Women’s Political Representation and Participation in Decentralized Systems in Africa: UGANDA
• Democratization in Uganda began with advent of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Government in 1986
• Government has since tried to fight the cause for women’s emancipation through affirmative action and enacting gender sensitive policies
• Uganda’s Constitution is one of the most gender sensitive constitutions in the world
• To harmonize the provisions of the 1995 constitution with decentralization, the local government act was passed in 1997
• Resistance Council (RC) introduced to facilitate people’s participation in national development through ensuring sound local level politics
• RC evolved into local councils which then led to the implementation of decentralization through the local government act (1997)
• This policy has provided opportunities for women to participate in local leadership from the grassroots level
• Under the RC System only 1 out of the 9 councilors had to be a woman
• Currently under the LC system, 1/3 of the councilors are expected to be women
• At LC1 and LC2 levels women’s representation has increased
• The Government of Uganda has put in place structures to facilitate the decentralization process
  – District and Sub-Country councils in rural areas
  – City and Division councils in urban settings
  – Municipal and division council in municipalities and towns
• The Local Government Act provides that 30% of the seats on local councils are reserved for women
• Despite these provisions, women are ill equipped to utilize such opportunities due to cultural and societal impediments, preventing them from full participation in the political processes
• ‘Women continue to be the Poorest of the Poor’
• Challenges:
  – Patriarchal culture of discrimination in government institutions
  – Most powerful positions in government are taken up by men
  – No system in place to build the capacity of women and confidence to participate in decision-making
Achievements:

- Increased women's representation in local councils
- Confidence building in women --> women becoming leaders in society
- Services have been brought closer to the people
- 90% of Uganda's population lives in rural areas; over 50% of these are women --> decentralizing power and responsibilities is a great opportunity for women to participate in decision making
UCOBAC Contributions

• Training female councilors
• Collaboration between organized grassroots women groups in the community and local authorities
• Local to Local Dialogues have created safe spaces for women to participate effectively
• Economic empowerment of women
• Human Rights Awareness
• Paralegal Programs
• Legal Empowerment Programs
Policy Recommendations:

• Need for policies and emphasis on increased spaces and opportunities for women to participate in local decision making
• Increased numbers should be coupled with capacity building for quality and effective representation
• Decentralization should be a process with emphasis on first building capacities of local government, before decentralizing responsibilities, power and resources