantaged children of the community, sponsored by Compassion International, while Christine was chosen to be a member of the District Service Commission and Brenda was involved with Girl Guides. Although she found the prospect of having to balance home and a demanding job with being Chief Commissioner, Brenda recalled that 'I was challenged to go beyond my teaching professionalism to make a difference in lives of people'.

Promoting women in Science and Mathematics

Several of the women were involved in research and advocacy for females in mathematics and science. Lydia and Charity were directly involved in FILMSA (Females in Learning, Mathematics, and Science) which was a country wide study (also in Zambia) to look at opportunities in these subjects. Patience was involved in Café Scientific and gave talks to encourage youth to enter the science. Ruth became Chair of FEMSA (Female Education in Mathematics and Science in Africa), through which she took a stand against books which showed girls in inferior positions relative to boys.

Conclusion

The 18 women role models who took part in this research are amazing women. Each had a unique, personal narrative to share, and this short report has scarcely allowed us to do justice to the richness of their stories. The key characteristics of the women we interviewed included resilience, determination, self-esteem, confidence, and perhaps most importantly, self-belief. We thank them for sharing their personal life histories, and we are grateful for the time they spent with us. We admire their enthusiasm, their encouragement to the next generation of Ugandan women, and their tremendous sense of commitment.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and thank the women we interviewed as part of this project and those who enabled us to select them for interview; all their names are listed earlier in this report. We would also like to express our sincere thanks to the Commonwealth Education Trust whose financial support of the Centre for Commonwealth Education made this research possible.

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