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THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHILD POVERTY IN UGANDA

Volume 2: Views of the Public - 2024

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MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHILD POVERTY IN UGANDA
VOLUME 2: VIEWS OF THE PUBLIC | 2024

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FOREWORD

In 2013, the Government of Uganda launched its Vision 2040, which outlined its ambition to transform the country from a rural economy to a powerful, industrialized and developed society. The Vision emphasizes the need for urbanization, infrastructural development, innovation and investment in human capital. The Ugandan Government has also been committed to achieving, by 2030, progress on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) key of which is '*ending poverty in all its forms everywhere*'.

However, poverty is multidimensional in nature and reflects (i) resource insufficiency, commonly manifest in low incomes and expenditures, (ii) vulnerability to adverse shocks such as illness, violence and loss of livelihood, and (iii) powerlessness in the political, social and economic life of one's community as well as the country. Consequently, no single measure (including multidimensional poverty index), no matter how cleverly designed nor carefully measured can ever provide an encompassing treatment of poverty.

The purpose of this study therefore is to provide an in-depth understanding of poverty by following a qualitative approach, which captures the vulnerabilities that people, particularly the youth, are facing, as seen through their eyes. This would complement quantitative poverty measures to inform policy and programmes aimed at transforming the lives of Ugandans and realizing Uganda's Vision 2040, the SDGs and Africa Agenda 2063. The approach taken in this report to achieve its goal was qualitative in nature. The Report focuses on four (4) key themes, namely Adolescent pregnancy and Early marriage, Aspirations and the Labor market transitions, Urbanization and Mental health. The selection of the 4 themes was informed by the need to understand public perceptions, which are critical in designing policies and programmes that address the concerns and challenges of Ugandan citizens. A total of 48 focus group discussions for Ugandans aged 14 to 64 years across 9 regions in Uganda between July and September 2022 were conducted.

The study finds that in Uganda, adolescent pregnancy and child marriage are driven by poverty. Further, poverty is exacerbated by other risk factors such as lack of sex knowledge and stereotype norms in favour of the boy child. With regards to aspiration and labour market transitions, the study finds that gender norms about domestic work remain influential but may be shifting. The study further finds that the main drivers of mental health are genetic factors and external stressors such as drug and alcohol abuse, but the most important challenge is the lack of awareness by the public.

The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) would like to acknowledge the effort of its key partners in the production of this report. The Bristol Poverty Institute has been a key partner in the inclusion of qualitative approaches to understanding multi-dimensional child poverty. UNICEF Uganda has also been key in not only strengthening relationships with multiple institutions that have been key in the measurement of monetary and multi-dimensional child poverty but also facilitating the building of technical capacity in UBOS to measure child poverty. The Bureau extends its appreciation to all stakeholders who, because of space limitations, cannot be acknowledged individually who contributed towards the success of this report. I would also like to extend my thanks to the management and staff of UBOS, who tirelessly worked to make this report a success.

We therefore urge government institutions (Ministries, Departments and Agencies) and development partners to use the findings in this report to better the situation of the Ugandan child.

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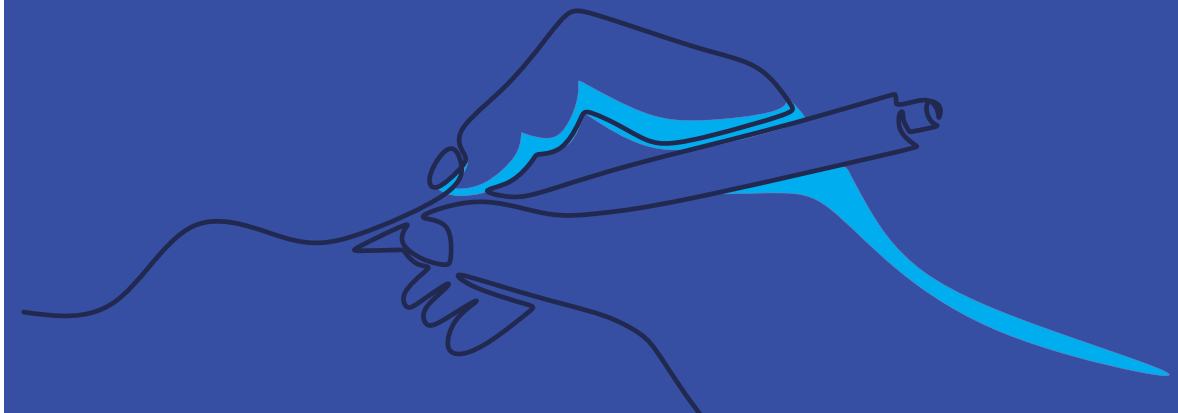


CHAPTER 01
INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the Government of Uganda launched its Vision 2040: a bold document that outlined its ambition to transform the country from a rural economy to a powerful, industrialised and developed society (NPA 2013). The Vision emphasizes the need for urbanisation, infrastructural development, innovation, and investment in human capital. At the heart of its strategy is the youthful population of Uganda, whose health, access to education and economic participation are essential to delivering these outcomes by 2040.

Uganda's Vision 2040 aligns with other regional trends towards recognising and integrating the role of young people in development strategies. The African Union's Youth Charter (2006) emphasizes its conviction that Africa's youth are its greatest resource and that 'through their active and full participation, Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead'. The African Union's Agenda 2063 (AU 2015) acknowledges the vital role of young people in the achievement of 'The Africa We Want' and stipulates the need to ensure that the Youth Charter's commitments are delivered in order for its development objectives to be realised.

Since 2015, the Ugandan Government has also been committed to achieving by 2030, progress on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The overall goal of the SDG 1 is 'ending poverty in all its forms everywhere' during the 21st Century and one of its key principles is "Leave No One Behind". In relation to this achievement, the Government of Uganda has thus agreed to a range of ambitious targets with potentially transformative implications for children and adolescents growing up in Uganda. These include targets on poverty eradication (SDG 1), good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10).

It is clear that the policy environment both nationally and globally, is oriented towards capitalizing on the 'demographic dividend' that a youthful population offers (Bloom and Williamson 1998). Indeed, Uganda has made significant progress in transforming the lived experience of young people in recent years, particularly in maternal and child health and increased educational opportunities. However, its ambition to reach its Vision 2040 (NPA 2013) requires significant effort to build on this progress, particularly ensuring that "no one is left behind".

1.1 RATIONALE

This report provides vital input for policy and interventions aimed at transforming the lives of Ugandans and realizing both Uganda's Vision 2040 Agenda and other regional and global agendas. Four key topics were selected for the focus of the research:

- adolescent pregnancy and early marriage
- aspirations and labour market transitions
- urbanisation
- mental health

The first rationale for the selection of these topics is their significance for the development progress of Uganda in line with national and global goals around children, adolescents and young people's participation, rights and wellbeing. The selection of these topics aligns clearly and directly with the SDGs on gender equality, decent work, education, reduced inequalities, good health and wellbeing.

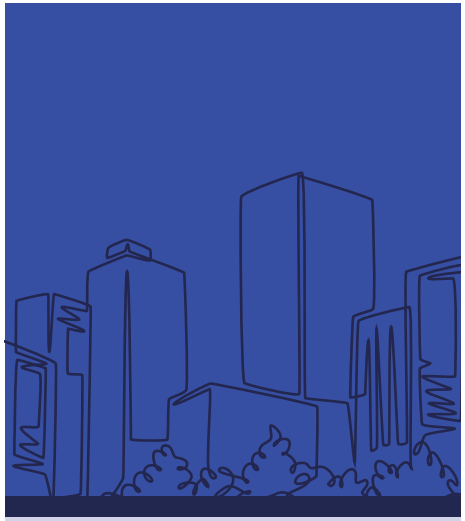
The second rationale is the dearth of up-to-date, robust data on these issues, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, and the importance of improving the evidence base for policies and programming to address these issues in the future. Understanding public perceptions of these issues is critical to designing policies and programming that genuinely reflect and address the concerns and challenges of Ugandan citizens. This is why the approach of this research has been to engage with the views of Ugandans of all age groups, across the country and inclusive of all regions.

THE FIRST TOPIC IS ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY AND CHILD MARRIAGE.

These two issues continue to affect high numbers of girls and young women in Uganda and present major challenges for addressing poverty, unemployment, gender inequality and child health, amongst other issues (NPA 2020). However, there is limited understanding of how young men and young women navigate decision-making about their sexual relationships and what kinds of support can enable them to overcome social norms and economic pressures.

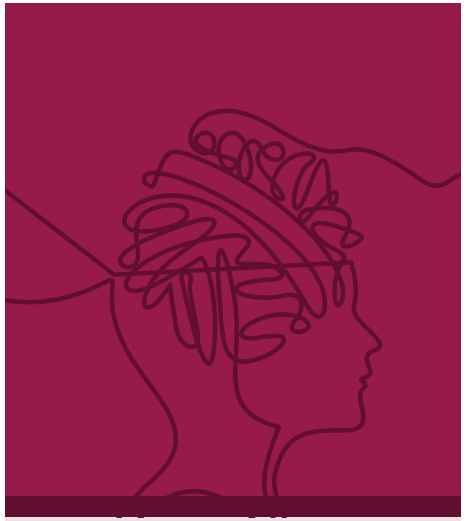
THE SECOND TOPIC IS ASPIRATIONS AND LABOUR MARKET TRANSITIONS.

Whilst young people's aspirations have shifted considerably over the past two decades, in part due to the expansion of education at primary and secondary levels, Uganda's Vision 2040 recognises the need for better alignment between young people's ambitions and work opportunities. Understanding the aspirations, lived experiences and work-related challenges faced by young people across the country can offer key insights into what factors can help young people to make the transition into the labour market successfully (Rietveld et al. 2020).



THE THIRD TOPIC IS URBANISATION.

Uganda's cities are rapidly growing, expanding and developing and urbanisation has become synonymous with development and wealth. However, a closer look reveals high levels of inequality that stifle young people's opportunities to benefit from urbanisation processes (World Bank 2016). This research offers the opportunity to explore how young people experience urbanisation, with particular attention to service provision and access that can improve wellbeing in urban centres.



MENTAL HEALTH

is a particularly novel topic for examination in Uganda, where there are recognized to be high levels of psychological distress amongst young people. This is often linked to substance abuse, a lack of family support, violence, and neglect (Swahn *et al.* 2012). However, there remains a poor understanding of how to support and treat mental health problems in children and adolescents, both at the community level and within national health planning, which this research can help to address.

1.2 METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

This report investigates the views of people aged between 14 and 64 years on key issues affecting young people. Given Uganda's diverse population (in terms of ethnicity, language, sources of livelihood) and the different challenges facing its different regions, a total of 48 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics involving participants recruited from across nine regions in Uganda, between July and September 2022 (see Appendix for details). The research was funded by UNICEF Uganda. A team of researchers, led by the University of Bristol, worked with UBOS to develop the data collection topic guides and on the analyses of the FGD results.

FGDs involve a group of participants responding collectively to questions asked by an experienced facilitator, who follows up with probing questions to allow for deeper insights into the issue under discussion. FGDs allow for insights into group norms and consensus as well as allow for points of difference around age and gender to emerge. The age groupings of the FGDs for the different topics is documented in the Appendix. FGDs were conducted on the four specified topics, starting with more general questions about perceptions of the topic at hand before moving to more detailed probing intended to capture norms, drivers, consequences and intersections with other key issues.

With the consent of participants, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently translated and transcribed verbatim into English.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The overall pattern of response to the questions asked within the FGDs is summarised in the framework analysis tabulations in the Appendix to this document. By their nature, FGDs are well-suited to uncovering the breadth of public views and perceptions rather than more in-depth personal narratives and experiences. Participants' responses typically encompass both personal experiences based on age and gender and perceptions of wider social conditions in their communities and villages. Research interviews began with a relatively unstructured discussion of these issues and moved into more detailed probing. During analysis, responses were organised by topic guide questions and FGD to reflect this progression of questioning.

Framework analysis (see Ritchie & Lewis 2003) was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, this was because of its suitability for working thematically and by case, which makes it appropriate for systematically addressing the key questions at the heart of this research. Secondly, retaining links to original transcripts in the process through line referencing makes it possible for indexing, mapping and interpretation of data to be reviewed by other researchers in order to promote rigour.

The data analysis software Taguette was used for data management and supplementary analysis, in addition to framework analysis through Excel. Taguette is free digital software which allows for manual coding of data and for collaboration on work projects. This function can be useful when a team is undertaking analysis in different locations. A list of tags (codes) was developed by indexing and summarizing the data in Excel. The list was then imported into Taguette from Excel.

Inductive analysis was undertaken through summarising the responses of participants; noting emerging themes and patterns across the data; cross-referencing these commonalities; contextualising them in reference to the extant knowledge base on each topic, and refining the resulting interpretations of the data iteratively through repeated readings of the FGD transcripts and critical dialogue with colleagues.

CHAPTER 02

ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY AND CHILD MARRIAGE IN UGANDA

2.1 BACKGROUND

Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage have major negative consequences both for individual girls and young women and for the development of Uganda more generally (UNFPA et al. 2022). Of all births in Uganda, 25% are to adolescent girls, of which 34% are from the lowest wealth quintile compared with 15% from the highest quintile (NDPIII 2020-2025). Girls in rural areas are more likely to become pregnant below the age of 19 than their urban peers (UBOS 2023). Previous research has found that adolescent pregnancy in Uganda is driven by poverty, peer pressure, social norms and a lack of family support, in addition to a lack of knowledge about prevention methods and risky sexual behaviour (Hulton et al. 2000; Leerlooijer et al. 2014; Nabugoomu et al. 2020; Rutaremwa 2011; UBOS 2016). Adolescent girls are at a heightened risk of poverty because they are forced to drop out of school and struggle to find work (Rutaremwa 2011).

Adolescent pregnancy is also strongly connected to child marriage. According to the most recent DHS (2016), child marriage rates in Uganda have remained high even in recent years, despite the government's attention to the issue. 34% of young women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18 (DHS 2016). Girls who marry before the age of 18 have lower school completion rates and worse health outcomes than those who marry later in life. In part, this is due to the link between early marriage and a high rate of childbearing (WHO 2012; Yakubu and Salisu 2018). The psychosocial wellbeing of girls married below the age of 18 is also worse than their unmarried peers. Married girls report feeling more socially isolated and at a heightened risk of gender-based violence (Government of Uganda and UNICEF 2015).

In order to develop effective and targeted strategies and policies, it is important to improve understanding of the many interconnected factors which contribute to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in Uganda. This report, therefore, engages with issues including voice and agency, how expectations are formed and how decisions are made about marriage and pregnancy through examining the experiences and perceptions of Ugandan youth in relation to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. It includes the views of those who have marriage and parenting experience and also those who are not yet married or have not yet become parents.

2.2 RESEARCH FOCUS

The research was undertaken with young people in nine regions of Uganda to better understand the issue of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage from the perspective of young people in various contexts. The research aimed to generate insights into the temporal, social, relational aspects of child marriage and teenage pregnancy, existing supportive mechanisms and their effectiveness and evidence-based transformative and enforceable strategies.

KEY QUESTIONS AT THE HEART OF THE RESEARCH WERE:

- How do young people make decisions and to what extent is this a fully informed decision?
- How do young male and female partners enter sexual relationships?
- How do young people prevent unintended and unwanted pregnancies?
- How do young people communicate the fact of unintended and unwanted pregnancies, and to whom?
- What, if any, support for those at risk of child marriage or teenage pregnancy are participants aware of and what are their perceptions of it?
- What are the wider community's perspectives on child marriage or teenage pregnancy?
- What do participants think effective, accessible and non-stigmatising support would look like for young people at risk of child marriage and/or teenage pregnancy?

Finally, as the world was living through the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact, understanding of perceptions and experiences of child marriage and teenage pregnancy before the pandemic and since, including analysis of change and continuity in these areas of concern, will offer vital input for policy and interventions aimed at addressing these issues.

