

Factsheet

The Realities of Young Women Creatives in Uganda

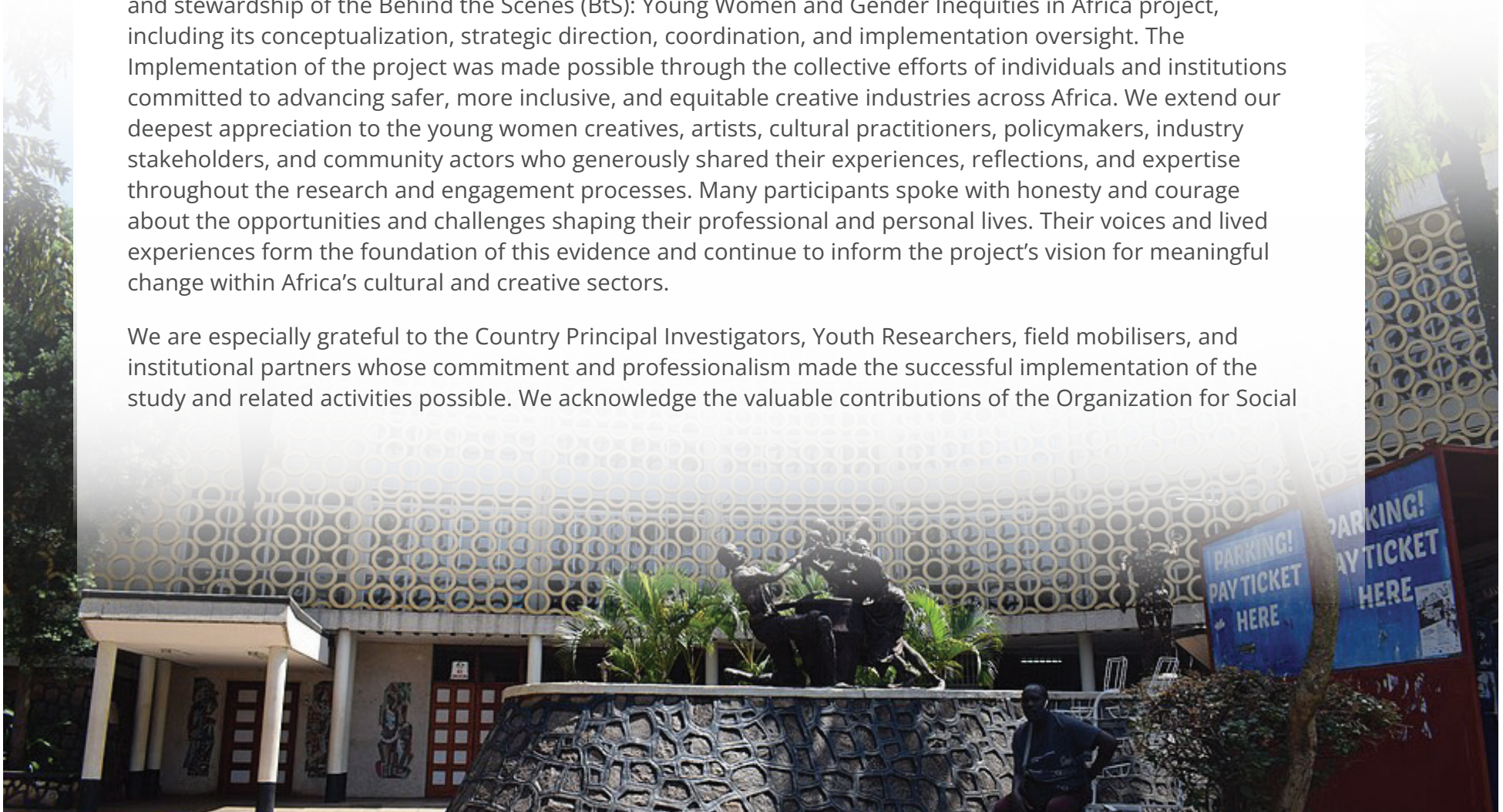




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National Theater Uganda



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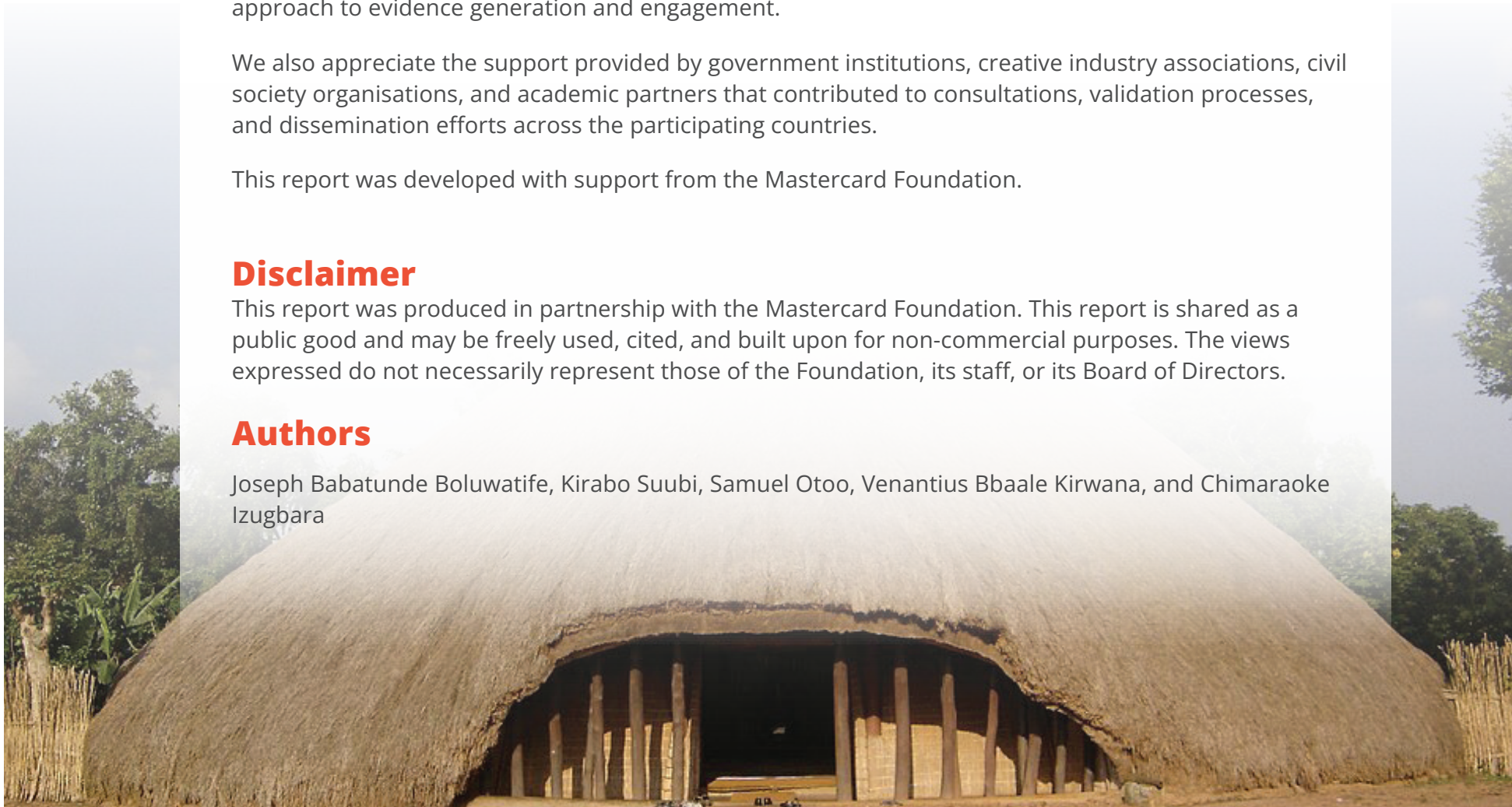
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Executive Summary

This factsheet presents evidence from a study of young women creatives across diverse subsectors in Uganda, highlighting both their substantial contributions and the persistent gendered constraints shaping their careers. While most respondents work full-time and aspire to long-term creative professions, they face pervasive gender-based inequities that limit their advancement. Participants reported exclusion from decision-making, denial of professional roles, unequal pay, and frequent assignment to non-professional tasks. Gender-based harassment, including sexualized comments, coercion, and unwanted physical contact, was widespread and intensified by weak reporting and accountability mechanisms. Additional barriers, such as childcare demands, domestic responsibilities, and pregnancy, further restrict women's participation and continuity in creative work. These inequities reduce the sector's innovation potential, constrain workforce retention, undermine competitiveness, and reinforce informal labour practices. Addressing them requires coordinated, multi-level action across government, industry bodies, creative enterprises, donors, civil society, and educational institutions. Recommended interventions include enforcing gender-responsive labour standards, strengthening anti-harassment frameworks, expanding childcare support, ensuring transparent and safe workplaces, financing women-led creative enterprises, promoting norm-change, and integrating gender equality training into creative education. Collectively, these actions can foster a more equitable, safe, and thriving creative economy for young women in Uganda.





