

Speech

By

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

On the Occasion to Commemorate

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**Theme: *“Women's Economic Empowerment; A vehicle
for Sustainable Development”***

Kololo

8th March 2016

H. E. the Vice President;
Rt. Hon Speaker of Parliament;
His Lordship, the Chief Justice;
Rt. Hon Prime Minister;
Hon. Leader of the Opposition;
Hon. Ministers;
Hon Members of Parliament;
Your Excellencies the Ambassadors and High
Commissioners;
Fellow Ugandans;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am pleased to welcome you all to the national celebrations to commemorate International Women's Day 2016.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate all Ugandans upon the successful completion of the general elections and to thank all those who observed peace and conducted themselves in an orderly and lawful manner during this process.

I wish to thank everyone who has contributed to the renewal of my mandate and reinforcing your confidence in the National Resistance Movement Government to steer you to Uganda's Vision 2040 focusing on unity, peace, development, wealth creation, jobs, skills development and political stability the core features of our Manifesto.

As we celebrate International Women's Day, we take cognizance of the contribution of the women folk in nation building. Hence, the theme for this year, **(Women's Economic Empowerment: A Vehicle for Sustainable Development)** highlights a significant dimension of the role of women in development and emphasizes the fact that empowering women economically is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development.

Empowering women economically involves putting capital in their hands and allowing them to earn an independent income and in this way contribute financially to their households, communities and the nation at large. Empowering women economically also means, first and foremost, education for all, girl children included, so that literacy and numeracy are

universal. We are now working on the issue of skills by working to build a technical school in every constituency.

Women's economic empowerment is fundamental for strengthening women's rights and enabling them to have control over their lives. It entails supporting women to access economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property, productive assets, basic education, skills development and market information

Women's economic empowerment is firmly embedded in the political framework that guides the socio-economic development of Uganda. The overall focus of our development agenda has been and continues to be on wealth creation. Hence, ensuring that women are at the forefront of this agenda is a priority concern.

The track record of NRM Government in uplifting the status of women is very clear as evidenced by the current situation. In our Manifesto, NRM is committed to uplifting the status of vulnerable groups including women, youth, the elderly and Persons with Disability (PWD).

It is the NRM's policy to empower these disadvantaged groups, to create wealth and contribute to the process of leading Uganda into a middle income status.

Our policies aim to strengthen the fundamentals of the economy to harness the abundant opportunities of the country. We foresaw the potential that women, who are 51% of the population, have to contribute to the economic transformation of this country. Investing in women is good business as has been proven globally and locally that it increases positive impact of development programmes, as women are more likely than men to spend their incomes on households and family needs. Men should cooperate with women towards efforts that are aimed at creating household income. People cannot only depend on food cultivation because there is need to have money to acquire other essentials

It was, therefore, a deliberate strategy to invest in women through the various policies and programmes that Government has implemented. The NRM leadership has focused on key development pillars to set the basis for empowering women and

for which national mechanisms have been instituted to foster positive outcomes. These are:

Political Participation: From the onset, the NRM Government sought to give women political power through the affirmative action policy that provides for a special seat for women for each district and one third representations in Local Councils. The result has increased the presence of women in Parliament at 35% in the 9th Parliament. This policy has earned Uganda an award from the African Union (AU) which was handed over on the 25th Ordinary Session of the African Union that was held in South Africa in June 2015. Ugandan women have also distinguished themselves in various leadership positions in the Public Service and Private Sector.

Infrastructure development: Concerted effort has been made to improve the physical infrastructure namely roads, electricity generation and distribution including rural electrification, water transport and information communication technology. Improved infrastructure is the basis for all economic activities including those that women are engaged in.

Education: It is the foundation for overcoming limited knowledge and fostering positive attitudes and mindsets. We have performed remarkably well in this area and now have over 8 million children in primary school (49 percent girls and 51percent boys). The unprecedented rise in tertiary Institutions has seen the establishment of 25 universities and many colleges offering a variety of courses. There has also been a marked increase in the ratio of female-to-male graduates in universities and other tertiary institutions, which has enhanced the level of female participation in leadership, in formal and informal sectors.

The NRM Government has done alot towards empowering women. The UPE programme has empowered everyone, especially the girl children, who were the biggest victims suffering from lack of education. An educated girl does not only have literacy but also skills which enable her to generate income.

Water and Sanitation: We have made progress in improving access to amenities that women need to ease their workload and facilitate their productive activities. These are: access to safe water which stands at 95 percent and 71 percent in urban and rural areas respectively.

Health: Women's reproductive health has improved significantly. More than 75% of Ugandans live within 5kms of medical facilities. Infant mortality has been reduced to 54 per 1000 live births down from 137 per 1000 live births in 1986. Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission (EMCT) has been scaled up to national coverage and the number of persons living with HIV and AIDs accessing ARV therapy stands at 713,774.

Government introduced **mass immunization** with the target of first protecting the children and the second beneficiaries were women because they would not be bogged down by ill children.

