



MINISTRY OF GENDER, LABOUR AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Statement on the occasion to mark the International Women's Day, 2021

Theme: **"Building on Women's Strength for a Better Future in a COVID-19 World"**



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Uganda today joins the rest of the world to commemorate the International Women's Day (IWD). On this day, all State and non-State actors take stock of their activities towards promoting Gender Equity and Empowerment of Women, which is Sustainable Development Goal 5, and lay strategies for future actions. The global theme for this year is "Women in leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a COVID-19 World." The theme celebrates the efforts by women in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The theme selected for the national celebration is "Building on Women's Strength for a Better Future in a COVID-19 World." The theme highlights the effects of COVID 19 on women and girls and also seeks to generate a national dialogue on the urgent need for a gender responsive National COVID- 19 Response Plan to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on women and all communities in Uganda. The theme equally highlights the role and contribution of women in the efforts to manage and also recover from the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is over one year since COVID

-19 was declared a global pandemic and a public health crisis. It has been associated with strict lockdown measures to protect our right to life despite the several challenges we have encountered and are still encountering.

Government is now focused on building the Country's capacity to cope with consequences of the pandemic as a priority. Government developed and is implementing the National Preparedness and Response Plan whose goal is to provide a framework for coordination and control of COVID-19 by reduction of importation, transmission, morbidity and mortality in a bid to minimize the social economic disruption that might

result from this outbreak.

Whereas Uganda remains strong in its preparedness and response, a total of 40,426 COVID cases had been registered by February 4, 2021 with 15,052 recoveries and 334 deaths.

Effects on the Economy:

COVID 19 and the associated lockdown measures have reduced the economic activities in several sectors such as education, tourism, transport, manufacturing, logistics, and services. According to MoFPED, the total resource envelope for FY 2020/2021 was projected at UGX 39.6 trillion comprised of both domestic and external sources, down from 40.4 trillion in the FY2019/2020, largely due to a reduction in external financing, a slowdown in international trade, which accounts for about 42 percent of all the tax revenue and a reduction in the economic activities in retail and trade, services, hotels, tourism and manufacturing sectors, which has translated into reduced VAT, remittances, and corporation tax payments to Uganda Revenue Authority (URA). URA estimates domestic revenue shortfall of UGX

404.5 billion in FY 2019/2020 and UGX 350 billion in FY 2020/2021 due a reduction in economic activity.

Our External Employment Programme continues to face uncertainties as the pandemic persists (MGLSD 2020). The suspension of labour export services by the MGLSD effective March 18th 2020 and the subsequent closure of Entebbe International Airport and all border points on March 22nd 2020, halted international travel, deepening the uncertainty in the external labour sector. The reduction in remittances associated with COVID-19 has affected many Ugandans especially those recipients without any form of social protection or formal safety nets. There has been severe unemployment in all sectors. Overall, 76% of the businesses reported to have reduced the size of the workforce due to the risk presented by COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown measures. Of these, 29% reduced their employees by more than 50%, and 27% of surveyed businesses reduced their employees by a range of 26 to 50%. Only 21% of businesses reduced the workforce by a range of 1 to 25%.

The pandemic has affected labour productivity with a 35% decline in sales per worker. Only 38% of the businesses



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President Museveni presents a dummy cheque the leader of Kidabago Women Disabled group during the International Womens Day in Mbale on March 8, 2020.

COVID 19 and closure of schools and education institutions:

The closure of schools and education institutions has affected more than 17.5 million people enrolled in both public and private schools. Efforts to promote online learning and teaching by the Ministry of Education and Sports are commendable and should prepare Ugandans for the digital future. The phased re-opening of schools which started at the end of 2020 with candidate classes is intended to minimize the risks of spreading the pandemic. Unfortunately, the re-opening of schools and education institutions has re-awakened us to the bitter realities of increasing number of teenage pregnancy in Uganda despite our efforts to implement the National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy (2014/2015-2019/2020).

