YOUTH 4 POLICY

FEBRUARY 2020

YOUTH FOR POLICY PERSPECTIVES

COLLECTION OF BRIEFING PAPERS ON KEY POLICY CHALLENGES IN UGANDA

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AUTHORS LEFT TO RIGHT

Tonny Okwir, Dinnah Nabwire, Harriet Kamashanyu, Sandra Namarome and Daniel Adyera

CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

Y4P | YOUTH 4 POLICY

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

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OVERVIEW

Public policy making is inherently a mandate of public officials either as part of public service bureaucracy or as elected representatives of national and sub-national governments. However, policy decision-makers do not operate in a vacuum. They are influenced by multiple stakeholders including international players like the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), influential lobby groups and civil society. The idea of Youth4Policy (Y4P) is to build capacities and facilitate a platform for young people to influence public policies in Uganda.

Uganda is struggling with a large youth population that has outmatched existing opportunities and the capacity of the state to provide essential services. Yet, existing public policies are failing to address the needs and aspirations of the young population. If young people are going to contribute towards a new way forward, they will need to be able to evaluate existing evidence scrupulously and recommend policy alternatives based on scientific analysis.

This publication presents a collection of policy briefing papers by young leaders under the Youth4Policy initiative. The authors attempt to address diverse topics and challenges affecting youth as well as the broader social, political and economic development of Uganda.

Daniel Adyera explores policy options for countering criminal radicalisation and inter-ethnic extremism among South Sudanese youth in refugee settlements in Uganda. The paper contends that the existing laws and policies regulating refugees in the country are to a large extent reactionary and non-target-specific.

Dinnah Nabwire reviews Uganda's psychosocial support policy in addressing sexual violence in the country's conflict-affected settings. The study establishes that inadequate psychosocial support not only protracts the effects of sexual violence in and after conflict; it also increases risk and vulnerability to the occurrence of incidents.

Harriet Kamashanyu scrutinises disadvantaged women groups that are excluded from the financial system in Uganda and the role of financial inclusion in supporting women's empowerment. As many women still lag behind in gaining access to financial products and services, the study programmes to support capability development, create and increase productivity, thus increasing sustainable demand (as opposed to supply) for financial services and products, and reducing poverty.

Sandra Namarome tackles youth unemployment by taking a closer lookg at the Skilling Uganda Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) Strategic Plan. This paper finds that the BTVET programme needs to be restructured to accommodate a supportive and enabling environment for the BTVET graduates to act on their business ideas in a bid to become successfully self-employed.

Tonny Okwir argues that limited access to information on government programmes by the citizens contributes to increasing cases of accountability deficits, resulting in poor public service delivery by local governments in Uganda. His research recommends strengthening the institution of village executive committees as a channel for communicating all government plans, policies and programmes. In addition, there is a need to establish Sub-County Integrity Promotion Forums (SIPFs) to coordinate anti-corruption efforts and effective leadership.

CONTENTS

YOUTH FOR POLICY PERSPECTIVES

COLLECTION OF BRIEFING PAPERS ON KEY POLICY
CHALLENGES IN UGANDA

The Case for Robust Policy Options for Countering Criminal Radicalisation and Inter-ethnic Extremism among South Sudanese Youth in Refugee Settlements in Uganda

Daniel Adyera

This policy brief explores policy options for countering criminal radicalisation and inter-ethnic extremism among South Sudanese youth in refugee settlements in Uganda. The paper adopts a working definition of 'criminal radicalisation' and 'inter-ethnic extremism'. The paper contends that the existing laws and policies regulating refugees in the country are to a large extent reactionary and non-target-specific, and do not adequately tackle the increasing crime and existing inter-ethnic extremism among South Sudanese. The researcher used qualitative research methodology consisting of open-ended questionnaires and literature review. Data was collected from key informants in refugee settlements and analysed with existing literature on refugee radicalisation, criminal coping and violent extremism in other refugee-hosting jurisdictions. Two key findings emerged from this study. First, the study found that there are combinations of mixed factors contributing to the criminal radicalisation of South Sudanese refugee youth. These factors are multivariate and operate at an interactional though different matrix levels, that is, at the micro and meso levels. Second, the study found that there are two categories of radical South Sudanese refugee youth, that is, the passive radicals and the active radicals. In an attempt to address South Sudanese refugee criminal radicalisation and inter-ethnic extremism, this policy brief recommends: i) mass sensitisation of all refugees in all settlements to Uganda's basic laws, particularly criminal law and land law; ii) the extension of inter-cultural/ethnic dialogue for South Sudanese refugees in all refugee settlements; and iii) empowerment of all refugee youth through meaningful engagement and active participation in decision making and implementation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

There are growing concerns about the rising level of crime and inter-ethnic extremism among South Sudanese refugees in refugee settlements in Uganda.[1] This problem foments insecurity and sustains tension within the refugee settlements and surrounding host communities. Uganda is currently host to over 1.3 million refugees, most of whom are youth, from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Rwanda and Somalia, among others.[2] In the past few years, there have been some reports in the media[3] and from agencies such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNCHR)[4] about the rising crime rates and violence in refugee settlements, perpetrated by the youth, mainly from South Sudan. For instance, in 2018, refugees in Bidi Bidi camp[5] staged a violent strike over delayed and missed food rations, which led to massive looting, destruction of property and physical assaults on both UNHCR and World Food Programme (WFP) staff.[6] In other instances, several South Sudanese refugees have been intercepted or arrested for illegal possession of firearms and military attire and others for recruiting South Sudanese refugee youths into military organisations such as the Sudanese

People's Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO).[7] In an attempt to counter the growing criminality, in July 2017, the UNHCR donated twelve patrol vehicles to the Uganda Police Force (UPF) to help patrol border areas and maintain peace, security, law and order in refugee settlements.[8]

There have been some intervention measures to curb crime and inter-ethnic extremism within the refugee settlements by the Ugandan government, donor agencies and community-based organisations (CBOs). For instance, the government has had police stations established within almost every refugee settlement. Donor agencies have also engaged in programmes aimed at equipping refugees with entrepreneurial skills to start their own businesses and desist from criminal activities. Also, international organisations like Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) have advocated dialogue and inter-ethnic tolerance by organising and hosting community radio talk shows (Kabake) in some refugee settlements, hence facilitating dialogue among South Sudanese refugees.[9]

However, much still remains to be done to reduce criminal radicalism and inter-ethnic conflicts in refugee settlements. The situation is exacerbated by the ongoing civil war in South Sudan and the porous Uganda-South Sudan border, where unsubstantiated reports suggest that some South Sudanese rebels hiding and recruiting young South Sudanese to fight in the South Sudan war.[10]

1.2. Uganda's refugee policy at a glance

Uganda's refugee laws (Refugees Act 2006 and Refugees Regulations 2010) and policies[11] have been lauded and branded as 'progressive' and a model for refugee-hosting countries around the world.[12] These laws and policies largely aim at promoting the social and economic welfare of refugees and fostering social integration within the host communities. The laws spell out rights, duties and freedoms for refugees such as access to education, health, land for agriculture and freedom of movement. However, notwithstanding Uganda's benevolence towards refugees, some scholars, such as Loescher and Milner (2005), have warned that there is need to understand and appreciate the 'security implications of hosting refugees'.[13] They argue, like Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo (1986),[14] that there are risks 'posed by the spill-over of conflict and [the problem] of refugee warriors'[15] in refugee settlements. For instance, allegations about the presence of South Sudanese rebels and reports of refugee recruitment drives in settlements have the potential to create hostile relations and misunderstandings between the Government of Uganda and that of South Sudan. Also, the socio-economic and environmental impacts of hosting refugees have been highlighted by some migration scholars.[16] They argue that the pressures and burdens of hosting refugees are heavy on host communities, leading to tension, conflicts and crime perpetration. There are numerous reports of cases of competition for land, energy resources (firewood), local services and infrastructure between refugees and their host communities, which have led to crime, strained relations and violence.[17]

Fig. 1: Statistics showing refugees and asylum seekers in Uganda
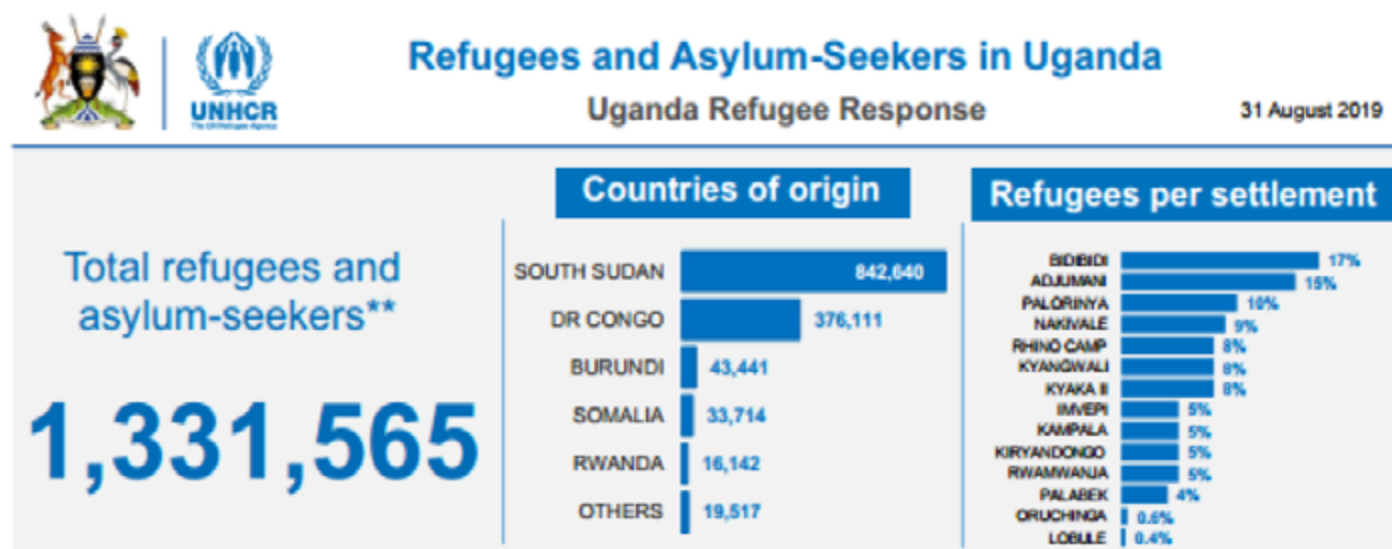
Source: OPM/UNHCR, 2019

Fig. 2: Map showing the distribution of refugee settlements in Uganda
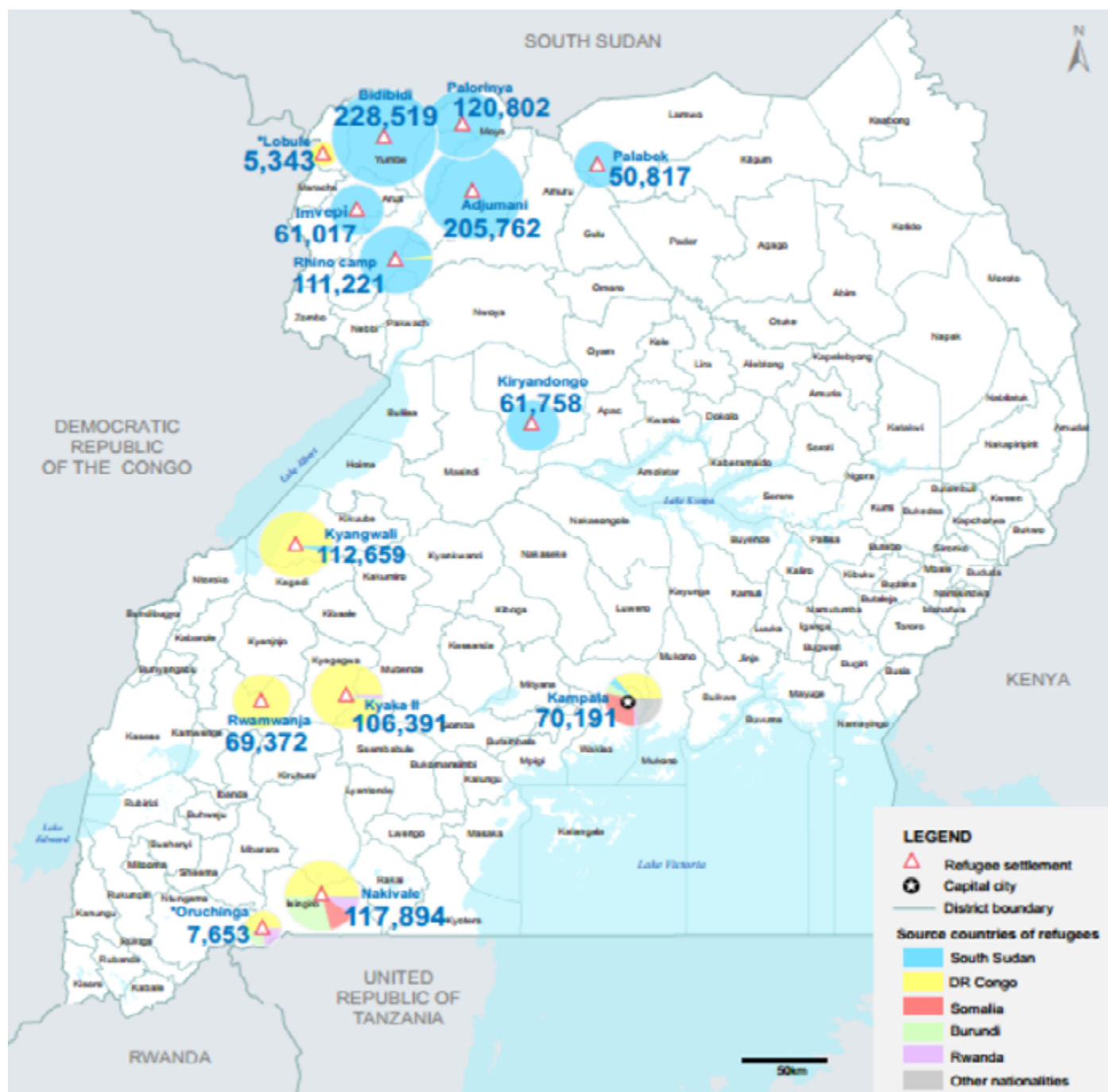
Source: OPM/UNCHR-Statistics, 2019 (ProGres version 4)

2. Methodology and Terminology

2.1. Methodology

In this study, the researcher used qualitative research methodology consisting of open-ended questionnaires and literature review. The questionnaire consisted of demographic information and questions related to causes of refugee youth criminal radicalisation/inter-ethnic extremism and current policy interventions to counter these problems. Data from key informants in refugee settlements was obtained and analysed with the existing literature review on refugee radicalisation in countries such as Turkey and Jordan and inter-ethnic extremism in Kakuma refugee settlement in north-western Kenya. The study was limited by a number of factors such as limited access to all key stakeholders and inadequate time to visit all refugee settlements with South Sudanese.