Introduction

In Uganda, the creative sector generates approximately USD 600 million annually, about 3% of the national GDP and employs an estimated 400,000 people, accounting for 1.3% of the national workforce. Women and youth aged 15–35 play a pivotal role in driving this sector, acting as producers, innovators, and cultural trendsetters across domains such as music, fashion, digital media, and crafts. They reinforce the sector's economic and social significance through leadership in grassroots enterprises, adoption of emerging technologies, and the shaping of contemporary cultural narratives. Despite this rapid growth, the sector remains characterized by entrenched gendered disparities that constrain women's participation, career advancement, and sustained engagement within creative enterprises.

This factsheet highlights key evidence from a recent multimethod study conducted by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. The study explored the dynamics, impacts, and challenges of gender-based inequities among 495 young Ugandan women creatives aged 15–35 years. Study participants were sampled from across diverse fields, including music, film and television, fashion and design, performing arts, visual arts, crafts, publishing, photography, gastronomy, advertising, digital media, gaming and animation and cultural heritage/tourism. The factsheet targets a broad public readership and is intended to spark reflection and motivate action.

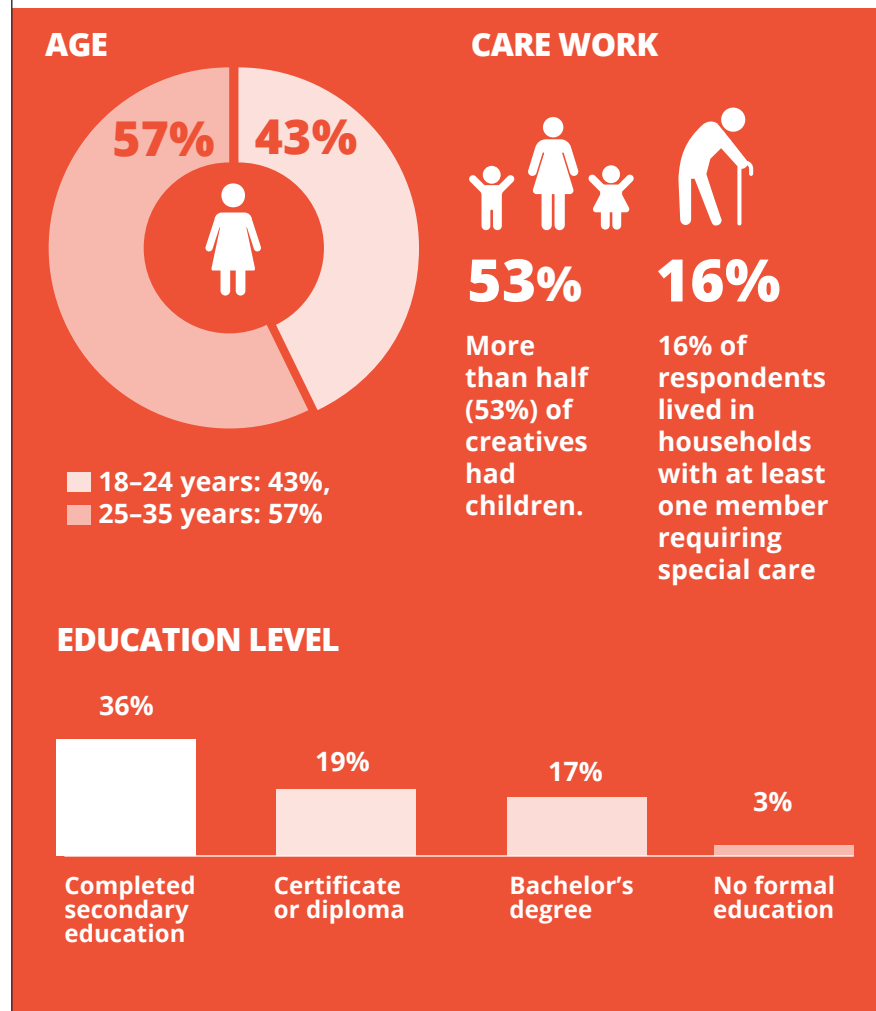
Uganda creative sector generates approximately USD 600 million annually, about 3% of the national GDP and employs an estimated 400,000 people