The findings shared in this section of the report are organized as follows. First, young people's perceptions of decision-making about adolescent pregnancy and child marriage are discussed. The consequences of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy for young people's lives are then explored. We then reflect upon how young people view sexual relationships, approach the issue of contraception with partners and how they view pregnancy when it happens. Next, perceptions of the wider community are engaged with. We explore the support that young people perceive as available to them both in terms of services and interpersonal relationships and how their communities respond to adolescent pregnancy and early marriage. Finally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child marriage and adolescent pregnancy is explored.

2.3 FINDINGS ON ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY AND CHILD MARRIAGE BEFORE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

2.3.1 Young people's (14-30 years) Perceptions of Decision-Making About Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage

Poverty Drives Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage

The stigma of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage was emphasized by respondents across sites. Poor knowledge about preventing pregnancy and a lack of education, were also seen as important drivers. Poverty was not specifically stated to be a factor in adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. However, it is clear that poverty had an impact on the decisions and outcomes of young people who married or had children early. This was largely because poverty limited the options available to young people, especially in relation to education.

A lack of support from parents and a lack of money in general, had a negative impact on young people's opportunities for education. Both girls and boys from across the different sites noted that changes in their family affected their schooling. For example, the death of a parent or the loss of income experienced by the family often led to a lack of money for school fees and the need for young people to start working to help support the family.

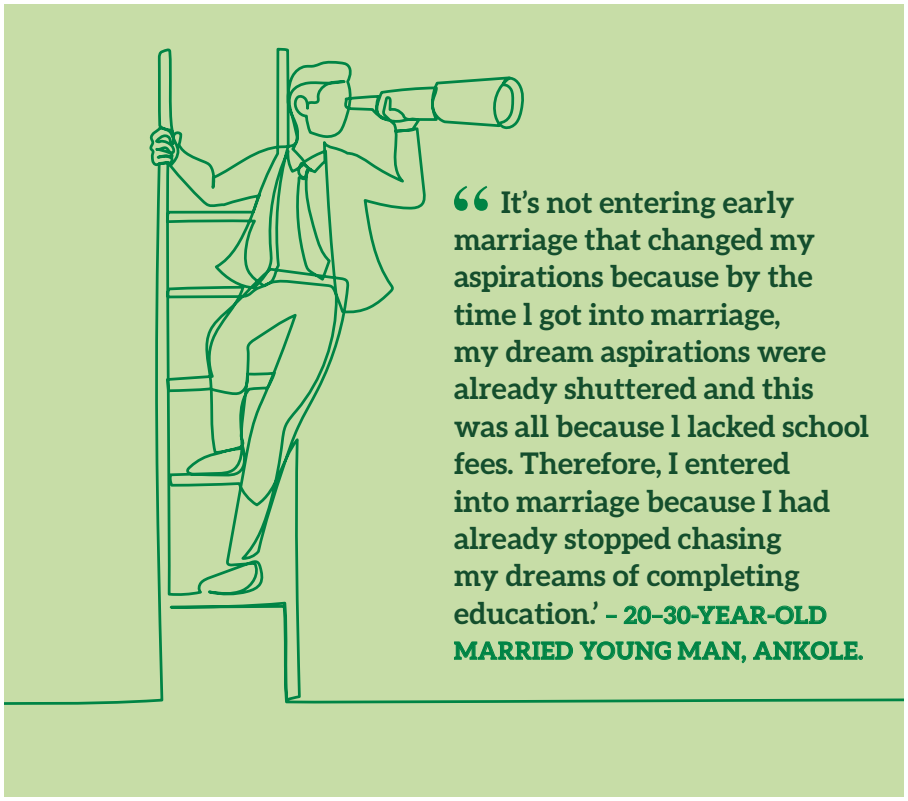
However, girls, in particular, emphasized that parents could not always be relied upon to provide support or money for things they want or need anyway, such as pads, books, or food, so they had to find other sources for these. Sometimes, girls said this was because of the prioritisation of male siblings' education over daughters' education, particularly when money was tight.

Marriage in a context where livelihood options are severely constrained was also sometimes framed as a strategic and financial decision for men seeking to establish a family unit – with child marriage enabled by girls also having limited alternatives.

Poverty is Exacerbated by Other Risk Factors

Girls and young women understood that having children and marrying young would not make life easy and it was not their first choice for themselves. However, they described themselves as being in a position where this was the only means of survival available to them and did the best they could in the circumstances. In this sense, marrying early was not seen as a choice but an outcome of constrained options due to a lack of family support.

Indeed, dropping out of school was often explained as being a cause rather than an outcome of pregnancy. Both girls and boys described looking for alternative livelihood options once their educational aspirations were no longer possible:



> **“ It's not entering early marriage that changed my aspirations because by the time I got into marriage, my dream aspirations were already shuttered and this was all because I lacked school fees. Therefore, I entered into marriage because I had already stopped chasing my dreams of completing education.' – 20–30-YEAR-OLD MARRIED YOUNG MAN, ANKOLE.**

Beyond not having money for education, girls described having to leave their parental homes due to violence or neglect by parents and step-parents. Others reported that their parents told daughters to fend for themselves and marry as they were old enough to not be reliant on them anymore. Once they had left home, many confirmed that their lack of knowledge about sex leading to pregnancy and poor decision-making skills then would lead to accidental pregnancy. Young men also reported poor accessibility to condoms, on top of their own ignorance about the consequences of unprotected sex.

> *“ For me there was no option because the shops to buy condoms from were far. There was also no time to think of it.'* **– 20–30-YEAR-OLD YOUNG MAN WHO BECAME A FATHER AS A TEENAGER, BUNYORO**

The Transition to Adolescence is Very Challenging

Girls and women, in particular, emphasized the role of peer pressure from friends in adolescent pregnancy and school dropout. During adolescence, girls observe they began to listen less to their parents and were more influenced by what their friendship groups were saying and doing.

> *“ Getting pregnant doesn't come from your own wish, sometimes it is peer pressure like when you move with your friend in groups, there are others who do not study but for you, you study, so, your colleague can ask you why you study, then they will influence her to go to discos, move around, there are some parents who don't care about their children, you find that sometimes children return home at midnight when they are from moving with their group, so you get influenced like that and join that peer group and when you join, you also become like them, you stop schooling, sometimes you go to drink, you don't listen, so, sometimes you may want something then you go and look for the ways of getting it.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD GIRL, BUKEDI.**

Young women also noted that the experience of marriage as an adolescent turned out to be very challenging. Young women acknowledged that they were often not mature or experienced enough to know how to handle conflict within their relationship nor domestic management such as budgeting for food. Young people of both sexes cited divorce and domestic violence as key issues facing young couples.

Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage are an Interconnected Phenomena

School-based and non-school-based factors contribute to drop out of school (Tumuhairwe, 2009). They are more likely to marry because they have dropped out of school, especially when school attrition is linked to pregnancy. Indeed, these connections between adolescent pregnancy and child marriage are evident in the discussions of young people as to whether their entry into marriage was a choice or not. Some young women noted that entering marriage may be due to pressure from parents.

> *"Parents told me as a girl to go and marry. "You are old go get married" just because I developed breasts on my chest. And when one asks for school requirements like books, school fees... this also led me to get married, to stop begging my parents.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD MARRIED YOUNG WOMAN, BUNYORO.**

However, more widely discussed was that marriage was an expected outcome of pregnancy as a means to avoid defilement charges for boys and give support and safety to girls.

> *"Sometimes if the affected person doesn't have items for dowry, they take away the daughter, but others go and report the issue of defilement hence most community members take the issue of the girls more serious than for boys especially when she is under the age of 18.'* **–14–19-YEAR-OLD GIRL, WEST NILE.**

Indeed, some young men felt that there was no alternative to early marriage in the case of pregnancy. Furthermore, the jailing of boys as punishment for defilement can mean that girls get no support when they have a baby.

2.3.2 Consequences of pregnancy

School Attrition

Dropping out of school was one of the most widely mentioned dimensions of adolescent pregnancy. This was particularly emphasized as being an outcome for girls of having a baby. Indeed, participants widely described that pregnant girls would be 'chased' out of school and were unable to go back. This was in contrast to boys, who would have to leave school if they had no alternative but to work and support the girl they had got pregnant. However, it would be socially acceptable to stay in school if their own parents were willing to continue to support them:

> *"It's different for the girl. It's difficult to go back to school. There is a lot of stigma – while for a boy when he walks there are no marks or signs that show he produced. He can go back to school.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD GIRL, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *"There's a proverb in Runyakole which says that girls are looked at as milk whereas boys as potatoes. If milk pours... you can't pick it (up) again, but if a potato falls down you can pick it (up), clean it and eat it. So, this whole thing affects a girl child. A boy can go back to school but it's hard for girl to go back.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, ANKOLE.**

School attrition for girls was not always a consequence of getting pregnant. Often, the sequence of events was that a lack of money for school fees or the prioritization of male siblings led girls to drop out and then seek alternative futures for themselves that often involved having a baby or marrying. Sometimes girls engaged in work which put them at risk of pregnancy due to increased interaction with boys and men, whilst sometimes girls deliberately chose to get married as a means of creating security for themselves when their parents were no longer able or willing to support them financially.

For young men, a lack of money to pursue education was also a major factor in ending up in jobs they did not plan for and feeling precarious as a result. Once they married and had children, they also experienced an expectation to financially prioritize their family and put their own ambitions to one side. Many young men declared that they would hope to one day continue education but having children meant that this was not a possibility anymore, as all their resources went on their futures instead.

> **“ If I was making sufficient savings from my fishing business, this would make me to be more hopeful about becoming a successful business man, but currently what is standing in my way are the increased financial responsibilities of taking care of my wife, the hospital bills, and I know when the baby is born, more responsibilities will come which requires money implying less savings.’ – 14-19 YEAR OLD MARRIED BOY, LANGO.**

In areas where there were a lot of opportunities for paid work for young people, such as near the Kenyan border where there is a lot of trade and manual labour, these opportunities sometimes appeared to be a good move for young people who wanted to transcend poverty – even though they meant giving up school. Indeed, during COVID-19, young people were drawn to these roles and did not return to school afterwards.

Stigma and Isolation

Across the data, participants described the negative responses of their communities to young girls who have a baby or marry before the age of 18. Being held up as a bad example to other young people, mocked, discriminated against, prevented from speaking at community meetings or from spending time with other young people and even called names in the street were described across all sites. Making poor choices was seen as evidence of girls’ bad characters and, thus, justification for their social rejection.

> *“ Community have bad view of people who experience early marriage, since as a young family, they can’t take good care of their family needs.’* **– 14–17-YEAR-OLD BOY, LANGO.**

The consequences of this for girls’ self-esteem and social lives was very negative. For girls who experienced this treatment by society, having a baby was not the only thing that stopped them from fulfilling ambitions. Rather, it was the way they were then shunned, discriminated against, disrespected, devalued and excluded that led them to lose hope for the future. They were excluded both from community life and from the possibility of school. Therefore, girls who had children as adolescents reported a lack of hope for the future and a sense of alienation from the wider community.

> *“ (The community) mistreat you and look at you as second-hand people who have no value.’* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD MARRIED GIRL, BUGANDA SOUTH .**

It is important to note that this treatment largely affected girls. Boys reported receiving some condemnation and mockery for having children young and thus unable to look after them properly. However, this experience did not appear to have the same impact on their self-perception, and they were not socially or educationally excluded in the same way as girls were. Whilst boys who get girls pregnant were described as being seen as ‘bad characters’, this labelling did not appear to have the same impact on their lives as girls, whose reputation was much more important and harmed by pregnancy.

Some boys did report engaging in a degree of self-isolation by leaving their community to avoid gossip. Yet, in other areas, boys described how becoming fathers automatically meant that they attained the status of ‘men’ in the community and became participants in new social circles as a result.

Poverty also shapes the social judgement that young men and boys experience. Young men noted that if you are poor and get a girl pregnant you would be condemned more than someone with the money to take care of the child and its mother.

> *“ The community views you depending on your family background, that is, they assume a boy from a rich family has the ability to take care of the girl and will be condemned less compared to the one from a poor family who will be undermined.’* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, BUGANDA NORTH.**

2.3.3 Perceptions of sex, relationships, pregnancy and contraception

Gender Differences: Male Desire and Female Resignation

Boys were comfortable in many of the sites discussing their sexual desire and interest in girls. The inevitability with which the desire to have sex was described meant that many participants did not even see it as a choice to get someone pregnant – they were just acting without thinking. The main negative emotions around this were fears of imprisonment for impregnating girls. When asked if they would do things differently, most young men acknowledged that they would probably again not use a condom and have sex because of how it felt.

> *'As a boy, when going to have sex, I take it as pleasure or as a means of relieving stress, not knowing these outcomes will follow... unfortunately, you end up as a father or mother at an early age'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUGANDA NORTH.**

In sharp contrast, the main narrative around girls' sexuality was that they did not have choices in relation to sex. Some girls described receiving sexual attention from teachers in exchange for school fees or gifts, which they were not able to refuse because they could not meet their needs and wants in other ways. More often, though, girls and young women described being tempted by boys into having sex in exchange for things they wanted or needed but then being abandoned when they got pregnant.

> *'It was just like a mistake, it wasn't a decision made. For example I had basic needs as a girl child but parents could not afford to give me (what I needed), so you get a boyfriend.. (he) can deceive you: 'you come, I will buy for you what you want'... when you go there, you can't know what will happen, but you can get pregnant.'* **– 14–19-YEAR-OLD YOUNG MOTHER, BUKEDI**

There was an absence of sexual agency and decision-making in these accounts, with sex framed as something that girls did because they did not have other options. Young men also described girls as being exploited and victimised by older men for food or school fees, but such girls were also seen as responsible for tempting men by dressing indecently.

Autonomy and Independence

Some young people described that, when they were younger, they saw married teens as having a good quality of life. However, for many, that was challenged as they grew up and saw that life is more complex, or when they themselves got married and realised it was harder than it looked. Most often, marriage was framed by girls as a way to avoid stigma and discrimination associated with adolescent pregnancy. Marriage was however for some still connected to the pursuit of independence, especially given the other options available:

> *'Even if you have an alternative (to early marriage) or a relative you can go to, most of them are not willing to help you. They want to turn you into their helpers or gardeners while their children go to school. So, it is better to (have) your own home, than suffer at a relative's.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD YOUNG MOTHER, ACHOLI.**

> *'For me it was my choice because I wasn't on good terms with my parents which gave me many thoughts of thinking that I should get married and get my own home. My parents used to say hard hurtful words all the time and I got tired of their insults'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD MARRIED GIRL, ANKOLE.**

By contrast, marriage was framed by some boys as a way not to avoid stigma but to regain some of the respectability they might have ended up losing by getting a girl pregnant outside marriage. Becoming a husband and father was seen by some young men as a rite of passage to be aspired to and admired. Being a man with a wife and several children was seen by some as aspirational, giving prestige and respect in the community. However, to obtain this, it was essential to choose a girl who would provide one with a respectable life and it was better to wait until one was older to make that decision more carefully.

> *'Boys look big and responsible among colleagues if the wife appears to be looking good but the boys are viewed badly by the community if the wife is looking bad.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUNYORO.**

2.3.4 Community practices and perceptions

Family Support

Young people observed that parenthood and marriage immediately altered the relationship one had with their own family. Once you become a parent or marry, young women noted, your family will not support you financially, as you are seen as having become an adult. Many young men and boys also reported that once you have left school and entered romantic relationships, parents would not support boys any longer and there was an expectation to look after your new family or risk being held criminally responsible by a girls' family.