2.2. Terminology

There are continuing debates and complexities surrounding the meaning of the terms 'radicalisation' and 'extremism', and not much consensus has been reached.[18] To date, radicalisation and extremism have been conceived and evaluated mainly through military and political action, and terrorism lenses. According to Dr Alex P. Schmid,[19] 'there is lack of clarity and consensus with regard to key concepts of radicalisation [and] extremism'. He argues that 'radicalism is not a synonym for terrorism' despite the fact that 'much of the literature on radicalisation focuses on Islamist extremism and jihadist terrorism'.[20] These debates are not presented here. However, emerging research on radicalisation has shown some links between radicalisation and common/petty crime perpetration and criminal coping.[21] Hence, for the purposes of this paper, a crime perspective of radicalisation is adopted. Therefore, criminal radicalisation refers to the belief in, support for and adoption of an uncompromising mind-set towards crime perpetration against any target as a means of survival, revenge, gratification or any other purpose. And inter-ethnic extremism is defined as the 'belief in, support for and acceptance of violence against individuals of a different ethnicity'.[22]

2.3. Objective of the study

The objective of this study was to explore robust policy options to counter criminal radicalisation and inter-ethnic extremism among South Sudanese youth in refugee settlements in Uganda.

Crime and inter-ethnic violence not only affect 95 per cent of refugees who live in the settlements[23] but also threatens the security of surrounding host communities.[24].Key drivers of criminal radicalisation include factors such as extreme poverty, shortage of employment opportunities, limited access to education and inadequate access to factors of production.[25] These problems are manifested in the increasing crime rates and inter-ethnic extremist violence in the majority of South Sudan refugee settlements. South Sudanese inter-ethnic extremism is mainly caused by the deep political disagreements, especially between the ruling Dinka and the Nuer ethnic groups. According to the Refugee Law Project 2018 Annual Report, a total of 1,221 criminal cases were registered within the various refugee settlements.[26] The crimes reported include cases of violent rape (46 cases), murder (81 cases), malicious damage (63 cases) and robbery (32 cases), among others. For instance, in October 2019, Ian Natukunda, the officer in charge of Palorinya refugee settlement in Obongi district was shot and fatally wounded by a South Sudanese refugee, whom he attempted to disarm after he had stolen a gun from a female police officer. In response, the Inspector General of Police, Martins Okoth-Ochola urged the UPF to intensify vigilance and prohibit any form of violence within the refugee settlements.

Inter-ethnic extremism and tension within the refugee community have resulted in extreme violence.[27] For instance, in June 2018, the UNHCR condemned the extreme youth violence between the Dinka and Nuer tribal factions in Rhino Camp that left four people dead and scores injured, and led to the mass displacement of women and children.[28] The violence was triggered by a fight between two young men watching a World Cup game. Other incidents have been triggered by fights between women at water collection points and between school-going children. A teacher interviewed by the International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) explained that '[w]hen children play together and

one is injured, for example a Kakwa and an Avokaya, they [their parents] fight'. Another added that '[t]here is friction, and only a small thing can trigger it. The problems of South Sudan are in our minds.' In other incidents, a Nuer woman living in Tika zone told IRRI: 'Some people who chased us from South Sudan were doing the same things here. We [they] said that once we would react, there would be consequences'.[29] Other forms of violence have also been reported among South Sudanese refugees of similar language and origins in Imvepi refugee settlement.[30] Also, some reports exist on tensions between host-community members and refugees emanating from sharing scarce resources such as land and public services, which have led to the commission of more crimes.[31]

2.4. Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

Primary research question

What robust policy options can be explored to counter criminal radicalisation and inter-ethnic extremism among South Sudanese youth in refugee settlements?

Secondary research questions

1. How are criminal radicalisation and inter-ethnic extremism being dealt with?

2. How can the government improve current refugee policies to address criminal radicalisation and inter-ethnic extremism?

3. Critique of the Existing Legal and Policy Framework

There are two main pieces of legislations and various policies regulating the existence of refugees in Uganda. The Refugees Act 2006 and the Refugees Regulations 2010 are the statutory sources of refugee rights, duties, obligations and protection in Uganda. The laws are supplemented by polices such as the Self Reliance Strategy (SRS) implemented by the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment Strategic Framework (ReHoPE).[32] At best, the laws mainly regulate security measures at refugee entry points whereas the policies prioritise the socio-economic development of refugees. There are no clear policies specifically addressing criminal radicalisation and inter-ethnic extremism exhibited through resorting to crime and inter-ethnic violence.

3.1. The legal framework

Refugee Regulations 2010

S. 19 provides for the surrender of firearms at the registration entry points by refugee status applicants. Inasmuch as this law is entrenched in the refugee laws, media reports have cited cases of several South Sudan refugees entering Uganda with small firearms that they use to commit crimes and intimidate fellow refugees.[33]

S. 20 (i) and s.22 provide for screening of refugees seeking admission at every refugee border entry point and the separation of civilian refugees and disarmed combatants respectively. This is aimed at maintaining a purely civilian character of the refugee population in settlements. These provisions are largely premised on the securitisation, control and maintenance of peace and reducing insecurity risks during mass refugee admission into the country but not addressing the internal crime and security risks posed. Recently, the Government of South Sudan echoed their concerns and dismay towards Uganda, claiming that there are South Sudanese rebels dwelling in Ugandan refugee settlements, using it as a launching pad for numerous armed attacks and destabilising security in South Sudan.[34]

3.2. The policy framework

a) Criminal prosecutions

Refugees accused of committing crimes are prosecuted in courts of law by the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (DPP) on behalf of the Government of Uganda. However, the challenge is that criminal prosecutions need a lot of resources for investigations and trials yet the criminal courts are currently overwhelmed with case backlogs.

b) Separation of rival ethnic factions.

The separation of the rival Dinka ethnic group from the Nuer and Morolem has been carried out to prevent violent clashes. Inter-ethnic rivalry is the root cause of insecurity in South Sudan. Unfortunately, the separation may not solve inter-ethnic rivalry but only postpone clashes. In addition, given the freedom of movement enjoyed by refugees, rival ethnic groups can cross over to each other's territories, leading to violent clashes.

c) Mobile police patrols

Mobile police patrol refugee camps and settlements with the aim of keeping law and order. Adequate resources are needed in terms of manpower and finance to patrol the camps daily.

4. Research Findings

There are two main research findings from this study:

a) The findings of this study revealed that criminal radicalisation among refugee youth stems from a combination of factors, such as individual and collective strains and ecological factors, which are interrelated and operate at different matrix levels. Inter-ethnic extremism among South Sudanese in refugee settlements is an extension of decades of political rivalry and instability that are still ongoing in South Sudan.

b) The findings of this study also showed that there are two different categories of radicalised South Sudanese youth, that is, those with radical mind-sets but who do not engage in crime and inter-ethnic extremism (passive radicals) and those who perpetrate and engage in crime, inter-ethnic extremism and other violent acts (active radicals). This finding is in tandem with those of other research carried out by scholars such as Sude et al. (n.d.) who argue that radicalisation leading to crime and other violent extremisms is a process of both internal and external factors and motivations. It also supports Soliman, Bellaj and Khelifa's (2015) conclusion that 'not every radical is a criminal' (p.129).

4.1. Crime perpetration for survival, gratification or revenge

The findings of the present study revealed that there are combinations of mixed interrelated factors contributing to the criminal radicalisation of South Sudanese refugee youth. These contributory factors are multivariate and operate at different matrix levels, that is, at the micro level and meso levels. At the micro level lies individual and collective strains felt and experienced by the refugee youth, and at the meso level are ecological factors that have influences on youth's decision to become radicalised and engage in crime for survival or vengeance. In their 2017 study of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Badayneh, Alshawi and Alhasan[35] found that there is a significant relationship between strains experienced by refugees and radicalisation into crime and violence. They argue that refugee camps provide conditions and experiences that are no less difficult and traumatic for refugees than during and while escaping wars (and persecution), which make non-criminal coping a huge challenge for many (refugees) amidst situations of scarce resources, loss of income and source of livelihood, death or disability of loved ones.

4.1.1. Micro level: Individual and collective strains

The findings of this research revealed that refugee youths feel and experience numerous individual and collective strains. Scholars on crime and radicalisation and violent extremism among vulnerable populations, such as Robert Agnew,[36] have found that strains experienced by such individuals are the main drivers of the adoption of radical and uncompromising ideologies that advocate crime and violence as a coping mechanism.

Agnew argues, for instance, that these strains include grief resulting from the death or disappearance of loved ones, uncertain futures, unfulfilled dreams and ambitions, unemployment, inadequate labour market skills, extreme poverty, discrimination in employment, inadequate formal education, limited access to quality health services and food insecurity. For example, a member of the security personnel interviewed at Palabek refugee settlement said:

"Many refugees here are sad and angry because they lost their loved ones and everything in [during the] the war' … They [mainly the youth] move in groups, eat mairung'i, smoke njaga [marijuana], loiter in sports betting and then cause chaos whenever someone disagrees with them….they even don't fear the police and can attack them if they are with colleagues."

A local community leader added that'[t]hey have no respect for peoples' gardens. They sneak into our gardens and steal [food items]'.

4.1.2. Meso level: Ecological factors

The findings of this study revealed that ecological factors directly and indirectly influence individual and collective feelings and strains experienced by the refugee youth. Ecological factors are environmental contextual influences that affect and influence behavioural coping strategies and mechanisms for individual and collective choice-making to either adopt radical ideologies, engage in crime, violence and other deviant behaviour or remain law-abiding and respect social norms. These ecological factors include, among others: i) challenges in the assimilation and adoption of host-community norms, including national laws and tribal and ethnic intolerance and divisions. According to one local host-community leader interviewed, some of the factors to blame include

"easy access to cheap alcohol and [illicit] drugs, ethnic and tribal tensions [within the refugee settlements] and availability of sports betting houses [gambling facilities]. Because they [mostly male] lack what to do, after taking some *lira lira* [local gin], they start picking fights on the streets with anyone they may not like or have grudges against, but it's worse if a group of Dinkas met Nuers… it's fire [emphasis added]."

4.2. Categories of radicalised South Sudanese refugee youth

The study revealed that there are two categories of radical South Sudan refugee youth in refugee settlements in Uganda. The first category comprises those whose radicalism can be conceived as passive. They are dormant, characterised by 'passive deviant behaviour'. Their 'passive deviant' behaviour manifests through individual and collective non-norm or non-rule/regulation following. 'They are simply resistant and defiant to lawful authority, uncooperative and detached from both fellow refugees and locals [host community members]', said one community leader. Many are 'disobedient to orders and do not like following laws and other social regulations established by authorities', added a member of the security forces.

The second category comprises those whose radicalism can be conceived as 'active'. They share similar characteristics with those in the first category such as deviance from social norms and disobedience to lawful authority. However, unlike the 'passive' radicals, the 'active' ones are crime instigators and members of criminal gangs. 'They control small groups or gangs, engage in criminal activities such as theft, rape, intimate partner violence, riots and demonstrations', a local leader lamented. '*Waragi*, drugs and sports betting is their job,' he added. The active radicals are believed to be those with an uncompromising stance who perpetuate and participate in ethnic violence, conceal dangerous weapons such as guns, and have participated or have connections in civil unrest in their countries of origin.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

A review of the media and institutional reports on the rising crime rate and increasing inter-ethnic extremism among South Sudanese in refugee settlements in Uganda merits more attention from the government and other stakeholders. Despite some attempts being made towards countering crime and inter-ethnic extremism in the country, such as community policing, increased police patrols and inter-ethnic community dialogues,

there still exist reports of growing crime rates in refugee settlements with a South Sudanese majority. This state of affairs causes insecurity in both refugee settlements and the host communities, with some analysts concerned that in the long run, if unresolved, this might jeopardise security in the regions hosting them which, themselves, are just recovering from the ravages of decades of war.

5.2. Recommendations

5.2.1. The government and supporting agencies should carry out mass sensitisation to basic Ugandan laws, especially criminal law and land law, in all refugee settlements

All persons, including refugees, ought to be law-abiding citizens if peace, law and order are to be maintained. As foreigners with little knowledge and understanding of Uganda's basic laws and its penalties, refugees need basic lessons on Uganda's basic laws, in addition to other existing programmes, such as entrepreneurial skills. Embedded within these laws lie Uganda's attitude and stance on what are the acceptable standards of behaviour and social relations. Without doubt, the South Sudanese youth have hardly enjoyed relative peace. The majority have witnessed and participated in civil war, crime, inter-ethnic conflicts and unending violence. The majority have lived in largely lawless communities where survival for the fittest seems the norm and the rule. The need for this basic legal education for refugees is both timely and long overdue. For instance, after the shooting of the officer in charge of Palorinya refugee settlement, Uganda's IGP, Okoth-Ochola, condemned the incident and called for the education of refugees on Uganda's criminal laws so that the refugees can be law-abiding members of the community. In addition, legal education in basic land law, tenure and right use may also reduce conflicts and tension between refugees themselves, but mostly with host community members who have had bitter relations with refugees stemming from land disputes. This would also help in reducing crime perpetration arising from land disputes in refugee-hosting areas.

