WEEKENDVISION May 23-24, 2024

FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS SHOOT UP

PHOTO NANCY NANYONGA

Mukiza signing to launch the Uganda Harmonised Integrated survey report. He was flanked by Vincent Fred Ssenono, the deputy executive director of UBOS, at Uganda Bureau of Statistics head offices in Kampala on Thursday

BY JOHN RICKS KAYIZZI AND JOHN MASABA

Uganda's family structure is slowly shifting, with women taking centre stage in grooming families.

Latest findings released by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) indicate that the proportion of female-headed households has shot up, a trend experts say brings to the fore the rising question of absent fathers.

The new Uganda Harmonised Integrated Survey 2021/22, 2023/24 and 2024/25 shows that female-headed households increased from 33.7% in 2021/22 to 35.7% in 2024/25, reflecting a two percentage point rise over the three-year period.

At the same time, male-headed households declined from 66.3% to 64.3%.

Presenting the findings in Kampala on Thursday, Dr Chris Mukiza, the UBOS executive director, said the trend demonstrates changing socio-economic realities within Ugandan homes and communities.

"The proportion of male heads decreased by 2.0% from 66.3% in 2022 to 64.3% in 2025. Females increased by a similar percentage," Mukiza said while unveiling the survey findings at the UBOS headquarters.

The survey covered 5,640 households selected from 470 enumeration areas across the country using a two-stage stratified sampling approach. UBOS retained a high response rate across the three survey waves.

Mukiza said the findings should help policymakers better understand Uganda's changing social structure and design interventions that respond to emerging realities, especially the growing role of women in household leadership and economic management.

"This survey provides critical evidence for planning and policy making. The changing household dynamics show that Uganda's social and economic environment continues to evolve," he noted.

Mukiza said the increasing number of female-headed households comes at a time when Uganda is also witnessing shifts in household composition and economic activity.

The findings show that one-member households increased from 7.8% in 2021/22 to 10.2% in 2024/25, while households with more than five members reduced from 44.% to 42.1% over the same period.

RISE OF WOMEN

At the same time, more women are increasingly participating in household enterprises and financial systems. The survey indicates that nationally, households operating household enterprises increased from 36.9% in 2021/22 to 38.8% in 2024/25. Female-headed households operating enterprises stood at 37.6% in 2024/25 compared to 35.8% in 2021/22.

The statistics reflect evolving economic survival strategies among Ugandan families and it integrates the Uganda National Panel Survey and the Annual Agricultural Survey in order to improve efficiency and reduce duplication in data collection.

"Integration entails shared samples, shared questionnaires and similar field work protocols, thereby improving technical efficiency, avoiding duplication, aligning methodologies, improving coverage, achieving estimated precision and timely outputs," Mukiza said.

He added that the survey also seeks to provide information on welfare dynamics at household level and to generate longitudinal data to support policy analysis, monitoring and evaluation of projects, investments and programmes.

EXPERT'S VIEW

Reacting to recent statistics showing a rise in households headed by women, Pastor Michael Kyazze of Omega Healing Centre questioned how such categories are defined, arguing that the term "household head" does not necessarily mean the absence of a husband.

"Does that mean a husband is not around?" he asked, noting that a household may include "husband, wife, children and whoever else is in that setting."

He suggested that the trend could be interpreted in multiple ways, including improved access to economic opportunities for women.

"If it is women leading households, then it is about possibility and economic power. The positivity in it is that women have gained more access to resources than men in the past, and therefore have taken charge and responsibility over households, depending on who is seeing it," Kyazze said.

However, he cautioned that the development could also signal deeper social and economic challenges affecting men's participation in household welfare.

"It could also be showing that men are being relegated from active access to jobs and resources to take care of their households. It could also be a sign that some women are abroad sending money to their homes and therefore they are looking after households," Kyazze said.

He added that migration patterns and labour mobility may also explain the trend, with some men leaving home for work while women assume responsibility at home.

"It could also mean that men have moved away to go and work and have not returned, and left their houses to women," he said.

While acknowledging the complexity of the issue, he said the trend could be seen positively in contexts where women are stepping up to ensure household stability.

"For one, I think given the culture of Africans of being non-resident fathers, it is a positive sign. If women can take charge, it is good because the house is not sinking," he added.

The above remarks come amid broader discussions on changing labour patterns, women's increasing economic participation and evolving household responsibilities in Uganda.

The Government and development partners have, in recent years, expanded gender-focused programmes aimed at reducing inequality and improving women's access to finance, education and decision-making.

The debate over female-headed households, experts added, is expected to continue as policymakers assess the implications of these demographic shifts on family systems, economic planning and social welfare.

PASTOR SSEMPA WEIGHS IN

Pastor Martin Ssempa attributed the rise in female-headed households to externally driven gender policies and welfare systems, arguing that they may be affecting family cohesion.

"This is another milestone in the feminisation of our African society. Indeed, this is a European agenda... I saw it as an experiment that failed in America," he said.

He cited welfare reforms introduced in the US in the 1960s, arguing that they encouraged female-headed households while discouraging male involvement, a trend he claimed contributed to "fatherlessness and delinquency" in some communities. Ssempa further argued that similar patterns are being replicated in Africa through donor-funded programmes and gender-focused interventions, which he said often prioritise women in economic empowerment initiatives.

"When you look across the board, out of 10 projects of economic empowerment, a majority are targeted at women," he said, warning that this could weaken the role of men in households.

He also criticised what he termed "radical feminism" in policy and academic discourse, arguing that it prioritises power and economic control over family balance. He pointed to gender equality requirements in development programming as evidence of externally influenced policy shifts.

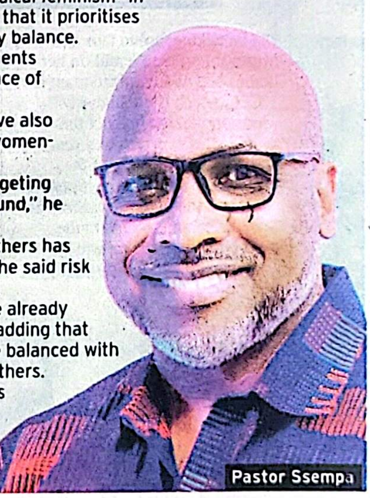
Ssempa says financial institutions have also contributed to the trend by designing women-focused lending products.

"If you look at the banks, they are targeting women, there is nothing called a man fund," he said.

Ssempa noted that the absence of fathers has long-term consequences for boys, who he said risk growing up without strong role models.

"You have boys who are weak. We are already seeing a crisis of masculinity," he said, adding that emotional care from mothers should be balanced with "responsibility, duty and order" from fathers.

He further suggested that households without male figures may experience weakened social stability, drawing comparisons with trends in Western societies.



Pastor Ssempa