



## **Generations of work without pay:**

### **How the unfair domestic and care workload is keeping women poor and worsening inequality**

#### **Policy position paper**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

The policy position paper is a discussion of attitudes and trends in unpaid and domestic carework in Uganda. It is informed by Oxfam's research on the gender roles and the care economy in Ugandan households that was carried out in the districts of Kaabong, Kabale and Kampala. The research involved quantitative and qualitative investigations to establish the statistical trends in the distribution of carework as well as the attitudes and social norms that inform and reinforce women's unfair and unpaid care and domestic workload. This position paper summarises the key findings and arguments and makes recommendations on ways in which policy makers and influencers can contribute to the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid domestic and carework for a better economy for all Ugandans. The paper argues that there are three key steps in ensuring that the unpaid domestic and care workload remains with women. First women are socialised to shoulder the workload from childhood, second their position as care givers is reinforced by social norms and cultural practices and lastly both women and men are punished if they deviate from the status quo. Understanding these steps, and the ways in which the unfair work load keeps women in poverty through generations, is necessary to if we are to have the right policy and practice interventions to enable women reach their full economic potential and contribute to transforming the economy.

#### **2.0 Background: What if women stopped giving us their unpaid labour?**

Care and domestic work, mostly unpaid and carried out by women, is no doubt essential for our wellbeing as families, communities and a country. A good illustration of just how important unpaid care and domestic work is for the functioning of society and life is when for a few days a Ugandan family that usually has a house help, commonly known as housemaids, wakes up to find the housemaid has left. The home is thrown into panic. Someone, usually the female spouse or partner, has to leave work and rush home to look after the children. Meals will go unprepared, clothes unwashed, the house smothered in dirt. The family may have to spend more money getting already prepared food and outsourcing labour to get some of the work done. Life is suddenly in disarray. Costs go higher, the family is strained and their quality of life generally reduces. Yet, we hardly think about the real value of domestic and carework, and those who do it, when we sit in our sparkling clean houses and enjoy a well-organised life.

Now, imagine it is not just the house help who withdraws her care and domestic work but all women in Uganda. Imagine a world where women say, "I quit." The country, like the home where

the house help quits, would fall apart. Men would have to leave their paid day jobs and stay home to look after the children and others who need care. They would have to clean, wash clothes, do the shopping, drop children to school and trade their boardroom meeting for that school meeting. Businesses, which, as Oxfam told us in her inequality report *Who is Growing?*, mostly employ men, would grind to a halt.<sup>i</sup> Male politicians, members of parliament, the president, would all have to put aside their grand callings to do essential unpaid domestic and care work. Globally, the value of women's unpaid care work annually is 10 trillion US dollar. Women's unpaid care work is worth 14 per cent of the global economy. This is nearly equivalent to China's- which is the second largest economy in the world- contribution to the global economy.<sup>ii</sup>

Women's unpaid care work, while not officially recognized in national statistics, is not only necessary for everyone's wellbeing but is as valuable as any other economic activity. National, regional and international laws and policies all have some kind of recognition of women's unpaid care work. However, this recognition has not translated into effective recognition, reduction and redistribution of this work.

### **3.0 Statement of the problem**

Domestic and care work is no doubt important, contributing to the economic and social wellbeing of families, communities and the entire nation. However, the biggest domestic and care workload falls on women who carry out this work altruistically with no compensation and little appreciation. While domestic, national and international laws and policies have basic recognitions of women's unpaid care and domestic work, they are yet to translate into effective recognition, reduction and redistribution of this work.

### **4.0 Objectives**

- i. To establish the trends and attitudes in distribution of unpaid care and domestic work
- ii. To suggest ways in which policies and practice can change and be used to effectively recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid domestic and care work

### **5.0 What is unpaid care and domestic work?**

Globally, unpaid care and domestic work is understood as work done in service of others and motivated by reasons other than financial compensation. It is often carried out almost entirely by women and girls. Box 1 provides a definition of unpaid carework. The terms 'unpaid care', 'care work' or 'care' are also used interchangeably.