> *"I no longer have hope. Ever since I gave birth, no one is willing to offer a supporting hand, they consider me as an adult who can take care of myself.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD YOUNG MOTHER, BUGANDA NORTH.**

With regards to the wider community's perception of early marriage, various opinions were reported. Some observed a split in their community between those who are educated and thus wanted more for their children (and presumably could afford to help them) and those who wanted to expand their clan and may support early marriage for their own children. Other young people noted that teen pregnancy is seen as a product of girls, in particular, being spoiled and inadequately disciplined by their mothers.

Unlike married men, women were more likely to express a loss of hope in their ability to achieve their dreams as their futures were dependent on their husband's support.

> *"I wanted to be a business manager but after getting married my husband stopped me from working and said that I should go for a vocational job like tailoring.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MARRIED WOMAN, BUGANDA NORTH.**

> *"I wanted to be a hair dresser but my dreams were cut short by my husband who doesn't want me to acquire the skills because he believes that I might get other men in the process'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD MARRIED YOUNG WOMAN, ANKOLE.**

Indeed, across the data, having support from loved ones, such as parents and family, led to feeling more hopeful about the future. In cases where a lack of family support was noted by respondents, hope was present where young people perceived that the government or an NGO programme might provide them with the support they needed to achieve their ambitions.

Gender Norms

There were a wide range of opinions shared by young people of both sexes as to who is most disadvantaged by adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. Much of the impact on both boys and girls was connected to social norms about gender. In Uganda, the moral and financial responsibility of caring for a family is placed on men, so being able to fulfil this obligation was the main concern shared by boys when it came to avoiding pregnancy as a teenager. Many recognized they were not ready and capable of this.

Once girls were married, they moved from being the responsibility of their father to being reliant on their husbands and this meant that their aspirations and future achievements were also reliant on spousal emotional and practical support.

However, at the same time, moral responsibility for pregnancy was generally laid on girls, who were blamed and punished by the wider community for getting pregnant. As a result, they were isolated from support networks that might otherwise help them manage the expectations and pressures of marriage. Girls described people in the community gossiping about them and holding them up as examples of what happens when you behave badly. They were seen as unable to care for their own children and husbands, and others were pleased with their downfall from 'proud' schoolgirls to wives and mothers.

> *"You become a laughing stock in the community and lose respect from the people'* **– 14-19 YEAR-OLD MARRIED GIRL, BUGANDA NORTH.**

> *"Most of them will feel happy because you are no longer in school, they might say "this one used to feel proud because she was schooling, now you are pregnant"'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD MARRIED YOUNG WOMEN, LANGO.**

Access to Services

As noted earlier, young people had limited knowledge about pregnancy prevention or about where to access services. Whilst some gave detailed responses as to where they could go if they found themselves facing an unplanned adolescent pregnancy, most answers described what happened to people they knew personally within the community. Teachers were largely not seen as accessible due to the fear of being forced out of school. Nurses, Village Health Teams and medical centres were mentioned less often as sources of support.

2.4 IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON ADOLESCENT PREGNANCIES

2.4.1 Increasing Pregnancy Rates During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Girls also found the idea of going back to school unappealing in many cases. As they were not children anymore, marriage became a more attractive option. Furthermore, some families who had struggled during the pandemic no longer had the money for fees. Girls who had previously anticipated continuing through education thus found themselves coming out of the pandemic as older teenagers no longer in school, able to marry and facing high costs to re-enrolling, underlining how broader circumstances beyond just personal aspirations/dreams affect young people's trajectories into marriage.

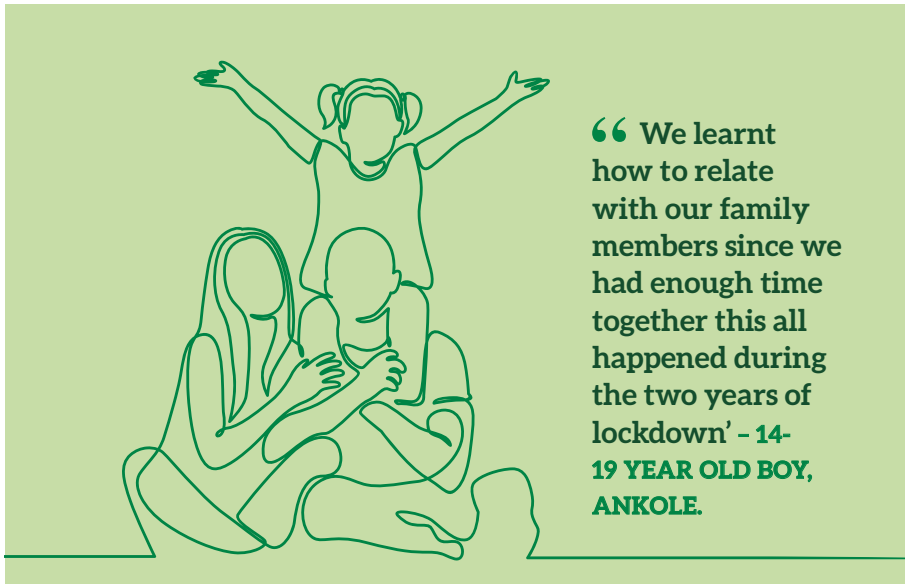
> *"During the lockdown, we lost two years and found we were already grown. So, going to class was embarrassing and some decided to get married'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD MARRIED YOUNG WOMAN, BUSOGA.**

School attrition and entry into work, often to support family incomes, also meant that the risk of adolescent pregnancy during COVID-19 was heightened because of increased opportunities for interaction with the opposite sex. Furthermore, some girls described going to work in professions like bar and hotel work, even during lockdowns where such places stayed open illegally. At border areas, girls who were out of school due to COVID-19 were trading near the border or over the Kenyan border and taken advantage of by boda drivers and army servicemen who requested money and if they could not pay would demand sex in exchange for the 'favour' of safe passage.

> *"Some motorcyclists will carry you for the first time you don't pay, second time he carries again, third time, so others can request for the money others request for love and when you allow, he wants to take you to his place, so, when he takes you to his place, he wants to sleep with you, sometimes you can get pregnant or diseases.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUKEDI.**

2.4.2 Family Dynamics

For some young people, COVID-19 was observed to have had positive impacts on their family relationships. This was especially the case where time had been spent together working and cooperating to cope with the impact of the pandemic.



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CHAPTER 03

ASPIRATIONS AND LABOUR MARKET TRANSITIONS IN UGANDA

3.1 BACKGROUND

Uganda has a large and rapidly growing youth population like many African countries. In 2020, the median age in Uganda was 16.7 years – well below the global average of 19.7 years (Worldometer 2020). Nearly half of its population is under the age of 15 (UBOS 2017). Growing numbers of young people in Uganda are obtaining a basic education, in part due to progress made in expanding primary and secondary education in recent decades (UBOS 2016). Many young Ugandans also express high ambitions for their futures. Whilst traditionally an agricultural economy, few young people dream of going into farming – instead they imagine themselves as businesspeople, lawyers, engineers, medics and teachers (Awiti 2018). More than half of the youth (48%) were in transition, 24% had transited to employment and 22% had not yet started transition (UBOS, 2021).

However, the economy has not managed to keep up with the aspirations of young people. This is a challenge that is noted in Uganda's Vision 2040 as a key issue of concern for the country's development. The transition from school to work is characterized by precarity and uncertainty. Ugandan youth are often unemployed or under-employed, working frequently in poorly paid roles, doing casual labour and unskilled work (UBOS 2016). While the mainstream view is that education provides the main route to gain employment, evidence suggests that, even if they complete their education, young people struggle to find the kinds of professional jobs they aspire to (Awiti 2018; Tulibaleka et al. 2021). However, there remains a lack of robust empirical evidence as to what types of youth policies and programmes are effective, in part driven by the lack of attention to young people in Uganda's diverse needs and constraints in relation to labour market participation (Rietveld et al. 2020)

In order to understand the link between their aspirations and labour market transitions better, this report acknowledges young people's possible choice to seek an alternative route to 'success' and asks questions to gain insight into how Ugandan youth find jobs and gain income from employment. Looking at youth aspirations from their own perspectives and their lived experiences in fulfilling their goals, it examines the trajectories of Ugandan youth, including the transition from education to employment. While young Ugandans may be unemployed because of a lack of qualifications or employment opportunities, others may be underemployed where their skills are under-utilised and they lack an enabling environment to attain their full potential. A greater understanding of what factors enable and constrain the achievement of young people's aspirations can offer valuable input for policy makers and appropriate intervention fit for the context.

3.2 RESEARCH FOCUS

Research was undertaken with young people in nine regions of Uganda in order to find out about young people's choices and opportunities in relation to work, existing supportive mechanisms and their effectiveness and evidence-based transformative development strategies that can support the transition into work. Such strategies could enable young people to fulfil their potential and establish a good quality of life. In addition to achieved and missed aspirations, analysis is also focused on patterns of youth employment, unemployment and underemployment in Uganda.

KEY QUESTIONS AT THE HEART OF THIS RESEARCH WERE:

- What are the barriers to developing quality and market-relevant skills?
- How successful are young peoples' transitions from school to work?
- What factors shape the transition to employment for young people and employers (and how does this align with the labour market's current and future demands)?
- Where do young people find work once they leave the education system, and what is the process of finding employment?
- What support do young people want to facilitate the transition to decent work?
- What are the drivers behind un/underemployment?
- What are the drivers behind young people not being in education, employment or training?
- Who is most at risk in making the transition and/or unemployment?
- How well do young people's aspirations align with their prospects and labour market outcomes?

Finally, as the world is living through the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact, an understanding of youth aspirations before the pandemic and since (including the impact on both men and women) will offer important input for policy and intervention aimed at tackling poverty and inequality and the long-term consequences for labour markets in Uganda.

The findings shared in this section of the report are organized as follows. First, the role of education in young people's perceptions of their capability to achieve their goals and the extent to which it enables aspirations is discussed in relation to gender and age. Barriers to aspirational achievement are then explored, with a focus on intergenerational poverty through cost-related barriers to the labour market and the options available to young people. We then reflect upon young people's perceptions of skilled work and formal employment and the barriers they face in reaching their aspirations. This highlights the limitations of existing mechanisms for labour market entry for the most marginalized and poor young people. Next, the ways in which young people nonetheless navigate these challenges are considered, emphasizing young people's agency and determination. Finally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's aspirations and experiences of work is explored.

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3.3 FINDINGS ON ASPIRATIONS AND LABOUR MARKET TRANSITIONS BEFORE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

3.3.1 The Role of Schooling

Education is Not a Direct Pathway to Achieving Aspirations

When asked about what they would aspire to if anything was possible, young people responded most frequently with ambitious roles which required a lot of education, such as medical professions and practising law. These high aspirations centred on jobs which generated financial security and social respectability. Younger people who were still in school were much more hopeful and positive about their aspirations than those, even those qualified, who had already left, and they emphasized the role of behaviour and discipline in achieving them. Young people who were still in school retained their optimism by largely ignoring structural challenges like unemployment rates, available job types, school attrition rates and other issues. Instead, they emphasized hard work and personality qualities, such as being obedient and respectful to parents, as being the most important factors in enabling them to achieve their goals.

Some did, however, observe that the quality of education they were receiving made them less optimistic about schooling as a mechanism to reach their aspirations:

> *"Teachers do not know what they are teaching, for example, sometimes teachers google class content on their phones and present it to us the same way it is even if it's not correct. In such circumstances, it's not easy to become a professional because we are given incorrect content which stops us from achieving our aspirations.'* – **14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, ANKOLE**

In particular, older young people recognised that getting an education was not always a means to obtaining a professional job, given that such jobs are scarce and highly competitive. This, in turn, put parents off paying school fees:

> *Within this Amolatar district, most adolescents study and come back in the village and spend between 3 to 10 years without getting any jobs, this has discouraged other parents from paying school fees for their children'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, LANGO.**

> *Some situations make us less hopeful for example, in our village here someone who studied up to senior six and is also digging like someone who dropped out in primary two so they say there is no hope in schooling.'* **–14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, WEST NILE.**

A lack of money for school fees was the most widely reported constraint on the realisation of one's aspirations. The challenge of securing financial support for the level of education required to achieve jobs that required extended schooling was widely reported across all sites and age groups.

> *The cost of school fees and scholastic materials is high and later the cost of university tuition is also high making it very hard to have the hope to finish school.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, ANKOLE.**

Because of the emphasis they placed on schooling as the key pathway to realising their aspirations, young people were not hesitant to engage in casual labour, small enterprises, work in the school holidays and take out loans to pay school fees. Young people also reported travelling long distances on foot, missing meals and studying late into the night and getting up early in order to continue with schooling. However, competing pressures and demands on young people's time, such as having to do domestic work or labour in family businesses like agricultural work, sometimes led to missing school or giving up on education early.

> *If you have limited income to pay school fees and yet you are interested in studying, but at the same time you are able to do some casual work, this will lead you to drop out of school, thereby making it hard for you to look for a job because you are not qualified'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, LANGO.**

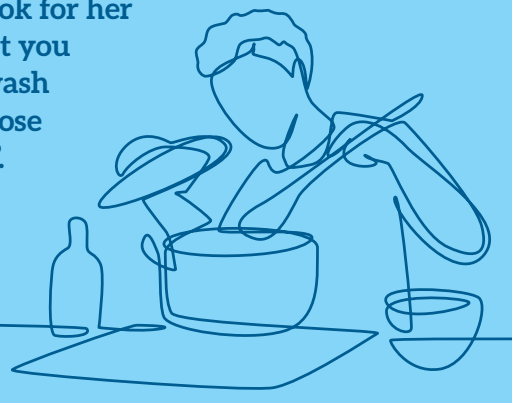
> *At time there is too much work at home and it stops you from concentrating in school'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD GIRL, ANKOLE.**

Gender Norms on Domestic Work Remain Influential but May be Shifting

To help their families, girls were still largely expected to do domestic chores like cooking and cleaning, whilst boys did work outside of the home, from herding animals and farming to casual work, to bring in extra income. However, there were some signs that attitudes were changing, with many young people saying that girls could work to support the family and boys should take care of their families when they are unwell. Some of this appears to be driven by schools, for example, in the below quotes:

> *Relating to this area where I stay, (roles for boys and girls) are still based on gender not this modernity of these days. (However) at our school, they told us that even a boy is in position to wash and cook for his mother. There is no longer a specific job related to gender. Suppose the mother is sick and the girl is not around, the boy has to cook.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, BUGANDA NORTH.**

> **My mother brought me up in a way... to teach me things that girls can do and some boys can't. Other boys are just stubborn – like cooking, you have to learn because at one time your wife will become sick... and you can't go and buy food from the hotel... (she) needs you to learn how to cook and when she is maybe sick, you cook for her and she eats the food that you have cooked, and (you) wash plates, mop the house, those activities are not so hard'.**
> **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, BUKEDI.**



Young People's Perceptions of What is Possible Change as They Enter Adulthood

Over the past 20 years, there has been a major shift in the growing number of young people who achieve a basic education in Uganda. This means that there is now more competition for jobs which require schooling, leading to increasing underemployment of qualified youth:

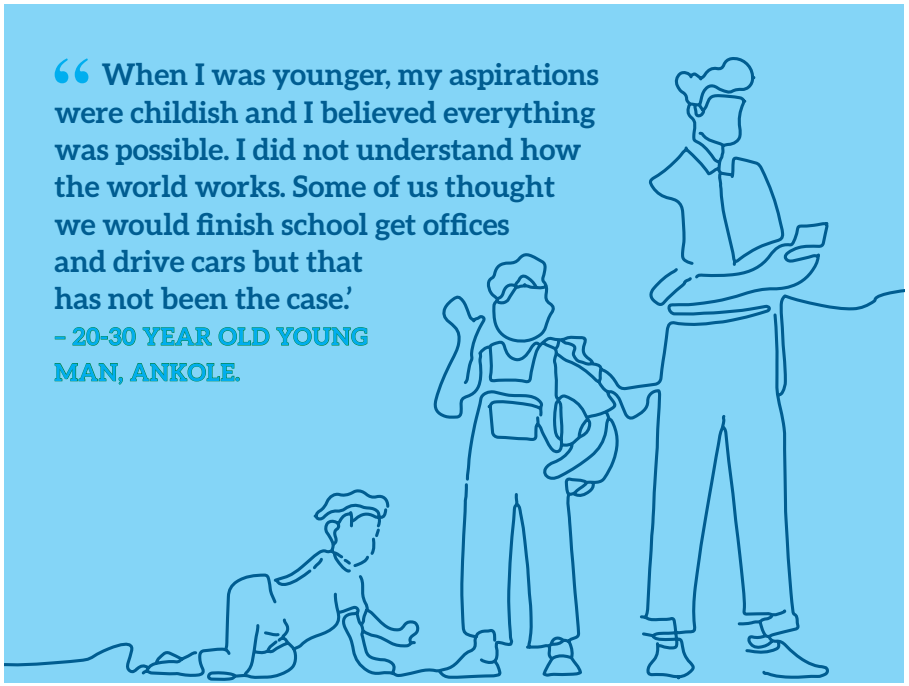
> *"Back in the days they say a primary seven dropout could work as a chief at the district or at the sub county but right now, you can go to the district when you have senior four paper/qualifications and they tell you that you are not worthy for this position, your papers are still low.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUKEDI.**

> *"My aspirations changed because there are no jobs – not only for the studied people, but in general.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUNYORO.**

Whilst young people described supplementing their education with agricultural work in rural areas, for older youth, this was more likely to have become their primary activity, despite their intention to do it as a means to fund other opportunities. Making money from agriculture was hampered by drought, the high price of essential inputs like equipment and seeds and market volatility. Meanwhile, older youth were more aware of the complexity and entrenched nature of the various barriers they faced to achieving their goals.

