

SPECIAL  
RELEASE



INSTITUTE  
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## Revitalizing Uganda's Markets: IST's Transformative Journey to influencing the Repeal the 1942 Markets Act.



***Finally H.E the President puts a pen to it.***

Institute for Social Transformation's tireless advocacy and collaborations with stakeholders has redefined the landscape for market vendors, especially women and youth.....

- After 80 years under the outdated Markets Act of 1942, Uganda's market vendors, particularly women and youth, can celebrate a landmark victory.

The ancient law failed to address modern challenges, leaving vendors grappling with unclear governance, gender-insensitive policies and other inequalities. Read more as we take you through this transformative journey.

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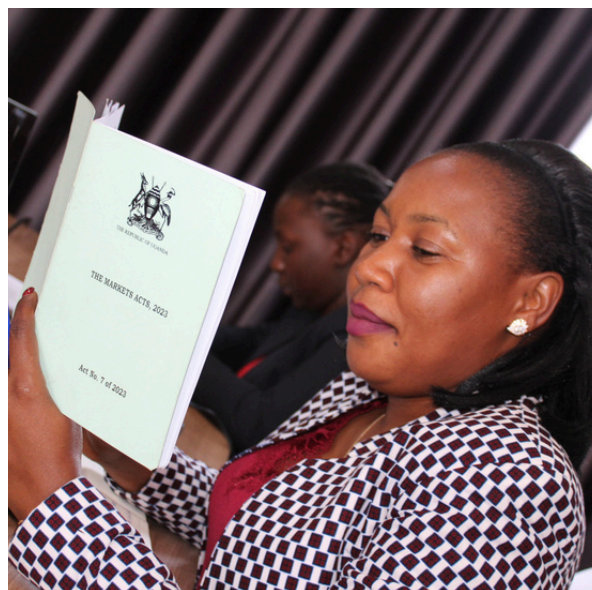


## Introduction

In a landmark achievement for economic empowerment and gender equality, Uganda has successfully repealed the outdated Markets Act of 1942, ushering in the new Markets Act 2023. This transformative journey was spearheaded by the Institute for Social Transformation (IST), whose tireless advocacy and collaboration with stakeholders have redefined the landscape for market vendors, especially women and youth.

The revitalization of Uganda's markets marks a significant turning in the country's socio-economic landscape, recognizing that the informal economy employing approximately 89% of the labor force primarily consists of women and youth (UBOS, 2020). For decades, these groups have faced significant barriers due to the outdated Markets Act of 1942, a remnant of colonial legislation that failed to accommodate modern market dynamics and thus affecting the growth and empowerment of these vital groups.

**IST supported by partners like Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Urgent Action Fund (UAF), OXFAM- Uganda, UN Women and National level CSOS in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government, has been very instrumental in advocating for the repeal of this archaic law and the successful enactment of the new Markets Act of 2023.**



### The urgent need for reform

For over 80 years, Uganda's markets operated under the colonial-era Markets Act of 1942, whose framework failed to address the following contemporary realities faced by market vendors;

- **Governance structure gaps.**
- **Unclear Taxation policies**
- **Ineffective Dispute resolution mechanisms**
- **Lack of Safe provisions for nursing mothers**
- **limited Market accessibility**
- **High rental costs**

The above challenges deepened economic inequalities and hindered the growth of informal enterprises, with women vendors disproportionately affected by gender-insensitive regulations, highlighting the need for a modern, inclusive legislative framework

IST recognized these systemic issues and advocated for a legislative overhaul and influenced the review and repeal of the Markets Act of 1942 which began in earnest in 2017.

### Advocacy Process: IST at the Centre stage



IST's advocacy journey towards repealing the Markets Act was marked by a series of strategic actions that effectively influenced the legislative process:

From 2015, IST focused on promoting inclusive civic engagement and enhancing women's leadership in markets. This work laid the groundwork for a comprehensive advocacy campaign aimed at reforming the outdated Markets Act.

### Consultative meetings

IST organized a series of consultative forums that brought together market vendors, civil society organizations, and government officials to discuss the pressing challenges faced by market stakeholders and contributed to the drafting of the new bill.

Through various initiatives, IST sought to create a comprehensive platform for dialogue and action that would facilitate a new legislative framework better suited to the needs of Uganda's informal economy by engaging in consultations with market vendors, civil society organizations (CSOs), policymakers, and relevant ministerial agencies. This process not only aimed to repeal the old law but also to create a more inclusive framework that integrates the perspectives and needs of both male and female vendors.



Stakeholders' sensitization engagement

### Research and Evidence Gathering

Through formative research conducted by IST from 2025 to 2028, IST provided compelling data on the gender-based barriers faced by women in markets. This evidence was crucial in demonstrating the necessity of a new regulatory framework to policymakers. The compelling evidence provided by the study also underscored the urgency and thus playing a key role in influencing policymakers of the need for change

## Collaboration with Key Stakeholders

IST's partnerships with Development partners like FES, UAF, OXFAM, and UN Women facilitated a multi-level dialogue engagement with a wide range of stakeholders that included government agencies, market leaders, and community representatives. This broad engagement was essential in advocating for a comprehensive review of the existing law, and ensuring that diverse perspectives were considered in the reform process.



**Stakeholders at the launch of the Markets Act. 2023 at Fair Way Hotel**

## The Turning Point: The passage of the Markets Act 2023

On May 22, 2023, His Excellency the President of Uganda assented to the Markets Bill 2023, which officially took effect on June 8, 2023. This landmark achievement was celebrated at a national breakfast meeting organized by the Ministry of Local Government (MOLG) in collaboration with IST and FES, which attracted 115 stakeholders from various sectors, including government, civil society, and market communities.