5.2.2. Extending inter-cultural/ethnic dialogue for South Sudanese refugees in all refugee settlements

The government, donor agencies and CBOs should continue and extend inter-cultural/ethnic dialogues for South Sudanese refugees in all refugee settlements. International organisations, for example KAS, have carried out many inter-ethnic/cultural activities such as dialogues and radio talk shows promoting peace and tolerance to reduce South Sudanese inter-ethnic tensions in refugee settlements in Bidi-Bidi, Rhino and Kiryandongo refugee settlements. Reports have indicated that these dialogues actually do work to reduce the tensions and promote tolerance and positive relations. If extended in all refugee settlements, these dialogues also have the potential to create a foundation for ending political agreements which are at the root of the South Sudanese civil war.

5.2.3. Empowering refugee youths through meaningful engagement and active participation in decision making and implementation

Refugee youth empowerment through meaningful engagement and active participation in decision making and implementation should be highly practised and encouraged. Given their numbers and ability to mobilise one another, an empowered youth group with a collective agenda for their own social and economic transformation is likely to challenge radical ideologies that have negative returns. Refugee youth have limited national fora or platform to advocate or air their plight for possible solutions and resolutions. Therefore, platforms for refugee youth engagement in some national affairs will put refugee youth interests and devise programmes for their meaningful engagement in the national agenda and other broad government programmes. This is likely to strengthen a sense of belonging, thus acting as a catalyst for hope and inspiration in the face of numerous challenges.

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Expanding the Psychosocial Support Policy to Address Sexual Violence in Conflict-Affected Contexts in Uganda

Dinnah Nabwire

In addition to killings and torture, Africa's prominent armed conflicts have been characterised by gross forms of sexual violence that include mass rapes, sexual slavery and abduction for sex, and child and forced marriages, among other forms.[1]

Despite the absence of an active armed conflict at the time of the study in 2019, Uganda's historical blood-soaked conflicts have resulted in it being counted among emerging war-affected countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia, with documented records of sexual violence during and after conflict.

This policy research interrogates the psychosocial support policy in addressing sexual violence in Uganda's conflict-affected settings. It is based on qualitative methodology incorporating both secondary and primary data through literature review and fieldwork covering key informant interviews (KIIs) and community discussions.

Surveyed pockets of research indicate that 14 per cent of the national population (approximately 6.2 million people) are affected by the problem. Studies show a direct correlation between sexual violence experiences, psychosocial needs like trauma, and a poor general functioning among affected groups. Moreover, this was also linked to lower attainment in reconstruction interventions, such as the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP), among them.

This study established that inadequate psychosocial support not only protracts the effects of sexual violence in and after conflict; it also increases risk and vulnerability to the occurrence of incidents. In addition, inadequate psychosocial support was found to exacerbate preexisting mental health and psychosocial support needs, increase dependence on poor coping mechanisms like alcoholism and breed a cycle of postponed stressors that intensify vulnerability to continued cycles of violence, especially among post-conflict populations and refugee communities.

Uganda's policy framework defines and criminalises sexual violence in addition to providing specific guidelines for psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). The framework is, however, limited in addressing the intricate needs of conflict-affected settings. These are known to have a predetermined vulnerability to psychosocial needs, a recovering service environment and broken social supports that are too complex to reach through population-wide policy approaches. Beyond addressing perpetrators and direct survivors, the existing policy definitions pay little attention to the experiences of those who are aggressively coerced into witnessing or committing sexual crimes.

The study recommends the development of specific psychosocial support policy guidelines for redressing conflict-related sexual violence. The guidelines will seek to appreciate the unique needs of conflict-affected contexts and break the gender-biased perpetrator-survivor binary, which limits the definition of needs and services for groups like men. Moreover, specific mental health components are required to address severe trauma related to the intensity of methods and extreme levels of aggression associated with the forms of sexual violence which cannot be fully addressed through psychosocial approaches alone.

1. Background

Over the years, sexual violence has emerged as a core subject of research, policy and practice in the fields of human rights, peace and security globally.

Uganda contributes to Africa's large-scale experiences of sexual violence related to conflict that have been documented across past wars in the country's Northern

region, West Nile and Luweero-Rwenzori areas, among others. Moreover, since Uganda is the largest refugee-hosting nation on the content, its response policy framework is sufficiently tested to address the experiences of thousands from the world's worst sexual violence hubs like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

In the wake of interventions, policies and programmes geared towards post-conflict reconstruction and humanitarian assistance, this research interrogates the existing psychosocial support policy in addressing sexual violence in conflict-affected contexts.

Qualitative methods were used to explore the scope/extent of services, how psychosocial support needs and services affect sexual violence and opportunities for redress. Primary and secondary data was collected through a literature review of Uganda's policy and legal framework, journals and reports. In addition, key informant interviews (KIIs) with experts on gender, conflict, mental health and psychosocial support, in-depth survivor interviews and a community discussion with 15 survivors in Palaro sub-county, Gulu district were conducted. The sample covered post-conflict northern Uganda, Luweero and humanitarian West Nile.

Uganda has a supportive legal and policy framework for the prevention of and response to sexual violence. This includes the Constitution, the Penal Code Act Cap. 20, the Domestic Violence Act and National Development Plans, among others, which define and criminalise sexual violence as a form of GBV. Specifically, Uganda has national psychosocial support guidelines for GBV survivors. These, in addition to the frameworks listed above, define psychosocial support in the context of GBV and provide for a minimum response package.

The existing policy framework, however, takes a population-wide approach that views Ugandans and their sexual violence-related needs for psychosocial support as homogeneous, while they are unique for conflict-affected contexts that often have predetermined needs and socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

This study is crucial as it addresses a problem that affects approximately 14 per cent of the country's population, which translates into 6.2 million people, represents an opportunity to maximise outcomes from reconstruction investments, rated at over UGX 400 billion annually, and offers to redirect focus towards the country's commitment to international, regional and national human rights obligations.

The findings of the study offer pioneering steps towards policy that appreciates the unique needs of conflict-affected contexts, including redefining sexual violence experiences and psychosocial support needs for conflict-affected communities to address coerced witnessing and perpetration; capture the experiences of men and women; and expand the dynamics of psychosocial support that eliminate sexual violence as well as opportunities to utilise psychosocial support policy for the prevention and redress of protracted effects.

2. Definition of the problem

In the absence of a comprehensive study, pockets of research show that approximately 6.2 million people (14 per cent of the current population) from Luweero to northern Uganda and among refugees are affected by sexual violence related to conflict. In 2015, the United Nations Development Programme – UNDP – found that 50 per cent of the population in the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) region was affected by trauma and critical events, including sexual violence related to war.[2] The PRDP region comprises at least 55 districts in the Greater Northern region, most of which suffered the 20-year Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war.[3] Similarly, in a 2004 study, 70 per cent of the women interviewed in the Luweero Triangle area had been raped by groups of soldiers during the conflict.[4] At the time of the study, Uganda was host to over 1.4 million refugees fleeing conflict-related atrocities in neighbouring countries like the DRC and South Sudan. These countries are also known as regional hubs for conflict-related sexual violence.[5]

Sexual violence is notorious for its psychosocial implications for the affected groups. These include rape trauma syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression in the short term and chronic headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances such as nightmares, flashbacks, alcohol and other substance use disorders, as well as suicidal ideation and self-harm, in the long term.[6]

In a cross-sectional population-based survey in Northern Uganda, sexual violence was listed among

the worst war events and directly linked to suicidal ideation, rape trauma syndrome and PTSD.[7] In Luweero, women affected by the conflict in that area, specifically those who had been raped, expressed psychological distress through somatic symptoms like fatigue and poor functioning. In another cross-sectional survey on GBV and mental health among female urban refugees in Kampala, 63 per cent of the interviewed women who had experienced sexual violence in their country of origin showed a high prevalence of depression and PTSD symptoms.[9]

Relatedly, men who had suffered *feminisation* through being forced to rape other men, to have sex with inanimate objects like banana stems, or to rape women in the presence of their family members, experienced prolonged self-blame, shame and guilt about being labelled homosexual and coexisting in similar communities.[10]

Ten years into the implementation of reconstruction programmes in 2016, it was found that 65 per cent of formerly abducted girls who had experienced sexual violence in rebel captivity still showed a direct correlation with stigma, poor community relations, and low general functioning. These experiences were also known to negatively affect their active participation and benefit in ongoing development initiatives, such as the PRDP interventions.[11]

Emerging insights about the problem

With regard conflict-affected contexts, sexual violence extends beyond the perpetrator-survivor binary within which men and women are respectively positioned. Breaking this binary is essential to expanding the scope of the definition for the problem. Available literature shows that perpetrator groups in conflict settings are heterogeneous, and include combatants, state groups and civilians, among others, with a heterogeneity of motives.

In a study of 19 rapists and 12 heterosexual pedophiles, it was found that high-risk situations like a perceived breakdown of social structures, moods and emotions like anger experienced by groups with power, underpinned committing sexual crimes in conflict.[12]

The breakdown of systems in conflict-affected contexts further presented a relatively shared vulnerability for men to be forced to rape and for women to be raped. In other words, inhabiting a male body for many ceased to guarantee masculinity or a homogeneous position of power and domination, since experiences such as *failing to protect their wives and daughters from being raped while they witnessed it* left severe traces of trauma several years after active conflict.[13] This also includes experiences of men and women who do not fall in categories of direct survivor and instead sustained grave trauma from experiences such as being systematically coerced to witness mass rapes of loved ones or people known to them.

Moreover, mental health and psychosocial support dynamics, such as preexisting conditions, are known to increase vulnerability to abuse, especially in situations of broken social order.

3. Why is it important to address the problem?

Addressing the psychosocial social constructs of sexual violence in conflict-affected contexts remains a question of urgency linked to the quality of Uganda's human capital. The correlation between sexual violence, its psychosocial constructs and poor community relations as well as low general functioning directly affects the attainment of the political and economic participation of over 6.2 million people in Uganda.[14] Moreover, if not addressed, the problem threatens to compromise government commitment to the attainment of global, regional and national outcomes like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in which Uganda is actively involved, the African Union Vision 2063, the National Development Plan II and, ultimately, Vision 2040.[15]

Furthermore, this study partially responds to Uganda's pursuit of opportunities for the effective implementation and attainment of the costly reconstruction plans and

programmes. In 2018, UGX 8 billion was allocated to the Luweero Triangle Parish Community Associations (PCAs) while USD 136 million was spent on the PRDP projects.[16] Retrospectively, it was estimated that USD 323 million had been spent on refugee response by Uganda in 2017. These investments have generated accountability queries linked to whether they are well designed to address the existing needs of target populations in addition to broader accountability problems like corruption.[17] Moreover, findings of the PRDP review in 2011 showed that addressing GBV in all its forms, including sexual violence, and delivering *counselling* comprehensively represented an opportunity for increased outcomes in reconstruction programmes.[18]

In breaking the perpetrator-survivor binary, this study presents psychosocial support as a unique opportunity for the government to combine etiological and intervention-based approaches that champion the prevention of first-time occurrence and recurrences of sexual violence aligned with Uganda's zero tolerance to sexual violence as contained in the Kampala Declaration of 2011.[19]

4. Existing policy interventions & Analysis of the policy framework

Uganda has a supportive policy framework for redressing psychosocial support needs in a context of prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). It includes the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, as amended, the Penal Code Act (Cap. 120), the Domestic Violence Act, 2010 and the National Development Plans (NDPs).[20] In addition, basic elements of psychosocial support and SGBV response are integrated into reconstruction programmes like the PRDP and the refugee response plan.[21]

Moreover, most specifically, Uganda has national gender-based violence (GBV) psychosocial support guidelines for survivors through its Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD).[22] The guidelines recognise and define the psychological constructs of GBV. They also offer direction for a minimum package, principles and quality of psychosocial support services for use by various stakeholders responding to the needs of survivors.

In similar post-conflict countries such as Liberia, evidence shows that conflict-affected contexts have a predetermined vulnerability to psychosocial needs, a recovering service environment and broken social supports which are too complex to address using general development approaches that exclude these unique dynamics.[23] Thus, the population-wide approach to the existing policy framework is limiting.

The existing policy framework also takes a perpetrator-survivor binary where men are largely presented as perpetrators and women as survivors. This is restrictive for conflict-affected contexts where variability of motives, forms and methods of committing sexual crimes place both men and women at a relatively shared risk and vulnerability, especially if they do not wield physical power or control ammunition.[24]

Moreover, the policy framework is stronger on response and limited on prevention. As such, it excludes innovative approaches to addressing psychosocial drivers and vulnerability factors for sexual violence, such as increased alcohol and drug abuse, prior sexual violence victimisation or perpetration, daily stressors and pre-existing mental health and psychosocial support needs which could facilitate prevention.[25] In the Acholi and Lango areas, for instance, GBV in all its forms, including sexual violence, were found to be largely caused by alcohol consumption, drug abuse and the psychosocial effects of the war, in addition to other factors, such as poverty.[26]

5. Findings of the study

In retrospective narrations, survivors listed rape and sodomy as the commonest forms of sexual violence experienced during the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict. Both women and men were raped, and often in the presence of their family members.

All survivors listed forced witnessing of mass rapes of relatives as common during the war. These left them with severe psychosocial needs, including suicidal ideation, vengeance feelings and anger. Out of 15 participants in the community discussion, three knew someone who had raped during conflict as a means of revenge.