> *"For me my aspiration has changed when I am in senior one (s.1) but in my childhood I wanted to be a lawyer. And people told me that unless you want your home to be sold, the course is very costly. I thought that whatever you study for is what you achieve but later realized it is not the case sometimes.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD GIRL, BUGANDA NORTH.**

Many young people from the older age groups expressed that, when they began to develop aspirations when they were younger, everything felt easier and more straightforward.



Indeed, many 14–19-year-olds envisaged a very straightforward trajectory from education to the jobs market and expected to be able to achieve their ambitions, which were often unrealistically very high. However, older youth suggested that, as you got older, life got harder. Parents might die or separate and be unable to pay school fees and friends could influence your goals in negative ways. In Bunyoro, young women reflected on their aspirations from when they were younger as unrealistic and naïve but, nonetheless, felt that they had done well for themselves in the context of the difficult circumstances that shaped their lives:

> *"We are doing well compared to what we imagined to become and if we look at the level we are at now, we would not be there if we insisted on the dreams we had'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUNYORO.**

3.3.2 Barriers to Aspirations

Poverty is an Intergenerational Issue

The cost of school fees inevitably means that those from poorer backgrounds were less likely to finish school or achieve the qualifications needed for skilled work. However, even if young people were able to secure support for schooling, they faced hidden costs to entry into formal employment. Wealthy families were able to pay for quality education and could afford bribes to get their children jobs – as well as having the contacts to access information about jobs that were becoming available.

> *"You might be two people applying for a similar job and the other person goes behind your back and gives the employer money to be considered for that job'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUGANDA NORTH.**

> *"f you have money you can easily get a job, but if you are poor, you will send an application and it will take forever.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, LANGO.**

> *"When you apply for a job, people come in hundreds but people who put butter in the envelope are people who are considered before others'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUKEDI.**

> *"At times it depends on the kind of family you hail from, for example if you are from a poor family, it is not easy to get a job, but if you are from a rich family, chances are there that you have studied in good schools and have connections with rich children who can easily connect you to get jobs, as the saying goes "Dok dongo nangere ken gi", literally implying in this context that rich people will always help their fellow rich..'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, LANGO.**

Young people were also affected by the reputation of their family and its history. For example, if someone in the past had committed a crime such as theft, they might not be trusted by an employer. Given the connections between poverty and crime, this reproduced marginalisation and a lack of opportunities between generations.

Meanwhile, for young people who wanted to go into business or for whom self-employment was the best option in the local job market, lacking capital was frequently mentioned as a barrier to being able to invest in resources or tools that they needed. In particular, a lack of information about how to apply for a loan from financial institutions and how to plan business activities and calculate profits was mentioned as a key barrier for those looking into self-employment. While savings and loans co-operatives were often mentioned, few young people reported being part of such activities as they were seen as young and inexperienced. Some young men perceived that NGO supported activities in relation to saving and loans only targeted investment in women.

Lack of Support

Young people noted the importance of social networks and maintaining a good reputation as a way of being able to access support and advice for coping with challenges. Young people recognised that they needed help and support from others to achieve and this required being seen in a particular way in their community. Young people described values such as obedience, hard work, good manners, not boasting, being a good listener and avoiding negative influences as being ways of achieving one's aspirations. Social networks also were an important source of information about finding jobs or training opportunities.

> *"The ways I should take to be successful with my dreams are: I have to be disciplined, if you are well behaved and you lack fees someone can easily assist a disciplined person, because you're always loved due to your good character, (so) in case of no funds people can help you.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD WOMAN, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *"We must create many friends and social groups so that we can be of help to each other in case one fails financially to finish school'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, BUKEDI.**

Reciprocity was sometimes mentioned as part of this. For example, if you got help when you needed it, you would be able to return the favour in the future. In some cases, people described 'commission' being taken by those who connected you to a job, in the form of a percentage of the salary, however, this was linked more to officials in positions of power than friends.

When asked where they could turn for support in the community, many young people described elders and councillors as being proud of them and happy to encourage them. However, others noted that jealousy about others doing well meant they felt they were not encouraged. A lack of support also had an impact on young people's perceptions of their capability to achieve their goals:

> *"Some people in the community tend to discourage you especially we the girls and from poor families that we are just trying our best, but we can't make it to the end due to our family backgrounds. This really psychologically hinders our zeal to succeed.'* – **14-19 YEAR OLD GIRL, BUSOGA.**

Environmental Challenges

Young people noted the impact of climate change on their ability to make and save money from agriculture. This has, historically, been perceived as work which required limited skills to turn a profit or at the very least provide subsistence for the family and which could provide a safety net. Drought, in areas such as Lango, was reported by young people to have severely affected agriculture, leading them to make losses on crops and reduced the availability of casual gardening work.

> *"(Young people should) rear animals which can't be affected by climate like agriculture is'.* – **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *"Drought affects farmers and the crops we grow and as a result we get nothing, yet land that we cultivated is hired'.* – **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUNYORO.**

> *"The long droughts in the country are a big challenge to us farmers. I was told that even in Masaka the drought made people lose a lot of banana plantations. We the farmers lost a lot of money because we did not produce any beans, yet we get a lot of money from beans after harvesting'.* – **14-19 YEAR OLD, ANKOLE.**

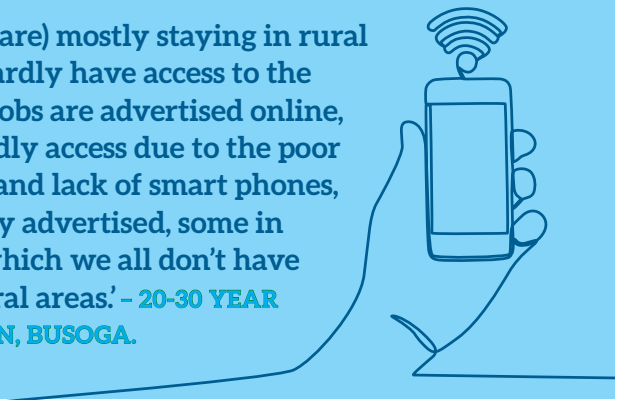
The quote from Bunyoro mentioned the issue of land rental, which was also noted in other areas as causing land scarcity, as investors buy up large swathes of land for mass production and impact market rates. This was further contributing to the challenge of making a living, let alone making money, from agricultural labour.

3.3.3 Accessing Skilled Work

Limited Information About Training and Jobs

In some areas of the country, young people noted that, realistically, they were only able to access unskilled jobs because recruitment for more professional roles was rare and usually required contacts who could let you know about a role. Young people reported a lack of timely access to information in rural areas, in part because professional roles might be advertised online and their internet access was poor while other roles are advertised in the newspapers which are inaccessible to the majority.

> **"We the youth (are) mostly staying in rural areas where we hardly have access to the job market. Some jobs are advertised online, which we can hardly access due to the poor internet network and lack of smart phones, some are internally advertised, some in the newspapers, which we all don't have access to in the rural areas.'** – **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUSOGA.**



As young people got older, aspirations such as becoming a nurse or pilot were further diminished by the realisation that they did not know where they might study such subjects or how to get to schools that offered them from the locations where they were living. Young people's perceptions of what aspirations might be realistic and available to them were also shaped by the local job market and training and vocational opportunities. For example, in Lango, in a neighbourhood where there is a large technical and vocational school, young people frequently stated they aspired to be teachers at the school. Meanwhile, in West Nile, where there were a large number of INGOs due to the protracted refugee situation near the South Sudanese border, young people aspired to work with these organisations.

Corruption

There was wide agreement that being given a professional job was not only reliant on one's skills but on one's ability to pay bribes to hiring officials. The process of getting a skilled job also often required letters of recommendation which often had to be paid for and official identification documents which some young people did not have. These created substantial barriers for the poorest young people to accessing skilled roles.

> *'(There is) a lot of bureaucracy and corruption. There was a need of money to get a letter (of recommendation) from the sub county and a lot of delays plus paperwork, so I ended up not succeeding because a lot of money was needed at the district level.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD MAN, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *'Getting a job whether here in Namutumba or Uganda at large is difficult due to high corruption prevalence. Unless one has to bribe their way out, you are most likely not to succeed however high your scores may by in an interview.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUSOGA.**

Young people perceived a large degree of tribalism and ethnic inequality remained a challenge in Uganda where certain ethnic groups were strongly associated with professional roles. Young people observed that this led to favouritism within selection processes, which was very disheartening:

> *'What you should know that in Uganda we are in divide and rule, so people who are in their offices, they first pull their own... they don't look at qualifications nowadays'* .– **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUKEDI.**

When asked about the kinds of policies they would like the government to implement in Uganda to help young people, many mentioned creating industrial development through factories which were obliged to hire local people in the locations where they were established, reflecting the perception of job scarcity and outsourcing. For example, young people described that, in West Nile, the refugee crisis brought jobs but poor locals could not access them as they were given to people from other regions who had connections with organisations working with refugees or to foreigners.

Poor Compensation and hazardous working conditions

Young people felt that it was difficult to earn enough money to meet their own needs and to save. This meant they worked additional hours or took on extra jobs. However, this made it difficult for them to transition into the roles they really wanted. For example, the working hours in some industries, such as construction, were often long and this meant young people did not have time to look for other jobs. For some jobs, travel expenses could be deducted from salary payments, meaning that young people earned less than expected. A lack of safety regulation in some jobs made some young people fearful about training or applying for roles such as electrical work or construction:

> *'There are things that happen, for example someone can climb up when power is on and this (can) cause shock and death, that's why I said 'let me leave this'.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUKEDI.**

Some young people also observed that being paid regularly made a job attractive, however, usually it was professional and skilled roles which were salaried.

> *'What I am doing currently brings me money on a daily basis than what I had aspired to be, which would pay me monthly. This is much better now.'* – **14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, BUSOGA.**

Wages were often observed by older youth, who had entered the job market, as being lower than expected for professional roles:

> *'Some of us who diverted to teaching, we experience low payments, which at times (are delayed) since we work in private schools.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUKEDI.**

Indeed, some used casual work to make ends meet even when they started in professional roles because of the widespread problem of employers taking a long time to pay them.

> *Now, as you know our Uganda, you don't base only on one job. When I finished university... my small business selling chapatti was sustaining me, for like a year... In that year is when I got (a job in real estate in Kampala), and what I got is not what I expected because I was not given salary. I left when I was (owed) six hundred thousand shillings, I couldn't add on the third month and yet I was (owed) two months and yet I was spending, I had to pay rent, water, everything is costly as you know in Kampala, I decided to wind up and leave.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUKEDI.**

3.3.4 Navigating the Labour Market

Diversification of Skills

Young people who participated in the research described moving in and out of education systems and work depending on available resources and opportunities. Many described doing bits of farming and casual work to save up to study a course that might take them closer to their ambitions or in a promising direction, only to find there were still no jobs for them.

> **I had to join school and studied up to Advanced level because I had wanted to become an engineer. Lack of school fees made me drop out and then went to Juba, South Sudan for business. When I came back, I joined a diploma in accountancy course and need the skills for managing my farming business. I made some little money/savings, so when I came back to Uganda I joined school and did accounting course for one year. The reason I opted for this business administration course was to ensure that I would come and apply it in managing my farming activities plus other businesses.'** – **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, WEST NILE.**

The flexibility that this offered sometimes meant young people perceived that having one's own business was a more attractive option than 'application jobs' where you worked for someone else. Doing business also did not require educational qualifications which could mean that it was also a potentially respectable alternative to poorly paid casual employment.

> *A good job is working for yourself (business)... the 'application jobs' we admire have a lot of disappointments here in Uganda.. the boss can have his/ her own character, (and) remember you signed an application, so, that is a contract with the business – but they don't want to pay you for one month, two months. But in Uganda the cost of living is very high, then how will you earn a living? Now, as per me, I can decide to do my own business.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUKEDI.**

> *I aspire to be a business woman whether I have completed my studies or not. With this aspiration, I have to ensure I get capital no matter what comes my way.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUSOGA.**

At the same time, various barriers to starting one's own business were noted, such as the need for start-up capital. Also mentioned often in relation to business, were issues such as high taxation and legal regulation such as laws around border trade or the use of water. These challenges were particularly emphasized by older youth who had more experience in attempting to start up their own business.

Older youth in rural areas of Uganda also described farming and growing crops with the hope of one day saving enough to change direction in life. Farming is 'free' and thus was seen as a viable alternative in rural areas for young people who lacked qualifications or skills for professional roles.

> *Getting a skilled job is hard because of school fees – but farming is easy because we can dig easily.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD WOMAN, WEST NILE.**

However, agriculture is subject to challenges such as inclement weather conditions, poor yields, fluctuating markets, as well as material challenges such as access to land, seedlings and equipment, all of which required money. Many therefore found themselves stuck in a cycle of subsistence agriculture or only making enough from selling crops to get by.

This way of living required young men to be largely unencumbered by dependents. When a young man was responsible for his wife or children's upkeep, it was harder to support the pursuit of aspirations with casual work – especially when it might not lead anywhere. This meant that young men had to choose between pursuing their aspirations of work and their aspirations to 'grow up' as men, which required moving out of their family home for precarious accommodation in cities and establishing serious relationships and families. Interestingly, rural-urban migration was described as a strategy for realising one's dreams but not widely – this was only noted in Bunyoro. In others like Bukedi meanwhile, opportunities for unskilled work other than just farming were noted because of its location:

> *"As we are at the border, there are supermarkets and restaurants, you can request for a job to work there because you find that in some places there is nothing completely, only digging/hoe but here, you can hustle.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUKEDI.**

Gender Differences in Strategies for Pursuit of Work

There were some differences in the strategies that young men and young women employed in the pursuit of work. Being able to seek support and advice from others in the community had a gendered element for younger girls who faced more constraints than boys and older young women on their mobility and social interactions. For those who had sought to start up their own business, young women also faced the issue of husbands trying to prevent them because of being jealous or simply being unsupportive when it came to financially and emotionally backing their wives' aspirations.

