

# MUSLIM WOMEN EDUCATION IN UGANDA: HISTORY AND CONTRIBUTIONS

By

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## Abstract

*Today's educational system displays unequal chances based on socioeconomic status, family background, gender, and religion affiliation, to name a few. J. Walker, C. Pearce, K. Boe, and M. Lawson (2019:5), As a result, it's not unexpected that Muslim women in Uganda were neglected in school for a long time. Schulz is a well-known figure in the (2013: 399). This article examines the history of Muslim women's education in Uganda by tracking the evolution of education, both Islamic and formal, and Muslim women's enrollment in the early years, as well as how far they have progressed in their educational pursuits. Specific instances of educated Muslim women in Uganda from various professions in the private and public sectors, as well as their contributions, will be discussed. Several authors have depicted Muslim education in general, as well as how Muslims have been sidelined in secular education.*

**Keywords: Muslim Educated women, Islamic education, secular education, Madrassa Schools, Sheikhs, Muslim founded schools.**

## Introduction

### A brief History of the spread of Islam in Uganda

In order to address the topic comprehensively it's important to first look at a brief history of Islam in Uganda since it's in this that Islamic education has its origin. Aiseta, (2020 p. 42) notes that Islam in Uganda entered through two routes i.e. the Northern route on one hand which saw a number of Sudanese Muslim soldiers who had been sent by Khedive Islam to annex and carry pout

trade in the area, teaching the locals in both West Nile and Bunyoro the new religion, and the other was the Central route . Mpoza (2012 , p.6) further explains that according to a historian at the Islamic university , Sekatawa Muhamadi who emphasizes that the Sudanese worked hand in hand with Egyptians and Turks who had come to search for slaves in the area to informally teach Islam to those that admired the religion during their free time. Then Later, when the Nubian soldiers intermarried with the locals for example the Acholi, they strengthened the Islamic influence in the area. Soi I (2011.p.62)

The Central routes on the other hand, points out that, Islam entered Uganda in 1884 when a group of Arab traders under the leadership of Ahmed bin Ibrahim visited King Sunna who was at that time king of Buganda kingdom. Since their coming was mainly associated with trade, most of the time during the day, was spent in trade transactions. However, in the evenings as a pass time, the Arab traders would teach those that admired Islam some basics about the religion as noted by Kasozi, (1986.p.9)

## **B. History of Islamic Education in Uganda**

As earlier on indicated , Islam was spread informally as a pass time by mainly traders and soldiers, Christianity on the other hand had a fully established mission to spread the religion in Africa as emphasised by Soghayroun (2007.p. 118) & Trimmingham, (1964.p.102). However, with the passage of time as many people converted to Islam and become interested to learn more about the religion, and among these was \_a group of Ugandan Muslims who decided to go to Zanzibar to search for Islamic knowledge. From this group, none were women. Upon their return, they became instructors of Islamic education, focusing on teaching Quran memorization and basic Islamic rituals. This type of education was highly informal without a defined curriculum and used rudimentary methods of teaching. Lessons were usually conducted on the verandas of the sheikh's home or in the few

constructed mosques. This is what came to be known as Madrassa Schools (Kulumba, 1999, 13 and Mutumba N: 2013,p.4).

Upon analysis of the madrassa school enrollment it is noteworthy that both the instructors and, all the so-called students were mainly male,- there were no females. This was so because girls and women remained at their parents' home to help with housework. Only a few lucky ones would be taught the very basics like prayer by their male relatives as noted by Sengendo (2016 , 122-123).

All this was happening in the midst of the Scramble for Africa by European colonialists and Uganda was soon declared a British protectorate in 1894 as explained by Twaddle (1993,40). However, our focus on the colonial era will be confined to the establishment of formal education and the resultant impact it had on Muslim education. With the arrival of various missionary groups in the 1870's formal education was also established in Uganda. Each missionary group established schools where its followers would attain education. Among such schools included Mengo High School initially referred to as Kayanja that was built by the church missionary society in 1895. Admission in these schools was tied to religious affiliation. Thus, each child enrolled had to be baptized. This meant that many of the Muslim parents were hesitant to enroll their children in such schools for fear of being converted to Christianity thus, leading to the Muslims lagging behind in formal education (Kasozi, 1986, 36; King , Kasozi and Oded 1973,29).