Peace and security: Peace and security of person and property is the legacy that the NRM has ensured and this has been the bedrock for economic development. We take pride in our Armed

Forces which, in addition to securing national security, is serving in several Peace Keeping Missions abroad.

Regional integration: Government has made deliberate effort to promote a market based economy and this has been pursued through regional integration. Hence through the favorable trade regimes available under the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) regional blocs, women are now able to trade within the region facilitated by the supportive policies and infrastructure. At the international level, women have the opportunity to export to the lucrative markets of USA, Europe, Asia and other parts of the world. As a result of the efforts that have been made to promote trade and investment, the proportion of women owning businesses increased from 37% in 2001/2 to 44% in 2011/12. (*Census of Business Establishments, COBE 2011*).

It is, therefore, evident that we have achieved alot for women over the years. All these Programmes have opened up opportunities for women to engage in activities that generate income and economic benefit and their participation is so far

commendable. Additionally, women are involved in various self help initiatives that assist them to maintain the livelihoods of their families.

The promotion of **women's entrepreneurship** is one of the avenues for wealth creation as there is great potential and benefit from investment in women business enterprises in the country which we will pursue in the coming years. Our plan under the **Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) Initiative** is to improve and fast track the process of service delivery to households through implementation of 5 priority programmes. These are:

- **Agriculture:** It remains the most important source of work for Ugandans with 70% of household relying on farming for their livelihoods. Women are the majority in the agricultural labour force accounting for 58%. The National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) aims to transform the livelihoods of farmers where we will inject Sh. 1 trillion to provide inputs including planting material and

extension advice to farmers will support women farmers to become commercialized.

- **Youth Funds:** The youth comprise over 50% of Uganda's population and have, therefore, been targeted for economic empowerment. Over the last three years, Government has mobilized youth groups to start businesses and acquire entrepreneurship skills through the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP). To date, the Programme has directly benefited 83,271 youth, 30% of whom are female to set up 6,537 business projects throughout the country.
- **Microfinance:** The NRM Government instituted a deliberate policy to support the expansion of Microfinance Institution through legislation to regulate their operations. This has enabled the proliferation of these institutions hence availability of financing support for various enterprises. At present, almost every town has a microfinance institution or Savings and Credit Cooperative. Government will therefore avail Sh. 180 billion to boost these services.

- **Innovation Fund:** Shs 500 billion will go towards support for Ugandans for science and technological development and women scientists should benefit from this Fund.
- **Women's Fund:** Government has decided to give women a special fund to boost their enterprises. To be able to engage in business, women need to have access to affordable credit. During the commemoration of last year's International Women's Day in Kabale District, I officially declared the start of the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP) with the overall aim to create wealth and jobs. This new program is a landmark initiative that will enable women create wealth through boosting their entrepreneurship capabilities. It will provide affordable credit, offer technical advice and information on value addition as well as market access for their products and services. Increased access to affordable credit through UWEP will stimulate growth of high quality and increase the competitive edge of women enterprises in the micro, small and medium enterprise subsector, in which women are key actors. The Programme will give women

information and training on skills that are needed to make income generation a reality. We are now set to promote women led businesses as a strategy for job creation. In my campaign, I set out to put aside Shs. 234 billion each year for the Women Fund, all other factors being borne in mind.

Last year Uganda joined the rest of the United Nations Member States to adopt **the post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda**. In doing so, we committed to a set of goals that are expected to combat poverty, hunger and disease. The National Development Plan (NDP) II has been aligned to the SDGs with a focus on growth, employment and social economic transformation for prosperity.

The development frameworks we have committed to will address the challenges that women still face due to traditional beliefs and practices as well as institutional barriers that make it more difficult for women to access resources and opportunities than men. These include: limited access to finance, land and information. Women who run enterprises do

so in the informal sector where they are unlikely to grow their businesses.

NRM government is cognizant that there are still bottlenecks towards women's empowerment. These include high prevalence of Gender based violence such as child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which continue to devastate the lives of women and girls. Women still bear most of the burden of unpaid care work within their households including child care and care for the sick, elderly and those living with disability. This limits the time they are able to devote to productive work. In addition, the male to female wage gap stands at about 39% (*State of Uganda's Population Report, 2013*). This gap in productivity between male and female is of great concern both to GDP growth and to the distribution of income between men and women.

Other factors that hinder women's efforts to progress in the economic sphere are low literacy levels, limited control over productive resources and limited access to information including market information.

Some of these bottlenecks notwithstanding, our Government is ready to counteract them within the framework of the National Development Plan II that will deliver on agriculture modernization, industrialization and social transformation. With an annual growth rate of 5.8% the economy is strong and we are on course to meet the set targets.

I, therefore, call upon Ugandan women to take advantage of the prevailing conducive environment as well as the programmes Government has put in place to reap benefits for yourselves, your families and communities. Let us collaborate as Government, the Private Sector and Civil Society to transform the goal for women's economic empowerment into a reality. We have worked together over the past years to make steady progress and should continue to do so in our country's journey to middle income status.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and all those with whom you have worked to organize this event.

I thank you all for attending this ceremony. I wish you joyful celebrations and a year of prosperity.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