> *"Some husbands are not supportive, they don't want their wives to do certain businesses'.* **– 20-30 YEAR-OLD WOMAN, LANGO.**

Some young women who had entered the job market meanwhile reported being harassed by employers for sex in exchange for being given a job or having to let their employer meet their parents to check that they were well-behaved before being granted employment. One young women in Bukedi described working for two years as a customs officer and was harassed by her boss but when she told her father he said that is just what men who work in that role are like. Meanwhile, two women in Buganda North described how they looked and dressed being a major factor in being able to get a job. However, this is perceived by some young men as an advantage rather than discriminatory issue for women entering the job market.

> *"Some girls working as house girls find it hard to work because of their male bosses. Some even get pregnant'* **.– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUGANDA NORTH.**

> *"I have a sister, she applied for a job to work at a certain hotel. The employer just looked at her looks, dress code and her body structure and told her that she is employed.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG WOMAN, BUGANDA NORTH.**

> **"Women have one possibility, it is easy for them, that is why they say if you apply for a job, both a boy and a girl, it is the girl who first gets, by the time a girl applies it is when she is interested in that job so much, so, she gives in for any possibility she is told to do... Most big/powerful offices the managers are males, and you find a young girl has applied and the manager says for you to have this job, you must have sex... she says for the good of the family, let me sacrifice as a person, I give him what he wants and I get a job' .– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUKEDI.**

3.4 IMPACT OF COVID-19

Loss of Hope and Aspirations

COVID-19 led to a loss of hope and change in the aspirations of some young people who were not able to go back to school after the pandemic. This was either because their families could not afford it or because they had taken other directions in life such as getting married, having children or going into work. Girls described feeling unable to return to school for social reasons too, such as feeling they were too old for the class they would be returning to.

> *'The two years of school lockdown due to Covid19, young girls got married, many got pregnant and could no longer pursue of their dreams and aspirations.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD GIRL, ANKOLE.**

> *'Pandemics like Covid-19 make young girls outgrow their classes. For example, a girl may fear to repeat a class considering the size of their breasts and general body. It is shameful to have the biggest breasts in class, yet others are young.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD GIRL, ANKOLE.**

Exacerbated Precarity

For young people who were already out of school, the pandemic also had an impact on work opportunities, particularly because young people's work tended to be more precarious.

> *'The COVID-19 Pandemic affected my search for fulfilling life, the little business I had collapsed'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD GIRL, LANGO.**

> *'COVID-19 also affected people in Uganda in terms of getting jobs. The few job opportunities which used to be available were reduced further, because some business closed up due to excess losses being made'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD WOMAN, LANGO.**

3.4.1 School Attrition

Young men were more likely than young women to note having developed new skills and knowledge during the pandemic as a result of adopting 'side hustles' or engaging in work with their families. However, this also had a negative side when it came to educational progression. Some young women noted that the opportunity to work instead of study meant some young people did not want to go back to school after lockdowns as they liked having their own money.

> *'It's through Covid-19 era where I learnt skills like working and taking care of some of my needs for example the clothes are putting on now I worked and bought them myself.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, ANKOLE.**

Some young people described the embarrassment and frustration they felt about the idea of going back to school to complete a grade after spending two years growing up. This was especially the case for older teenagers, who had reached the age of maturity during lockdown and more opportunities for work were available to them, as well as having the chance to freely spend their time with girls and friends. The length of time to complete school and thus be prevented from earning was also noted to put many young people off continuing.

> *'Some people like us refused to go back to school because the 2 years of lock down were long, and we had gotten used to life without school. When you come from the garden in the morning, you bathe and go to spend some time on the main road and from there you see a girl and admire her which after leads to other things, that a big effect of Covid-19'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, ACHOLI.**

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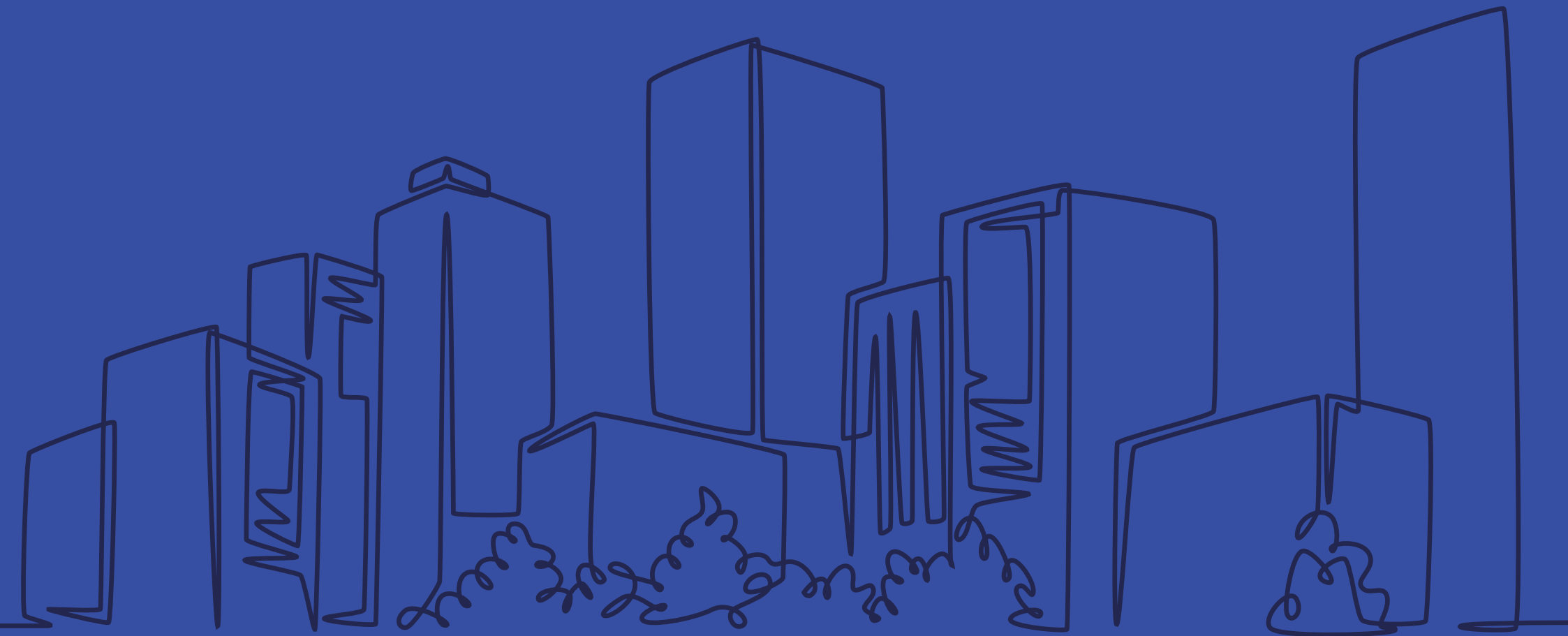
CHAPTER 04

URBANISATION IN UGANDA



4.1 BACKGROUND

With approximately a quarter of its population currently living in urban areas, Uganda is still a predominantly rural nation. However, the country is urbanizing rapidly, with double the rate of growth happening in urban compared with rural areas (World Bank 2016). Between 2002 and 2014, the share of Uganda's population living in urban areas increased by more than 50%, and it is estimated that 21 million people will be living in urban areas by 2040 (World Bank 2016). Moving towards an urban economy is important in the Government's 2040 Vision and National Development Plan.

Cities can also create a number of risks for children that can undermine the realization of their rights. This is of concern as a high proportion of urban dwellers are children and youth. Children in urban areas are generally considered 'better off' than children in rural areas, with greater access to improved sanitation (74% of urban children vs. 60% of rural children), improved drinking water (83% vs. 65%) and better health care (UNHS 2019/20 – authors calculations). However, because cities are often also home to the most affluent, well-educated and healthy segments of the population, official statistics that only depict averages tend to mask the actual living conditions of poor urban dwellers. Indeed, over the last two decades, there has been a greater increase in income inequality in urban areas than in rural areas (UNICEF 2015; World Bank 2016).

Urban environments and the effects of rapid urbanisation exhibit a variety of characteristics that combine to put children at risk of abuse, exploitation and neglect, including higher rates of street living and HIV exposure (HRW, 2014). However, urbanisation also creates a number of opportunities for children and adolescents. Managing urbanisation is, therefore a key challenge for the Government of Uganda. However, until now there has been little research into the particular vulnerabilities of children and adolescents living in the country's urban centres.

4.2 RESEARCH FOCUS

Research was undertaken with people in nine regions of Uganda to better understand how urbanisation affects children and adolescents, exploring both the challenges and opportunities associated with urbanisation from the perspective of both older and younger people in a range of contexts. The aim of the research was to generate insights into how urbanisation impacts education, health and WASH outcomes, living conditions for children and adolescents, access to and experiences of service provision in urban centres and young people's concerns about issues affecting them.

KEY QUESTIONS AT THE HEART OF THE RESEARCH WERE:

- How do people understand the processes of urbanisation?
- What opportunities does urbanisation offer to younger people in relation to building social networks, access to technology, education and employment?
- How does urbanisation affect young people's quality of life?
- What are the gender dimensions of how young people experience urbanisation?
- How do rich and poor people experience urbanisation?
- What is the level of service accessibility in urban centres?
- In what ways can urbanisation be improved to provide better opportunities and outcomes for young people?

The findings in this section of the report are organised as follows. First, drivers of youth participation in urbanisation are explored, highlighting differences between younger and older respondents' perceptions of the issues of land ownership and opportunities in rural areas and the extent to which urbanisation might deliver on young people's ambitions. Second, we consider social connections in urban and rural areas and their role in enabling young people to establish themselves in urban centres. The report then considers gender differences in young people's urbanisation experiences. Next, access to different kinds of services is discussed, particularly in relation to education, employment, technology and healthcare. Finally, the risks associated with urbanisation for traditional ways of life are discussed.

4.3 FINDINGS ABOUT URBANIZATION IN UGANDA

4.3.1 Drivers of Youth Participation in Urbanisation

Types of Available Work

Young people explained that a major driver of rural-urban migration was that it was difficult for them to find work in areas where the main industry was farming, yet to make any money from agricultural work required land ownership. Land remained largely concentrated in their parents' hands, meaning they felt they needed to seek alternative work. It was widely felt that there were more types of work available in urban areas than in rural places, where people mostly engaged in agricultural labour and occasionally sold surplus crops. The presence of markets and a bigger population with more money to spend was a major factor in these expanded opportunities.

> *'In the rural areas, it is mainly cultivating and then sitting afterwards. Here in town, you can even buy ground nuts for 3,000 shillings and you hawk it to for a profit. But in the village, you can have an acre of ground nuts but find it difficult to sell it.'* – **OLDER RESPONDENT(AGE UNKNOWN), BUSOGA.**

The kinds of jobs that are available in urban areas were often perceived to be more appropriate for the skills and physical capability of young people rather than older people. They were also accessible even to those who lacked formal education. Young people were described as having more energy and strength to do casual labouring such as construction work and pottering, as well as boda riding.

> *'Children and adolescents provide the manpower in urban centres that's why they are many and often move to the urban. Old men cannot survive the heat and hard work in the urban centres. That's why they have left the urban for young people'.* – **OLDER RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), ANKOLE.**

> **'Young boys are energetic enough to do the casual work like loading and offloading which accommodates even the unskilled.'** – **14-19 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA NORTH.**

Finally, for some young people, reaching adulthood was marked by the need to find independence from one's family and moving to an urban area was the only opportunity to do this, given that there was a lack of viable work opportunities in rural areas. For example, respondents in Bukedi described it as a social norm that once young people reach the age of maturity around 18 years, they could no longer sleep under the same roof as their parents as they had reached adulthood and were expected to find their way in life.

Perceptions of Older People

There were different perspectives across focus groups as to why there are high numbers of young people in urban areas, though generally it was agreed that most of them had moved from rural areas. Older people were more likely to put this movement down to children behaving badly and running away from parental supervision in search of a more exciting life in the city. Some described younger people as being too soft and lazy for agricultural work, instead wanting an easy life.

> *'The reason why children are many in the urban areas is because these children don't respect and listen to their parents so they decide to move on with their lives and start eating marijuana and for the girls they refuse to listen to their parents and end up into bad actions e.g. theft in the urban areas.'* – **OLDER RESPONDENT(AGE UNKNOWN), WEST NILE.**

> *'Most adolescents are too lazy to indulge in agricultural activities in the villages, this makes them move from rural to urban to look for alternative ways of survival by doing casual labour'.* – **OLDER RESPONDENT(AGE UNKNOWN), ACHOLI.**

> *'Younger people don't want to work, they need soft lives. They tend to move to urban areas to look for a soft life.'* – **OLDER RESPONDENT(AGE UNKNOWN), BUGANDA NORTH.**

Gaps Between Reality and Imagination

Some respondents reflected on the gaps between adolescent and young people's perceptions of what urbanisation might bring them and the reality of precarity and underemployment that was experienced:

> *'Urbanisation has turned out many jobless youths to be a source of insecurity. These are participating in riots and demonstrations in reward of empty promises and some little pay which has led to deaths at some point.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA NORTH.**

4.3.2 Social Connections in Rural and Urban Areas

Quality of Connection is Better in Rural Areas

Social networks were widely seen as very important to having a good quality of life as well as access to opportunities for work and progression. However, there were differences in perspectives as to whether the kinds of social connections that could be established in urban settings were more or less available or were weaker or stronger, compared with rural settings. For example, in rural areas, some respondents observed that people lived more closely together because there were more opportunities to come into contact with each other, in the context of both work and everyday social and cultural life. As a result, it was more possible in rural areas to ask for favours and return these over time. There was also more homogeneity in rural areas, meaning that there were fewer sources of tribal and clan tensions.

> *'Building relationships is easy in the rural areas and much better because you may find it is very easy to socialize and also to help one another in the rural areas and also in the urban areas it's difficult to have property like utensils in the urban areas for instance a neighbour who has got a wall fence it is difficult to share.'* – **OLDER RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), WEST NILE.**

> *'Neighbours in the rural areas are good, because they socialize by staying together sometimes compared to the people in the urban areas who stay in isolation; they basically don't want to stay together'.* – **14-19 YEAR OLD, WEST NILE.**

> *'I think rural life is better because everything is in the villages its only money that is hard to get but otherwise life is easy there, for example there is water, firewood, you can ask from your friend today you ask for salt, tomorrow you ask for flour, the other day you ask for greens.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

> *'Urbanization reduces socialization because people do not have a common activity that they can do as team. For example people do not have gardens to plough as a team or even attend church together.'* – **14-19 YEAR OLD, ANKOLE.**

Urban Areas Allow for More Positive Social Connections

Whilst generally seen as a positive, living close together, as people in rural areas do, might have negative effects too, such as allowing jealousy and tensions to grow. In urban areas, where there is more anonymity as well as diversity, some people observed that it was easier for people to get along as tribal backgrounds become less important and being less interdependent and involved in each other's lives can be positive for building relationships that are free of obligation and history. Also, in rural areas, people may live far apart whereas, in towns, people lived in a more neighbourly way. In Acholi specifically, people observed that socialising in towns was easy for this reason and, in villages, historic enmity between families might affect current relationships. At the same time, the diversity of people living in urban areas and the mingling of different cultures was seen as a positive for socialising.

> *'It is easier in urban because people cooperate for example neighbours in semi-detached houses or 'mizigo' settlements come together to your rescue in the time of need like sicknesses, deaths, because they are closer compared to the rural where people stay like 1 to3 kilometres apart.'* – – **OLDER RESPONDENT(AGE UNKNOWN), ACHOLI.**

> *'I think socialising in the village is hard because when you go to the village, may be long ago there was enmity with some people of clans and maybe they have been living as enemies therefore there is so much hatred and people cannot help each other.'* – **20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

However, for some people, these relationships were much more superficial than in rural life, where social connections were based on community history and

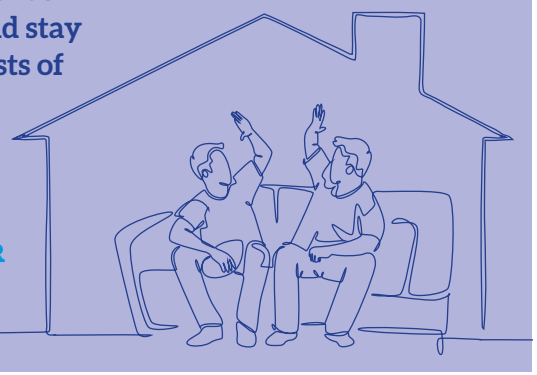
shared values and work. This was repeated often in the idea that 'town is meant for customers not friends', implying that connections in urban areas are underpinned by possible mutual benefit rather than by genuine care. Some older people felt that young people's distance for their communities led to bad behaviours.

