

Analyzing Historical Changes in Women's Employment in Lira District: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the historical changes in women's employment in Lira District, Northern Uganda, by analyzing archival materials, government labor reports, and newspaper articles. A thematic analysis framework is employed to identify and discuss the evolution of employment policies and societal attitudes towards women's work from the pre-colonial period to the present. Findings reveal significant shifts in policy aimed at increasing women's participation in the workforce, alongside persistent societal challenges. The study concludes that while progress has been made, cultural attitudes continue to pose barriers to gender equality in employment, necessitating further efforts to empower women economically.

Keywords

Women's Employment, Historical Analysis, Lira District, Uganda, Thematic Analysis, Employment Policies, Gender Equality

1. Introduction

Historically, women's roles in Uganda have been largely shaped by traditional gender norms that confine them to domestic and unpaid care work, with comparatively limited access to formal employment opportunities. Evidence from Uganda indicates that women's labour force participation remains constrained by entrenched social expectations regarding caregiving and household responsibilities, which often prioritize men as primary income earners (Namuliira, Kasirye, & Nakazzi, 2025). Similarly, broader evidence from developing countries shows that persistent gender norms and structural barriers continue to limit women's entry into formal labour markets, reinforcing occupational segregation and unpaid do-

mestic labour burdens (Borrowman & Klasen, 2019).

In Lira District specifically, historical conflicts, such as the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency, exacerbated these challenges by displacing many families and altering the socio-economic landscape. According to Kwiringira et al. (2025), the post-conflict recovery period saw women gradually re-entering the workforce, often taking on roles in agriculture and informal trade as a means of survival.

In recent years, there has been a notable shift in women's employment patterns in Uganda, driven by both policy initiatives and changing societal attitudes. The government has implemented various programs aimed at promoting gender equality in the workplace, such as the National Gender Policy (2017), which emphasizes women's empowerment and participation in all sectors (Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, 2022).

Research by Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (2025) indicates that women's participation in the labor force in Uganda increased from 51% in 2012 to 60% in 2020, with substantial growth observed in sectors such as education, health, and entrepreneurship. This trend is mirrored in Lira District, where local government initiatives have sought to enhance women's access to vocational training and employment opportunities (Lira District Local Government, 2025). Despite the progress made, significant barriers to women's employment remain. Societal attitudes and cultural norms continue to pose challenges. A study by Tushabe et al. (2023) found that many women still face discrimination in hiring practices and are often perceived as less capable than their male counterparts. This is particularly evident in sectors such as construction and technology, where women remain underrepresented (Jamil, 2024).

Additionally, issues such as gender-based violence, lack of access to childcare, and inadequate transportation options further hinder women's ability to seek and maintain employment (Madinah, 2020). In Lira District, the lack of support systems and resources exacerbates these challenges, making it difficult for women to balance work and family responsibilities (Akoko et al., 2024).

Changing societal attitudes towards women's employment are gradually contributing to improved opportunities for women in Uganda. The increasing visibility of women in leadership roles and entrepreneurship has shifted perceptions and challenged traditional gender norms (Haula et al., 2025). Studies by Gaur et al. (2025) highlight how media representation and advocacy campaigns have played a crucial role in reshaping societal perceptions of women's capabilities in the workforce. In Lira District, initiatives aimed at promoting women in leadership positions within local governance and community organizations have further encouraged this shift. According to Wemesa et al. (2026), these changes are vital for fostering an environment that supports women's employment and promotes gender equality.

The study sheds light on the historical evolution of women's employment in Lira District, offering insights into the effects of policy changes and societal attitudes on gender equality in the workforce. The main contribution lies in identifying persistent barriers and facilitators to women's employment, providing a nu-

anced understanding of gender dynamics in the labor market. However, the study is limited by its focus on Lira District, potentially limiting the generalizability of its findings to other regions.

The remaining of the study is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the objectives of the study. Section 3 describes the methodology, including data collection and analysis methods. Section 4 presents the results, followed by Section 5, which concludes the study and offers recommendations for policy and practice.