> *"…I raped them because I wanted them and their people to know how I felt. I was very angry because of what they did to me and my people… they raped our women, myself and all the men. They had to pay…"*
>
> **[Extract from respondent, Palaro sub-county…]**

In refugee settlements, key informants listed bad touches, forced abortions, forced marriage and belittling comments as the most common sexual violence forms, mostly faced by women and girls. For refugee survivors who experienced sexual violence in their countries of origin, memories of the incidents were registered to be very fresh as some often heard voices, saw images and felt the presence of their abusers through various ways, such as dreams and other imagery, for instance seeing a soldier.

In emergencies and post-conflict settings, men were also less likely than women to share their experiences or seek services for fear of shame and stigma. In the group discussion, both men and women perceived sharing of such cases by men as feminine. The respondents were also confident that most service providers held similar perceptions, which they believed affected disclosure, service seeking and uptake among men.

While key informants generally attributed sexual violence to unequal power relations between men and women, they classified the excessive use of aggression to commit systematic sexual crimes as unique to conflict settings. Thus they argued that the psychosocial social needs for sexual violence redress in conflict needed to be more specialised to integrate mental health services in order to address the intense trauma.

Moreover, cases of unresolved traumas from ethnic and political bouts yield vengeance, hate and anger, which threatens post-conflict reconstruction principles like guaranteeing non-recurrence. Two cases in the community discussions were recorded to have resulted from revenge several years after the conflict.

Pre-existing mental health and psychosocial support needs, including substance abuse, bipolar disorder, psychosis and depression were also found to exacerbate the risk and vulnerability to sexual violence in post-conflict and humanitarian contexts. Relatedly, increased survival pressures and changing gender roles were cited as increasing vulnerability, especially for women and girls. Increased cases of alcoholism among women and girls were attributed to these pressures while more girls were exposed to prostitution and sexual exploitation and abuse as they sought survival.

Overall, psychosocial support was delivered in conflict-affected contexts. However, the scope was small and fragmented despite the overwhelming need for it. In addition to the national guidelines on psychosocial support for GBV survivors, global guidelines for mental health in humanitarian settings were used by some actors in emergency West Nile. This limited scope also presented the absence of psychosocial support as a mediating factor in aggravating drivers and risks of sexual violence in conflict-affected contexts. Thus, providing mental health and psychosocial support could emerge as a mitigating factor for the risk and multifaceted drivers of sexual violence.

The impact of this low scope mainly presented itself in two ways: the absence of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to address preexisting conditions; and the absence of MHPSS to address emerging risk and vulnerability factors that drive sexual violence in humanitarian and post-conflict times.

Moreover, in the face of broken sociopolitical and economic systems, psychosocial support was cited

to hold the potential for rebuilding social cohesion through group therapies. Equally important was psychoeducation about socioemotional issues which, when not addressed, exacerbate feelings of vengeance, anger and hopelessness, with the potential to disrupt reconstruction outcomes.

While approaches such as basic counselling to survivors with group- and community-level activities are part of the minimum package in the national guidelines, these do not fully address the severe psychosocial needs relating to sexual violence among conflict-affected groups.

Key informants also cited capacity gaps in the current set-up of services, as some partners, especially those in emergency response, tended to confuse psychosocial support with basic counselling, case management or life skills activities.

6. Recommendations

Development of specific psychosocial support policy guidelines for sexual violence redress in conflict-affected contexts

The existing national guidelines for psychosocial support to GBV survivors (including sexual violence) take a population-wide approach that overlooks intricacies in conflict-affected contexts. While drivers and effects largely relate across conflict and non-conflict contexts,, conflict-affected settings have a predetermined vulnerability to psychosocial needs, a recovering service environment and broken social supports which mutually interplay to exacerbate the occurrence of fresh cases and recurrences, and facilitate the protraction of effects.

Specific guidelines will also expand the definitive scope of sexual violence beyond direct perpetrators and survivors to 1) capture the general experiences of those exposed, for example through coerced witnessing of sexual violence incidents; 2) address the intensity of aggression and a systematic nature of sexual violence acts that leave behind adverse psychosocial needs; and 3) stretch the concept of unequal power relations to include physical power or the possession of arms under which inhabiting a feminine or masculine body holds relatively equal points of vulnerability to abuse by more physically powerful groups that seek to subdue others through sexual abuse, among other ways.

This expansion in definition and scope will open up opportunities for millions of individuals in conflict-affected areas who are not direct perpetrators or survivors yet experienced high trauma triggers from passive exposure. Moreover, it will deliberately allow inclusive redress for men and boys whose experiences largely go underreported largely owing to social stigma.

Screening tools from the WHO Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in emergencies must be adopted into the recommended guidelines to address severe aspects often associated with an intersectionality of extremely aggressive acts like sexual organ mutilation, rape by inanimate objects, and being forced to rape family members and relatives or to witness while family members are being raped. This will help complement the current psychosocial support set-up as well as address preexisting traumas and other mental health conditions.

7. Conclusion

This study shows that inadequate psychosocial support increases risk and vulnerability to sexual violence in conflict-affected contexts. It also protracts its effects among those who experience it. Conflict-affected contexts present unique needs that are often missed in mainstream population-wide policy approaches.

Specific guidelines for psychosocial support are recommended as essential in addressing the unique needs of conflict-affected contexts, redefining sexual violence and psychosocial support to include forms like systematic witnessing of sexual crimes, breaking the perpetrator-survivor binary to expand the prevention and response scope for men and women, and integrating mental health methodologies for the comprehensive sexual violence redress of risks, drivers and vulnerabilities as well as effects.

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Policy Options for Fostering Financial Inclusion of Disadvantaged Girls and Women in Uganda

Harriet Kamashanyu

Women's empowerment has taken centre stage in the present development agenda. The study examines disadvantaged women groups[1] that are excluded from the financial system in Uganda and the role of financial inclusion in supporting women's empowerment in Makindye division, Kampala district, central Uganda. Using both purposive and simple random sampling, a sample of 82 respondents was selected and a response rate of 95 per cent was realised. The study found that financial support appeared to be sparse, and that most key informants acknowledge that financial inclusion includes the wider capacity of everyone to tap into the financial systems. However, a number of considerations for some groups like marginalised women is not yet up to the standards, causing many women to still lag behind in gaining access to financial products and services. The study, therefore, recommends that the government should design programmes that address both the demand and supply side constraints on economic participation by disadvantaged women in Uganda. The programmes should support capability development, create and increase productivity, thus increasing sustainable demand (as opposed to supply) for financial services and products, and reduce poverty.

Although many researchers have reported the supply of financial services to be good, this does not depict women's financial inclusion. Financial inclusion of women is about expanding women's asset base and capabilities to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable the institutions that affect their lives. Economically empowering women through financial inclusion is key to reducing poverty, growing economies, and building healthy and safe communities.

1. Introduction

Empowering women is seen as one of the central issues in the process of sustainable development for many nations worldwide. Governments and different organisations strive to increase women's empowerment by implementing different interventions, such as offering access to microfinance services to promote sustainable development and human rights (Huis, Hansen, Otten, & Lensinka, 2017). Although several financial institutions have tried to offer financial products that resemble alternative financial services to consumers, there is still delineation between financial inclusion and the financial empowerment of women, particularly in Makindye division, Kampala district, Uganda.

The strategy behind financial inclusion efforts has been to get more people to use mainstream financial products (and use fewer alternative financial services). This includes bringing the 'unbanked' and 'under-banked' consumers into the regulated financial service system to access affordable and safe financial products (Niki et al., 2015; Morgan & Pontines, 2014). The unbanked population includes the vulnerable groups such as weaker sections and low-income groups. The success of mobile money, for example, illustrates the transformative potential of technical progress and innovation to promote financial inclusion. Mobile money, for example, which is a form of branchless banking, has allowed people who are otherwise excluded from the formal financial system to perform financial transactions in a relatively cheap, secure and reliable manner.

Although several financial institutions have tried to offer financial products that resemble alternative financial services to consumers, there is still delineation between financial inclusion and the financial empowerment of women, particularly in Makindye division.

This paper aims to address the public problem of disadvantaged women groups that are excluded from the financial system in Uganda.[2] This kind of financial exclusion presents a major challenge as it worsens their already disadvantaged position in society.

The study conducted was based on a cross-sectional survey design. This design was chosen to ensure that the study accurately described the true nature of the existing conditions at that time. Data was collected from Makindye division, Kampala district, central Uganda. Using both purposive and simple random sampling, a sample of 82 respondents was chosen from among the respondents and the response rate was 95 per cent. The questionnaire was tested for validity and the results were credible and reliable.

The study targeted disadvantaged women who were clustered as single mothers, female commercial sex workers, widows, housemaids, market vendors etc., in relation to access to financial services and products, and also established the role of financial inclusion in their empowerment. The findings indicated a significant association between the financial inclusion and financial empowerment of women. The findings support Head, Zweimuller, Marchena and Hoel's (2014) observation that access to economic opportunities on women's part increases their cash earnings, which boosts their self-esteem and bargaining power within the household.

Despite significant advances in financial inclusion for both men and women between 2014 and 2018, most women in Uganda still lag behind in access to and usage of financial products and services.[3] The number of affected women is estimated at 45 per cent. Of these, women of weaker socio-economic status are facing this problem more severely.

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) – Uganda National Household Survey 2016/17, the national poverty level has increased from 19.7 per cent in the financial year 2012/13 to 21.4 per cent in 2016/2017, and women account for 15 per cent of this.[4] According to UBOS statistics, this puts the total number of poor Ugandans who cannot afford three meals a day at eight million. This group of persons has close to zero chances of financial inclusion (UBOS – National Household Survey 2016/2017)[5].

Access to financial services is highly unequal, with poor people – and particularly poor women – frequently the least served by existing institutions and systems. Accordingly, they cannot enjoy the individual and household benefits of financial inclusion. As a result, disadvantaged women have no access to finances and, thus, are entirely dependent on their male relatives. This not only hinders them from being able to become financially literate, but it also deprives them of the ability to make their own expenses. In numerous cases, this constrains women to hand over their small incomes and, thereby depriving them of the possibility to be self-reliant. This reinforces the high levels of gender disparity.

According to Alliance for Financial Inclusion[6], the importance of improving financial inclusion for women is receiving an increasing amount of attention. Recent research by Alliance for Financial Inclusion provides solid evidence that when women – who constitute 50 per cent of the world's population – do not participate in the financial system, there will be no significant benefits in terms of economic growth, greater equality and societal well-being because women will not be able to save securely, borrow for investment or consumption, insure against risk, and send and receive money safely.

Women's financial exclusion undermines women's economic and broader empowerment and, therefore, the reduction of poverty. Such exclusion is also highly relevant to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 – Gender Equality. Moreover, financial exclusion infringes on SDGs 2 to 7, as it both undermines the opportunities for individuals and households to benefit from and contribute to economic growth, and also impedes households from managing the money needed to access health and education services.

Financial inclusion, on the other hand, could increase the empowerment of women in a number of ways. First, having access to resources on their own account and to the tools that help them to earn a living increases women's bargaining power within households and their influence over how money and other resources are used. Second, financial inclusion helps increase women's opportunities to earn an income or control assets outside the household. Third, it reduces women's vulnerability by, for example, allowing them to insure against risk or borrow to meet unexpected expenses, such as medical treatment. These are all key factors for economic empowerment and they can also help to empower women more broadly. Studies show that access to savings schemes can improve women's confidence and decision-making power in the household, improve their purchasing power, and reduce vulnerability. This is according to UBOS – Women and Men in Uganda, Facts and Figures 2016.[7]

The financial inclusion of women, especially disadvantaged women, is at the core of moving towards gender equality and eradicating poverty. These two goals, which are addressed in regional, national as well as international development plans, will not be

achieved if disadvantaged women are not financially included. Accordingly, the risk goes far beyond just affecting this target group directly but may have severe repercussions for the socio-economic development of the nation as a whole. Even worse, the affected group may socio-economically fall farther behind, making them vulnerable to extreme poverty, which will possibly affect their very livelihoods.

In Uganda, 40 per cent of smallholder farms are run by women, yet women receive only 10 per cent of MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) credit (IFC). Fifty-eight per cent of SMEs (small and medium enterprises) are run by women. Yet, only 43 per cent of women who run small businesses have bank accounts compared to 52 per cent of their male counterparts[8] (FinScope, 2010).

Moreover, women are informationally disadvantaged with smaller and less diverse networks, and are less likely to receive referrals from people within their networks. They are also more difficult to reach through the usual channels that target men, including wage payments and remittance channels as well as savings accounts. This challenge has not been addressed as providers have less incentive to cater to women because the margins are smaller and because women require more upfront investment to be brought on board as customers.

Additionally, women often prefer informal products, particularly for savings, and reaching them with formal products entails higher costs as, through lack of

experience, they statistically demand more information on products. Moreover, human and financial capital is needed to influence men in their surroundings, to whom women turn for advice and affirmation.

To further complicate this, social norms constrain women's demand for financial services. Oftentimes, women are not expected or encouraged to have financial independence or access to land. Sometimes they also have mobility constraints that make it difficult to engage with financial institutions.

Finally, women also have less access to technology, which is accompanied by high levels of illiteracy and lack of confidence. With mobile phones being touted as the latest game changer that could radicalise rates of financial inclusion, the gender gap is at risk of increasing if women are not specifically targeted. This policy research is, therefore, undertaken to generate policy options for fostering financial inclusion of disadvantaged girls and women in Uganda.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: The next section discusses women as users of financial services and the gaps identified in the existing financial policies of Uganda. The section after that provides evidence on the role of financial inclusion on women's empowerment .The final section concludes the paper and generates policy recommendations as well as references.