> *"Urban children don't introduce their cultural / clan names, they fear to be punished by their clan leaders especially when they have impregnated a fellow clansmate. For example, if I am from the clan "Ongila", and I meet an urban boy, he will not allow to declare his clan name, he will declare a different clan name e.g. "won lao" even if he knows that we are from the same clan, as such you might find that you are in relationship with your own relative.'* – **OLDER FEMALE RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), LANGO.**

Peer Groups Play an Important Role for Young People's Entry to Urban Areas

Young people with friends in urban areas often described being able to move there because of the people they know. For some, this was about being called by friends and told about the better quality of life there. Others described having friends already in an urban area as giving them the opportunity to share the expense of living whilst they looked for work. Peers in urban centres could also enable access to work, which often required connections:

> **"The connection by friends in urban areas to come and stay together and share the costs of living like rent, and food. Many youths have found they're into urban areas by friends influencing them to come.' – 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA NORTH.**



4.3.3 Gender Differences

Urban Girls' Lives

Urbanisation was seen to affect girls in conflicting ways. On the one hand, girls were perceived to have access to more opportunities than boys in urban areas. Respondents described girls having many opportunities to work in hotels, restaurants, shops and lodges, do domestic work, and start their own business. However, at the same time, girls were also perceived to be at heightened risk of sexual violence in urban areas compared with rural settings. Some girls also commented on access to modern amenities which made their lives easier and gave them more free time. Girls also observed they could find men of a higher status than in rural areas.

> *"Girls no longer have to spend a lot of time grinding millet using the grinding stone.'* – **14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, LANGO.**

> *"Urbanization helps us more as female. It attracts men with money and why would we get married in the village when there are better men with money and jobs in town?'* – **OLDER FEMALE RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), BUSOGA.**

However, at the same time, respondents described girls becoming spoilt by urbanisation, wearing short indecent clothing, smoking marijuana, drinking alcohol and dancing at clubs. Some of the work they did was also seen as making them less respectable, particularly working in bars and hotels. Many respondents described girls as becoming at risk of getting involved in sex work in urban areas in order to meet their basic needs.

Urban Boys' Lives

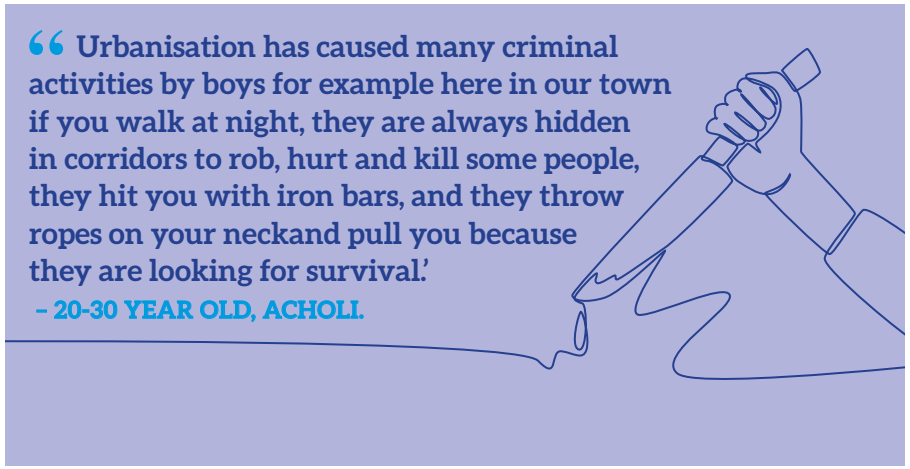
Meanwhile, living in urban areas was perceived to make boys more likely to engage in petty theft, violence and sexual misdemeanours. Respondents across all sites noted that it was boys who were joining gangs and, if unable to find work, would rob people, often with violence. Related to this was the concern that boys in urban areas were very likely to drink and take drugs, in part because they had a disposable income and because they were away from the influence of parents.

> *(Urbanisation) increases crimes among the boys. For example, mostly boys go to town at night and rob people. This is because they want to have what they cannot afford'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, ANKOLE.**

> *'Boys are a problem to the town, they go taking drugs and that causes them to go and steal, so, that is a big problem in town among youths.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUKEDI.**

Indeed, criminal activity was associated strongly with life in urban settings. Young men, in particular, were perceived to join groups and gangs and engage in petty theft, violent muggings, and sexual violence. This was seen to be driven by the precarity of work in urban settings:

> **Urbanisation has caused many criminal activities by boys for example here in our town if you walk at night, they are always hidden in corridors to rob, hurt and kill some people, they hit you with iron bars, and they throw ropes on your neckand pull you because they are looking for survival.'**
> **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**



In some places, this was seen to be caused by boys having access to bad influences in urban areas, including peer groups, exploitative gangs that would supply them with money and alcohol in exchange for committing theft, and exposure to cinema which glamorised violence, especially robberies.

4.3.4 Inequality in Processes of Urbanisation Leads to Disadvantages for Poorer People

Power and Influence

Echoing findings that urban centres are broadly perceived to be richer, many respondents connected urban living with wealth in comparison with rural areas where there seemed to be no rich people. Wealthy people in urban areas were described as having televisions in their houses, eating whenever they wanted, sending their children to school in cities and dressing in fashionable good quality clothes and shoes. By comparison, poorer people had none of these things.

> *The wealthiest have access to better facilities such as schools, hospitals, recreation centres, unlike the poor who has no choice left to him but to go for what may be available.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD GIRL, BUGANDA NORTH.**

> *(A risk of urbanisation is) inequality and discrimination in urban areas, and also segregation between the poor and the rich, the rich associate with people of their class and so do the poor'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

More importantly, being wealthy was also seen to generate more power in decision-making, both at the community level and in processes of urbanisation. Some respondents felt that rich people stuck together, amplified inequality in urban areas. This was especially the case when it came to city planning and development, where poorer people felt there was no accountability for the impact of urbanisation on their land.

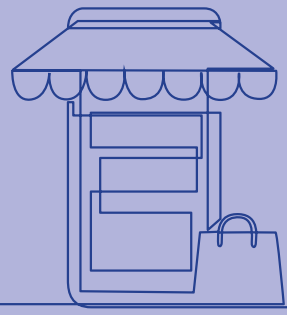
> *The difference between the rich and the poor is that the rich people are easily heard in community meetings than the poor people.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *More attention is given to the rich as their voices are heard and the poor are less attended to.'* **– OLDER PERSON, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

Land Ownership and Social Impacts of Urbanisation

In Bunyoro, where there has been significant development and investment by companies in recent years related to the oil industry, poorer people described being displaced, having to sell their land to investors only to find it being blocked off by roads and new buildings or having roads built that infringed on their plots without compensation. This has also led to tensions and differences within families over how to use land and who had the right to profit from it:

> **“Urbanisation is leading to forced planned structure like shops for example, people with plots are forced to put up certain structures which the authorities want in town, and if you are unable to, you are forced to sell off your plot even at lower price.’ – OLDER MALE RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), BUNYORO.**



> *“Urbanisation is causing a lot of conflicts mostly among family members. This is because land in Bulisa now is small and expensive and therefore each family members is fighting to have a share.’* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUNYORO.**

At the same time, local people felt they were generally not benefiting from the investments in oil. Some described the sexual exploitation of adolescent girls by men working for road construction and oil companies. Others explained that local boys had found jobs working as cleaners and drivers for big companies but there were varied views of whether this was good or not:

> *“There are no employment opportunities due to discrimination in labour market. Good jobs are being given to the outsiders not people of Buliisa. Only non-formal jobs are given to the residents of the soil.’* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUNYORO.**

4.3.5 Education

Urban-Rural Educational Inequalities

It is widely observed that access to education is better in urban areas for various reasons. These included the schools being closer to where children lived, reducing the time needed to travel there and back, and also promoting safety because they were not travelling in the dark late at night to get home. Better quality of teachers was also noted. In rural areas, people commented that teachers often did not show up for work, were late or are poorly prepared but, in urban areas, they were expected to take their jobs more seriously. The advantages of schooling in urban areas were seen to particularly benefit girls, who faced a higher burden of domestic work at home in rural areas, and encountered social norms that devalued girls’ education.

> *“The adolescents in town have more time to study than those in the rural areas for example in rural adolescents are involved in domestic work like digging and others’.* **– OLDER PERSON (AGE UNKNOWN), ACHOLI.**

> *“When you compare the girls in towns and those in the villages, you find that there is access to education to the girls in urban, because there are beliefs in the villages that girls should cook and fetch water, firewood instead of going to school but here in town there are strict laws about children going to school so they have to go school’.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

Young people were also observed to be motivated by the role models they had for work in urban settings, which encouraged them to persevere with their education:

> *“(In urban areas) our very young children, they see someone that works, they see someone who wakes up early in the morning to go work let’s say in an office, the child grows up seeing and being encouraged because in the villages those things are not there, therefore a child in town sees and appreciates education hence studying hard.’* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

There were also seen to be a wider variety in the types of education available. Young people were described as being able to access both informal and formal

educational establishments in urban areas. The lack of opportunities for vocational training was seen as a key challenge in rural areas for young people and many commented that a government policy should be to address the lack of training institutions across the country. However, young people themselves felt that opportunities for education were still mediated in urban areas by ability to pay.

> *In urban areas there is variety of education services, formal and informal, so children and adolescents can access vocational skills training like working in a garage, salon and tailoring'* **.– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *In my thinking, I see that development in urban areas is more towards adults and within few families who can actually afford, but children don't benefit much especially those from poor families. If you look at our centre, you will find that only well- off families can afford good education, but the poor ones (who located within the urban areas can afford education.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, LANGO.**

Differences Between Rich and Poor Families

An interesting finding was the perception of differences between rich and poor families and the consequences for schooling. Living in urban areas and therefore having jobs where there was more delineation between home and work was seen by some as enabling rich people to be more involved parents to their children.

> *There is proper parental care with the wealthy for example, they care for their children, they dress them well to school and breakfast in the morning, they even help them with their homework but the poor children just wake up and do what they want because parents cannot afford so much.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

> *'Urban child can easily be taught / guided in their class homework by their parents and guardians compared to rural parents. A rural parent most times are not at home, they go to the garden, and in the evening hangs out and comes back at 10:00PM, hence little time is given to children to help them with homework.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, LANGO**

However, hiring other people to look after one's children and being less involved in their lives was also seen as the reason that young people from wealthy backgrounds often did not observe social etiquette:

> *Children from rich families have bad behaviours, they don't greet because they know they have everything and another thing the parents who are rich they don't stay with their children, they wake up to go and work, they don't care for their children but the poor families stay with their children and care for them but the rich families leave their children with house helpers who do not care for children well.'* **– OLDER RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), BUKEDI.**

> *Parents in the urban areas no longer have time for their sons. Therefore, the boys are easily exposed to vices such as drug and alcohol abuse.'* **– OLDER RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), BUSOGA.**

Some respondents also felt that poorer people saw the value in education more than wealthier people who took for granted that they could access services and do well in life:

> *When they see their parents have money, they don't see a value in education because money is there, everything is there, but for the poor, the parents advise them to study because they know what they have left behind their homes, the mother has gone to the garden, so, the poor will say let me go and study, sometime the mother can be sick and she goes to the hospital but the doctors fail to work on her, so, that inspires the child to study and also become a doctor to treat his own parents instead of going to the hospital and they just chase you because you are poor'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUKEDI.**

4.3.6 Health and Wellbeing

Availability of Services

Overall, health was perceived as being better in urban areas. This was for several reasons, including easier access to hospitals, clinics, doctors and medication. In rural areas, health personnel do not stay in the area but visited remotely, meaning that opportunities to obtain healthcare including sexual and reproductive health-care were more limited than in urban areas, where healthcare was available 24 hours day.

> *'I see that urbanisation has brought wellbeing especially for the youths, a while back there were no means of protecting oneself but nowadays, they are being provided with condoms, testing kits for HIV, and so it has improved health of the young people'.* **– 20-30-YEAR-OLD, ACHOLI.**

> *'You find in the rural areas people have that laziness to visit government health centres because of the long distances, but in towns people rush to hospitals quickly in case of emergencies or sicknesses attack.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD RESPONDENT, WEST NILE.**

These benefits also were noted as having positive effects for girls' empowerment:

> *'The good thing about urbanisation on girls is that there is access to family planning. Here in town there is medicines (contraceptives) that can help young people to avoid early pregnancies and also they are educated about different things at the health facilities'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

Access to Services in Reality

However, many respondents also felt that in urban areas, there was widespread corruption in the provision of services in hospitals. Treatment was prioritized to who could pay, even when services were intended to be free at the point of access. Some observed that health care workers stole drugs to sell them directly to patients, leading to shortages of medication in clinics:

> *'The government sends medicine to hospitals but most health professionals take medicine to their own clinics, so, when you go to the government hospital to get medicine they just write for you to go and buy'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUKEDI.**

> *'There is increased corruption in hospitals like they sell drugs to people mostly in the government hospitals. This denies most people the health service, yet they have to get them for free.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA SOUTH**

Nutritional Inequalities Between Rural and Urban Areas

A wider range of food was noted by some to be available in urban areas, including non-seasonal food items that, in rural areas, could only be obtained during market season each year. This meant that a more varied diet could be eaten.

However, some people observed that the reverse was true and commented on the increase in diseases related to the types of food people ate in urban centres, including diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure. Furthermore, the range of food was not seen as being always accessible because it required money to buy, unlike in rural areas, where food is grown and therefore does not need to be bought.

> *'The children in rural areas are better because they eat a balanced diet i.e. can get oranges, pawpaw, while the urban children eat fast foods which are not good for one's health which cause many diseases so village children don't over get sick like urban children.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD YOUNG MAN, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *(Urbanisation) has also increased eating of chemicals like food flavours, processed foods, and NAADS food which later result in complications that affect the lives of people'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

> *'Urbanisation does not provide a route for easy accessibility to better nutrition because most adolescents are self-employed and at times they fail to get work to do because some jobs here are seasonal and therefore at times getting money to buy what they need to eat is hard.'* **– OLDER RESPONDENT, BUNYORO.**

> *'(Being rich) makes you grow fat or eat things like too much sugar but for the poor you will cook your green vegetables and posho, when the rich are putting Royco, taking sugar and yet they don't know how they are manufactured.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUKEDI.**

Sanitation

Sanitation was also noted as a problem in urban areas. People described widespread issues such as limited access to clean water due to the water supply only being run in certain areas, people not having toilets in their homes leading to open defecation, air pollution from factories and noise pollution from the number of people living in the city. These all were seen to have negative consequences for population health, compared with living in rural areas, where the only noted sanitation issue was that often people worked very long days and may be too tired to bathe every evening.