On this day, the IST board Chairperson - Dr. Thelma Awori appreciated the support, dedication and commitment rendered towards the signing of the market act 2023, substantial milestone in Uganda's journey towards a thriving market economy



*This new markets Act will avail avenue for fair competition, innovation, and entrepreneurship. It will create a level playing field for all market participants, while encouraging market-driven initiatives that will propel Uganda's economy to new heights.*

**Dr. Thelma Awori**

IST's long standing relationship with UN women, which was represented, in addressing challenges faced by women markets vendors to increase profitability of their businesses, safety and security was manifested in this new law as it shines inclusivity and progress as well as acknowledging the undeniable potential within women



***This Act is ought to be celebrated as it reflects our commitment to address the systematic discrimination and necessitates the creation of an environment where women ideas, efforts and talents can flourish, and be recognized and taken on board.***

**Adekemi Ndieli – UN Women Uganda Country representative**

The occasion was graced by Hon. Raphael Magyezi, the Minister of Local Government, who emphasized the significance of the new law in revitalizing market operations and fostering sustainable economic development.

***This new law will address various challenges like revenue collection, corruption, utilities and also it provides for the construction of day care centers where the women will keep their children while doing business. Finally, I call upon your support in the massive sensitization of all relevant stakeholders especially vendors across the country***



**Hon. Raphael Magyezi**

There was enthusiastic expression of support and commitment by different level stakeholders signaling a collective commitment for the effective implementation the Markets Act 2023 effectively and thus transforming Uganda's market landscape and marked a significant step forward in empowering informal sector workers. Amid all these developments, market leaders from Kasubi and Nakawa expressed their appreciation for being included and considered and on the same note, they called for similar representation at the KCCA decision-making table, as Mr. Zzibu Ronald highlights below;



“As a vendor and leader, I appreciate being part of this positive change and legislation, and I can assure you that we will fully comply with its implementation. Since we have been involved in this process, I urge the same inclusivity to be extended to the KCCA leadership, so that vendors in markets can also have a voice in decisions that affect us.”

**Zzibu Ronald**

The minister established a committee led by local government officials to oversee the roadmap alongside a team from KCCA and IST. Copies of the new Market Act 2023 were distributed to the various partners who contributed to the bill's amendment. The event climaxed with the minister officially launching the Market Act 2023 by signing it, along with all the partners in attendance.

### **Implementation and Ongoing Engagements**

Following the enactment of the law, the Ministry of Local Government, in collaboration with IST, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and OXFAM initiated a critical process of drafting regulations to guide the effective enforcement of the Markets Act, 2023.

IST played a central role in organizing awareness and consultative meetings with Local governments and market leaders across multiple districts, ensuring that their voices were heard in shaping the new regulatory framework.

The series of meetings focused on educating participants about the law's key provisions while seeking their insights and recommendations for its effective implementation. Among the major issues addressed were political interference in market operations, corruption, and the fair allocation of market spaces.

At a recent stakeholder meeting, women vendors voiced their concerns about the ongoing absence of breastfeeding facilities in most markets. One noted that;

***Despite the high costs we pay to secure market stalls, we are still forced out of our spaces when we need to care for, breastfeed, or work alongside our children.***

*Market Vendor*

The call to action from all the key stakeholders was the urgent need for swift measures to create a more supportive environment for women vendors, particularly those balancing work with childcare responsibilities.

In November 2023, a two-day residential meeting convened to draft regulations, gathering input from over 60 participants representing diverse stakeholders from various cities and municipalities. This collaborative effort and dialogue not only ensured that the needs of market vendors-who are the most affected and critical stakeholders-were integrated into the regulations, but also fostered a sense of ownership and commitment hence creating a fairer and more transparent marketplace for all involved.

As the sensitizations of the stakeholders continues, the supportive Achim Vogt, FES Country Representative had this to say on the new Markets Act;



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***We believe the new Markets Act will provide unwavering commitment to build a robust and sustainable market ecosystem, anchored on transparency, accountability and the protection of the key stakeholders.***

*Achim Vogt, FES Country Representative.*

## **Conclusion: A New Dawn for Uganda's Markets**

The repeal of the 1942 Markets Act and the introduction of the Markets Act 2023 signify a new dawn for Uganda's market landscape. The Markets Act 2023 represents a transformative opportunity for market vendors, particularly women and youth, to actively engage in market management and administration. With the unwavering support of IST and FES, this new legal framework aims to address longstanding challenges in Uganda's markets, fostering a more equitable and efficient environment for all stakeholders.

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With IST at the forefront of this transformative journey, we are committed to fostering an inclusive marketplace that empowers all vendors, particularly women and youth. With this dedication, we call upon all interested stakeholders and development partners to come on board so that we can steer and continue advocating for the successful implementation of the Markets Act and ensuring that all stakeholders are informed and engaged in shaping the future of Uganda's market landscape. By working collaboratively to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the new law and promoting inclusive practices, Uganda can pave the way for sustainable economic development that benefits its citizens and strengthens the informal economy. We look forward to a future where markets are equitable, inclusive, and supportive of all vendors, particularly women and youth. Together, we can create a thriving marketplace that uplifts communities and drives sustainable development.

IST extends heartfelt thanks to Urgent Action Fund, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, UN Women, OXFAM Uganda, CSOs and all partners who have supported this transformative journey over the past five years. Your unwavering commitment has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of women and youth in Uganda's informal sector.

***Together, we are creating a safer, more equitable environment for all market vendors!***



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