Characteristics of Interviewed Women Creatives

- Age: 18–24 years: 43%, 25–35 years: 57%
- Education level: Completed secondary education: 36%, Certificate or diploma: 19%, Bachelor's degree 17%, No formal education: 3%. 53% had some form of training in creativity.
- Marital status: Single or never married: 58%, Married or cohabiting: 34%, Separated: 8%
- Care work: More than half (53%) of creatives had children. 16% of respondents lived in households with at least one member requiring special care, such as elderly or disabled relative.
- Employment type: 66% of the respondents were engaged in full-time creative work and 34% worked part-time.
- Long-term careers in the creative sector: 90% expressed determination to pursue long-term careers in the creative sector.
- Social media use: 73% of participants use at least one social media platform for their creative work. Among those reporting social media use, WhatsApp (97%) and TikTok (79%) were most commonly used. Others were Instagram (44%), Facebook (44%), X (22%), and Telegram (15%).



"All you need is a smartphone... there are platforms, local and international, where people are uploading and monetizing... fashion houses are using Instagram to reach their market."
(KII- creative association leader)



Emerging evidence

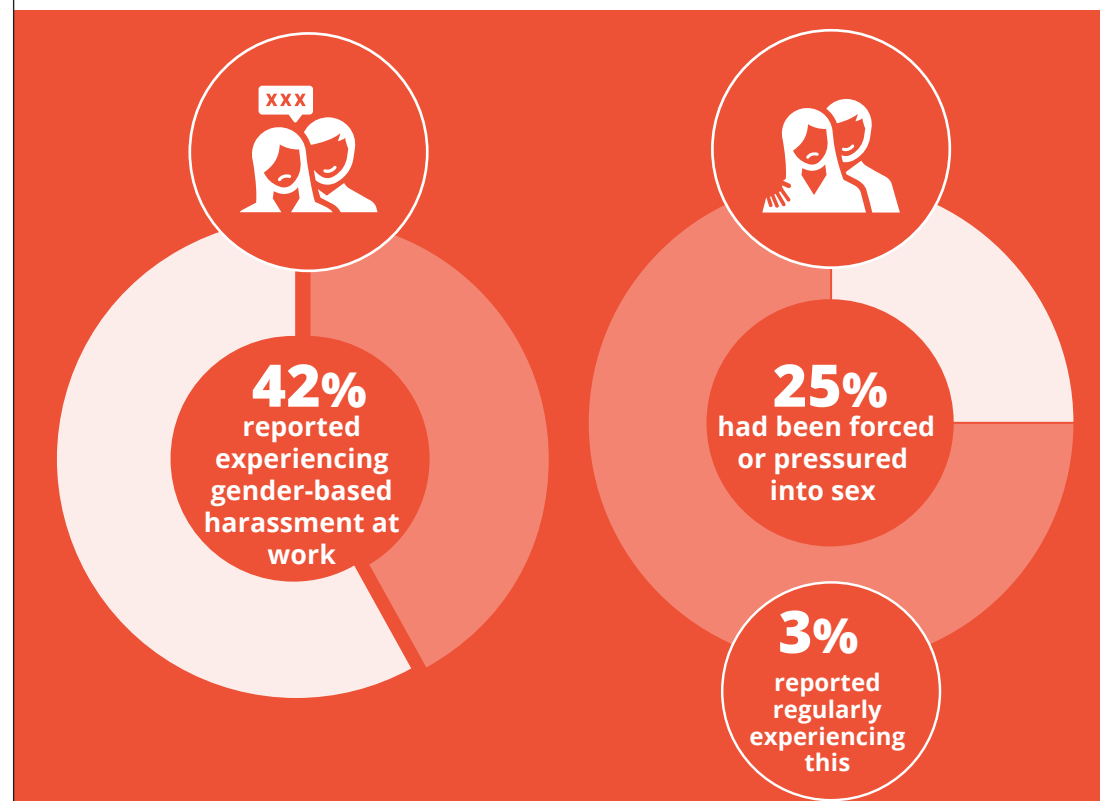


"Some ... believe that men do art, and women don't do art. How are you going to convince someone like that that you will be able to paint something for them? They believe that such opportunities are for men. For a woman to paint, it will lack a certain touch because it is made by a woman. That is a big challenge." (IDI – Jinja, artisan painter)



A. Women's Experiences of Harassment in Creative Workplaces

- 42% reported experiencing gender-based harassment at work
- 25% had been forced or pressured into sex (3% reported regularly experiencing this).
- Among the creatives reporting ever experiencing workplace gender-based harassment:
 - comments on appearance/body were experienced by 79% (33% reported experiencing this regularly).
 - Sexualized jokes were experienced by 73%.
 - Sexual nicknames were experienced by 52%.
 - Inappropriate online messages were experienced by 44%.
- Lack of workplace safe reporting systems was viewed as common and a contributor to the problem.



