

leading women

The regimes which include Idi Amin and Obote II really destabilised the country not only politically but also caused mayhem socially and more economic devastation. The Ugandan woman bore the brunt of the socio-economic quagmire visited on the population during the repression under reckless regimes.

However, Ugandan women have over the years organised themselves in informal, semi-formal and a few formal multi purpose groupings, which engaged in cultivation, income generation, savings and cultural activities. As political space opened up after the regime change that saw President Yoweri Museveni romp into power in 1986, the greatest beneficiaries were Ugandan women, who got the opportunity to challenge the murky practices, beliefs and institutions of the past, which limited their capabilities.

Since 1986, there has been a gradual growth of women's influence in virtually all sectors of Ugandan life. The Ugandan government has become a leader in women's rights in Africa and the speed with which women's lives have been transformed over the last decade is amazing. The country has played a significant role in improving the status of women especially with the promulgation of the equality of women and men as enshrined in the constitution in 1995. In 1998 the country passed a law, which among other things recognises the right of women to own land and property.

The government also introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy in 1997 to provide free primary education to four children per family, two of whom must be girls and the affirmative action in favour of marginalised groups in the society, particularly women. All this has gone a long way in emancipating the Ugandan woman.

With women able to get education right from primary school to university on equal terms with men, a good number of women currently hold key positions in government and are leaders in other spheres like NGO's professional associations and in business.

The 7th parliament of Uganda had 74 women Members of Parliament, 13 County Representatives, 56 District Women Representatives and five Special Interests Representatives. Among the Special interests representatives, there were two women representing persons with disabilities, two women representing the youth and another one representing workers. In the just-ended 1st Parliament of the East African Legislative Assembly, Uganda was represented by nine members, including four women.

The current number of women doing business in Uganda is big and still growing and the businesses they are involved in cut across most of the sectors of the country's economy. With a population of 12,5mn representing 52 percent of the national population, a 61 percent literacy level, the future is bright for the Ugandan woman. ▶



**SAPPHIRA
NYABUNWA**
Managing Director,
SAFI CLEANERS SERVICES

WHEN Sapphira Nyabunwa was given early retirement at Uganda Commercial Bank (UCB) after serving on contract for five years, she thought life was unfair.

"When UCB delayed to confirm me, I wondered what on earth they would lose if they gave me a permanent contract. So when I was retrenched at 26, I felt bad but had no time to waste regretting".

Nyabunwa enrolled for two diploma courses, which she did concurrently and later joined Makerere University for a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. She began Safi Cleaners Services while still in college and went ahead to win a coveted award, the best young businesswoman of the year 2000. Since then, Nyabunwa has never looked back and only last year, she won the Presidential Transformers Award and Women Achiever of the Year organised by the Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Limited (UWEAL).

Slightly over a decade since she started the company, Safi Cleaners Services has a turnover of \$88 088 (Ushs160mn) per month. The company deals in cleaning lawns, fumigation, garbage collection, dry cleaning and laundry services. Its corporate clientele include Shell Uganda, Stanbic Bank, Total Uganda, World Food Programme, Celtel Uganda, Uganda Telecom, Mulago, Rubaga and Mengo Hospitals and the British High Commission.

Nyabunwa's business is labour-intensive and she currently employs over 800 people who are spread across several towns in the country. "The biggest challenge in my business is the management of human resources because it is unskilled and they need to be shaped into hardworking, honest and reliable workers." Nyabunwa notes that whereas business is good, her reason for being involved in a commercial undertaking has now gone beyond just making profits to ensuring an income for her ever-increasing workforce. "My greater burden is to ensure that I maintain contracts and get more so that my employees can get something to take home at the end of the day because we are now like one big family," she says.