With the passage of time, however, Muslim's realised that the new socio-economic dynamics demanded them to get exposed to modern opportunities which among others included formal education. Besides that, they had realised that their Christian counterparts had greater advantages on attainment of government jobs, as compared to them. (Ssekamwa, 2000,56).

In 1944, Prince Badru Kakungulu together with a group of prominent Muslims took on the initiative to not only start but also promote secular education in the already established Madrassa Qur'anic schools. This later led to the establishment of the Uganda Muslim Education Association (UMEA), which worked tirelessly to bring up Muslim founded schools with dual curriculums that taught both secular and Islamic religious education. By 1960, there were 180 primary schools, 8 junior schools, 1 secondary school and a teacher training college were in place. Not forgetting that by 1962 the Muslims had only two graduates who were Haji Kakyama Abubakar Mayanya and Honorable Kirunda Kivejinja (Bwire, 2012,150).

However, the above-mentioned Muslim run schools, though appealing to Muslim parents, still lagged behind in educational standards than those offered by their compatriots Christians. It's also important to note that Kasozi (2002, 17) noted that generally, for decades enrollment in the Muslim schools was mainly for boys since their social functions were considered of greater value compared to that of the female, educational attainment inclusive. As regards to girls, since formal schools had in most cases turned out to be centers of conversion, they feared to send their girl children to such schools. Above all, the girl child would no longer have time to lend a hand in the daily chores (Schulz, 2013,404, Kiyimba 1990,99). This was similar to what happened elsewhere in the world where male outnumbered females in education enrollment as is noted by Patsy (2015,3).

## **Discussion**

### **A.. Promotion of Muslim Female Education in Uganda**

However, to boost Muslim female enrollment in formal education, an all-girls boarding Muslim school "Nabisunsa Girls School", opened. It was founded by Prince Badru Kakungulu in 1954 with the intention to offer post primary education to the Muslim girl child. However, since up to that

time only a small number of female Muslims had completed finished primary school, the majority of the girls that attended were non-Muslims in the beginning although this later changed. Today the school alongside many other Muslim founded school have played a remarkable role in providing education to the Muslim girls who have competed with their Christian counterparts. (Kiyimba, 1990, 98). In fact, Nabisunsa was ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in a study that was carried to find out the decade's best performing ordinary level schools in Uganda between 2000 to 2015.( Musoke, R. 2015,10)

Migdad (2012: 66-67) adds that, in 1974, Muslim education had another steppingstone when the then president, Iddi Amin registered Uganda as a member state of the Organization of Islamic Conference (O.I.C). This gradually improved Muslim access to education as it opened up opportunities for Muslim (male), to attain higher Islamic education in the Arab world. Soon in 1988, Islamic University in Uganda was opened, this was a landmark, given the great roles that the university plays, particularly in education , mainly to Muslims across the region since it gave rise to Muslim elites in various professions both male and females (Byrne, 1960.p.11-12). It should be noted that by 1988, Makerere University had already been established. thus, the latter had produced 30 female Muslim students in the 1990's and by 1988 the number of Muslim female graduates from Makerere was already well established –in the various professionals. Thus, therefore IUIU only added more opportunities for access to professional jobs (Kiyimba 1990,101).

The years that followed soon saw an opportunity for an increase in girl's education. This was because slowly parents became interested in sending their girls to school. Thus, there was an increment in Muslim girls' enrollment in school. Thus , this equally saw an increase in the number of female Muslim students enrolling at Makerere University Muslim student's association. (Kiyemba, 2012, 36).

In the 1990's, many Muslim parents had indeed recognized that education was of paramount importance to all children, females inclusive. This was further boosted by a free primary education policy implemented from 1997 onwards then later a universal secondary education policy in 2007. Since then those that would not afford the expensive education would now attend such school which increased the number of schools going children, including female Muslims (Schulz 2013, 4).

It's also important to note that Nabukere (2018,22-23) and Schulz (2013, 397) both affirm that with the opening of Islamic University in Uganda- at Kabojja in Kampala as the only existing campus for females , hundreds of Muslim females had attained degrees in various fields and secured many professional jobs.

In light of this historical background it is clear that, at the start, female Muslims lagged behind in secular education, however, the trend improved from the 1980's onwards. Today, Ugandan Muslim women offer services in the various professions. They have attended schools, colleges and universities both within the country and abroad. Many Muslim women have currently attained certificates, diplomas, degrees in Uganda and others still have gone abroad or travelled miles to complete their master's and PhD's degrees in various disciplines. As noted above, the article will in the next section cite some examples of prominent Muslim Ugandan females in various fields.