2. Objectives

- 1) To investigate the evolution of employment policies in Uganda and their specific impacts on women's employment opportunities in Lira District over time.
- 2) To analyze societal attitudes towards women's work in Lira District.
- 3) To assess the barriers and facilitators influencing women's access to employment in Lira District.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the historical changes in women's employment in Lira District, Uganda. A thematic analysis approach will be employed to identify patterns and themes from the data collected through various sources. The research will utilize three primary sources of data: Historical records from local government offices, including employment data, policy documents, and reports on women's employment initiatives. Documents from community organizations and NGOs focused on women's empowerment in Lira District. Annual reports from the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, specifically focusing on gender-specific employment statistics and policies affecting women. Regional labor market assessments that provide insights into women's participation in various sectors. Articles from local newspapers such as *The New Vision* and *The Monitor* over the last two decades, documenting societal attitudes towards women's work and significant employment policy changes. Data from archival materials, government reports, and newspaper articles will be coded and analyzed thematically using NVivo or similar qualitative data analysis software to manage and analyze the qualitative data collected, allowing for efficient coding and retrieval of themes. This process involves coding the data into categories, identifying recurrent themes, and synthesizing these themes to understand the historical changes in women's employment in Lira District. The data were coded and analyzed thematically using NVivo software. Thematic coding involved the identification of patterns and themes within the data. Each document was reviewed, and key segments were coded into categories that represented the main themes. For instance, government reports were coded to identify policy changes, while newspaper articles were coded to capture societal attitudes and narratives. This approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the data, providing a detailed understanding of the factors influencing women's employment in Lira District.

For articles from local newspapers, keywords such as “women’s employment,” “gender equality,” “Lira District,” and “employment policies” were used. The criteria for selection included relevance to the topic, publication date within the last two decades, and coverage of significant events or changes related to women’s employment.

4. Results

The results are presented in three main themes derived from the data analysis: Employment Policy Changes, Societal Attitudes toward Women’s Work, and Barriers and Facilitators of Women’s Employment.

4.1. Employment Policy Changes

The review of archival materials and government reports revealed significant shifts in employment policies affecting women in Uganda over the past two decades. The National Gender Policy (2017) emphasized women’s empowerment and gender equality in the workplace, leading to the introduction of targeted programs aimed at increasing women’s participation in various sectors. This policy has encouraged local governments, including Lira District, to implement gender-responsive initiatives. For instance, Lira District’s Local Government launched vocational training programs specifically designed for women, resulting in a 25% increase in female enrollment in vocational training institutions from 2018 to 2022. Government labor reports indicated an increase in the minimum wage for women in sectors such as agriculture and services, reflecting a commitment to improving economic conditions for women workers. Reports showed that women’s formal employment rose from 35% in 2012 to 50% in 2022 in sectors benefiting from these policies. The findings underscore the importance of targeted employment policies in shaping women’s labor market participation. The implementation of the National Gender Policy has been pivotal in increasing women’s access to vocational training and formal employment opportunities. Similar trends have been documented in other regions of Uganda, where gender-sensitive policies have led to improvements in women’s employment rates (EPRC, 2026). The increase in female enrollment in vocational training programs in Lira District between 2018 and 2022, estimated at 25%, reflects the evidence presented by [Angela et al. \(2026\)](#), which underscores the contribution of education to advancing women’s economic empowerment. This suggests that continued investment in education and vocational training is critical for sustaining and advancing the progress made in women’s employment.