2. Analytical Framework

According to Financial Sector Deeping Uganda (FSD Uganda)[9], financial Inclusion in Uganda has gained significant recognition through the recently launched National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) 2017-2022, whose major focus area is to enhance the financial sector to be more robust to enhance inclusion. There has been an opportunity for more Ugandans to access a broader range of affordable, high-quality financial services and products.

Interventions like the Uganda Women's Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP)[10] – a Government of Uganda credit and entrepreneurship skills development facility for women – highlight women's effectiveness in utilising financial resources, which is against the assumption of banks that women are not 'bankable'. This can be an eye-opener towards financial institutions to re-think their

policies around women's access to financial services.

As much as the purpose of NFIS is to develop a consolidated definition and, in line with a vision and strategy, to improve financial inclusion in Uganda (with the ultimate goal of families being financially secure), this policy has a number of gaps that need to be filled:

- It focuses a lot on financial infrastructure with an emphasis on the institutions that the Bank of Uganda (BOU) supervises. However, more people having accounts does not reduce poverty or enhance the economic security of families through usage of affordable financial services.

- Much as Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs) remain a major potential source of financial services and inclusion of most

populations, they are less regulated, causing a trust deficit and providing challenges like lack of oversight and capacity, poor book-keeping and inadequately skilled staff and boards. This could have significant adverse socio-economic impact on the financial sector and hinder financial inclusion.

- There is also a trend in many studies to either focus on qualitative 'empowerment' variables or quantitative variables to measure women's financial inclusion, but not to measure both at the same time. The effects of economic strengthening interventions are often mediated through such 'empowerment' variables, so it is important to measure both.

- Though there is a great deal of policy research on the role of microfinance on women's empowerment, there is very little research done on savings-led approaches for disadvantaged women. Similarly, inconclusive data on the impact of vocational training demands further investigation, particularly with regard to its effects when combined with microfinance.

- Excluded women are harder to identify as household surveys are expensive and time-consuming, but they are the only mechanism to identify people who are outside the banking system. Banks can survey their clients and study their transactions, but this limits them to people who already have financial access.

- Promoting greater access to financial services for low-income households and firms is a core part of the overall strategies for economic and financial development. However, there remains uncertainty as to whether financial inclusion results in financial stability.

The study investigated the role of financial control on women's empowerment. The findings indicated a significant association between financial inclusion and the financial empowerment of women. The findings noted that access to economic opportunities on women's part increases their cash earnings, which boosts their self-esteem and bargaining power within the household. Relatedly, increasing women's access to economic resources, such as savings and control over productive assets, expands their assets and capabilities to negotiate with and influence the institutions that affect their lives.

Despite evidence of benefits to individuals and society as a whole, financial inclusion often proceeds on an isolated track – more social policy than macro policy. It is critical to avoid such a 'silo mentality'. Financial inclusion – including greater access to and use of financial services by women – is an integral part of inclusive growth strategies and should be closely integrated into macroeconomic and financial policies. When financial systems become more inclusive, they help broaden financial markets and can make monetary policy more effective. By bringing more sections of the population into the formal sector – such as including more women – the tax and expenditure effects of fiscal policy can be broadened.

Mounting evidence shows that financially empowered women are more likely to improve their family's welfare. Financial services help women shape household spending decisions, make investments, and manage economic risk. Specifically, access to insurance helped women farmers in Burkina Faso and Senegal increase yields and better manage food security (Delavallade et al., 2015). Women in the Philippines who used a savings account reported greater control over household decisions and increased spending on items they needed, such as washing machines and kitchen appliances (Ashraf, Karlan, & Yin, 2009). In Kenya, women merchants who received a basic account invested more in their businesses (Dupas, & Robinson, 2013). Women-headed households in Nepal spent 20 per cent more on education and 15 per cent more on meat and fish after receiving a savings account (Prina, 2015). More broadly, surveys of the micro literature suggest that women's financial inclusion enhance the growth-promoting potential of finance, help reduce income inequality, and benefit the next generation by improving the health and education of children.

3. Conclusions

The primary objective of this paper is to generate policy options for fostering financial inclusion of disadvantaged girls and women in Uganda.

A sense of urgency is present regarding financial inclusion. While financial inclusion is an important goal in itself, new evidence suggests that greater inclusion of women as users of financial services has generally positive macroeconomic outcomes as well. Greater access to and use of accounts for financial transactions, savings and insurance can help increase long-term macroeconomic growth. In line with results observed for financial inclusion more broadly, the marginal benefits for economic growth wane as financial depth increases. The clock is ticking on financial inclusion and a focus on disadvantaged women can help!

The foundation for financial inclusion stands on three pillars – access, trust and comfort. But this foundation cannot be built through a single government policy or a development agency in isolation. Instead, it will entail a range of partnerships across technology, banking, the private sector and government departments, especially those addressing both the demand and supply constraints.

The study also advocates the need for macroeconomic policymaking to integrate financial inclusion and stability to ensure better economic and financial outcomes. Despite evidence of benefits to individuals and society, financial inclusion often proceeds on a separate track, more as a means to address social goals than mainstream macroeconomic goals.

More broadly, the findings strengthen the case for financial inclusion for women to enhance economic growth, reduce income inequality and foster financial stability. Further research will allow us to draw stronger causal links, discerning which of the possible hypotheses could be driving the results.

4. Recommendations

The government should design programmes that address both the demand and supply side constraints on the economic participation of disadvantaged women in Uganda. The programmes should support capability development, create and increase productivity, thus increasing sustainable demand (as opposed to supply) for financial services and products, and reduce poverty.

Several studies have raised concern about how collateral security impedes financial use and access. The government should establish buffers to serve as collateral security for women who intend to secure financial credit.

Financial service providers should lower the costs of operating accounts for the financial inclusiveness of women, particularly disadvantaged women.

The government should tighten the monitoring, regulating and supervisory policies of financial service providers to restore public trust in financial institutions in Uganda. Women appeared to shun formal accounts owing to ignorance and the dearth of information on financial management.

Financial services providers, the government and other development partners should continue offering both formal and informal business education training.

A macroeconomic policy should be made to integrate the financial inclusion of disadvantaged women and stability to ensure economic and financial outcomes.

Policymakers and financial regulators should spur banks to collect sex-disaggregated client data as well as supply-side financial services data and then act on that data to provide products and services that work for women. The Central Bank of Uganda should encourage commercial banks to sex-disaggregate their data and grow the women's market sector. Closing the financial inclusion gap will only happen when banks and mobile money providers treat women fairly and as a distinct market segment, collect sex-disaggregated data on their portfolios, and use that data to design products for women clients. When banks collect sex-disaggregated data, products become more women-friendly.

Women should leverage the promise inherent in savings. Savings are crucial, especially for women entrepreneurs – self-employment being the norm in Uganda. Disadvantaged women will want and use their bank accounts if they are linked with secure savings products.

The critical roles of the IMF and the World Bank. They are respected international leaders in the financial sector, and have a unique opportunity, through their regular policy dialogue with client countries like Uganda and their lending and technical assistance work, to lead and champion financial inclusion for women in their core economic sector lending to bring women on board.

An integrated digital financial ecosystem for women should be created. Unless women reliably find value in using their bank accounts, no initiative can spur their financial inclusion. The active usage of accounts through credit-debit transactions is a critical success factor for catalysing financial inclusion, and is also the necessary first step for women to adopt digital mediums for conducting financial transactions. A large number of women's accounts remain dormant owing to negligible credit and debit activity. By identifying the prevalent income-generating activities or value chains among women customers and connecting these income streams to their accounts, greater account usage can be activated. This will also form the first link of a sustainable digital financial transaction chain. To complete the integrated digital financial transaction ecosystem, data generated from digital incomes, savings and spending can be utilised to build the digital financial profiles of the women, which can then enable improved financial access for them.

Endnotes

1. Disadvantaged is an adjective (of a person or area) in unfavourable circumstances, especially with regard to financial or social opportunities – lacking in the basic resources or conditions (such as standard housing, medical and educational facilities, and civil rights) believed to be necessary for an equal position in society..

2. The National Financial Inclusion Strategy, 2017-2020

3. The National Financial Inclusion Strategy, 2017-2020

4. Uganda Bureau of Statistics – Uganda National Household Survey, 2016/17

5. Uganda Bureau of Statistics – National Household Survey, 2016/2017

6. Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2016

7. Uganda Bureau of standards – Women and Men in Uganda – Facts and Figures, 2016

8. FinScope, 2010

9. Financial Sector Deeping (FSD) Uganda, 2017

10. Uganda Women's Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP), 2017

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Policy Option for Addressing the Entrepreneurial Skill Gap in the Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (Btvet) Programme to Increase Youth Employment in Uganda

Sandra Namarome

Many countries face challenges of youth unemployment, especially when the majority of their citizens are younger than 30 years, as is the case with Uganda. Along with other interventions, the Government of Uganda rolled out the Skilling Uganda Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) Strategic Plan 2011-2020 to help tackle the youth unemployment question. However, this plan has not delivered its initial anticipated promise as evidenced by 1) the drop in enrolment rate from 63,209 in 2016 to 45,153 in 2017 and 2) the inadequately skilled workforce that is channelled into the labour market yet adequate skills are integral to finding or creating employment.

This paper used purposive sampling to conduct a qualitative study of two institutions that deliver BTVET programmes in Kampala – Nakawa Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) and Nsambya Sharing Youth Centre Vocational Institute (NSYCVI). To collect data, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted as well as focused group discussions (FGDs) using open-ended interview guides. In addition, relevant research papers, reports and other literature were reviewed to support the policy brief developed.

The paper finds several factors that may contribute to the gap between the BTVET programme as it operates now and its intended goals. First, specific courses to develop business and entrepreneurial skills are not included in the BTVET programme. This limits the expectation of youth enrolled on BTVET programmes, most of whom desire to put their business ideas into practice.

Second, many graduates of the BTVET programme find it more difficult to secure employment owing to the negative perception that most BTVET attendees are school dropouts who are not good enough to develop technical and vocational skills. This policy brief finds that the BTVET programme needs to be restructured to accommodate a supportive and enabling environment for the BTVET graduates to act on their business ideas in a bid to become successfully self-employed.

This policy brief proposes a Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy (YES) that will enable the country's most energetic workforce, the youth, including BTVET graduates, continuing students and intending students to become technically skilled for employment as well as successful entrepreneurial job creators.

1. Introduction

Youth unemployment is a top policy issue given its far-reaching associated risks. It is a pivotal deterministic factor in crime rates[1] yet long periods of unemployment scar youth for life, given the negative labour effects they experience.[2,3] With Uganda's population growing at an annual rate of 3 per cent yet 78 per cent of the population is below the age of 30, the youth unemployment challenge has never demanded as much attention as it does now. Whereas the rate for the unemployed youth is reflected at 13 per cent, the composite measure of youth labour underutilisation (LU4) stands at 38 per cent.[4] In 2017, a significant 58 per cent of youth did not

actively search for work owing to loss of hope in finding any gainful employment.[5] This implies that the rate of unemployment may be greater than the official figure of 13 per cent[6] yet several youths continue to suffer in precarious, underpaid and exploitative jobs, with some becoming survival entrepreneurs, living on less than a dollar a day.[7]

To tackle the youth unemployment challenge, it is imperative to understand the root cause and only then can a viable solution be identified. Owing to structural constraints, Uganda is inhibited from increase job

opportunities that match the demand for jobs.[8] This partly explains why, of the estimated 700,000 annual technical, vocational and tertiary graduates in Uganda, only about 90,000 get jobs – meaning that 87 per cent go without jobs.[9] To help solve part of the challenge, the Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Education and Sports, enacted the Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) Act in 2008[10], which was followed by the Skilling Uganda: BTVET Strategic Plan 2011-2020.[11] These plans were initiated to deliver comprehensive employable skills that are relevant to the labour market. However, despite various investments, BTVET's mandate of delivering employable skilled workforce is still limited as evidenced by 1), the drop in enrolment rate from 63,209 in 2016 to 45,153 in 2017 and 2) the inadequately skilled workforce that is channelled into the labour market.[12] Also, 63 per cent of employers expressed dissatisfaction with the BTVET graduates' performance at workplaces, as reported by the New Vision newspaper in 2017. [13]

It is worth noting that the population of youth in the labour force for financial year (FY) 2016/2017 was 4.4 million but a significant proportion of these – 68 per cent – did not have specialised training (of the youth aged 18-30). This presents a major challenge to the social, political and economic development of Uganda. This is because not having any training reduces youth's capacity to find or create profitable jobs. It is also notable that 46.9 per cent of youth were in employment in FY 2016/17 but 40 per cent of youth were not in education, employment, or training (NEET).[14] For developing countries like Uganda, NEET youth need to be engaged and involved in production activities to grow the economy. The job-searching periods for youth who cannot find employment in the labour market owing to a lack of skills become considerably longer than for skilled workers. Persons who are unemployed during their youthful years have lower earnings, poorer health, lower job satisfaction and higher probability of longer periods of unemployment even in their adult years.[15] This evidently drives many youth into heightened levels of anxiety, depression and hopelessness.[16] Although youth in Uganda strive to enter the labour market, many of those without adequate skills struggle to secure rewarding livelihoods.[17]

2. Policy Review

Policy Intervention	Skilling Uganda: BTVET Strategic Plan 2011-2020
The aim of the BTVET Strategic Plan in brief	i). Review the technical and vocational programmes in the education sub-sector. ii). Make Uganda's education, particularly, vocational and technical education relevant to Uganda's private and public sector needs.
Proposition of the BTVET Strategic Plan	Establishment of a Skills Development Authority (SDA) to coordinate the process of skills implantation but this has not taken effect.
Myths about the BTVET Strategic Plan	BTVET continues to be viewed as an alternative for the intellectually inferior students and is associated with non-prestigious blue-collar jobs.
Efforts to promote the BTVET Strategic Plan	Recent government efforts to promote BTVET have focused on increasing advocacy for funding to build more BTVET institutions.
Policy gaps in the BTVET Strategic Plan	i). Current efforts have not addressed the low levels of learner interest, which aggravates the fact that vocational jobs such as plumbing, masonry or carpentry are dominated by informal, precarious, low-paid work and, consequently, attract low levels of social dignity. Low interest in BTVET was confirmed in UBOS' School to Work Transition (SWT) survey of 2015 where only 16.7 per cent of students surveyed expected to complete vocational education compared to 57.6 per cent for tertiary. ii). Many BTVET graduates and youths in Uganda generally are unable to find or create employment over the ten-year period in spite of all investments.
Evidential limitations of the Skilling Uganda: BTVET Strategic Plan 2011-2020	i). With just months to end the Skilling Uganda: BTVET Plan 2011-2020, the impact of BTVET on the youth employment situation remains in balance given the enrolment drop as evidenced in 2017 from 63,209 in 2016 to 45,153. ii). 63% of employers expressed dissatisfaction with the BTVET graduates' performance at workplaces as reported by the New Vision Daily Newspaper in 2017.