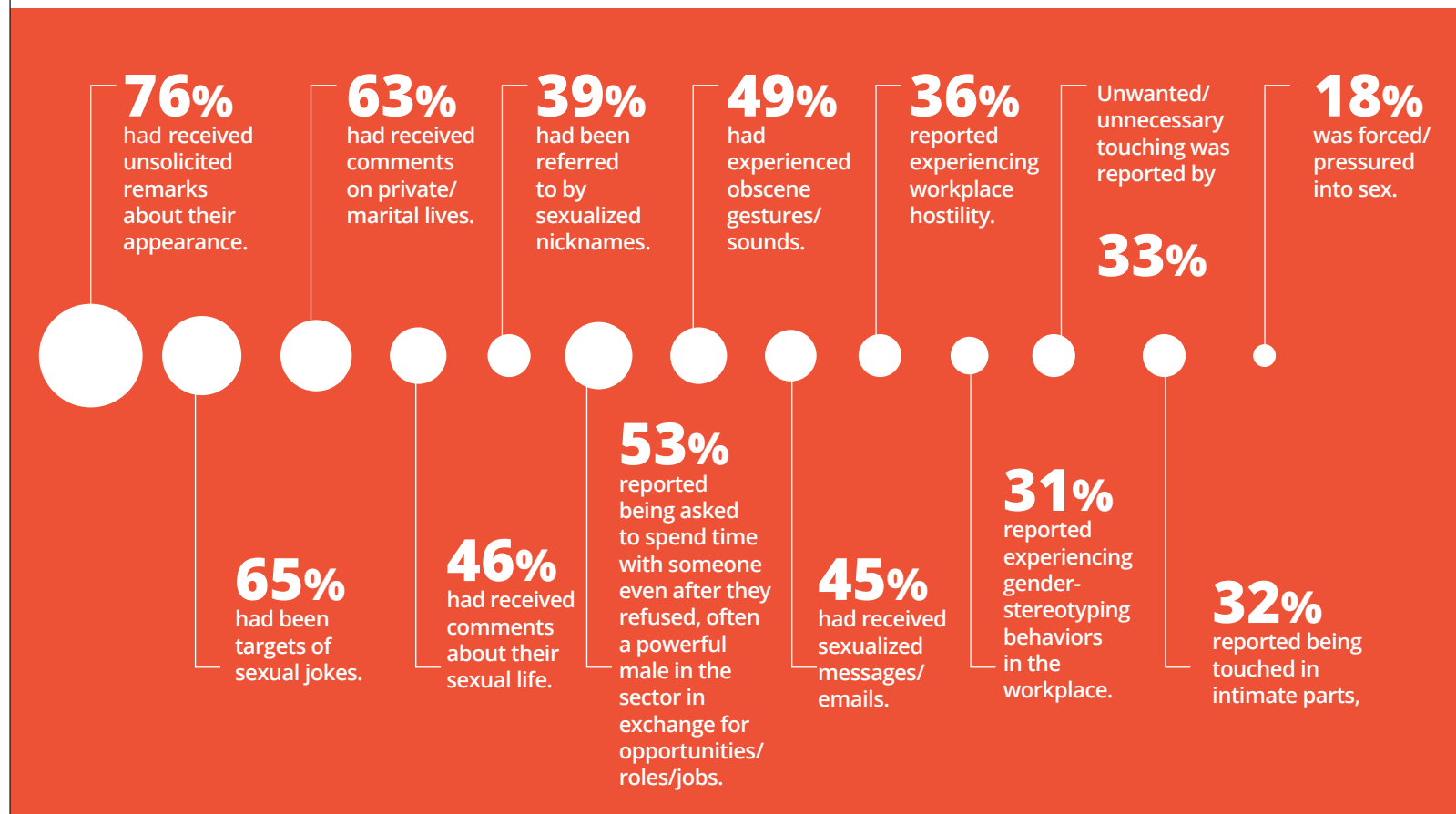
"You know, the creative sector is dominated by men, so most times, they make decisions that favor them, without thinking about the women. And as women, if we don't stand up and get into those leadership positions, we can never get what we want. I find a lot of challenges, because I find myself sitting at a table with 20 men, and I'm the only lady." (KII, musician).