### **Box 1: Unpaid care and domestic work**

*‘Unpaid care and domestic work’* (UCDW) refers to care of persons and housework performed within households without pay, and unpaid community work. As a term, UCDW is used similarly to the older terms ‘reproductive work’ and ‘unremunerated work’, as used in the Beijing Platform for Action (UN Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995).

*‘Care of persons’* is a component of UCDW devoted mostly, but not uniquely, to the direct care of persons with care needs, such as children or elderly/sick/frail adults. The time devoted to the care of persons overburdens women (and men) who engage in care relationships, limiting their opportunities to engage in gainful employment, education, politics or leisure.

The *‘housework’* component of UCDW refers to household chores such as cleaning, cooking and doing laundry/ironing for family members, which can also be understood as ‘indirect care’.

The *‘unpaid community work’* component of UCDW refers to unpaid care activities provided to households beyond one’s own. It includes work undertaken for friends, neighbours or next of kin, and work undertaken out of a sense of responsibility and duty to the community as a whole.

Source: Esquivel (2014)

## **6.0 Policy environment on unpaid care and domestic work**

Unpaid care work has been recognised as a women’s rights, economic and equality issue in the Global Agenda 2030 under SDG 5 which, under target 5.4, exclusively calls upon countries to:

“Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.”<sup>iii</sup>

At regional level, the Africa Agenda 2063 commits to foster the development of joint programmes that promote debates on women’s care.<sup>iv</sup> The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women specifically recognizes women’s contribution- especially rural women- to the economy and enjoins government to ensure that their economic rights, right to health and access to facilities such as clean, accessible and portable water is guaranteed.<sup>v</sup> The Constitution of Uganda contains an affirmative action clause that recognizes the need to correct cultural, religious and historical imbalances that have kept women from reaching their full potential.<sup>vi</sup> No doubt the unfair distribution on care and domestic work that falls on women from childhood is one such imbalance.

The National Development Plan II recognizes women as key providers of unpaid care and domestic work. The National Gender Policy by integrating Gender in reform policies and programmes while the National Social Protection Policy offers policy direction in decentralizing service delivery, especially in education, water and health. Policies such as the National Childhood Development Policy and the National Health policy all have a bearing on women’s unpaid care workload and strategic investments in these sectors would reduce the amount of time and effort women spend on unpaid domestic and care work.

Indeed, reducing women's unpaid care work is at the heart of women's economic empowerment. Gender equality, as envisaged under Uganda's Constitution, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the and the protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women, is only fully possible if we address the centuries old problem of women shouldering most of the unpaid care work. Global and national development goals cannot be attained when half of the population is shackled with unpaid and underappreciated work for generations.

If we are to raise boys and girls to equally participate and contribute to the economy, we must start in the small and very essential family unit to model equal behavior, which includes equal sharing of domestic work. Countries where women and men are equal also develop faster. Government must put in place and implement laws and policies that will accelerate the recognition, redistribution and reduction of women's unpaid care workload. This will in turn reduce economic inequality between men and women, enabling families, communities and the country reach development goals faster.

## **7.0 Generations of work without pay: A discussion of key findings**

Oxfam in Uganda's research found that there are three major steps that ensure that the biggest unpaid care and domestic workload falls on women. The first is that from an early age, women are socialized to take on the biggest share of unpaid care and domestic work. The second step is the continued reinforcement of unpaid carework through subtle and overt social norms while the third is active punishment and social exclusion of both men and women who dare deviate or question the unfair care and domestic workload. Understanding the ways in which these three steps interface to sanction women's life sentence of unpaid work is necessary if we are to propose effective interventions to break the cycle and change attitudes and practices in regard to unpaid care and domestic work.

### **7.1 Boys and Girls socialised from childhood**

The care workload reduces for boys as they get older while for women it increases. Interviews with children aged 17 years and below revealed that boys spend an average of 3.8 hours on unpaid care and domestic work while girls spend an average of 3.8 hours. This means that girls spend one hour more than boys on unpaid care work. The average time children below the age of 18 years spend on unpaid care work is 4.5 hours. Girls therefore spend more than the average time and boys less. This leaves girls with less time to spend on school work and leisure. For most homes, unpaid care work is packaged and framed as a priority for girls while school work and being successful enough to participate in the monetary economy is a priority for boys. Domestic work and taking care of a family member in need or younger siblings rank as some of the top reasons for girls dropping out of school.<sup>vii</sup>