> **“ One thing which is paralysing health is that, there are certain areas in town which are very dirty, characterised by poor waste disposal, poor drainage, all these affects health and well-being’.**
> **– OLDER RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), LANGO.**

4.3.7 Access to Work

Role of Social Networks

Respondents observed that, whilst casual labour was easily available in urban centres, this was not the case for formal employment in office jobs. Getting formal employment required social networks and connections to obtain, often in addition to paying bribes:

> *“ If it comes to these jobs we study for, like office work, it’s hard to get that one. In order for you to get that kind of job you must have a relative or a friend that can connect you there which makes it hard to get the job’* **.– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

4.3.7.2 Competition for Jobs

Employment of those outside of the local area also meant that, even when living in urban centres, there was further competition for work, which also contributed to high numbers of people living in urban areas, as explained by a respondent in Acholi:

> *“ We have some projects here in our town, we have two projects i.e. construction of the market and construction of the roads but you find that they are bringing people from outside to come and do the work ignoring the locals who are also qualified and ready to do the same jobs. The contractors, who get the contracts, come with their own people or relatives’* **.– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

4.3.8 Technology

Young people were often described as being attracted to urban centres because of the promise they offered for a better standard of living. This included access to technology such as computers and televisions and communication through radio and smart phones. Internet connectivity was more consistent in urban areas than in rural areas, as was electricity. Young people who were able to use smart phones were seen to be more educated because the settings of smart phones are in English, requiring a basic working knowledge of the language. Schools in urban centres, in their provision of better facilities for learning, were also seen as more likely to use computers and offer training in ICT skills. However, this also underlines that access to technology in urban areas remained mediated by financial resources, as smartphones remain expensive to buy and require ongoing monetary inputs such as airtime and charging.

> *“ For me when I look at my village, it is difficult to find a 10-year-old that knows how to operate a phone. However, in the urban areas, such children can operate a phone very well. Some in the urban centres can even use computers and some own them’.* **– OLDER RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), BUSOGA.**

> *“ There is electricity in urban areas which enables people to use gadgets such as computers, televisions, phones and even access internet to connect you globally’.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA NORTH.**

4.3.9 Risk of Urbanisation

Shifting Social and cultural Norms

Urbanisation was associated with negative changes in the habits, values and morality of young people and adolescents. Noted widely was the impression that young people who moved to urban centres no longer had respect for their elders.

> *Long time ago, our cultural values (were that) one had to peel while seated but now they have degraded, children just sit anyhow, greeting habits of kneeling down have also changed... Those days, parents used to advice and tell stories along the fire side but they no longer exist so culture has been affected even our beliefs, children of today know swimming, beaches but don't know any folk stories.'* **– OLDER RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), BUGANDA NORTH.**

> *Urbanisation leads to loss of cultural values and beliefs since every town dweller thinks about themselves, they think that everyone in town has gone there for a purpose and therefore are doing something.'* **– 20-30-YEAR OLD-MALE, LANGO.**

Adolescents were also described as being influenced by Western culture in negative ways. They took indecent photos of themselves, watched pornography, changed their style of dressing and doing their hair and makeup.

> *The rise of industries can lead to loss of culture as people come and adopt new behaviours in town. They dress poorly, which is against the Busoga culture that encourages women to wear long dresses.'* **– RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), BUSOGA.**

This was partly enabled by access to technology, which allowed young people to consume social media as well as access sexually explicit media:

> *Technology is good but it is spoiling children too much, you find that children of fifteen to nineteen years have telephones or computers, they buy data to search and watch pornographic movies, and so, you find that the child has gotten spoilt because of technology.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUKEDI.**

Displacement and Environmental Degradation

Processes of urbanisation also were seen to have had physical impacts on communities in some areas, including displacement, removal of water supplies and environmental degradation:

> *When the town is developing it creates conflicts and disputes as a result of displacement of people e.g., when constructing a road through the land'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD GIRL, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *Most of the urban development plans are in favour of the rich. For instance, when they are designing a road in an area, the rich are first consulted about its passage unlike the poor yet they are all occupants.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOY, BUGANDA NORTH.**

> *For us here, we have a problem when the rich are constructing, they always block us and you find that there is nowhere to pass... Even the officials from the government, for them they just come in the morning and start constructing for example a road and they destroy all your properties and you have nowhere to report.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD BOYS, BUNYORO.**

> *Those people who make roads cut pipes that connect to the tap, so when pipes are cut, we lack water and fetch water from the wells and water from the wells is dirty, so, we have problems with water because even people who fix tap water take long and yet for us, we drink tap water.'* **– 14-19-YEAR-OLD, BUKEDI.**

> *(Urbanisation) has led to environmental degradation, for example Jomayi property masters who has turned wetlands into dwelling places causing flooding in the cities.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA NORTH.**

> *Environmental degradation due to pollution, cutting trees for firewood which is used in bakeries. Most of the bakeries use wood to heat the bread and because of the demand for bread, a lot of trees have been cut creating an environmental problem. We have had a dry season for almost a year now because most of the trees have been cut'.* **– OLDER FEMALE RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), ANKOLE.**

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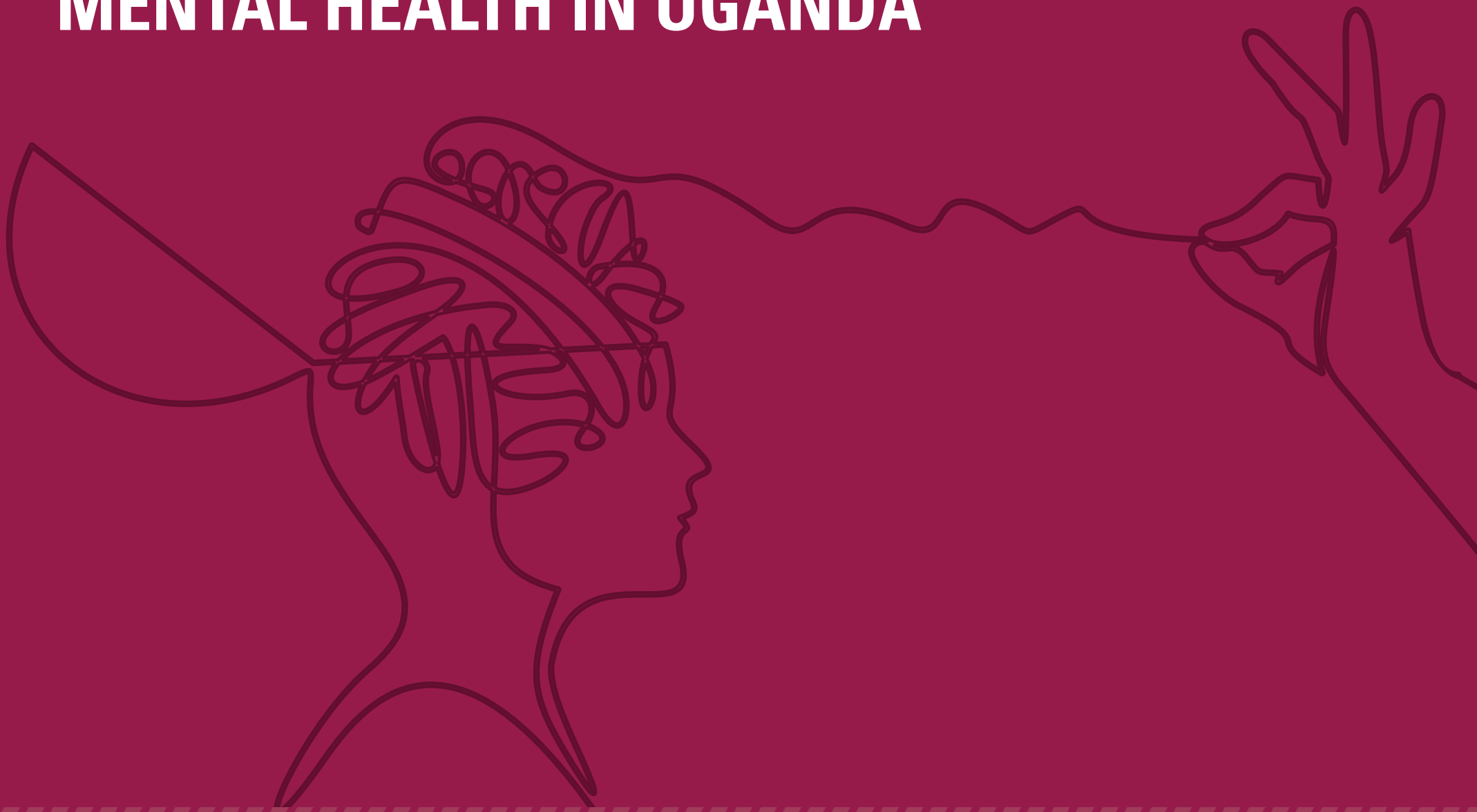
CHAPTER 05

MENTAL HEALTH IN UGANDA



5.1 BACKGROUND

Mental health is quickly becoming a growing public health issue in sub-Saharan Africa. Uganda is significantly affected by the burden of poor mental health (Kaggwa, Harms, Mamun, 2022) and a recent systematic review founds that "*Almost one in three individuals in Uganda has depression, with the refugee population being disproportionately affected*" (Kaggwa et al, 2022, p2). Young people are known to be particularly at risk of poor mental health in Uganda. One in five adolescents suffers from symptoms of depression and a further one in four adolescents suffer from anxiety disorders (Nabunya et al 2020). Evidence also suggests that it is children and adolescents who are already marginalised who are at the most risk of poor mental health (Swahn et al 2012). Girls are more affected than boys, with almost 30% suffering from anxiety disorder, compared with 23% of boys (Nalugya-Sserunjogi et al., 2016). Young people who are particularly vulnerable to poor mental health include those who are extremely poor, neglected by their families or living on the streets or in slums (Swahn et al 2012).

The impact of poor mental health on the ability of children and young people to live a good quality life is serious. Studies in Uganda have found that around a quarter of young people had considered or planned suicide (Culbreth et al 2021; Rudatsikira et al 2007). Poverty drives poor mental health and mental health problems can increase the chance of slipping into poverty (Nyoni et al., 2022). Widely held beliefs that mental health problems are caused by witchcraft can lead to people with mental health problems being socially isolated and discriminated against (Spittel et al 2019).

Despite this mental health crisis's growing prevalence and severity amongst young people, Uganda's health system is poorly equipped to respond. There are very few services outside centralised government hospitals which are difficult to reach from rural areas (Cappo et al., 2021). Moreover, beliefs about witchcraft and curses are still widely held even amongst health professionals (Spittel et al., 2019). There is little understanding of how children and young people's experiences of mental health problems differ from those of adults in Uganda, despite the implications for this on the kinds of services that are needed to address the mental health issues facing children and young people.

5.2 RESEARCH FOCUS

Research was undertaken with people in nine regions of Uganda in order to understand the current situation in relation to young people's mental health in the country and the functioning of existing mental health programming and services. The prevalence and nature of mental health problems, people's awareness of and perceptions of the management of mental health, knowledge of and access to effective care and availability of services for children and adolescents were the focus of this component of the research.

KEY QUESTIONS AT THE HEART OF THIS RESEARCH WERE:

- How do people in Uganda understand what is meant by the term 'mental health'?
- How do people define 'mental health problems and symptoms?
- Who is most likely to suffer from a mental health problem?
- How does gender and age affect one's experience of mental health problems?
- How are people with poor mental health treated in the community?
- What do people see as the causes of poor mental health, particularly amongst children and adolescents?
- What are the impacts of mental health problems on the lives of children and adolescents?
- What kinds of interventions are seen as being the most effective and accessible, especially those who are the poorest and most vulnerable?

The findings are organised as follows. First, how respondents understand and explain mental health problems and illnesses is explained, showing the role that gender plays in understanding of mental health. Next, the causes of mental health problems from the perspective of people in Uganda are discussed, examining the role that is seen to be played by genetics, external stressors, witchcraft and other factors. Third, the responses of society to mental health problems are examined, including fear, stigma, isolation and other negative responses that need to be addressed through policies and programming. Next, how people perceive treatment options in the current landscape is explored, before a final discussion of what people think needs to be done to address the mounting crisis of poor mental health amongst young people in Uganda today.

5.3 FINDINGS ON MENTAL HEALTH IN UGANDA

5.3.1 Explaining Mental Health Problems

Misunderstanding of Distinctions Between Neurological and Mental Health Problems

When asked about their understanding of what it means to have a mental health problem, respondents often described neurological conditions, especially epilepsy and cerebral malaria as 'mental health problems'. This led to a lot of confusion and misunderstanding amongst respondents about the causes of mental health problems, the risks to young people who are affected and the implications for treatment. This misunderstanding appeared to be linked to the fact that both mental health issues and neurological problems are related to the brain and cause involuntary physical behaviour that people cannot understand or explain. Epilepsy and poor mental health were often both described as being inherited and genetic conditions rather than caused by an external factor.

> *"Mental health problems are caused by abject poverty that disables Ugandans today to access medical care for children in particular who are vulnerable to malaria ending up with cerebral malaria which affects their brains.'* **– OLDER RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), BUSOGA.**

> *"Mental health-illness is a person with epilepsy. They live a very short life, if they get an attack and they are in dangerous places like near water and ditches, they can end up dead.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ANKOLE.**

Other disabilities were also linked to mental health, including impairments which made communication difficult:

> **"Children with a hearing disability, you call the children, but they cannot respond but they are seeing you I think this is also related to mental issues.'**
> **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ANKOLE.**

Behavioural Descriptions of Mental Health Problems

Respondents also offered explanations of what having a 'mental health problem' was by describing certain types of behaviour they associated with it. People with poor mental health were described as: forgetting things easily; constantly being worried and anxious; being traumatised after something bad happens and unable to recover; talking and laughing to oneself, isolating oneself, doing inappropriate things; being unable to cope with stress; being low and depressed; having headaches; drinking or taking a lot of drugs; not taking care of one's appearance, food intake or personal hygiene; being very angry all the time or having an unpredictable mood. These descriptions showed more insight into what it was like for someone to live with a mental health problem.

> *"There is also sudden change in behaviour of a person with mental illness, at times they over shout, and also get over excited.'* **– OLDER RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), LANGO.**

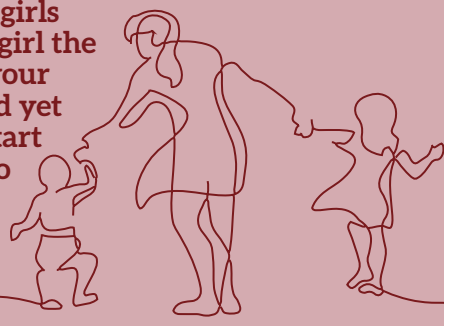
> *"They do things that people do not understand, if you tell them to get for you something they bring something different.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, WEST NILE.**

> *"They eat dirty things and stay in dirty environment and even themselves are dirty.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA NORTH.**

Gender Differences

The different perception of the way that mental health problems affect boys and girls is significant. Girls were seen as more likely to suffer when they were let down by boyfriends, which could lead to poor mental health, in part because of the stigma of unplanned pregnancy which might result from such experiences. Whilst there was a generally equal divide in whether respondents felt that girls or boys were more affected, people often felt that there was more sympathy for girls. This led to girls who were seen as 'mad' being given clothes and food, whilst boys were just seen as violent and menacing and chased away from the community.

> **Mental health is common in girls because if your parents die, as a girl the responsibility of taking care of your younger ones remain on you and yet you are also still young so you start having many thoughts of how to get food, how to look after the family and so on.'**
> **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**



> *For the young girls, they are deceived by these boys who end up denying them and the child, on top of that you do not even have support from home, they mistreat you, and they judge and insult you all the time. So this leads mental health problems.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

Both boys and girls were perceived to struggle due to household pressures and neglect or abuse by parents. However, boys were seen as more likely to leave home and engage in substance abuse to cope, which made them unpredictable, violent and unstable.

> *Unemployment has greatly caused a mental disorder among many especially men since they are the family head and have to provide for their people. Due to overthinking, some end up with mental health problems.'* **– OLDER RESPONDENT (AGE UNKNOWN), BUGANDA NORTH.**

By contrast, girls' helplessness and vulnerability was emphasised, with respondents noting their risk of being sexually abused when they were mentally unwell. They were seen as more likely to be kept at home than boys, who were harder to control.