B. Workplace Harassment (<12 months before the survey -Feb 2025)

- 47% young female creatives reported experiencing workplace gender-based harassment in the 12 months prior to the study: Among these,

"We have about four known cases of rape here, yet the rapists are still free because there are no organizations in the industry that can intervene or hold them accountable... Directors often give young girls roles only after raping them." (IDI-Kampala, actress)





C. Experiences of Workplace Gender Equity, Pay Gap, and other Challenges

- 64% reported gender-related obstacles in the workplace, such as unequal task assignments
- 57% of respondents had witnessed unequal pay between men and women creatives

A man will say, 'I want UGX 200,000,' and refuse if it's not met. But as a woman, you may accept UGX 20,000 because you left your home with hungry children.' (IDI-Kampala, Actress)

"Men will outrightly negotiate their pay and get it. Women often get a pay cut simply because they are women."
(KII-creative trainer)



35% reported personally experiencing gender-related pay



37% encountered discriminatory job advertisements (gender, age restrictions).



43% avoided certain jobs due to working late hours or security risks.



Avoided opportunities simply because they were young women.



Avoided certain opportunities because of unequal pay.



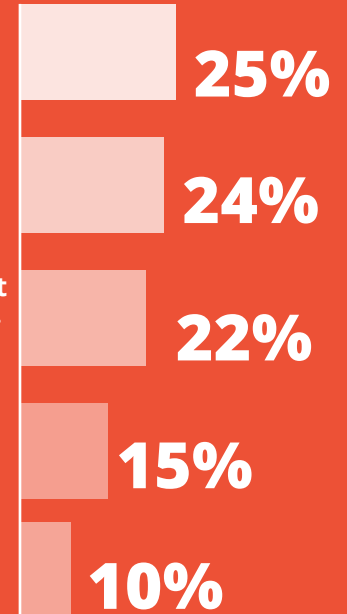
Avoided opportunities to prevent experiencing sexual harassment.



Avoided opportunities because they believed men would be preferred.



Avoided opportunities due to expectations of verbal abuse



51%

disagreed that men and women in their workplace had equal promotion/ advancement chances.



49%

disagreed that men and women had equal pay/ wage increase opportunities.



46%

disagreed that men and women had equal benefits in their workplace.



47%

disagreed that men and women on equal bonuses in their workplace.



28%

reported not receiving due credit for their work because they were women



18%

considered their workplace to be unsafe for women



44%

reported reduced access to roles and opportunities because they were women



45%

of study respondents reported limited safeguards against gender discrimination in their workplaces.

"The challenge ...is that those people who give us gigs don't pay well. We once went somewhere, and they left us in a warehouse where we shot the video from. They don't value you ... Some leave you when you don't even have transport, yet you've worked for them." (IDI-Kampala, video model)

- Workplace policies or practices were generally considered inadequate to accommodate women's needs, including menstrual, pregnancy support, and childcare needs.

"...this girl had her cramps. There was no first aid box, no painkillers... the director was mad that she was wasting his time" (FGD- Kampala, Actress)

- 40% of respondents reported gender inequity in career advancement. Women with disabilities reported compounded barriers, including stigma and assumptions about their creative abilities.

"People first look at my disability before they look at my work. Even when I studied the same skills as others, they assume I cannot deliver. Customers often walk away, comparing my disability with the work they want done, and I lose opportunities because of that." (IDI-Masaka, seamstress)

"Because I am disabled, some customers believe that the table mats I make are 'disabled' as well, simply because of my physical condition." (IDI-Gulu, seamstress).



D. Domestic and Care Work Pressures

- 25% reported losing jobs due to childcare/domestic responsibilities.
- 13% reported losing work due to pregnancy.
- 17% lost opportunities due to restrictions by partners, 16% due to parental/community disapproval.

