

# Government, private sector push women from rhetoric to action on economic empowerment



**G**overnment, private sector, and development partners have called on Ugandan women to move beyond words and embrace concrete steps toward economic empowerment, urging institutions to back commitments with measurable action.

The call came during the Ring the Bell for Gender Equality event in Kampala, where the Minister of State for Disability Affairs, Hellen Grace Asamo, said gender equality is no longer just a social justice issue but an economic imperative.

"Empowerment is not just about words. It is about what you do with the opportunities you have. We are 51% of the population. Where are our voices? Why are we quiet?" she asked.

Representing the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development Betty Amongi, Asamo urged women to translate access to leadership and economic spaces into tangible results.

She also emphasized financial literacy, planning, and discipline,



**Paul Bwiso, Chief Executive Officer, Uganda Securities Exchange (USE)**

cautioning women against impulsive spending on social obligations and unplanned purchases.

Asamo further highlighted the hidden pressures women face even in leadership positions, noting that many still fund school fees, manage households, and shoulder extended family responsibilities.

"Even ministers and members of parliament can be poor if they do not

manage money well. Go to schools on visitation day and see who is there. It is the women. Where are the men?" she said.

Government programs such as the Women Entrepreneurship Programme, the Parish Development Model, and grants for persons with disabilities aim to support women, but Asamo stressed that private sector engagement and practical support are equally critical.

Uganda Securities Exchange (USE) Chief Executive Officer Paul Bwiso called for greater participation of women in capital markets and corporate leadership.

"Women are not just participants. They are innovators and leaders who can transform the economy," Bwiso said.

Bwiso noted that women now account for over 57,000 investors in Uganda's capital markets, representing about 27% of the total investor base. While this is encouraging, he said more must be done to make markets inclusive.

He highlighted women leaders in companies like MTN Uganda and DFCU Bank, but warned that board chair positions and sectors such as industry and utilities remain largely male-dominated.

"Today we celebrate not just the presence of women in our markets, but their growing influence, leadership, and ability to transform the economic landscape," Bwiso said.

The USE is working to expand financial literacy, investor education, and access to capital for women-led businesses. Bwiso added that the exchange is exploring new products such as bonds

and real estate investment trusts to channel more capital to women entrepreneurs.

Anita Nabirye Mwandha, Country Officer at the International Finance Corporation (IFC), said private sector leadership is critical to creating an economy where women and girls can fully participate.

"When women thrive, economies grow stronger, challenges become more resilient, and opportunities expand for everyone," she said.

Mwandha noted that while Uganda has made gains, such as near-equal enrolment of boys and girls in primary education and stronger female representation in public leadership, barriers persist, including limited access to decent work, fair pay, safe workplaces, and finance.

She outlined three pillars for promoting gender equality: removing structural barriers, ensuring work offers dignity and growth, and moving beyond commitments to measurable results.

"Investing in gender equality strengthens business performance. Companies committed to these principles see measurable improvements in productivity, innovation, and market impact," she said.

Patrick Joram Mugisha, Commissioner for Business Development and Quality Assurance at the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, said Uganda is addressing gender gaps through a new gender and equity strategy.

He noted that women own fewer than six percent of registered land,

only 27% have access to formal financial services, and 87% are informally employed, earning less than men. Challenges such as limited digital literacy, costly technology, poor infrastructure, unpaid care burdens, and workplace harassment continue to affect women, especially in rural and cross-border trade.

The strategy aims to promote inclusive manufacturing, agro-processing, tourism, and digital trade while improving market access and institutional accountability. Mugisha cited government-supported initiatives such as the Mpondwe border market, which serves 2,768 vendors, 74% of whom are women.

Dr Pauline Chiwangu, UN Women Country Representative, said gender equality is not only a human rights issue but also a driver of sustainable economic growth.

"Investing in women is not a cost. In fact, it is the single most powerful investment we can make to strengthen our businesses and our nation," she said.

Chiwangu noted that Ugandan women remain the backbone of the economy but face setbacks in labour force participation, wage equality, and access to decent work. Nearly half of young women aged 15–24 are not in employment, education, or training, and women earn 30–32% less than men in comparable roles.

She urged companies to adopt the Women's Empowerment Principles and support the Corporate Gender Accountability Network to ensure that commitments translate into measurable results