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It is no secret that the growth and success of a community can only be realized when women are empowered. In short, this means that gender equality must be a central focus of all development initiatives and women and girls must have equal access to the resources and benefits of development. One fundamental tool needed to build the capacity towards female empowerment is education. However, education cannot be viewed as a magic solution to achieving gender equality. Although the Ugandan government has made education more accessible in rural areas by creating free primary and secondary schools, girls continue to face many obstacles in reaching their full potential within the current education system. It is for these reasons that I have chosen to focus on the Sustainable Development Goals of achieving Gender Equality and Ensuring Inclusive and Quality Education, as the situation in Uganda reflects the importance of gender analysis in development, specifically education initiatives, as providing equal access and benefits to girls will require special measures to ensure completion of studies, deconstruct social norms, and create meaningful employment opportunities.

Based on the observations I have made during my time on Bushara Island, it has been encouraging to have conversations about the growing importance of ensuring that Ugandan girls complete secondary school. Awareness about the importance of girl's education is growing and this has had many positive effects, such as an increase in age before marriage and children. While the benefits of education cannot be denied, and accessibility should remain a central area of focus, access to schools does not guarantee that girls will receive an education. By this I mean that structural barriers within communities must be addressed in order for girls to receive the full benefits of a quality education. Until such issues are addressed, education will not be a means to reach gender equality.

One example is that, in this area, although school fees have been eliminated the level of education in public institutions is very low in comparison to private primary and secondary schools. Free public schools are severely underfunded, overcrowded, and teachers are not provided with enough resources to ensure each student receives an education. This means that even if girls in rural areas complete secondary school, it is not certain that they will be able to attend college or get a job due to the poor quality of their education. Girls also face more barriers than boys do in all levels of education, including college. Since the responsibility of domestic work is placed on women, girls are expected to stay back and miss school in order to help their mothers with household duties. This also means that if families do not have enough money to pay for any costs associated with school, such as uniforms or supplies, it is more likely that boys will be chosen to go to school. As a result, it is likely even with a secondary education, women will be kept in a cycle of poverty and unable to attain any further training or skill building to advance their social and economic position.

Furthermore, even when girls attend college the gendered labor market still limits the choices women have. For example, Bushara Island hosts many college hospitality interns in hopes that the experience will help them gain employment once graduated. Due to the fact that hospitality is the cheapest postsecondary institution and includes duties such as cleaning, cooking, and reception, it attracts more females than men. The main issue is that there are very few jobs available once these interns finish school, and positions in this employment

sector are underpaid. Without more available postsecondary choices, and lack of employment opportunities women will remain constrained by devalued domestic labor.

Even though Uganda faces several barriers on the pathway to gender equality, the growing importance of educating girls and removing school fees in public institutions leaves much space for an optimistic outlook. I believe that there are two areas that require attention in order to make education a stronger resource for achieving gender equality. First, addressing barriers to women's progress is necessary, such as the unequal division of labor that places the burden of domestic work on women and girls. In this regard, I believe it is important to invest in women's advocacy groups and build capacity for women's voices to be heard in order to become agents of social change within their communities. To support the empowerment of women, it is necessary to listen to what women want as issues in each community will vary.

Secondly, education extends beyond a classroom setting, and initiatives must be taken to reach out to the most vulnerable areas. Due to the fact that the agricultural sector employs a majority of women, it is likely that many girls in rural areas will continue in this work. More must be done to make agriculture socially and economically beneficial by investing in technologies and programs to advance women's knowledge and skills to advance their position within this sector. The creation of better economic opportunities, in both agriculture and the employment sector, will be essential areas to work on in order to achieve gender equality.

In summary, education is an important means in the process of reaching gender equality in Uganda, but as examined, having free schools is not enough. More work needs to be done to ensure obstacles social barriers are removed, public institutions are well equipped to invest in girls education, technology and skills are provided for those working in agriculture to advance economic dependency, and also an investment into meaningful postsecondary and employment choices that break down the gendered labor market.