I have to return home at the exact time prescribed by my husband... This makes it very challenging to do my work.” (IDI-Amuru, seamstress)

- 15% reported unmet childcare needs as a major challenge for them
- Pregnancy-related restrictions were considered common in several creative subsectors
- There were also widespread reports of limited opportunities or roles due to domestic and caregiving responsibilities, or following marriage and childbirth

“When you produce [have a child], that’s a whole year wasted... In creative work you can’t waste a full year in reproducing.” (IDI-Kampala, actress)

“...I don’t have time. I have children. I have to cook for my husband, not to lose my family... So, when a woman gets married, other responsibilities come, and that reduces her opportunities. At some point, you find a woman neglecting her talent because of the family responsibilities she has.” (IDI-Isingiro, tailor)

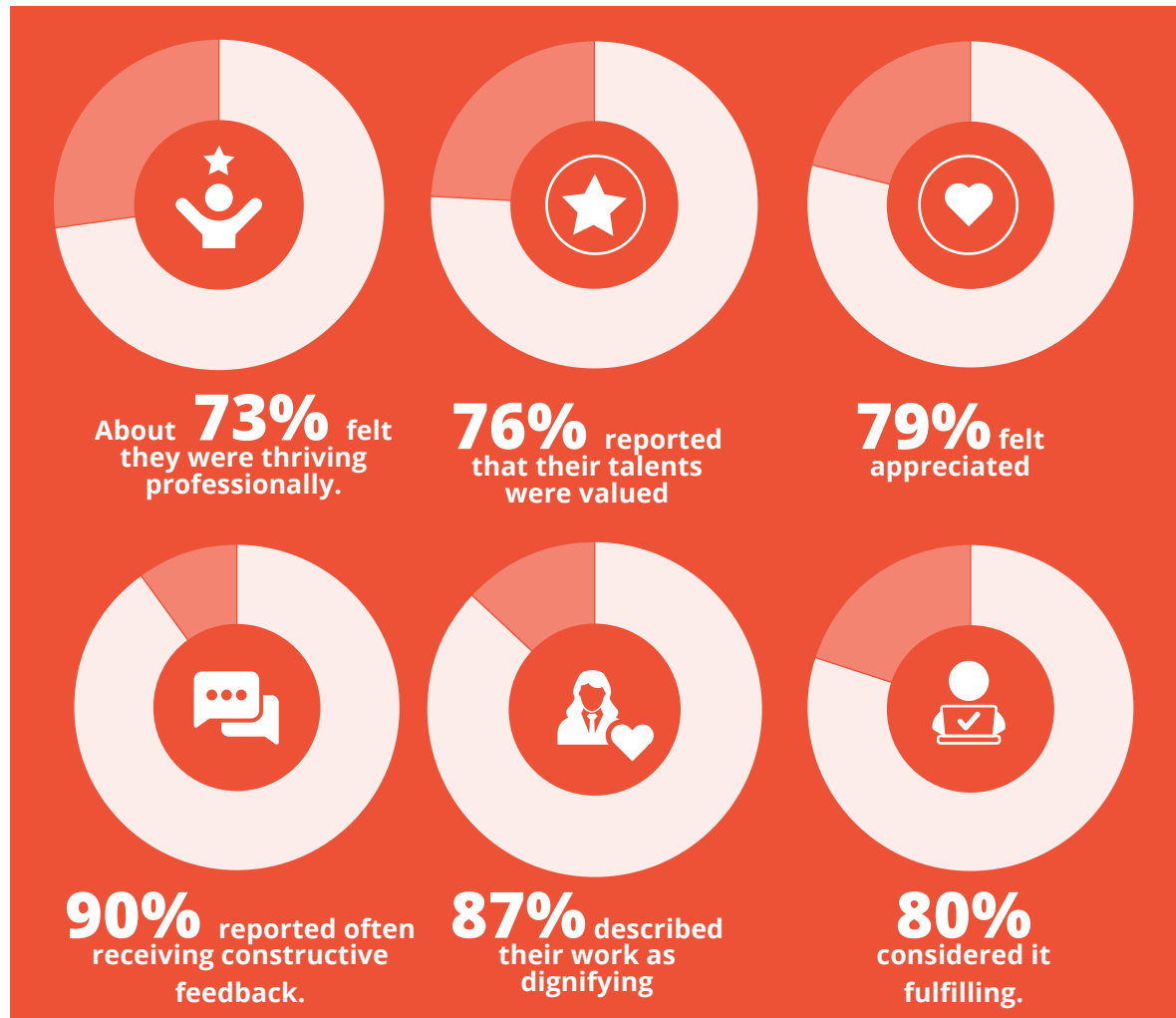
“...we’ve seen mothers come with their children... but they are torn between paying attention to the child and focusing on the learning process because there is no place where children can play or be in a nursery.” (FGD- Mbarara, Creative trainer)



E. Dignifying and Fulfilling Work

- About 73% felt they were thriving professionally.
- 76% reported that their talents were valued, 79% felt appreciated, and 90% reported often receiving constructive feedback.
- 87% described their work as dignifying, 80% considered it fulfilling.
- Respondents also indicated that their work would be more fulfilling and dignified if they received greater respect, had more opportunities for self-expression, were treated and valued fairly, and enjoyed improved economic benefits. Safer work environments and consideration for pregnancy- and unpaid care-related responsibilities were seen as essential for enhancing women creatives' job fulfilment and dignity.