> *From what I have seen in this area, the boys are usually more violent than the girls who are mentally sick. The mentally ill girls are always shy and keeps silent.'* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, LANGO.**

> *The girls whether they are mad, even normal men impregnate them and give birth to children.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUSOGA.**

5.3.2 Causes of Mental Health Problems

Genetic Causes

When asked about the factors that cause mental health problems, some also described depression, anxiety and madness as being inherited from one's family, especially if it presented at a young age:

> *Another thing that makes people get mental illness is in the blood, if your family you have that thing of running mad, they will just lose that hope of getting better, they will keep on referring to those who got mad in the family, so, when you also get mentally ill, they just look at you like those others because the thing is in the family'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUKEDI.**

> *If a person is born with mental health issues do not bother because that is genetical or it is in their family lineage'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUSOGA.**

> *I think children from poor families get affected because this problem of mental health is also inherited and most of the time families which are poor inherit it from one child to another child'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUNYORO.**

External Stressors

A number of factors were also connected to individual life experiences. 'Overthinking', meaning worrying too much about a problem, was mentioned frequently, especially in relation to the stress of poverty.

> *Abject poverty… has rendered most men helpless and useless to their families. Men are overthinking on how to sustain their families and at the end point is developing mental health problems'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA NORTH.**

Problems within the household were also described as having a negative impact on the mental health of children and adolescents. This included domestic violence, which was mentioned most often, but also pressures from their parents around school and housework. Abuse of children was also mentioned, particularly in relation to children from previous marriages who were living with a stepmother who was not happy about their presence. Neglect at home also was seen to contribute to poor mental health because of its impact on children's development.

> **‘Children of poor families feed poorly and therefore the foods they feed on don’t build their minds and give them energy’. – 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUNYORO.**

Stressors were also described as having an impact before a child was even born in some cases. This included the use of medication during pregnancy. Family planning was mentioned as having a negative impact on the unborn child. Another respondent suggested that not taking a full course of antimalarial medication when pregnant can have a similar effect of causing mental health problems for the child once born. Others described violence by partners affecting one’s unborn child negatively.

> *‘Using Family planning – when one takes these tablets, yet she is pregnant, it affects the child. The child is born and the brain has issues.’* **– 60-64 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *‘Children whose mothers underwent a lot of violence like overbeating by husband during pregnancy (are most likely to have mental health problems). This greatly affects the unborn babies’.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA NORTH.**

5.3.2.3 Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Not only was child abuse at home framed as a direct reason for poor mental health in children, it was also linked to children leaving home and becoming exposed to further negative influences, the main one being drugs and alcohol abuse. In some locations, young people were described as becoming addicted to inhaling aeroplane fuel, which eventually led to them losing their sanity.

> *‘They leave home because of poor living conditions. When they reach there, they are forced to join groups in order to earn and get food thus start taking drugs’.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *‘For me I think that neglected children always end up in drug abuse, theft, and this leads to mental health problems. For example, when a parent neglects their child, the child will grow up without any proper guidance, and end up joining bad groups, which engage in drugs and other illicit substances like opium’.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, LANGO.**

5.3.2.4 Bewitching

A third widely mentioned factor in mental health problems was that of children and young people being bewitched. This was especially a focus in Bunyoro:

> *‘Mental health problems among the children and young people are caused by witchcraft and I want to bring it out here that Buliisa people here are not easy, it is as if people have degrees in witchcraft. This is done by very many people because of different intentions like they stole my cow so bewitch that person who stole, someone’s child is better than mine so bewitch him or her’.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUNYORO.**

> *‘Mental health problems are when someone is bewitched and the person is mad and does not understand well. So when someone is bewitched, he or she cannot understand well’.* **– OLDER RESPONDENT, BUNYORO.**

Misperceptions surrounding the causes of Mental Health issues

Alongside the factors of genetic causes, external stressors and bewitching, people gave various further explanations of the causes of poor mental health that underline a widespread lack of understanding of these issues. In West Nile there was a particular focus on how lack of hygiene affects mental health.

> *‘I believe mental health is because of using some of the dirty places for example our religious books tell us that demons can be got in those dirty places which may cause mental health for example bathrooms and toilets someone can come out and shout which is beginning of mental health’.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, WEST NILE.**

> *‘Having too much hair on the heads of children and young people cause mental health problems. This too much hair on the head makes the brain not to function well thus getting mental health problems. In addition you see there are some people who keep a lot of hair on their heads and they make them uncomfortable and they keep on scratching their heads and at time they develop constant headache’.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUNYORO.**

> *I think the mental health is as a result of weather for example if it's too cold and also if you pray while dirty, for example if someone prays without cleaning himself.'* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, WEST NILE**

> *Due to over reading it results into mental health problem'.* **– 31-64 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

5.3.3 Social Responses to Mental Illness

Lack of Awareness

As evidenced by people's poor level of understanding about mental health, people often did not take mental health problems seriously:

> *There is a challenge of lack of awareness on mental health problems so some of us here at times we think it is just a joke for some people to get a living there by pretending to be mad. So many people are mental health as a simple thing yet it is a serious illness thus not minding about the suspects'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUNYORO.**

Lack of Sympathy

Whilst many people expressed the need to be caring and look after people with mental health problems, some noted that this often was not the reality in their communities. They may even be blamed for their condition. Some parents themselves neglected their children with mental health problems due to the perception that they were a burden on their family and not worth investing time and money into.

> *We don't sympathize, they mock him "Okay you will see because you took drugs thinking what...?".* **– 31-64 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *Children/young people with mental health problems are a burden to the parents and even the people they are living with'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *If you are mentally disturbed, implying that your brain doesn't function well, so there are some parents who fear to have someone who is mad in the family they intend to leave the person to die and another thing they don't give care because they know that the person is useless, according to them that is how they understand'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD RESPONDENT, BUKEDI.**

Fear

Many people said that they were scared of people who had mental health problems. In part, this was because of the perception that many people with mental health issues are also potentially violent or taking drugs. It was also connected to the perception that they may have been cursed.

> *Some people view them as children who have curses upon their lives and makes them to isolate them thinking the curse might also affect them'.* **– 14-19 YEAR OLD, BUSOGA.**

> *They are considered as a threat in the community and even family members, especially those who are violent and like fighting, throwing stones or always moves with dangerous objects. Such (behaviour) make it difficult to stay with them' .–* **20-30 YEAR OLD, BUSOGA.**

> *The mentally ill person can't associate with others. Sometimes when hungry and asks for food, you fail to give him because you fear what if he has other plans' .–* **31-64 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

Stigma and Isolation

The lack of compassion expressed towards those with mental health problems was in part caused by the stigma of poor mental health. Sometimes family members were blamed for their relative's mental health problem too. The stigma of mental health problems and the response of society led some people to simply isolate family members who had mental health problems from wider society. Some described individuals being chained or roped up inside the house and unable to leave, sometimes living in their own dirt and faeces.

> *Parents and caretakers are ashamed to freely move out with such people due to the marginalisation they face in society'.* – **OLDER RESPONDENT, BUSOGA.**

> *They are not able to interact with other people. For example, if there is a wedding they are not allowed to attend, they will keep the child closed up in the house because they fear he might make bad utterances or display a bad image'.* – **20-30 YEAR OLD, ANKOLE.**

> *According to me, people who have mental health problems are those that are isolated from the public and people do not wish to stay with them. You see, mental problematic people are difficult to control so the best way is to put them alone somewhere'.* – **20-30 YEAR OLD, BUNYORO.**

> **Some parents isolate (children with mental health) and serve them food like dogs. They don't give them special care as they give to the normal children. (The child) can be tied up with a rope and they serve him food while he is tied on the rope'.** – **20-30 YEAR OLD, BUKEDI.**

5.3.4 Treatment Pathways

5.3.4.1 Hospital Care

Respondents generally described three options for treatment. The first of these was hospital care. However, there were various barriers to care from medical professionals. Discrimination was described as being a problem even in healthcare facilities as people were scared and did not understand mental health issues. At a community level, people knew very few options for treatment. There was only one specialised hospital for mental health problems in Uganda, Butabika, which required not only a referral but also the money for transport and medication. This made it extremely inaccessible for poor people from other areas of the country. Some people also noted that service providers may speak different languages in other areas, making it impossible for them to understand what was happening. Doctors moved around to different hospitals as there were not enough of them working, so people described that you may repeatedly spend money on travel to keep going but eventually give up in frustration and never get treatment. Young people also relied on parents to take them for treatment, meaning that if their parents did not understand the nature of their condition, they would not receive appropriate care.

> *When you take a mentally ill person to Rakai hospital, He/She scares everyone even the nurses'.* – **31-64 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA SOUTH.**

> *The issue of money is making parents to get tired with the children because everywhere they go, they are asked for money, and yet you as a parent you don't have, you reach a moment and you abandon the child due to lack of money, there is nothing at home that you can sell, and yet sometimes may be you have others and they want to go to school, so, it means you will leave the sick and you go and work on the other ones first because of money'.* – **OLDER RESPONDENT, BUKEDI.**

5.3.4.2 Traditional Healers

The second widely discussed option was traditional healers. Because of the perception that people with mental health problems were likely to be victims of witchcraft or demons, this was seen as a useful option, given especially that medical intervention would not be able to treat such problems. These views were more likely to be expressed by older respondents.

> *People with mental health problems go to the Witch doctors for healing. You see when you go to the hospitals, they over charge you and these traditional doctors charge less and in case your patient is charmed, modern hospitals cannot heal them not until you visit witch doctors'.* **– OLDER RESPONDENT, BUNYORO.**

> *We have cases of children who fall sick, but you cannot tell what kind of illness they are suffering from, sometimes you even think they were bewitched because they do not respond to the treatment provided'.* **– OLDER RESPONDENT, BUSOGA.**

5.3.4.3 Churches and Prayers

The main source of care and support for young people with mental health problems appeared to be the church, which offered prayers. The church was also a place where people could be told about mental health problems and advised of ways to avoid those linked to behaviour such as substance abuse.

> *The best place is only the Church because pastors are trained on how to deal with different groups of people'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, LANGO.**

> *Most people with mental health problems go to Churches for spiritual healing. The reason is that church people are God's people and they have spiritual powers so when you believe in God, they can pray for you and you get healed'.* **– OLDER RESPONDENT, BUNYORO.**

5.3.5 Responding to the Crisis in Mental Health

5.3.5.1 Awareness

It was generally agreed that there was a need to improve awareness and understanding both of mental health itself and of the pathways to services. To do this, a range of modalities were described but the most widely mentioned were local chairpersons and the local Village Health Teams, who could also be supported to administer care. More awareness could help to address discrimination and stigma.

> *Local chairpersons should be involved in each village to make preparations for holding meetings to offer education about mental health problems'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, BUGANDA NORTH.**

> *Set up mental health facilities in the villages for easy access of mental health care and services. Equip the VHT with medicine so that they can prescribe and dispense medicine for the people'.* **– OLDER RESPONDENT, ANKOLE.**

5.3.5.2 Services

The lack of services and accessibility meant that awareness may not lead to treatment. Respondents who expressed more awareness of the issue recognised there was a need for localised and compassionate support to address mental health problems' causes and effects, rather than just removing people from the community. For some, this was also about addressing inactivity that led to substance abuse and hopelessness amongst young people.

> *They should train people to handle these issues at a grass root level because this is the biggest problem around and it's because people are hurting and it brings so many fights because people have nowhere to go for help because when you go to the chairperson he rushes to the police, when you go to the hospital, they say it is malaria and so on. The available places are accessed by few people'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

> *If they can get these children, put them in a group and be given something to do, like resource centers, these children will recover and never go back to their old ways. The reason children and adolescents are having mental issues is because they have nothing to do. For example, take a good look at us here, only about 3 people are in school, the rest of us are jobless but if they put us in a group, we will change our lives and reduce mental health problems'.* **– 20-30 YEAR OLD, ACHOLI.**

CHAPTER 06
CONCLUSION

The findings shared in this report document the vulnerability young people in Uganda face, as seen through the eyes of the country's citizens. They also emphasise the scale of the challenges facing the government, international agencies and civil society stakeholders in meeting the ambitious objectives outlined in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, Vision 2040 and the African Union Agenda 2063.

By addressing important knowledge gaps, this report provides evidence that will be useful for improving development policies and interventions in line with Uganda's commitments nationally and globally.

First, it should be recognised that the findings in this report across the four topics are deeply interconnected. Young people's labour market transitions and their ability to participate and benefit from urbanisation are essential components of Uganda's development strategy. However, in order for these objectives to be met, it is also essential that adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, and poor mental health, are effectively addressed, as these are widespread issues that hinder young people's capabilities and opportunities. Moreover, the findings of this report underline that adolescent pregnancy and child marriage and poor mental health are both driven by, and intensify poverty and inequality. It is those who are already vulnerable that are most affected by these issues.

Whilst there has been significant policy focus on the issue of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, there has been little research or programmatic attention to the actual experience of being married or becoming a parent whilst very young, nor what might help young parents to cope and live a life that they value. The findings in this report shed light on the importance of social support and access to vocational skills training.

To date, there has also been relatively very little qualitative research into mental health in Uganda, with major knowledge gaps as to how the Ugandan public understands mental health. The findings in this report thus provide key insights into the role of stigma in exacerbating poverty and marginality for people with mental health issues and the scale of unmet need in relation to adolescent and child psychosocial provisioning.

The findings on urbanisation and labour market transitions will also be of interest to the public and government of Uganda as they offer evidence as to how these aspects of development might be strengthened and made more inclusive. For example, the stories of young people's trajectories from rural to urban areas and the factors and opportunities that enable their successful establishment in urban centres, offer insights into how inequalities may be widened through the process of urbanisation. The role of social connection and bribery in obtaining formal employment also emphasizes the importance of not only widening participation in higher education but also ensuring that the job market for qualified persons exists in practice.

Children and adolescents are central to the development of Uganda. Scaling up provision and ensuring the accessibility of social services that address young people's needs and vulnerabilities will be essential for Uganda to meet its broader objectives of poverty alleviation. The evidence in this report provides a starting point for improving the understanding of what changes are needed and why they matter.

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ANNEX

TABLE A 1: **Sampling Framework for Focus Group Discussion**

TOPIC AREA	POPULATION CATEGORY	GROUPING	REGION	FGD IN EACH REGION BY THREE POVERTY BANDS	TOTAL FGD
Aspirations & transitions to the labour market	Young people (age 14 - 30)	3 (Male group, Female group, mixed group)	4	Sub-Region to be selected to include at least one Low, Medium & High Poverty rate area	12
Child marriage & teenage pregnancy	Young people (age 14-30)	3 (Male group, Female group, mixed gender group)	4	Sub-Region to be selected to include at least one Low, Medium & High Poverty rate area	12
Urbanization	Adult (older & working age) and young people (age 14 - 30)	3 (Young, working age, mixed age group)§q	4		12
Mental Health	Older adult, working age and Young people(including school children)	3 (Mixed age group, young group, school children group)	4	Sub-Region to be selected to include at least one Low, Medium & High Poverty rate area	12
TOTAL					**48**

TABLE A 2: **Proportion of Poor People By Region**

REGION	PROPORTION OF POOR PEOPLE BY SUB REGION		THREE POVERTY BANDS
	SUB REGION	%	
Central	Kampala	4	0-20% (low)
Central	Buganda South	12	
Northern	West Nile	20	
Western	Bunyoro	21	21-40% (Medium)
Central	Buganda North	23	
Western	Ankole	24	
Eastern	Elgon	24	
Western	Toro	27	
Northern	Lango	28	
Eastern	Teso	40	

REGION	PROPORTION OF POOR PEOPLE BY SUB REGION		THREE POVERTY BANDS
	SUB REGION	%	
Western	Kigezi	41	41-72% (High)
Eastern	Busoga	45	
Eastern	Bukedi	53	
Northern	Karamoja	70	
Northern	Acholi	72	

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