## **B. Notable Muslim Educated Women**

**This section is divided into women in three areas namely academics, Ngo and Political space. The article highlights examples of Muslim women in academics by looking at their academic qualifications, and contributions towards research , the various positions they have held, Muslim women with NGO's and Muslim Women Occupying Political Space in Uganda.**

### **A. Muslim women in Academics in Uganda**

**(i) Case studies of Muslim women in Academic and their Qualifications**

To begin with when one looks at institutions of higher learning like universities and colleges in Uganda, you will notice a number of Muslim women teaching /lecturing in different fields. They hold masters and doctorate degrees from both local and international Universities. Case studies include the following. In the field of Environment, is Dr Sheilah Namagembe lecture at the Makerere University Business School, who holds a PHD in Environmental studies and also services at external examiner for the department of procurement and logistic studies at the Islamic University In Uganda. (department of procurement and logistics studies at the Islamic university in Uganda, 2019). Another prominent Muslim Lady in the academia is Dr.Wasagali Sarah Kanaabi who lecturer at Kyambogo University and has over 20 years' experience in teaching at higher institutions of learning. She has a PhD in Economics from Makerere University. ((Osiba, A. (n.d.) . In the field of Psychology is Dr. Halima Akbar who holds a PhD in Educational Psychology and serves currently as the Academic registrar of the Islamic University in Uganda. (27<sup>th</sup> Graduation Booklet, 2019, p. 48). At the Islamic University in Uganda females Campus is Dr Madina Nabukera who is the campus director and has a PhD in Public Administration from the University of Malaya in Malaysia. She also lectures at Kyambogo University in the department of management. (cf. The Observer Newspaper 24 July 2017). Today, at the Kabale University, in the department of Zoology is also Associate professor Sarah Nachuha who holds a PhD in Zoology has gone an extra mile ahead and competed with men by transcending traditional barriers and beliefs that women usually go for soft professions (Bernard 1971:8). Dr Amal Nsereko is another renown educated Muslim lady in Uganda. She is a lady with a competitive mind, a quality assurance expert. She hold a PhD in Business Administration from the Atlantic International University U.S.A . She currently works as the Director of Quality Assurance at the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU). (27<sup>th</sup> Graduation

Booklet, 2019, p. 12). Others include Dr Saidat Nakitto holds a PhD in International Criminal Law from the University of Brunel London. (7<sup>th</sup> Graduation Booklet, 2019, p. 48) and Dr Wardah who holds a Phd in International Affairs and Development from the Clark Atlanta university (USA) and currently works as the director Higher degrees and Research at the Kampala International University. (*Kampala international University, 2019*).

**(ii) Examples of Research works, articles written and positions held by Muslim Women in the Academia**

**The above mentioned Muslim women have greatly contributed in the field of research by writing various articles and also they have occupied important positions given their qualifications as discussed below. In the field of research , Dr. Sheillah Namagembe** has co-authored a number of articles like “fuel efficiency vehicle adoption and carbon emissions in a country context 2020 among others (World Association Sustainable Development, 2020) . Dr. Wasagali Sarah Kanaabi wrote an article titled “Are women better tax collectors. The case the Uganda Revenue Authority, she has also served as Coordinator for Research and lecturer at the department of economics and statistics at Kyambogo University and as a board member for the Electricity Regulatory Authority a post she has held since 2015 to 2020 when she was appointed as the chairperson of the Uganda Electricity Regulatory Authority. Dr. Halima Wakabi Akbar has also written and published many articles among which is a study on the “Educational Difficulties Experienced by Aids Orphans in Ugandan Secondary Schools” . Dr Halima also participated as a patternner in a research about the governance models and the quality of leadership in African universities (College of