Table 1: Policy review of the Skilling Uganda: BTVET Strategic Plan 2011-2020

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative study of two case studies that deliver the BTVET programme: 1) Nakawa Vocational Training Institute (NVTI), which is government-aided, and 2) Nsambya Sharing Youth Centre Vocational Institute (NSYCVI), a not-for-profit organisation (NPO).

Key informant interviews (KIIS0 were conducted as well as focused group discussions (FGDs) and for both, open-ended interview guides were developed with open-ended questions to collect data. The interview guides focused on collecting BTVET graduates, current students and stakeholders' opinions on two research questions that included 1) how the BTVET training programme can be restructured to address Uganda's youth unemployment challenge and 2) what successful entrepreneurs need to grow successful businesses. The interview guides also made provision for analysing courses offered by both institutions and their contribution to answering the research questions.

In order to dissect the entrepreneurial skill gaps among youth, the researcher engaged both unemployed and employed youth who had graduated from BTVET programmes in both institutions together with continuing students. The study also sought insights from other BTVET stakeholders, including the education department, a development agency and the business employment sector.

A literature review was conducted to allow triangulation of data as well as increase the credibility of the results. The target population for this study were mainly youth aged 18-30 in Kampala district who pursued a BTVET course. Youth in Kampala district were chosen because the Kampala sub-region had a high unemployment rate for the labour workforce in 2016/2017.[18]

Using purposive sampling, data was collected from BTVET continuing students and graduates; NVTI had 10 continuing students and 10 graduates while NSYCVI had 11 continuing students and one graduate, making a total of 32 BTVET trainees and graduates. Data was also collected from BTVET programme stakeholders that included two representatives from the employers and business sector, one representative from the education department and one representative of the development agency, making a total of four stakeholders.

4. Results

This study was aimed at assessing the BTVET system to identify opportunities for better addressing Uganda's youth unemployment challenge.

## 4.1. The Findings in Response to How the BTVET Programme Can Be Restructured

i). Expectations of BTVET students and graduates

The study found that students on the BTVET programme have a high expectation of either getting employed or starting their own ventures. However, this expectation drops significantly and most graduates are unsure of the next step to take when they complete the BTVET course, as shown in Figure 1. This drop in expectation may be explained by 1) the inadequate focus on entrepreneurial skills, 2) the lack of an enabling environment to support ventures by BTVET graduates, and 3) the lingering perception that BTVET graduates are not good enough for the job market.

Figure 1: Plan of respondents (both current students and graduates) after completing BTVET course
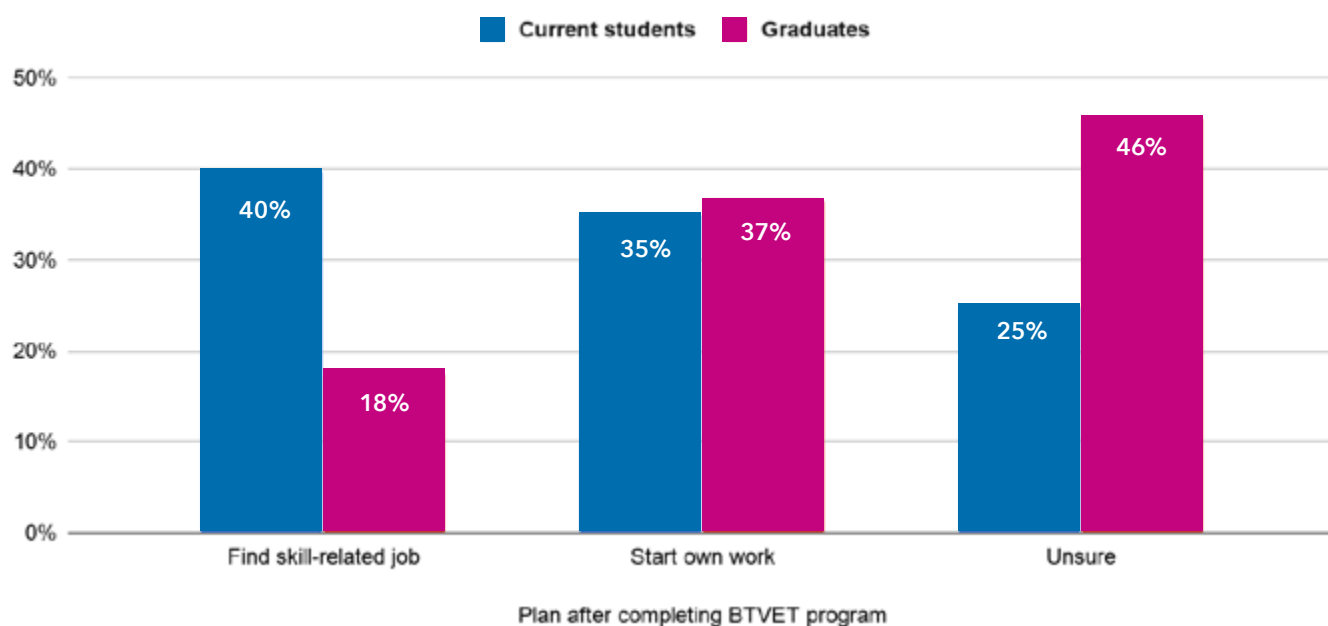
NVTI offers courses in electronics, electricity, machinery fitting and motor vehicle maintenance, woodworking, sheet and metal plumbing, welding and fabrication as well as bricklaying and concrete practice. NSYCVI offers courses in catering and hotel management, tailoring and garment cutting, carpentry and joinery, metal fabrication and welding.

ii). Perception of BTVET programme

Regarding skill-based jobs, the responses from the survey indicate that graduates of BTVET programme believe that they are disadvantaged on the job market. This is mainly due to the perception that the BTVET programme is largely a scheme for dropouts and those who fail to qualify for higher institutions, such as the polytechnics and the universities. Some of the stakeholders that were interviewed were of the view that a big percentage of BTVET graduates are not skilled enough to do the jobs well enough owing to poor training. This is not surprising, given that the respondents in both institutes are not only required to pay tuition fees but also to contribute to the cost of instructional materials. In cases where only a few can afford these, what is available is insufficient to serve all the students and this indeed limits the quality of the training they receive.

iii). Entrepreneurial and business skills development

The BTVET programme focuses on the foundation of technical and vocational skills that the youth need to become employable. A critical assessment of the courses offered at the two BTVET institutions indeed shows a focus on technical and vocational courses. However, youth who enrol to study BTVET courses do so not only to seek employable skills but also those skills that can enable them to start their own businesses. The study found that there are no courses geared at developing businesses and entrepreneurial skills specifically.

The respondents emphasised that they did not currently receive specific training in entrepreneurial and business skills that can sustain their business ideas. Regarding entrepreneurship, some respondents stated that even though they were able to secure some loans, they were not able to adequately use these loans because they lacked entrepreneurship skills in managing the businesses they have set up. One female graduate respondent from NTVI also mentioned that she faced some challenges while searching for work, with potential clients questioning her performance based on her gender.

iv) Course coordination and skills assessment for relevant courses

A section of graduate students revealed that they experienced hardships in finding jobs because of the inadequate vocational and technical skills that are not very relevant to the job market. To sharpen their skills, more than 50 per cent of the graduate students have had to upgrade by enrolling for diploma and degree courses at Kyambogo University to attain better competence skills which they hope will enable them to become better skilled in their vocations. This, in their view, is because diplomas and degrees are more respected and they attract better pay when negotiating for work. In upgrading, however, many find themselves having to repeat the same course units studied at certificate level which they find is a waste of time.

4.2. Findings in Response to What Successful Entrepreneurs Need to Grow and Sustain Businesses

i) An enabling environment to support a business

The respondents stated that they did not have a favourable environment to support their business ideas; some pointed out that they did not have access to business loans. Current and continuing BTVET students desire to have a supportive and enabling environment that can help them kick-start their business ideas so that they can become self-employed. The respondents cited two limiting factors they faced upon completing the BTVET programme: 1) access to financial capital for equipment attaining; and 2) lack of opportunities to practise at business hubs in ways that can perfect their skills. This is indicated in Figure 2. About 90 per cent of the respondents highlighted the significant role of financial capital to achieving their goals after completing the BTVET programme.

Figure 2: Responses on creating an enabling environment for BTVET entrepreneurs to thrive.
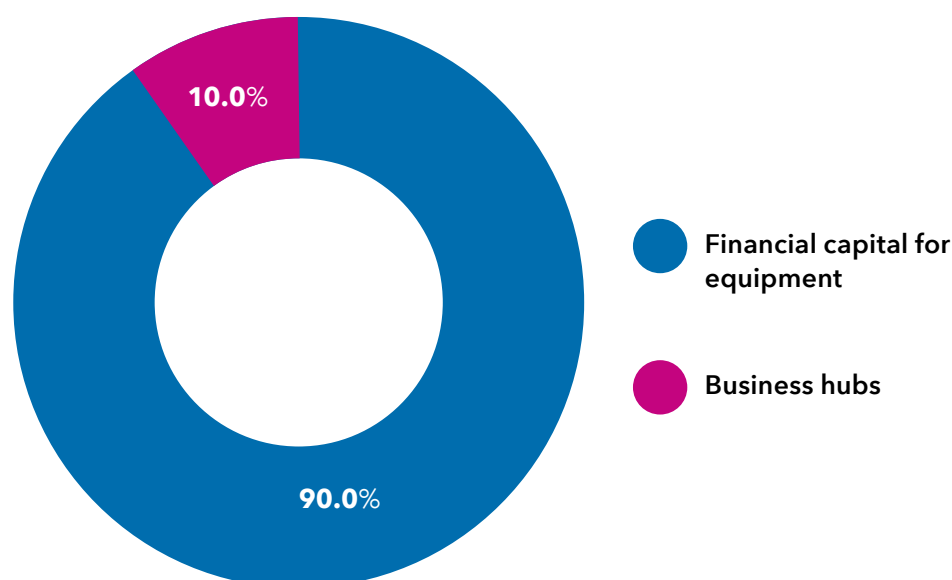
The respondents viewed achieving their goals through the lens of being able to attain financial capital that would enable them to purchase equipment as well as materials to start businesses. Even though business hubs and the need to attain capital were highlighted, the latter was more emphasized, at 90 per cent.

ii). Ability to determine the value of work

The respondents expressed an inability to determine the value of their work because they did not receive training that taught them to negotiate work rates. This is significant since some of the BTVET graduate students who manage to find work end up being underpaid. This situation places them in a category similar to that of the underemployed. This makes it hard for them to grow their earnings as many end up doing jobs for less pay, making them opt for underemployment over unemployment due to high unemployment rates. For the graduates who brave the challenges of starting out, they do so as surviving entrepreneurs – a far cry from their dream of operating as demand-driven entrepreneurs. It was also realised that females at times face difficulties in finding work because of their gender. This makes it hard for the females to bargain for higher pay when considered for certain jobs.

iii). Apprenticeship programmes

Students viewed apprenticeship programmes as an entry into the job market and also as a way to build experience and the networks that build connections. However, it was found that BTVET programmes are not accompanied with apprenticeships. The respondents stated that the apprenticeship programmes offered by some institutes in other countries, such as Nigeria and Germany, help students learn how to manage their skills profitably; and the respondents expressed the desire to have the same here in Uganda. The study found that while there are several scholarships that students can apply for, their availabilty are not effectively communicated to the respondents and to many other students who enrol on the BTVET programme.

5. Discussion

The perception that BTVET graduates are not good enough stems from the understanding that many trainees do not receive the kind of practical training set out in the BTVET course curricula. This is partly due to inadequate funding to meet the training costs realised mostly through expenditure on instructional materials and facilitation for the trainers. This affects the quality of the training that the students receive and also informs the negative perception about the skills of the graduates. However, even if adequate funding were to be available, because of the absence of a clear strategy that restructures the BTVET programme, this may not guarantee the realisation of the initial BTVET promise.

In Uganda, academic excellence is largely ascertained through performance in terms of grading rather than the delivery of practical skills that that respond to the job market demands. This explains why many institutions emphasise theoretical rather than practical classes. A report from the Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board (UBTEB)[1] attests to the fact that BTVET students receive, on average, only half of the time they are actually supposed be receiving for their practical training in BTVET courses. This most definitely impacts on the quality of graduates, who seem only to have an idea of what is expected of them instead of skills that they can perfect to solve problems in the marketplace. Ironically, it is solving problems in the job market that enables graduates to find gainful employment, especially for the self-employed persons. The emphasis on theoretical training is exemplified by NVTI, Lugogo Vocational Institute and Kakira Training Institute, which were not rewarded with good performance despite their high expenditure on instructional materials, compared to vocational institutions like Birembo Training Institute and Butaleja Vocational Institute, which spent less on the same but scored highly in theoretical assessments in 2014/2015.[2] This in itself detaches the institutions from their core objective of training students in practical skills that can enable them to start up their own businesses.