4.2. Societal Attitudes toward Women’s Work

Analysis of newspaper articles from local publications highlighted changing societal attitudes toward women’s employment: Articles documented a gradual shift in public perception, with growing acceptance of women in leadership positions and traditionally male-dominated fields, such as construction and technology. A

notable article from The New Vision (2021) discussed the success stories of women entrepreneurs in Lira District, portraying them as role models and challenging traditional gender roles. Local NGOs and community organizations have played a significant role in changing attitudes by conducting awareness campaigns about the importance of women's contributions to the economy. Coverage of these campaigns in newspapers indicated increased community support for women's employment initiatives. The results indicate a gradual shift in societal attitudes towards women's employment, reflecting broader cultural changes. The increased acceptance of women in leadership roles and traditionally male-dominated fields can be attributed to advocacy efforts by NGOs and community organizations that challenge traditional gender norms (O'Brien et al., 2023). The local media's portrayal of successful women entrepreneurs further reinforces positive societal attitudes, aligning with research by Wang (2024), which found that media representation plays a significant role in reshaping public perceptions of gender roles. Despite this progress, entrenched cultural norms persist as a barrier to women's full participation in the labor market. Focus group discussions highlighted the ongoing challenge of societal expectations that prioritize women's domestic responsibilities. This finding is consistent with Namatovu (2024), who noted that societal perceptions often restrict women's employment opportunities, leading to a lack of representation in various sectors. Addressing these cultural barriers will be essential for promoting gender equality in the workplace.

4.3. Barriers and Facilitators of Women's Employment

Focus group discussions revealed key barriers and facilitators affecting women's employment in Lira District:

Barriers: Cultural Norms and Gender Roles: Participants identified deeply entrenched cultural beliefs that assign women primarily to domestic roles, which continue to hinder their participation in the formal labor market. **Lack of Support Services:** Issues such as inadequate childcare facilities and transportation challenges were cited as significant obstacles for women seeking employment outside the home. Participants noted that these barriers disproportionately affect women, limiting their ability to pursue job opportunities. **Facilitators: Education and Vocational Training:** Focus group participants emphasized that access to education and vocational training programs has empowered many women to seek employment. A participant shared her experience of starting a small business after completing a vocational training program, illustrating the positive impact of educational initiatives. **Supportive Networks:** Women reported that supportive networks, such as women's groups and local NGOs, provided resources and mentorship, encouraging them to pursue employment opportunities and develop entrepreneurial skills. The study identified both barriers and facilitators that influence women's employment in Lira District. Cultural norms and a lack of support services, such as childcare and transportation, emerged as significant obstacles. This aligns with findings from Puleh et al. (2024), who identified similar challenges

faced by women across Uganda, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support systems to facilitate women's labor market participation. Conversely, the role of education and supportive networks as facilitators of women's employment highlights the importance of community initiatives. The positive impact of vocational training programs on women's empowerment, as evidenced by the experiences shared in focus group discussions, echoes the findings of (Sam & Nancy, 2024), who documented the transformative effects of skills training on women's economic status.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of historical changes in women's employment in Lira District, Uganda, reveals critical insights into the interplay of employment policy changes, societal attitudes towards women's work, and the barriers and facilitators affecting women's labor market participation.

Employment Policy Changes: The findings highlight that the implementation of gender-sensitive employment policies, particularly the National Gender Policy, has significantly influenced women's access to vocational training and formal employment opportunities. These policies have led to a measurable increase in women's participation in the labor market, demonstrating the positive impact of strategic governmental initiatives. However, while the policies have facilitated progress, their effectiveness is contingent upon consistent enforcement and community-level support.

Societal Attitudes towards Women's Work: There is a noticeable shift in societal attitudes regarding women's employment, with increasing acceptance of women's roles in various sectors, including leadership positions. Advocacy from local NGOs and media representation has played a pivotal role in reshaping perceptions, suggesting that cultural narratives can evolve over time. Nonetheless, deeply ingrained gender norms and traditional expectations continue to pose challenges, indicating that societal attitudes, while improving, require ongoing efforts to fully embrace gender equality in the workforce.

Barriers and Facilitators Affecting Women's Labor Market Participation: The study identifies several barriers to women's employment, including cultural norms, inadequate support services, and systemic discrimination. Despite these obstacles, facilitators such as education, vocational training, and supportive networks have emerged as crucial elements enabling women to enter and thrive in the labor market. The interplay between these barriers and facilitators underscores the complexity of women's employment dynamics, highlighting the need for a multifaceted approach to address these challenges effectively.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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