This speaks to the overt and subtle ways in which society grooms children from an early age to fit into specific gender roles. Children know right from an early age that following agreed social norms earns them approval from their reference groups, be it within the family or community or among peers.<sup>viii</sup> Children model the figures in their life that they deem important. For instance, 58.5 percent of men interviewed in Kaabong say that they never, as children, saw their father or any man in the home prepare food. In Kabale, the percentage is 52.1 percent while in Kampala it is 31.8 percent. Overall, 55.8 percent of men in rural areas and 41.4 percent of men in urban

areas never saw a man in the homes they grew up prepare food. Boys, too, are taught by the men in their lives not to engage in unpaid care and domestic work.

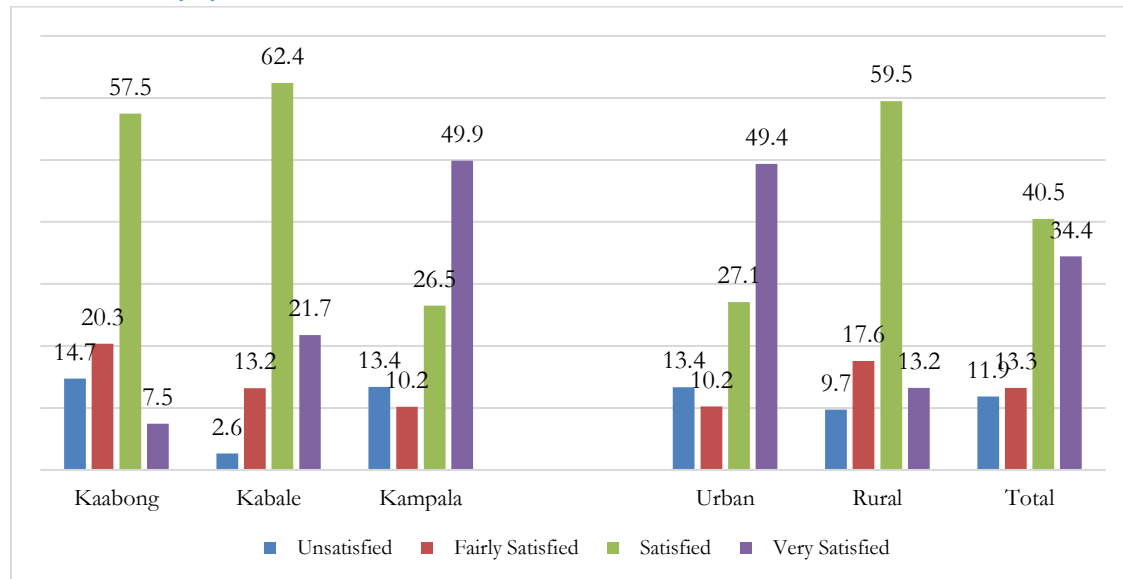
## **7.2 A woman's job: Social norms reinforce exclusion and poverty**

As boys and girls grow older, the gap between how much time they each spend on care work grows bigger. Women spend 32 hours weekly on unpaid care work and 21 hours weekly on unpaid production for home consumption, making it 53 hours of unpaid care and domestic work a week. This translates in 8 hours of unpaid work a day- the same amount of time people in paid employment dedicate to their jobs on average. Men, on the other hand spend 20 hours on unpaid care work and 10 hours on unpaid production for home consumption. Men therefore spend 30 hours a week on unpaid domestic and care work. This makes it about 4 hours a day on unpaid care and domestic work for men, just half of the time women spend.

In spite the unfair distribution of unpaid care work and its admitted effect on the health and wellbeing of women, both men and women expressed happiness with the way that the work is distributed. This is similar to findings where women who are victims of harmful social norms such as polygamy and domestic violence are also its biggest defenders.<sup>ix</sup> Both women and men, across the three districts, said that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the way care work is distributed. As reflected by Figure.1, nearly 75 percent of women are either satisfied or very satisfied with the distribution of unpaid domestic and care work. Only about 12 percent say they are fairly satisfied and 13 percent are unsatisfied with the status quo. Men, too, are very satisfied with the status quo. Nearly 90 percent of men say they are either satisfied or very satisfied by the division of unpaid care and domestic work. Only about 9 percent say they are fairly satisfied and one percent say they are not satisfied (see Figure 2).