An updated skills assessment register is important for any country, given that it ascertains the courses that are relevant to the labour market. This also helps to guide students on what courses to undertake in order to offer solutions to society's problems. Kintu et al.[3] agree that an assessment of skill gaps helps in determining skills that are in over-supply as well as those that are needed by the labour market. Morris et al[4] and Dyer et al[5] also agree with the respondents that business models and resourceful packages help equip youth with practical skills that grow their business ideas. This confirms the fact that entrepreneurship and business skills go a long way in helping youth become successful entrepreneurs.

While technical and vocational education serves several purposes, a key purpose is to prepare the youth for both formal employment and self-employment. To support self-employment, technical and vocational curricula should include entrepreneurship and business training. Recent studies have advocated entrepreneurship as a viable solution to youth unemployment[6] since successful young people who start enterprises inevitably end up employing others. Several countries, including Turkey, are modernising technical and vocational education to focus on training students in skills that would help them in running their own businesses to become successful entrepreneurs.[7] In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the informal sector accounts for the majority of new jobs being created.[8] Because of lacking a focus

on entrepreneurship skills development, the BTVET programme in Uganda is set up as if there are jobs available once students graduate. However, this is not the case on the ground and, therefore, necessitates the restructuring of the BTVET curricula to emphasise the practical teaching of entrepreneurship skills.

The question of missing work opportunities as a result of one's gender should be a thing of the past. Denying female graduates job opportunities basing on the perceived understanding that technically science-related work are male jobs is unfortunate. This state of affairs presents females with a double challenge: they do not only face difficulty in finding jobs but also lose some jobs as a result of their gender. This paper makes a case for training in entrepreneurial skills that level the ground for all genders in terms of job search and creation. Entrepreneurship skills empower every graduate to pitch for any job regardless of their gender; this is because entrepreneurship courses teach BTVET trainees to attach value and quality to the work they do and not the person doing the work.

5.1. Implications of the results

The main outcome of the research was to identify the perceived challenges within the BTVET training programme together with the conditions and prerequisites needed for BTVET trainees to be successful.

Using purposive sampling techniques for this study does not, however, guarantee the reliability of responses from stakeholders and respondents, given that they were drawn from small samples and only one sub-region. Further studies, beyond the scope of this research, are needed to contrast the perceptions of the stakeholders and respondents with the actual operation and design of the BTVET programme. Identifying the gap between BTVET structure and all stakeholders' perceptions of the programme will aid the development of policies to transform BTVET programme in future.

While this research included a diverse group of stakeholders that were carefully selected, the representative nature of the study may be improved by extending the list of stakeholders to include a bigger sample from the government, the education ministry, civil society, private and public companies and donor organisations.

6. Conclusions

The results of this study highlight the gap between the BTVET programme as it operates now and the supposed goals of the programme. The results support calls made by various stakeholders for the BTVET programme to be restructured. The results also identify specific sections of the programme where restructuring will contribute significantly to the intended goals of the BTVET programme to deliver its promise:

First, there is a need to correct the perception that BTVET is a programme for dropouts and those who failed to qualify for university. This perception, especially among potential employers, puts graduates of BTVET at a disadvantage on the job market. Promoting and creating awareness about the importance of BTVET would go along way in 1) opening up opportunities for BTVET graduates and 2) attracting more youth to take up courses offered on theBTVET programme.

Second, restructuring of the BTVET programme should focus on how to incorporate entrepreneurial skills that enable BTVET trainees to develop business and management skills through the curricula. Without closing this gap, the youth, even those with adequate technical skills, may not successfully navigate the job market. This is the reason why even when youth get loans from schemes like the Youth Livelihood and Youth Venture Capital Fund (YVCF), they are unable to invest it properly to make a good return on them.

Third, an enabling environment for youth to become demand rather than survival entrepreneurs was strongly emphasised as an important step to prepare youth into successful entrepreneurship. These require resourceful packages that can grow their business ideas practically such as start-up capital.

This policy brief proposes a Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy (YES) that will enable the country's most energetic workforce, the youth, including past BTVET graduates, continuing students and intending students, to become technically skilled and successful entrepreneurial job creators.

7. Policy Recommendations

7.1. A Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy (YES)

This is a proposed plan that looks to build youth entrepreneurial skills needed to enable youth to find gainful employment as well as start and sustain successful businesses. It is a plan that is projected through three thematic principles of Engagement, Empowerment and Equipment (3Es), as discussed below.

7.2. Youth Engagement – promoting the value of entrepreneurship

To overcome the negative bias against the BTVET programme, this theme looks at identifying champions in various BTVET institutions that will act as role models to create awareness of the benefits and opportunities that lie in entrepreneurship. This will help attract and encourage more youth to develop a spirit of entrepreneurship as they learn from the identified champions. In order to speak the language that is most easily understood by today's youth, social media channels, face-to-face meetings as well as online communications will be encouraged to reach and connect with youth, providing platforms where youth's employment challenges can be handled by responsible duty bearers.

7.3. Youth Empowerment – offering entrepreneurial learning platforms to youth

Entertainment-education (E.E) activities through youth festivals that feature competitions, awards and coaching sessions need to be enhanced to promote entrepreneurial-related work. In doing this, relevant research needs to be conducted to identify ways of aligning the entrepreneurial skills taught to BTVET students with those needed to produce goods and services desired by the local market. An entrepreneurial curriculum should be shared with all BTVET institutions to be used by trainers in BTVET institutions. Entrepreneurial concepts and theories that support case study learning methods should be encouraged in the BTVET curricula; these will, in turn, teach trainees how to negotiate for business work. Subsequently, BTVET trainees should be encouraged to develop business plans and incentives should be given to trainees with the most feasible business plans.

7.4. Youth Equipping – creating an enabling environment for youth to create and grow businesses

The Government of Uganda needs to improve employment policies for casual labourers, given that many BTVET graduates are employed this way. The government should also increase funding that adequately facilitates entrepreneurship trainers and equips them them with instructional materials, and makes available start-up capital to BTVET graduates with promising business proposals. Business hubs with apprenticeship programmes that motivate the BTVET trainees should also be promoted. In addition, strategic partnerships should be established to enhance cost-sharing among both private and public institutions and development partners. Once each partner leverages their strength in a coordinated manner, BTVET will support more youth to become successful demand-driven entrepreneurs.

In implementing the Youth 3Es Strategy (YES), a timeline needs to be created with proper indicators that can be tracked to measure the success of the proposed YES strategy, basing on lessons picked from Wales.[9]

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Policy Options for Strengthening State-Citizen Information Flow to Foster Accountability at Local Governments in Uganda

Tonny Okwir

This policy paper argues that limited access to information on government programmes by the citizens contribute to increasing cases of accountability deficits, resulting in poor public service delivery by local governments in Uganda. Indeed, the state duty to ensure adequate access to public information by the citizens is essential for strengthening the capability, accountability and responsiveness of public officers at local governments. The paradigm shift to people-centred approaches to development through a decentralised system of governance in Uganda has seen the proliferation of powers, functions and services at the local government levels. Yet the concept of citizens' participation remains widely misinterpreted. Abuse of power by public officers, corrupt practices, tedious complaints mechanism and citizens' reluctance to engage public officers are identified as some of the underlying causes of citizens' limited access to information on government programmes. This policy brief, therefore, recommends strengthening the institution of village executive committees as a channel for communicating all government plans, policies and programmes. In addition, there is a need to establish the Sub-County Integrity Promotion Forums (SIPFs) to coordinate anti-corruption efforts, effective leadership, accountability and good governance at the sub-county level.

1. Introduction

Uganda introduced the decentralised system of government in 1997 with the objective of transferring powers, functions and services from the central to the local government.[1] Decentralisation was expected to bring planning, budgeting and management of public resources closer to the people, thereby enhancing monitoring, participation and accountability in public service delivery. However, with more than 20 years of decentralisation, there are still widespread concerns over the lack of accountability of public officers, both elected and appointed, at local governments (LGs). If citizens are to meaningfully hold public officers accountable, they need to have adequate information about government decisions and actions during public service delivery. Existing platforms, however, do not provide adequate information on government programmes to citizens. As a result, over 60 per cent of citizens do not have access to public information at the local government levels.[2] Unfortunately, only about 14 per cent of citizens are aware of any law or policy that governs access to public information in Uganda.[3] And yet Article 41 of the Constitution of 1995, Access to Information Act, 2005, and Access to Information Regulations, 2011, provide for the right to access public information by the citizens.[4]

Limited access to information on government programmes by citizens contributes to accountability deficits, resulting in poor public service delivery at local governments. A working definition of access to information is the ability of people to seek or obtain vital public information through formal or informal means.[5] As communication experts argue, the main obstacles to citizens' access to public information include a culture of secrecy, bureaucracy, ignorance of the law and its relevance, tedious complaints mechanisms, and institutional barriers, among others.[6] Therefore, the information gap causes accountability deficits, which manifest themselves in the form of drug shortages in health centres, poor quality construction of roads and classrooms, shortages of learning materials in schools, failure to follow procurement procedures, and nepotism in the recruitment of staff, among others.

Uganda already loses billions of shillings annually due to limited accountability at local government levels, with many accountability experts describing corruption as 'severe, well-known, and something that cuts across social sectors.'[7] The risk, therefore, is that the trend of rising corruption will continue and negatively impact on the country's socio-economic development, thus hindering the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and Uganda's Vision 2040. In addition, the information gaps pose risks to the quality

of leadership by making citizens unable to cast informed votes in the elections, which impacts negatively on the democratic processes as weak and incompetent leaders are elected to political offices. Yet with decentralisation, the powers, functions and services are transferred from the centre to local governments. This requires strong and capable leadership to monitor and supervise public service delivery processes to avoid being abused or mismanaged by the technocrats.

The increasing cases of poor public service delivery necessitate the state to have effective, efficient and inclusive communication structures and processes, which enable the two-way exchange of information between the state and the citizens. Simply defined, a two-way communication is when the sender transmits a message to the receiver and the receiver, after getting the message, sends back a response, acknowledging the message was received.[8] A two-way communication system allows citizens to access adequate information on government programmes, which enhances citizens' participation in the planning, budgeting and monitoring of public service delivery. It further enables citizens to demand accountability from duty bearers, enter into an informed dialogue with the state on issues that affect their well-being, and influence political outcomes, among others. Indeed, many political experts argue that the two-way exchange of information encourages the development of trust between the state and citizens, which is the foundation of state legitimacy over the long-term.[9]

This paper, therefore, explains the underlying causes of limited access to public information by the citizens at local governments in Uganda. The paper further provides policy options for improving citizens' access to public information that would contribute to strengthening the capability, accountability and responsiveness of public officers. The study involved reviewing relevant academic literature, policy documents and government reports on the subject of access to information, accountability and citizen participation in local governance. This was complemented by semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders, mainly local government officials, elected leaders, representatives of civil society and community members. The main findings of the study identified the constraints undermining citizens' access to public information as: citizens' reluctance to engage with duty bearers; abuse of power by public officers; corrupt practices; and ineffectiveness in communicating government programmes to the citizens. As a policy remedy, this paper proposes a range of policy interventions and actions, including strengthening the institution of Village Executive Committee headed by the village (LC1) chairperson, which is made the first contact point in disseminating information on government programmes. There is also a need to establish the Sub-County Integrity Promotion Forums (SIPFs) to facilitate the coordination of anti-corruption efforts, effective leadership, accountability and good governance at the sub-county level.

Section 2 provides the research context on access to public information by citizens based on ethnographic research findings. The responses from the different development stakeholders are discussed, analysed and synthesised with findings from the literature reviewed in order to draw a comprehensive conclusion. Section 3 presents the conclusion and policy recommendations.

2. Contextualising citizens' access to information at local governments in Uganda

2.1. Legal and policy frameworks for access to public information in Uganda

Uganda has a supportive legal framework for access to information under which citizens' limited access to public information is addressed. The right to access public information is enshrined in Article 41 of the Constitution of 1995, which provides that 'every citizen has a right to access information in the possession of the state or any other organs of the state except where the release of the information is likely to interfere with the security of the state or the right to the privacy of any other persons.'[10] Indeed, Uganda became one of the few African countries to enact a right to information law, the Access to Information Act, 2005, and later the Access to Information Regulations, 2011.[11] The Act was enacted to promote the right of access to information by citizens so as to enhance the effectiveness, transparency and accountability of the state by allowing the public to access and participate in decisions that affect them as citizens.[12] Since the enactment of the Access to Information Act, 2005 and its enabling regulations, the Government of Uganda has undertaken noteworthy strides to ensure that citizens access public information.

In 2011, for instance, the government developed a communication strategy to establish an effective, efficient, well-coordinated and proactive communication system across all public institutions. Notably, the communication strategy was developed to further foster government responsiveness to the diverse information needs of the public. Findings, however, acknowledge that the realisation of the communication strategy and the right to information have significantly been affected by the ignorance of the citizens and other public officers about the existence of the available laws and regulations on access to information, its importance, and implementation approaches. From the interviews, for example, it was determined that only two out of 48 community members interviewed had heard about the access to information laws. Perhaps citizens' limited awareness about the access to information laws may not only reflect their ignorance about the significance of the access to information laws and regulations but may also reveal that the government has not done enough regarding their obligation of sensitising the citizens to the existence of available laws and regulations.

The government facilitates its engagement with the citizens through the Government Citizens Interaction Centre (GCIC). GCIC offers a platform for citizens to interact with the government through multiple channels, including a toll-free line, email, social media, website, online chat and SMS, among others. GCIC was established to make access to public information simple and more affordable by the citizens so as to foster the monitoring of service delivery, and to provide a channel for feedback and suggestions from citizens in a bid to promote open governance. However, only 10.8 per cent of households in Uganda have access to the internet and this proportion drops to 6.6 per cent of households in rural areas.[13] This indicates that persons outside urban areas face significant disadvantages in accessing online content. Therefore, GCIC may be serving an elite segment of citizens in urban areas to access information

from Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), excluding the rural poor who only access information directly from public officers at local government levels. Above all, most rural communities do not have electricity and, where electricity is available, there is erratic and unstable power supply, which does not favour the use of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment.