Government of Uganda is deeply concerned with the increasing numbers of teenage pregnancies and child marriages in Uganda. Many young girls are robbed of their childhood. This is unacceptable and has to stop. The Ministries of Health, Education and Sports and Gender, Labour and Social Development will take measures to roll-out the implementation of the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy, and all programmes on ending all forms of violence against children in Uganda as well as scale-up the provision of appropriate services to respond and mitigate the effects of violence against children. A special COVID 19 Sub-Committee on Gender Based Violence and Violence against Children (VAC) was established to respond to the GBV/VAC during and post COVID 19.

More women (95%) than men (92%) are in the informal sector, which has played a critical role in sustaining families, communities during and post COVID 19. Women in the markets continued to serve and "slept in the markets" during the lockdown from March to June 2020 in order to ensure that people in urban areas accessed food and supplies from the markets. Through their efforts, women were able to sustain themselves and families throughout the lockdown. The burden of unpaid care and domestic work increased with children and the sick at home. It is critical that we recognize unpaid care work and take measures to reduce the burden on women and girls through improving access to quality services and facilities as well as promoting appropriate technology.

Women constitute 70% of the health

care workforce, which exposes them to greater risk of infection. Therefore, the COVID-19 national preparedness and response programmes need to recognize and facilitate women specific needs and vulnerabilities.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority (70 percent) of Ugandans and contributes 50% of export earnings. Meanwhile, women comprise 82 percent of the agriculture workforce and have continued to produce food items during these COVID-19 times. This food production and supply has sustained Ugandans during and post COVID 19.

Recommendations for Women's and Girls Effective Recovery during and Post-COVID-19:

Government has set out a comprehensive response plan to address the effects of Covid-19 on the social and economic wellbeing of the population. This commitment entails:

- i. Formulation and implementation of a COVID-19 Response Plan to address Gender Based Violence and GBV and Violence Against Children (VAC).
- ii. Disseminate and Implement the Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings in Uganda as well as fast track the implementation of the sexuality education for young people in schools and those out of schools.
- iii. Scale up of ongoing initiatives for skilling and income generation for women, youth and other vulnerable groups.
- iv. Increase Government's investment in Programmes that provide financing, inputs and affordable credit to women and youth for more positive outcomes.
- v. Support women to enhance their use of ICTs for economic and social development.
- vi. Promote the integration of gender in Climate change mitigation and adaptation plans.

As a Country, we have to galvanize the potential that women have to contribute to the post COVID-19 development process. In the face of challenges, women are resilient and have the capacity to overcome adversity. Building on Ugandan women strength will promote recovery from the COVID 19 pandemic and its effects as well as build a better future.

reported changing salary structures for their employees. According to the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development estimates, an additional 2.6 million people are likely to become poorer during the coming Financial Year 2021/22.

COVID 19 has escalated cases of sexual and gender-based violence in Uganda:

COVID 19 pandemic has caused a lot of anxiety, stress, and hardships to most families and communities which has been associated with increased reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence across the Country. According to a Survey undertaken by the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) in 2020, 58% of respondents reported experiencing greater safety risks and vulnerability to crime and violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 16,242 cases of gender based violence (GBV) were reported to the Uganda Police for the period January-June 2020; 46.8% were cases of domestic violence; 43.2% were cases of defilement and 5.6% were cases of rape. A total of 161 cases of murders resulting from domestic violence were recorded.

GBV has undermined girls and women's physical, sexual, and mental health. It has had wider implications for the economic and social well-being of families and communities. The levels of teenage pregnancy and child marriages in Uganda have increased with the closure of schools and learning institutions at all levels. Children have been exposed to domestic violence, drugs and substance abuse, sexually abuse, loss of loved ones and are now traumatized.

COVID 19 and Effects on Health:

Government has done a commendable job to contain the pandemic and flatten the curve. With the restrictions on movements, some health services were inaccessible. For instance Antenatal Care visits attendance decreased by 7%, HIV positive pregnant women receiving ARVs declined by 12%, HIV Exposed Infants (HEI) who received ARVs at birth declined by 18% and Health facilities deliveries declined by 10%. This has serious implications on the health and wellbeing of all Ugandans.