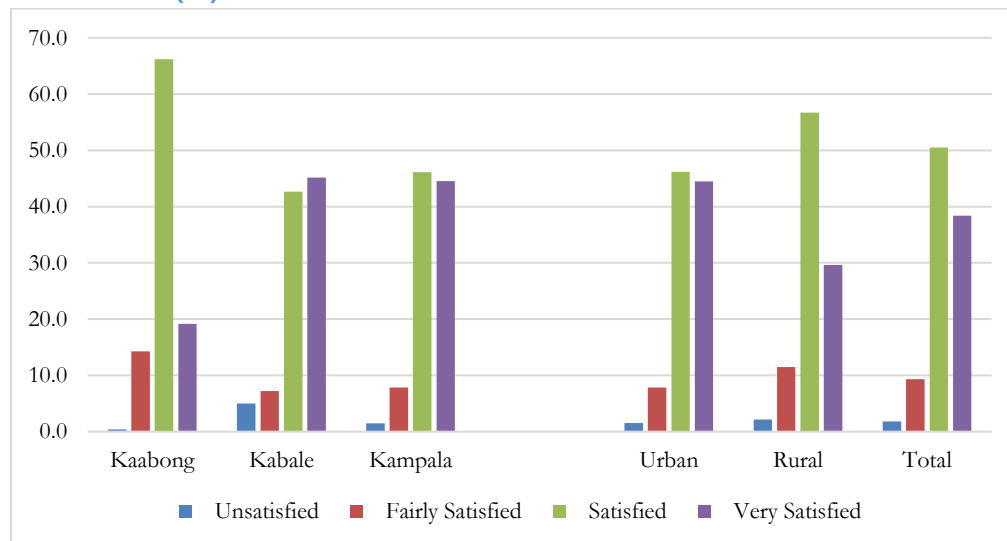
So deep rooted are gender roles in terms of unpaid domestic and care work that most women, even when they feel they should get more help, do not bother to ask for it. In spite of the findings that women and men are over all satisfied with the way unpaid care and domestic work is divided, over 50 percent of women had asked their husband for help at least once in the past month. The most common reason women give for not asking for help is that it is a man's task not a woman's task. Conversely, the most common reason men gave for not giving help is that it is a woman, not a man's task. Women were very clear on the tasks in which they would like help from men. Men, too, knew what tasks their partners would like help with.

**Figure 1: Women’s satisfaction with division of UCDW in the household, by district and urban/rural (%)**



Therefore, women’s need for help with domestic and unpaid care work was communicated but silenced by social norms. The “satisfaction” with the way unpaid care and domestic work is divided therefore speaks not to women’s contentment with the status quo. Rather it highlights women’s apprehension to over step their boundaries and shake what they have been taught is part and parcel of their burden as women.

**Figure 2: Men’s satisfaction with division of UCDW in the household, by district and urban/rural (%)**



### 7.3 Dying silently: Harmful consequences of unfair distribution of unpaid care and domestic work

Women are therefore dying silently with the unpaid care and domestic workload. Culture such as early marriage and bride price worsen the situation. Women and girls are often married off early to older men, affecting their education and further sentencing them to a lifetime of work without

pay in a relationship whose power relations is especially tilted in favour of the man because of the age difference. Women in such relationships cannot negotiate basics such as safe sex and family planning. Neither can they negotiate how much unpaid care and domestic work they can take on.

The payment of bride price further worsens the situation of women. Even though the Constitutional Court declared that the payment of bride price is not mandatory when entering a customary marriage- and that requiring its return upon divorce is unconstitutional- many people still practice the culture of exchanging bride price when getting married and returning it upon divorce.<sup>x</sup> Therefore, many women interviewed felt like the payment of bride price cemented their role as the providers of unpaid care and domestic work. They expressed fear of the consequences of not doing this work and the shame that would befall their families if they had to return bride price because she is not doing most of the unpaid domestic and carework.