In order to open up access and remove usage restrictions on all information on government programmes, the government introduced the Open Data Policy in 2017. The policy aims at making all public sector information open by default with the exception of personally identifiable information with security, commercial, intellectual property rights and environmental restrictions.[14] The Open Data Policy focuses on how opening up access to information can support performance monitoring as a means of improving public service delivery. Much as the Open Data Policy might have succeeded in opening up access and removing usage restrictions, the government needs to address the bureaucracy involved in the process of accessing information. Currently, under the Local Government Act, 1997 (amended in 2015) and Access to Information Act, 2005, all information on government programmes is supposed to be accessed from the Chief Administration Officer (CAO) at the district level. This bureaucracy essentially enables public officers to hide information from citizens for their personal gain. Public officers, therefore, should be obliged to freely release essential information such as bills of quantity (BoQs) used during the procurement and contractual processes to service user committees such as Health Unit Management Committees (HUMCs), School Management Committees (SMCs) and Water User Committees (WUCs), among others. This would encourage service user committees and other citizens to effectively monitor and supervise contract works, which would both reduce poor quality works and ensure value for money.

2.2. Citizen engagement with public officers at local governments

When citizens freely engage and interact with the state authorities, they are able to get first-hand information on government programmes, present their preferences regarding specific issues affecting them, participate effectively in public decision-making, and hold public officers accountable for particular decisions, actions and behaviours. Interviews with community members, however, revealed that only 18.8 per cent of the respondents have accessed government offices to seek

information on government programmes in the last three years. The interviews further revealed that most community members do not know the civil servants employed by the government to deliver public services. For instance, only 10.4 per cent of the respondents had personally met and interacted with their Senior Assistant Secretary, commonly referred to as the Sub-county Chief, on issues of public service delivery. Denis, for instance, said categorically that he is not aware whether

the Sub-county Chief is male or female. Similarly, Susan only knew the Sub-county Chief who died five years earlier and wondered whether he had been replaced.

Much as decentralisation might have brought government closer to the citizens, it seems that it is at the discretion of the public officers to decide when, where and how to engage and interact with the citizens. In fact, both district and sub-county officials who were interviewed acknowledged that few community members often came to their offices to seek information on government programmes. For instance, Francis admits that on average only two community members came to his office on a given day. Meanwhile, three respondents from civil society claimed that citizens were often reluctant and unwilling to go to government offices to access public information because they had lost trust in government as a result of corrupt practices by some public officers. This claim was indirectly accepted by Peter, one of the public officers interviewed, who argued that community members often had negative attitudes towards public officers, which made them reluctant to engage with public officers on issues of public service delivery. Indeed, this finding is in agreement with social accountability experts who argue that for citizens to proactively engage and interact with public officers, they need an enabling environment that facilitates free engagement and interaction.[15]

2.3. Communicating government programmes to citizens through local radio stations

Access to adequate information on government programmes by citizens promotes an efficient, effective, transparent and accountable government. Indeed, government policies, plans and programmes ought to be adequately communicated and well received by citizens in order to ensure quality public service delivery. According to interviews with government officials, information on government programmes such as Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) and Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP), among others, is disseminated mostly through local radio stations and public noticeboards. Local radio, however, seems to be the most preferred channel for communicating government programmes at local government levels. In fact, during the interviews, two of the district officials were quick to thank Uganda Communication Commission (UCC) for allocating free radio airtime to the districts, which they claim had eased community sensitisation and mobilisation on government programmes.

In 2013, UCC introduced free public education airtime, which requires all radio stations across the country to give free one-hour radio airtime weekly to the local government to mobilise and sensitise the public to government programmes and receive feedback on public service delivery. This has led to radio stations becoming an integral component of public service delivery in Uganda. However, while free radio airtime might have been successful in sensitising and mobilising some citizens to participate in government programmes, it has not reached economically disadvantaged people who cannot afford a radio receiver. This makes it impossible for some community members to access and benefit from the information on government programmes delivered through the radio stations. In fact, this concern has been confirmed by the National Information Technology Survey, which reports that only about 60 per cent of Ugandans access and listen to the radio; this number drops to 35 per cent of households in the rural areas.[16] Responses from community members interviewed also indicate that only 33.3 per cent of respondents access public information from local radio stations. The interviews also discovered that a district without a locally based radio station does not benefit from the free radio airtime allocated by the UCC. In fact, one of the public officers interviewed accepted that his district holds only one radio talk show in a quarter because of resource constraints.

Much as local radios seem to be the means most preferred by public officers for communicating government programmes, some community members also feel ignored. For instance, Jacky, one of the respondents, reported that the radio talk shows are often held very late in the night when most women are tired and already sleeping after a long day's work in the garden and engagement in domestic chores. In addition, given that the topics discussed on radio are pre-identified and determined by public officers, there is also a significant possibility that some critical information, such as BoQs for a project, may be intentionally left out for fear that pressure, criticism and a demand for accountability might arise from the citizens. For instance, Susan, one of the public officers interviewed, wondered why she should give a community member the BoQ for a project and yet he/she will use it against her on radio.

The research findings, however, revealed that local radios to some extent have been fundamental in driving citizens

to believe that demanding information on government programmes and holding duty bearers accountable can actually improve public service delivery. This has mainly been through social accountability radio programmes. For instance, Michael, one of the public officers interviewed, explained that community members always take advantage of morning radio discussions to demand information on government programmes and raise issues of accountability. He added that, as a district, they are forced to respond to such issues, although this is something that most public officers are not comfortable doing. Much as accountability radio programmes might have succeeded in providing a platform for demanding public information and holding duty bearers accountable, responding to such demands or claims is neither legally binding nor mandatory. Sam, one of the respondents interviewed, however, claimed that public officers, especially elected leaders, are often very quick to respond to community demands over the radio for fear of tarnishing their names. Respondents from civil society claimed that public officers are often opposed accountability radio programmes because they expose abuse of power, corruption and mismanagement of government programmes.

2.4. Citizen participation in government programmes at local governments

In recent years, community participation has dominated the development discourse in an attempt to facilitate local people's involvement in their own development. Indeed, in decentralised public sector governance, citizens are expected to proactively participate in the planning, budgeting and monitoring of public service delivery, which is significant in strengthening accountability at local governments. However, interviews with community members revealed that only 12.5 per cent of the respondents had participated in any government programme in the past three years. For instance, Samuel explained: 'I have never benefited from any government programme but I just hear about such programmes over the radio…' Six community members acknowledged that they applied for YLP and UWEP but their groups were not selected to benefit from the grants. Community members defined their participation in government programmes in terms of what they benefit as individuals rather than the designing, planning and monitoring roles of citizens. Community members also accepted that they are often not willing to attend any meeting organised by any public officer unless they are paid sitting allowances. Johnson, for instance, stated categorically that public officers often use their names and signatures to steal money from government programmes to buy expensive cars and build good houses, leaving them to suffer from poverty.

Johnson claims that accountability still remains a challenge at the government levels. Recently, the State House Anti-Corruption Unit in the Office of the President arrested several local government officials on corruption and abuse of office allegations.[17] During the interview, Lucy, a 58-year-old single mother of six living with HIV/AIDS, narrated her ordeal about being a victim of the corrupt practices of public officers at local the government. Lucy's name was in the beneficiary list displayed on the sub-county noticeboard for the government restocking programme under the Office of the Prime Minister's Peace, Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP), but eventually her name went missing on the day animals were being given out to the beneficiaries. Lucy claims that her attempt to seek justice was ignored by public officers at the sub-county, including the Resident District Commissioner (RDC), who told her to wait for another opportunity. Lucy's story could be a representation of the untold stories of other community members who are denied public services by public officers as a result of abuse of power and corruption at local governments.

Lucy's experience may point to an explanation as to why many citizens are unwilling to engage, interact and participate in government programmes. As explained in the Accountability Sector Bulletin Report, corruption hinders citizens' access to information on government programmes as public officers tend to hide critical information so as to limit citizens from demanding accountability.[18] The act ultimately demoralises citizens from performing their cardinal roles of participating in the planning, budgeting and monitoring of public service delivery, though this is something that public officers deny. For instance, Robert, one of the public officers interviewed, claimed that community participation is low because of the high rate of illiteracy, lack of exposure, fear and low self-esteem among citizens. John, another public officer, attributed the low level of community participation to limited government resources and increased demand for money by the community members.

3. Policy recommendations

This section makes several policy recommendations, which, if employed, are poised to respond to some of the underlying causes of citizens' limited access to information on government decisions and actions taken by public officers during public service delivery.

3.1. Strengthening the institution of Village Executive Committees headed by village (LC1) chairpersons

This paper has established that all communications on government plans, policies and programmes should be channelled through the Village Executive Committee headed by the village (LC1) chairperson. The Village Executive Committee is the lowest political administrative unit based at the village level, which was established through the Local Government Act in 1997. According to Article 50 of the Local Government Act, 1997 (amended in 2015), the village committee oversees the implementation of policies and decisions made by its councils.[19] It further serves as the communication channel between the central government, the district or higher local council and the people in the area. The functionality of the Village Executive Committees, however, was crippled by the failure to hold LC1 elections for 17 years; it was not until July 2018 that elections were held. This made some positions on the committee fall vacant, and allowed weak people who could not mobilise the village council members to assume the position of chairperson, and some chairpersons could not be held accountable by the village members. Yet LC1 chairpersons are well-placed to play the role of communicating government programmes because they know each village resident well, including their home locations, and have extensive social contact with community members through casual socialising and events such as burials, weddings and traditional marriage ceremonies, among others.

Borrowing from the rationale for the Local Government Reform in Tanzania in 2002-2005, dedicated to strengthening village authority and citizens' participation in poverty reduction,[20] similar attention should be given to strengthening the Village Executive Committees. Tanzanian local government reform ensured that all village leaders were trained, empowered and mandated to participate in formulating, implementing and monitoring government programmes, which succeeded in strengthening downward accountability. Village Executive Committees, therefore, should further be strengthened through holding regular elections every five years so that the village council members are able to hold the committee accountable for their decisions and actions, which are taken during public service delivery within the village. In addition, the facilitation which the government gives to the LC1 chairpersons annually should be given on a quarterly basis and attached to the village meetings conducted. The money should be given after the presentation of minutes of meetings and attendance lists for the general village meetings. This would encourage the Village Executive Committees to regularly organise meetings for the village members, thus serving as a reliable platform for communicating government programmes. To further ease the movements of village chairpersons, the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) should fast-track the delivery of bicycles which were promised to village chairpersons.

3.2. Establish Sub-county Integrity Promotion Forums (SIPFs) to coordinate public service delivery system

This paper revealed the weaknesses in the current citizen engagement mechanisms, which give public officers at the local governments too much discretion in deciding what, when and how public information reaches citizens. Indeed, the current platforms do not sufficiently empower citizens to access the information needed to effectively hold public officers accountable. Therefore, the government should consider establishing

Sub-county Integrity Promotion Forums (SIPFs) to co-ordinate mechanisms that aim to bring the leadership of a sub-county together to discuss issues of public service delivery, accountability and effective leadership in the sub-county. Borrowing from the justifications for the formation of District Integrity Promotion Forums under the Directorate of Ethics and Integrity in the Office of the President of Uganda, dedicated to fostering integrity and preventing corruption in the public

sector, similar attention should also be scaled down to fostering integrity and fighting corruption at sub-county level, which is the hub for public service delivery in a decentralised system of governance.

The SIPFs can be guided by the principles of mutual respect, honesty and service above self. Its membership can be drawn from among heads of sub-county institutions, representatives of civil society, media, and religious and cultural leaders. SIPFs would significantly address accountability deficits by frequently organising stakeholders' engagement meetings, public accountability meetings, and joint monitoring of public service delivery, which would greatly reduce abuse of power, corrupt practices, and mismanagement of government programmes by public officers at local government levels. In addition, SIPFs can be engaged by anti-corruption civil society organisations and accountability institutions, such as the Inspectorate of Government and the Office of the Prime Minister, in organising public accountability forums (barazas) at the sub-county level.

4. Conclusion

The concept of access to information evolved primarily as a means to promote citizens' participation in public service delivery, which enhances effectiveness, transparency and accountability of the state by allowing the public to adequately access information and participate in the decisions that affect them as citizens. However, because of the weaknesses in the current citizen engagement mechanisms, which give public officers at the local governments too much discretion in deciding what, when and how public information reaches citizens, citizens do not have adequate access to the information needed to effectively hold public officers accountable during public service delivery. The research findings highlighted governance challenges that have brought about a lack of trust between citizens and public officers. Indeed, it is worth noting that abuse of power and corrupt practices by public officers bring about the reluctance among citizens to participate in the planning, budgeting and monitoring of public service delivery at the local government levels. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that the access to information laws, policies and discourses should include abuse of power by public officers and sensitisation of citizens so that they are empowered to demand information on government programmes. This will give a complete account of the causes of citizens' limited access to public information and an accurate account of how to address limited access to information on government programmes, which would strengthen accountability at local governments.

In summary, in order to answer the questions of citizens' limited access to information as a means of strengthening accountability at local government levels, Uganda will need to have well-informed and empowered citizens to proactively participate in the planning, budgeting and monitoring of public service delivery. In addition, citizens will have to elect competent and capable leaders to supervise technocrats during public service delivery processes. Meanwhile, citizens will have to hold the public officers, both elected and appointed, accountable for their decisions and actions during the public service delivery. Improving citizens' access to information on government programmes will strengthen the capability, accountability and responsiveness of duty bearers at local government levels.

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