Education and External Studies, 2014). Associate Professor Sarah Nachuha authored many articles in her field, which include among others, “Distribution of Colonial Water Birds in Relation to Ugandan Rice Scheme” published in (2012). She also worked as a Project Manager for the Uganda Environment Conservational Trust in 2016, a project that worked tirelessly to ensure that there was safe solar purified water for domestic usage. (Aug-Sept 2015: Eco Trust Bulletin, the Environment Conservation Trust Uganda.). (Eco Trust Bulletin, 2015). Dr Saidat Nakitto has a research passion in International Humanitarian Law focusing on human rights. She is the current Dean of the Faculty of Law at the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU). (27<sup>th</sup> Graduation Booklet, 2019, p. 53). She has co-authored an article titled “The African Court of Justice and Human and Peoples Rights International Criminal Law Section: Promoting Impunity for African Union Heads of State and Senior State Officials” . (Ssenyonjo, M, Nakito, S, 2016 ) To add to the above , Dr Madina Nabukera is also credited for working hand in hand with Tika and Sena foundations for opening up a hands on tailoring campus where both students and the local community around the university campus have benefited. (Internet Source accessed on 2020/04/2018).

#### **.B. B. Muslim Women who have Created their own NGOs**

It’s also prudent at this juncture, to mention that educated Muslim women in Uganda, have also been in the forefront of creating many women associations. Many of these associations and organizations, have championed the empowerment of women and ensured that women’s rights are protected. Notable among such associations is the Uganda Muslim Woman Civilization Initiative, an association that was established in 2015 and has worked towards campaigning against gender-based violence. They also

seek to empower women by making available opportunities like jobs where they can earn a living that makes them ably stand up for their rights .

### **Shamila Namutebi**

According to Shamila Namutebi a Muslim lawyer who is the executive director of the above organization, the association has carried out outreach activities and fundraising events to empower and support women from domestic violence. For example, girls and women have been given computer training courses which has made them employable. The organization has also given women especially in Lwengo district, vacant land to grow different crops for both domestic and economic use. (U.s Mission speech, 2015).

### **Farida Nambi**

According to an online newspaper article written by Muleyi, (2020), the author indicates that the Nambi Children initiative for orphans is yet another Ngo that was founded by yet another Muslim elite lady Farida Nambi. She is the executive director for the organization. She has a bachelors and master's degree in business administration. She has earned a name both internally and locally due to her humanitarian works. The organization was set up to give a hand to the vulnerable children. The Nambi initiative has supported over 100 orphans by giving them bursaries. It has also played a great role in empowering women by providing poverty eradication programs such as, training them in bakery and weaving. Farida has played a tremendous role in advocating for gender equality by soliciting support both internally and externally to help in combating violence against women and children.

## **Hajjati Joweria Bagonza & Hajjati Khadija Kibira**

The Uganda Muslim Women Vision was founded in 1996 by Hajjati Joweria Bagonza and Hajjati Khadija Kibira who is currently a PhD student in Geographical studies among others. This association mainly aimed at empowering women and help improve their living conditions. Their vision was mainly to produce an elite woman who would bring social change and inspire others. To achieve this, they started from the grass root where annually they would organise seminars with students, right from the primary, secondary and Universities and equip them with basic skills such as leadership and entrepreneurship skills among others. They have played a great role in soliciting funds which are used to provide basic necessities such as food and clothes to the needy communities (Nankinga, M. 2010).

### **B. C Muslim Women Occupying Political Space in Uganda**

In this subdivision, attention will focus on Muslim Women occupying political space in Uganda. It's worth noting that the Ugandan parliament by 2012 had only one Muslim minister out of the five state ministers by then . Malaba (2010) noted that the number of Muslim women contestants in general elections had increased. This means that from 2012, there has been a steady increase in Muslim women in different political positions as the number in the 10<sup>th</sup> parliament increased to 8. (Internet Source : accessed on 2020 /05/12 ). Here are a few examples:

#### **Hon. Rukia Nakadama**

Rukia Nakadama, an educator and businesswoman, who holds a B.A in (Public Administration and Diploma in Education). She has served in different political

positions such as being Minister of Gender and Culture and woman MP for Mayuge district where she actively empowered women and acted as their voice in parliament. In 2018 she was appointed as the Pakistan Envoy to Uganda (Kazibwe,2018).

### **Hon.Hanifa Kawooya**

Among other Muslim women in politics, is honorable Hanifa Kawooya. She who holds a master's degree in international Relations and Diplomacy. She is also a woman activist and politician in her own right. She served as a woman member of parliament (MP), deputy resident district commissioner and 3<sup>rd</sup> deputy of the women caucus at the Pan African Parliament based in Midrand, South Africa, where she advocated for the implementation of laws that protected women human rights (Hanifa Kawooya,2020).