Yet, women's failure to do unpaid carework not only brings shame on her family but also exposes her to domestic violence. About 70 percent of women interviewed know of a woman who has been beaten or harshly criticized for not doing care work. Across all districts, women and men believed that there are instances when it is justifiable to beat a woman when she fails to do certain kinds of carework such as looking after children or preparing food.

Men who do carework are labled, mocked and shamed for doing work that is deemed to belong to women. In Kaabong, for instance, a man who cooks is nickname loroomot and perceived as greedy for always being in the kitchen. In Kabale, a man who helps his wife with kitchen work is believed to have been subjected to kibwankulata, a form of witch craft. Men who share domestic and care work are compared to dogs who stupidly follow their owners wherever they go. In central region, too, a man who shares care is deemed witched and bereaved of all his senses except basic ones such as those to enable him cross the road safely- phrased as oyo bamuloga nebamulekera agasala ekuubo.

#### **7.4 Women's unfair care and domestic burden worsening inequality**

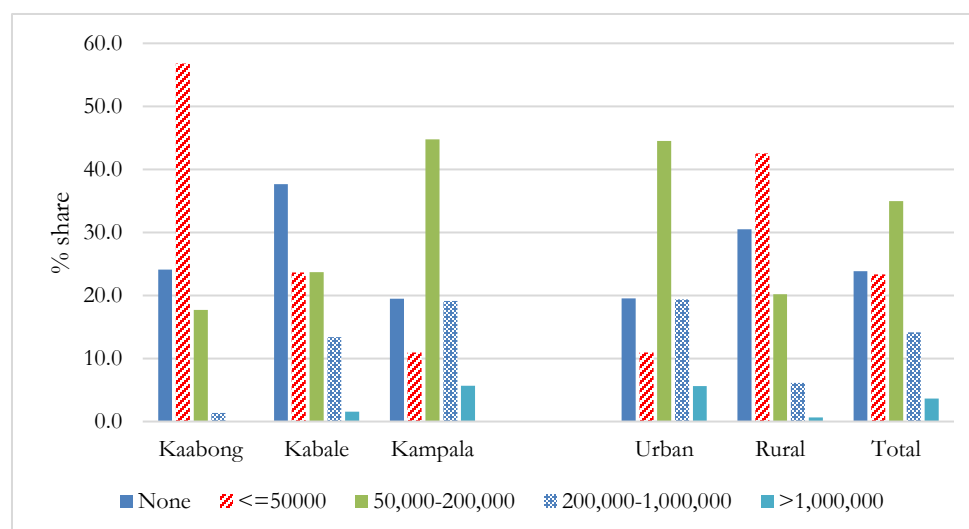
It is therefore clear that leaving most of the unpaid care and domestic workload to women is not benign. It has adverse consequences on the health, happiness and wellbeing of women. But, above all, it leaves women economically cripple for generations, worsening the poverty and inequality gender divide. Because they spend less time on school work as children, women's academic prospects are dimmer than that of men. Indeed, the higher the education ladder you, the less women you find.<sup>xi</sup>

Economically, women in Uganda earn less than their male counterparts. Indeed, 50 percent of women are employed in the three lowest paying sectors of the economy- these are domestic work, agriculture and mining and quarrying.<sup>xii</sup> In the public service alone, women earn 40 percent less than their male counterparts.<sup>xiii</sup> Women who go out to work in the public sphere are subjected to double shifts- at their formal workplace and at home- and this may affect their performance. They are also more likely to miss work to take care of children or a relative.

As already noted, the women interviewed spend most of their days- 8 hours on average- doing unpaid carework. The little time they spend doing paid work earns them very little. Over 60 percent of the women interviewed earn less than 50,000 shillings a month. The situation is made more absurd by the fact that even though men are expected to provide, many of them are also unemployed and spend most of their time on gambling and leisure. Women are therefore left with

the biggest care and domestic workload yet they are also expected to economically provide for their families.

Figure 3: Women's monthly earnings



The unfair care and domestic workload therefore stands in the way of reaching their full economic potential even though they spend a lot of their time working hard within and outside the home. This is not only unfair on the individual women but also on Uganda as a country that does not recognize the contribution these women are making to the economy. Economic inequality that the country is facing is therefore sowed right from the family level through the unfair distribution of unpaid domestic and carework. Without the right interventions, to recognize, reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care and domestic work, Uganda will not reach her goals of shared property and ending poverty for all.