"The dignity I get from my work depends largely on how I view it. Society may label certain jobs as undignified, yet those who do them may see them as highly dignified. As a cartoonist, I've faced comments like, 'What does a cartoonist know about politics?' meant to belittle my role. But such remarks only reveal the speaker's ignorance of what cartooning is, a form of communication, like writing." (KII – professional illustrator)





Conclusion

This factsheet synthesizes evidence from young women creatives across multiple subsectors in Uganda. Although the majority of the respondents engage in full-time creative work and most of them aspire to long-term careers, the findings reveal pervasive gender-based inequities shaping their professional trajectories. Respondents reported widespread discriminatory practices, including exclusion from decision-making, denial of professional roles, assignment to non-professional duties, and gender-related pay disparities. Experiences of gender-based harassment, including sexualized comments, coercive demands, and unwanted physical contact were prevalent and compounded by inadequate reporting mechanisms. Additional constraints related to childcare, domestic responsibilities, partner restrictions, and pregnancy further hinder labour force participation. Despite these structural barriers, most participants described their work as dignifying and fulfilling, underscoring the sector's transformative potential.

Policy And Programmatic Recommendations

Gender inequities significantly constrain the growth and inclusivity of Uganda's creative sector. Discrimination in hiring, pay, and role allocation limits women's access to high-value opportunities, reducing the sector's overall talent pool and innovation potential. High levels of harassment and unsafe work environments discourage participation, particularly among young women, weakening workforce retention. Care burdens, mobility constraints, and exclusion from leadership further marginalize women from decision-making spaces that shape the industry's direction. These inequities undermine productivity, professionalization, and global competitiveness, while reinforcing informal and exploitative labour practices. Addressing gender inequities in Uganda's creative sector requires coordinated, multi-level action by government, industry bodies, enterprises, creativepreneurs, donors, civil society, and educational institutions. Priority interventions include:

1. Government under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology and National Guidance (MoICT&NG)

- Enforce gender-responsive labour protections, including for freelancers and informal workers.
- Establish a Creative Industry Anti-Harassment Framework with clear reporting and sanctions.
- Introduce gender-equity certification for enterprises meeting standards on pay, safety, and leadership.
- Fund childcare services in creative hubs.
- Improve sex, age, and disability-disaggregated data systems in the sector, with support from Uganda Bureau of Standards (UBOS)

2. Creative Associations and Guilds

- Adopt sector-wide codes of conduct on discrimination and harassment.
- Set gender-equity targets for leadership.
- Provide legal and psychosocial support for GBV survivors.
- Strengthen mentorship networks for young women creatives.



3. Creative Enterprises and Workplaces with support from MGLSD in collaboration with Creative Associations and Guilds

- Conduct gender audits and implement action plans.
- Institutionalize safeguarding and ethics training.
- Ensure transparent contracting and standardized pay.
- Strengthen physical and digital safety.
- Adopt family-friendly and maternity-support policies.

4. Donors and Development Partners

- Fund gender-transformative programs and norm-change initiatives.
- Provide tailored financing for women-led creative enterprises.
- Support capacity-building in digital skills, entrepreneurship, and rights awareness for sector stakeholders.
- Invest in research on gender dynamics in creative value chains.
- Require gender-safeguarding compliance in partnerships.

5. Civil Society and Women's Rights Organizations in collaboration with MGLSD

- Lead norm-change campaigns engaging sector stakeholders
- Provide GBV prevention and response services for creatives.
- Produce focused advocacy content on gender equality and labour rights for the sector
- Facilitate peer-support and collective action spaces for women creatives.

6. Educational Institutions

- Integrate gender equality and anti-harassment training into creative arts curricula.
- Promote female mentors and role models.
- Establish incubation hubs supporting women-led creative ventures.

Consulted Work:

ICRW's report on Gender-based inequities in Uganda's creative sector: Experiences of young female creatives

UNDP (2025). The Creative Hustlers' Bazaar: A Marketplace with Soul. <https://www.undp.org/uganda/blog/creative-hustlers-bazaar-marketplace-soul>. Accessed December 6, 2025.



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