### **Hajjati Janat Mukwaya**

Janat Mukwaya is also another high-profile lady who has served in politics for over 30 years. Though currently retired, she worked in different posts such as member of parliament, minister of gender, labour, general duties, trade and industries. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors and a Master of Arts degree in Public Policy and Management from the University of London. Janat is remembered for her tireless efforts towards gender equality where she solicited support from both internal and external sources like the UN in combating violence against women and children so as to preserve their human rights (Janat Mukwaya, 2020).

### **B. D. Ugandan Muslim Women in Medicine**

In the medical world, among others is Dr. Hajat Mastula Nakitto Kasujja Kitunzi a qualified gynecologist. After completing a degree in medicine at Makerere, she then

proceeded to Makerere University Medical School where she specialized in Obstetrics and Gynecology. Later she attained a master's degree in the same specialization which made her the first Muslim female Gynecologists in Uganda. Today she serves as a senior consultant at Mulago Referral hospital. (Mutumba 2014). Today, however, there are a number of Muslim lady's gynecologists serving in different hospital.

Another famous Muslim woman medical doctor in Uganda is Dr Nalwogo Hawa. She holds a Master of Medicine in Pathology from Makerere University and a PhD in the same field from the University of Bergen, in Norway. She works as a lecturer at Makerere University Medical School and Islamic University in Uganda Medical School. Dr Hawa is a senior consultant at Aseklen group. Her main research interests today is in breast cancer where she has not only studied the different subtypes but also made a comparative analysis with in them (Centre for Biomarkers, 2015).

### **B. E. Muslim Women Journalists**

Uganda is also blessed with a number of Muslim female journalists who have excellently performed in various medias like the print, television and radio among others. In the field of journalism, the Muslim women community also has a number of representatives in the field.

#### **Ms.Kantono Rehema**

Prominent among is Islamic University in Uganda public relations officer Ms. Kantono Rehema who has a bachelor's in mass communication and master's in journalism and media. She is a high-profile lady who has worked tirelessly to ensure smooth flow of information between the university and the general public. She has successful

researched and written various articles prominent among them “Gender Mainstreaming and Journalism in Education”, “Media Representation of Female Candidates in 2016 Parliamentary Elections” and an “An analysis of three newspapers”. ((27<sup>th</sup> Graduation Booklet, 2019, p. 48).

### **Ms. Farida Nakazibwe**

Farida Nakazibwe is another Ugandan Muslim journalist who for over ten years has managed to remain at the top of the game due to her workstyle, hard work and talent. She has a bachelor’s degree in mass communication and for long has worked as a news anchor and talk show moderator on National Television and Spark Television. She’s considered as one of the most successful media personalities in Uganda. Statistics indicate that her NTV Luganda news and morning talk show are one of the most viewed tv programs. She has a soft spoken and kind voice yet perfect and one of the most influential women in Ugandan media . (Flash Uganda Media,2019).

### **CONCLUSION**

This article explored the issue of Muslim women education in Uganda. It attempted to discuss first, the historical development of Muslim education in Uganda focusing on how the Muslim girl child traversed to attain secular and Islamic education. In addition to this, efforts to uplift Muslim secular education both individual, organizational and institutional were discussed. UMEA took the lead in transforming the purely Madrassa School to Muslim founded schools where both Islamic and secular education would be taught and later saw the establishment of a variety of such schools. This enabled Muslims to somehow rise to the occasion and compete with their Christian

counterparts. The study also highlighted the tremendous role played by the late former President Iddi Amin, particularly, in securing scholarship's for Ugandan students to go and study in various Arab countries as well as his efforts in registering the country to be a member of OIC which later saw the opening of Islamic University in Uganda, which together with other universities are credited for training Muslim women in various professions. The paper also discussed the history of Muslim women education in Uganda and how far they have gone in the attainment of education now. It should be noted that for quite a long period of time, Muslims, especially, Muslim women in Uganda, were given little attention when it came to in the attainment of secular and religious education. With recent transformation however, trends have changed drastically to an extent that there is now an increased awareness about the need to educate the girl child. This development has given an opportunity to Muslim women in Uganda to become professionals in various fields and today a reasonable number of Muslim women have gone an extra mile beyond the ordinary undergraduate degree to get themselves Master's and PhD degrees—. This in turn, has made them to hold comparatively strong positions combining their Muslim identity with a professional career.

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