Gender equality and women empowerment are central to FAO and its mandate at all levels. “Together, gender and women empowerment form a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women and men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.” (UN Economic and Social Council, 1997).

The gender policy environment in Uganda is largely conducive; however, women continue to be disadvantaged by exclusive property rights and limited access to forests, trees and land resources. Women’s access to various services such as credit and technology is hampered by among others, bias and discrimination and their involvement in decision-making at household, community and national levels is only slowly growing in prominence. To foster gender mainstreaming in plantation forestry in Uganda therefore, FAO, through the SPGS III Project, commissioned a Gender Assessment in Plantation Forestry in Uganda.

The study, conducted in April 2018, aimed at assessing gender equality and women empowerment status in plantation forestry in Uganda. The assessment sought to propose specific actions to help address gender gaps in activities of FAO/SPGS III and partners, in an effort to contribute to gender mainstreaming in plantation forestry in Uganda.

It was conducted in 12 districts, which represent the overall coverage of FAO/SPGS III Project. Two key processes were used, namely: the gender analysis and the capacity needs assessment of key stakeholders in the industry.

Findings from the study indicate that irrespective of the nature of the household, women’s participation in plantation forestry is marginal, compared to that of men and ownership of resources favors men.

Figure 1: Gender ownership by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non COMMERCIAL</td>
<td>41.29</td>
<td>23.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMERCIAL</td>
<td>63.41</td>
<td>17.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Longstanding social and economic obstacles such as limited involvement sources, unequal division of household labour, social norms and limited access and control of personal resource endowments and productive assets like land, continue to limit participation of women and youth in plantation forestry.

However, according to the study, both men and women have limited access to knowledge and skills in plantation forestry. More men, compared to women, have access to information and trainings. There was also limited access to functional forestry extension services. Each of the districts surveyed had only one forester at the district and all the district forestry officers were male.

The study also identified a number of good practices in the communities, mostly through the Corporate Social Responsibility, some large planters are empowering women through employment in plantations, along forestry value chain and are operating flexible hours to allow conducive female participation.

The study further analyzed gender mainstreaming among a range of stakeholders including: National Forestry Authority (NFA), Forestry Sector Support Department (FSSD) of the Ministry of Water and Environment, Uganda Timber Growers Association, youth groups, civil society organizations as well as academia and research institutions. It noted progress in gender mainstreaming processes, as some institutions had Gender Focal persons and actively supported men and women to benefit from their programmes and take part in decision-making. However, some of the organizations had poor or no gender action plans/guidelines/checklists to facilitate systematic implementation of gender equality and equity. Limited or no budget allocation to support gender mainstreaming was observed.

FAO and partners believe that Uganda can be the champion in mainstreaming gender in commercial forestry and therefore deliberate efforts are required to ensure active participation of women and youths in plantation forestry. It is therefore hoped that this analysis will stimulate gender mainstreaming in other areas of the forestry value chain in Uganda.

The study also looked at factors affecting youth involvement in plantation forestry. Findings showed that more young men, than women, engage in plantation forestry, for reasons such as to protect their land from grabbing, timber production, herbal medicine and environmental conservation. However, their participation is low due to the limited ownership of resources and investment capital. According to Edwin Muhumuza, founder and Chief Executive Officer of Youth Go Green, an initiative that seeks to improve youth livelihoods through green-ventures, efforts should be geared towards mindset change of youths, to help them better appreciate commercial forestry as a beneficial, even though long-term venture.

### Recommendations for gender mainstreaming in commercial forestry in Uganda

**GOVERNMENT:**
1. Improve the licensing criteria and process for forest reserve allocation, as affirmative action to target women, youth and vulnerable groups
2. Develop gender mainstreaming guidelines and checklists
3. Allocate adequate financial resources to gender activities
4. Conduct capacity development for staff and key partners in gender mainstreaming in commercial forestry
5. Conduct gender awareness among communities and mainstream gender topics/dynamics in capacity development of technocrats at national and district local government levels

**FAO/SPGS III:**
6. Support gender mainstreaming into operations of private companies and planters to promote Corporate Social Responsibility targeting women empowerment
7. Mainstream Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS) and engage men for women empowerment in community-based groups to break tension, enhance household joint visioning, planning and sharing of forestry benefits
8. Providing incentives to private sector to increase participation of women, community groups and youth in plantation forestry and value addition

**PRIVATE SECTOR, CIVIL SOCIETY & YOUTH:**
9. Promote advocacy for gender mainstreaming in plantation forestry
10. Promote collaboration and synergies among stakeholders in the forestry sector, on issues like land tenure, food security, etc.
11. Promote mindset change and attitudes through awareness campaigns and trainings for youths
12. Facilitate trainings on leadership and negotiation skills for the youth
13. Facilitate collaboration with youth-focused institutions, for access to land and financial services
14. Support champions for gender equality in commercial forestry