## 8.0 Conclusion and Recommendations: Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute

This paper has shown the ways in which the unpaid care and domestic workload is left mostly to women and perpetrated through social norms that are passed on from childhood and overt ridicule and punishment of women and men who challenge this distribution of labour. It is important to change the status quo for the women whose wellbeing, health and happiness is affected and for whom gender equality- as envisaged under national, international and regional laws and policies- will remain a myth. Countries with more gender equality between women and men develop faster. If Uganda is to reach her development goals, reduce poverty and inequality, government must urgently take steps to recognize reduce and redistribute the unpaid care and domestic workload that mostly falls on women. In particular:

- Government should invest in the key sectors of health, education and agriculture. These investments would have the direct consequence of reducing the unpaid care workload on women who provide most of the care to the sick, most of the labour in the agricultural sector and for whom education holds the key to access to better paying work in the public sphere. These investments must therefore be deliberate in addressing the unfair care workload on women through a gendered lens.



- The ministry of gender should work with related ministries and lead the streamlining of clear indicators for tracking SDG 5, target 5.4, in government structures to show how key sectors such as education, health, water and sanitation, and infrastructure can contribute to reducing care work, and raise awareness among stakeholders in these sectors on how their work can contribute to the redistribution of unpaid care work.
- Government should invest in technology that would reduce women's care workload, in particular investing in clean accessible and potable water to women who spend a lot of time looking for it. Investments should also be made in agricultural technology and such technology and scientific information handed to women to use and control in order to reduce their unpaid agricultural production workload.
- Capture the value of women's unpaid carework in national statistics so as to value women's unpaid care and domestic work and how much it contributes to the economy.
- The Uganda human rights commission should work with related government bodies and CSOs to raise awareness on ways in which leaving unpaid domestic and care work violates their rights to health, better economic wellbeing and equality at all levels in the public and private sphere.

If government takes these steps, unpaid care and domestic work will be more visible and recognized as a policy, women's rights and economic empowerment issue. Investments in the suggested sectors and clear tracking and indicators of how these investments would reduce the unpaid care and domestic workload on women would automatically lead to redistribution of the workload to professionals, freeing women's hands and time to participate meaningfully in other economic activities.

## End notes

<sup>i</sup> Oxfam (2017). Who is Growing? Ending Inequality in Uganda. [https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/oxfam\\_in\\_uganda\\_inequality\\_report\\_compressed.pdf](https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file_attachments/oxfam_in_uganda_inequality_report_compressed.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Financial Tribune (2018). China's GDP to overtake Eurozone in 2018. <https://financialtribune.com/articles/world-economy/83189/china-s-gdp-to-overtake-eurozone-in-2018>; Also see Oxfam (2016). Underpaid and undervalued: How inequality defines women's work in Asia.

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<sup>iii</sup> UN (2015). Sustainable Development Goals. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

<sup>iv</sup> African Development Bank (2015). Empowering African Women: An agenda for action. Africa Gender Equality Index, 2015

<sup>v</sup> Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

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<sup>vi</sup> The Constitution of Uganda (1995). Article 32.

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<sup>vii</sup> UNICEF (2014). Out of schoolchildren study in Uganda.

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<sup>viii</sup> Marco F. H. Schmidt and Michael Tomasello (2012). Young Children Enforce Social Norms. Sage.

[https://www.eva.mpg.de/psycho/staff/tomas/pdf/Schmidt\\_Tomasello\\_2012.pdf](https://www.eva.mpg.de/psycho/staff/tomas/pdf/Schmidt_Tomasello_2012.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> Human Rights Watch (2003). Domestic Violence and Women's Vulnerability to HIV in Uganda.

<https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/uganda0803/6.htm>

<sup>x</sup> Mifumi (U) Ltd & Anor Vs Attorney General & Anor (Constitutional Appeal No. 02 of 2014)

<sup>xi</sup> UNICEF (2014). Op.Cit

<sup>xii</sup> Oxfam (2017). Op.Cit

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid