



# INTERPARTY YOUTH PLATFORM (IYOP) COMMUNIQUE

Supported By



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## INTRODUCTION

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**I**nspired by the need to provide effective channels for improved and meaningful youth participation in Uganda's political and development processes, leaders of the youth leagues of seven political parties established the Interparty Youth Platform (IYOP) in 2011. In essence, IYOP is a cooperation framework of the youth leagues of the seven major political parties in Uganda, namely: Conservative Party (CP), Democratic Party (DP), Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), Justice Forum (JEEMA), National Resistance Movement (NRM), People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the Uganda People's Congress (UPC).

The activities of IYOP aim at strengthening leadership capacities for the youth and advancing their influence on the social, political and economic frameworks of Uganda. Furthermore, IYOP serves its members as a forum through which young people are able to network and engage on critical topics of youth related development processes, including democracy and governance, trade, climate change, energy, and peace and security.

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**The activities of IYOP aim at strengthening leadership capacities for the youth and advancing their influence on the social, political and economic frameworks of Uganda.**

This document is the result of the First National Interparty Youth Conference held in July 2013. The Interparty Youth Platform (IYOP), in cooperation with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), took the occasion to bring together 100 youth leaders from the seven major political parties of Uganda as well as representatives of civil society, the National Youth Council and academia. The conference aimed at offering a forum for young leaders to discuss the development challenges Ugandan youth face and to propose solutions to these challenges.

The final Communiqué is a focused summary of the views presented and recommendations made at the event and is

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organised by how these recommendations target different stakeholders. It is intended to be used in follow-up initiatives addressed to key actors such as government, parliament, political parties, development partners, and the media. As a collection of key demands from youth, the Communiqué presents a very strong and legitimate tool to pursue youth focused advocacy work given that it is a consensus statement of young people from across the country. This includes members of all seven major political parties that are part of IYOP, spanning from the ruling party, over the opposition voices and to parties currently not represented in parliament.

The communiqué is presented in three sections following the thematic areas of the conference which were: economic empowerment, political participation, and social services. Each section presents specific resolutions from the conference and related calls for action. These are followed by a short paper that contextualises the key issues at hand. The papers authored by Max Walter<sup>1</sup> provided the background and input for the conference discussions. They were developed out of desk research and thematic focus group discussions with young Ugandan experts in the respective fields. We are grateful for invaluable contributions during these sessions from Oketa Jasper Obwot, Bernard Mukhone, Hope Kyarisiima, Emmy Otim, Angelo Izama, Isabella Akiteng, Yusuf Kiranda, Emmanuel Kitamirike, Malcolm Mpamizo and Perry Aritua.

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1 Mr. Max Walter is a graduate student of Development Management at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He conducted the baseline research, moderated the focus group discussion and wrote the input papers for the conference.

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# THE COMMUNIQUÉ

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## PREAMBLE

**WE** the youth leaders from the seven political parties and civil society, united for a common purpose under the banner of the Interparty Youth Platform, assembled at Esella Country Hotel in Kira Town Council, Wakiso District from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2013,

**Recognising** that the youth of 15 – 30 years are a significant majority in Uganda representing 23 percent of the total population, and that the proportion of Ugandans below the age of 30 currently stands at 78 percent of the total population and is expected to grow bigger;

**Alarmed** by the fact that the youth of 18 – 30 years constitute more than half of Uganda's voting age population and yet the issues of interest to them are not prioritised on the policy agenda;

**Deeply Concerned** about the enormous challenges the youth face in political, economic, and social fields including, but not limited to:

- Widespread unemployment and poverty
  - Inability to affect the political and policy formulation process to address the pressing needs of the youth
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- Limited access to information on political, social and economic development opportunities
- Pervasive corruption and lack of accountability in the public sector which significantly affects service delivery
- Lack of a common youth identity due to divisions based on political, ethnic, regional, and other factors
- Ineffective structures for youth representation including the National Youth Council
- An education system that is not adapted to the needs of the market and the nation, and specifically pays less value and attention to vocational training;

**Committed** to applying the young people's numerical strength and energy to turn around the currently unfortunate situation of the youth into an opportunity and to widen their prospects in the fields of economic empowerment, political participation and social services;

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**SECTION:****1****ECONOMIC  
EMPOWERMENT****We, the Youth,**

1. **RESOLVE**, and **CALL UPON** other political and civil society youth leaders, to:
    - a. play an active role in communicating the importance of Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTJET) to change the negative perception towards it;
    - b. engage with and hold government to account concerning the promotion of BTJET;
    - c. promote a savings culture among youth to foster enterprise and investment;
    - d. raise employee awareness of labour rights and procedures countrywide;
  
  2. **CALL UPON:**
    - a. Parliament to make priority budget allocations to the strengthening of BTJET through providing for salaries, infrastructure and the necessary tools and equipment;
    - b. the Ministry of Education to re-assume its role in promoting national identity through education by posting students to various regions of the country;
    - c. Parliament, the Ministry of Education and civil society organisations to reform secondary and tertiary curricula to integrate and promote vocational courses;
    - d. the Ministry of Education, training institutes, business leaders and private sector associations to build partnerships to give students opportunities for practical training and design training programmes tailored to meet labour market needs;
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- e. the government to support the Uganda Bureau of Statistics in carrying out a national manpower survey;
  - f. Parliament to enact a law giving incentives to foreign-owned companies based on the proportion of Ugandans they employ vis-à-vis non-Ugandans;
  - g. the government to strengthen the implementation of laws and policies regulating the employment of foreign managers;
  - h. the government to give incentives to young entrepreneurs to encourage the growth of their business and companies;
  - i. Parliament to review the youth venture capital funds guidelines and restructure them to make them more youth-friendly;
  - j. the government to strengthen its monitoring mechanism and tracking systems of Ugandans working abroad;
  - k. the government and civil society to set up and rehabilitate skills centres to promote youth talents and skills;
  - l. Parliament to make budgetary allocations to attract and empower youth in agriculture;
  - m. civil society organisations and government to encourage and supervise youth cooperatives;
  - n. the government to give full powers to an independent oil and gas authority that exercises full transparency in oil and gas governance;
  - o. the government and local councils to enforce labour rights;
  - p. Parliament to enact a minimum wage policy and laws;
  - q. the government to structure the legal framework for student loan schemes so that they can be successfully implemented;
  - r. civil society to strengthen trade unions.
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**Uganda's population is by some measures the youngest in the world. Young people under the age of thirty constitute a staggering 80% of its total population.**

## **YOUTH AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

Uganda's population is by some measures the youngest in the world. Young people under the age of thirty constitute a staggering 80% of its total population. This demographic group presents the country with immense economic potential as well as pressing needs. To realize their potential and cater to their varied needs, Uganda's youth must participate in and contribute to the economy as empowered jobseekers, employees, entrepreneurs and consumers. To ensure their economic empowerment, political, civil society and private sector stakeholders shall need to build inclusive frameworks for fair access to employment and labour rights, an enabling environment and the right support for entrepreneurship, a framework that maximizes the positive impact of emerging sectors on the youth's prospects, and a smart education infrastructure that gives young people the skills they need to become empowered economic agents. As the youth partake in these transformations, they must also harbour productive attitudes towards career, enterprise and consumption. With the aim of stimulating discussion among youth leaders, this paper outlines some of the strengths, gaps and promises of the current state of youth economic empowerment in Uganda while introducing selected potential courses of action for the future.

## **FOUNDATIONS OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

At the foundation of an economy of empowered jobseekers, employees, entrepreneurs and consumers lie the skills and attitudes that allow individuals to be proactive and productive contributors rather than excluded victims. An effective education is thus paramount for equitable economic empowerment.

The Government of Uganda has made great strides in extending its primary, and to some extent its secondary education system

to children in all parts of the country<sup>2</sup>. In spite of this, completion rates are still low with only 47% of Ugandan children finishing primary school. Further, even those children who do complete primary education have been found by various studies to lack the basic skills for future education and economic inclusion – basic literacy and numeracy<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the growth of UPE and USE, affordable schooling does not yet reach enough Ugandan families. Of those children currently not in school, 49% are not enrolled because school is too expensive for their families<sup>4</sup>. Almost half of the country's secondary-level pupils currently attend private schools. Real educational value for all Ugandan children will require significant quantitative as well as qualitative improvements in the years to come, especially as the number of young people continues to grow.

While an ever-increasing number of Ugandans are graduating from universities each year, experts point out that there is a skills mismatch between university courses and labour market demands and, therefore, call for more market-sensitive curricula<sup>5</sup>. University courses that prepare students with practical, applicable skills for the job market also require considerable resources such as libraries, laboratories and lecturers with practical experience.

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**Despite the growth of UPE and USE, affordable schooling does not yet reach enough Ugandan families.**

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2 Universal Primary Education (UPE) now covers 85-95% of villages across the country except for the Northern region, where it covers about 50% of rural areas. Countrywide enrolment in primary school has skyrocketed to 94%. USE only reaches about 30% of rural areas in Central Uganda and 15% in Northern Uganda.

3 International Youth Foundation (2011). "YouthMap: A Cross-Sector Situational Analysis on Youth in Uganda". Henceforth referred to as *YouthMap*. Available online at: <http://uganda.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/YouthMap%20Uganda%20Exec%20Version.pdf>

4 *ibid.*

5 Young Leaders' Think Tank for Policy Alternatives (2011). "Employment Policies for Uganda: Young Leaders' Perspectives". Available online at: [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_29797-1522-2-30.pdf?111221152359](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_29797-1522-2-30.pdf?111221152359)

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**Vocational training is gaining recognition among the youth as a practical alternative to university or secondary school.**

Cultural biases and a lack of practical career planning amongst the youth and their guardians may also be partly to blame for the surge of ill-prepared university graduates into the Ugandan labour market. Firstly, white-collar jobs are often seen as prestigious, especially by older generations, and blue-collar work has been looked down upon. In addition, Uganda's university courses have been criticized for not evolving from colonial times, when they were designed primarily to create a comparatively tiny cohort of qualified civil servants.

Secondly, practical career guidance has been largely absent in all stages of the education system, meaning that school leavers and university students often lack the capacity to confront further education choices and career planning with a long-term vision, information about labour market demands, an appreciation for options in entrepreneurship, and a productive attitude towards work.

Vocational training is gaining recognition among the youth as a practical alternative to university or secondary school. A growing number of public and private programmes provide vocational training through a three-tiered Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) system<sup>6</sup>.

Vocational training, with its focus on practical and applicable skills, presents a crucial opportunity to close the skills gap that leaves many school leavers and university graduates stranded in the search for economic opportunity in Uganda. Nevertheless, huge unmet demand for BTVET programmes exists due to cost issues. The impact of vocational training is also hampered by a lack of coordination with the private sector to gauge labour demands and collaborate in the provision of training. Finally, many BTVET institutions face inadequate resources to train the skills demanded by the labour market – under-resourced,

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6 Numerous studies have demonstrated the concrete positive social and economic impacts of vocational training programmes. BTVET graduates are found to have higher earnings, profits, savings and living standards as well as success in seeking employment.

they mostly provide low-cost skills trainings mismatched to the current and emerging market needs. The government has expressed its commitment to expanding quality vocational training through a 10-year BTVET policy<sup>7</sup>.

## EMPLOYMENT

Today there are over 18 million unemployed people aged 15-30 years in Uganda, amounting to one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. With an annual population growth of 3.2% and children under 15 years of age constituting over half of the total population<sup>8</sup>, the pressure on Uganda's economy to create more jobs for young people is likely to continue growing. Stakeholders, including the youth themselves, face the crucial task of shaping Uganda's economic development so as to accommodate the ever-increasing number of young jobseekers as productive participants in the economy in the coming years.

While an effective education system that empowers young people through basic professional and practical skills is crucial, meaningful employment opportunities for all young people requires additional linkages. The transition between education and work can be facilitated through work experience and internship programmes. These help young people gain important professional skills, encourage them to interact more with working life and job market realities and give them an opportunity to establish contact with potential employers. The National Youth Policy has called for tax incentives for companies providing training and jobs for young people<sup>9,10</sup>.

Some of the mismatches between graduates and job opportunities are due to inefficiencies in the labour market itself. For instance, youth experts consulted during focus group

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7 *YouthMap*

8 *ibid.*

9 Some youth experts recommend the introduction of compulsory internship programmes in university courses.

10 *YouthMap*

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discussions point out that over half of all civil service positions in Uganda are currently vacant. This is clearly not due to a lack of labour supply. Instead, two reasons cited by experts are the costly and cumbersome hiring procedures in government and the fact that many young graduates are unwilling to work in the rural or peripheral regions where many vacant positions are located. This points to a dual need for greater efficiency in the government human resource system and a more practical and flexible attitude among young jobseekers.

Youth experts have described a generally poor attitude towards work among the Ugandan youth. They point out that young people need to see their first job as a long-term career investment and a learning opportunity. Further, they see a “get rich quick attitude” leading young employees and jobseekers to demand wages the private sector cannot support or to snub ‘lower-level’ jobs.

An inclusive employment sector requires fair access to employment. The removal of barriers of entry into employment also serves to increase the efficiency of the labour market. This may include battling corruption and nepotism in the labour market, affirmative action to promote the hiring of women, disabled and at-risk groups, and ensuring that less well-connected jobseekers have access to information about jobs as well as support in the application process. To that end, young leaders have called on the Government to create job centres, conduct manpower surveys and disseminate information about which skills are in demand on the job market<sup>11</sup>. The East African Community Secretariat has in fact been attempting to compile a regional manpower survey, tasking Uganda with concluding its part by July 2013<sup>12</sup>.

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11 Young Leaders’ Think Tank for Policy Alternatives (2011). “Employment Policies for Uganda: Young Leaders’ Perspectives”. Available online at: [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_29797-1522-2-30.pdf?111221152359](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_29797-1522-2-30.pdf?111221152359)

12 EAC News (2012). “EAC Pushes for Finalisation of Manpower Survey” Available online at: [http://www.eac.int/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1128:eac-pushes-for-finalization-of-manpower-survey&catid=146:press-releases&Itemid=194](http://www.eac.int/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1128:eac-pushes-for-finalization-of-manpower-survey&catid=146:press-releases&Itemid=194)

The simple act of being hired is often insufficient to truly empower young people as economic citizens. For instance, unfair wages are common and gender discrimination in compensation is prevalent in spite of the fact that legal provisions for the security and fair treatment of employees exist in Uganda<sup>13</sup>. Most young employees either do not have enough information about their rights, do not know the correct procedures for addressing rights abuses or do not trust the law to protect them as workers. Further, gender discrimination at the workplace may require a focus on a deeper cultural problem.

Finally, it should not be overlooked that the link between employment and economic empowerment depends on a two-sided relationship between employers and employees. Efforts to prepare young people for a working life should emphasize the rights but also the responsibilities of employees.

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In reshaping the Ugandan economy to offer better opportunities for young people, the youth themselves must harness their entrepreneurial energy, creating new jobs and economic value rather than simply demanding it<sup>14</sup>. If the younger generations are further equipped with the skills, attitudes, frameworks and capital to become successful entrepreneurs, the bulging youth population can be a powerful driver of growth rather than a burden on Uganda's economy.

This begins with the acquisition of basic skills at primary school, and self-sufficiency, creativity and personal initiative in secondary and tertiary education. The draft National Youth

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**The simple act of being hired is often insufficient to truly empower young people as economic citizens.**

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13 For instance, labour laws give employees the right to equal pay for work of equal value, prohibit sexual harassment and discrimination, require employers to give notice and, under some conditions, offer severance pay in case an employee's contract is terminated among other provisions.

14 Over 30% of Uganda's adult population involved in some early-stage entrepreneurial activity, this proportion is even higher for young people. However, over half of these early-stage young entrepreneurs are in business out of necessity rather than opportunity.

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**The infancy of the credit sector and potential borrowers' lack of collateral may explain the reluctance of financial institutions to lend money at affordable rates.**

Policy 2011-2016 emphasizes the promotion of youth-led enterprise<sup>15</sup>. An entrepreneurship curriculum was introduced in A-level schools and vocational training institutes across Uganda in 2012. Young people are already obtaining business and enterprise skills through various avenues that enhance or complement the classical education system<sup>16</sup>, but much more could be done to bring business and entrepreneurship skills to young people across the country.

Ugandan entrepreneurs face a shortage in access to funding for business. The cost of borrowing is extremely high, with commercial bank lending rates at around 20%. The infancy of the credit sector and potential borrowers' lack of collateral may explain the reluctance of financial institutions to lend money at affordable rates. Government grants, micro-credit and SACCOs<sup>17</sup> are having only minimal impact in filling this gap despite their efforts to-date.<sup>18</sup>

Besides access to funding options, the success of entrepreneurs also depends on the government to provide an enabling policy framework. As a major entrepreneurship study found<sup>19</sup>,

*"[t]he government of Uganda has not yet set up a single agency to address all the needs of new and growing firms. While the idea of the Uganda Investment Authority was to facilitate such needs, the need to interface with several other state agencies continues...The Government of Uganda has several entrepreneurship related programs running but several of them are hobbled by implementation failures."*

In order for young people living in peripheral regions of Uganda to fully benefit from business opportunities, they must have

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15 YouthMap

16 For instance, the Student Training for Entrepreneurial Promotion (STEP) works with universities to deliver practical training that gives students a small starting capital and requires them to set up businesses and reflect on the challenges and opportunities involved.

17 Savings and Credit Cooperatives

18 GEM Uganda 2010 Executive Report

19 ibid.

access to the physical and communications infrastructure needed to transport goods to trading centres, buy inputs and access market information. While the reach of mobile communications is impressive in Uganda, there is a lack of roads to transport agricultural produce and electricity supply to power machines as well as piped water and gas.

Finally, land is crucial for successful entrepreneurship. It forms the basis of productive capacity and, when legally titled, can be used as collateral to access loans. Shortcomings in fair access to land as an enabling factor for youth enterprise include discrimination against women in land inheritance, rapid population growth leading to ever smaller land ownership per person in rural areas, and the lack of a unified legal property regime. In consequence, the disenfranchisement of youth and women in land customs and laws is a political problem young people should bring to the fore when campaigning for better economic inclusion.

## EMERGING SECTORS

The agriculture, ICT, telecommunications, oil, tourism and NGO sectors have been identified as emerging industries with a high potential to catalyze youth employment and entrepreneurship in Uganda. The impact of these sectors on youth economic empowerment will depend on the ability of the education system to adapt to new and emerging labour market realities, of the government to foster business and encourage the inclusion of young people, of private sector players to harness the youth's potential in exploiting business opportunities, and of young people to take advantage of new openings for employment and enterprise.

### ***Agriculture***

Agriculture occupies 80% of Uganda's total workforce, and 60% of those active in agriculture are youth. A large proportion of these young people are in subsistence or low-profit commercial farming. The government intends to transform the agriculture

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**Market imperfections and infrastructure gaps mean that small-scale farmers continue to depend on middlemen and have little bargaining power.**

sector from subsistence farming to market-oriented agriculture but much work remains to be done.<sup>202122</sup> Discussions with youth experts highlighted the need to expand extension services and market access for smallholder farmers, invest in agricultural value chains and promote competitiveness in the sector.

Market imperfections and infrastructure gaps mean that small-scale farmers continue to depend on middlemen and have little bargaining power. Government as well as private and social enterprises can be instrumental in empowering young farmers to increase their production capacity and participate gainfully in agricultural markets and value chains. Where schemes to support farmers exist, information gaps often persist, meaning that the most isolated people do not benefit from them. The young experts consulted also stressed the importance of fostering a positive attitude among young people towards the importance of, and opportunities presented by working in agriculture.

### **NGO Sector**

The NGO sector is expanding and employing a significant proportion of Uganda's working population<sup>23</sup>. NGOs generally have a better record of providing professional training and fair working conditions as well as being more open to hiring

20 *YouthMap*

21 Uganda Vision 2040 (draft). Available online at: [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDoQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.acme-ug.org%2Fmedia-laws%2Fdoc\\_download%2F117-uganda-vision-2040&ei=1G\\_JUaDWG8GOO5PIgagH&usg=AFQjCNGjPHUYZSv5zAMITjcUZxiU4TcNqQ&sig2=E9AoDWpyrxW67gqovyFbtQ&bvm=bv.48293060,d.ZWU](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDoQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.acme-ug.org%2Fmedia-laws%2Fdoc_download%2F117-uganda-vision-2040&ei=1G_JUaDWG8GOO5PIgagH&usg=AFQjCNGjPHUYZSv5zAMITjcUZxiU4TcNqQ&sig2=E9AoDWpyrxW67gqovyFbtQ&bvm=bv.48293060,d.ZWU)

22 The National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) Phase 2 is currently working to reach 68,000 farmer groups with capacity building and access to market and production capital as well as facilitating enterprise development in agricultural value chains. Under its implementation guidelines, youth are to be prioritised in service delivery and involved in decision-making processes.

23 The last study to estimate the number of people employed by the sector was carried out in 1998 and placed the figure at 230,000. This accounted for over 10% of the non-agricultural workforce in the country, and the number of NGOs registered in Uganda is estimated to have grown roughly three-fold since then.

and training young people than other sectors. Voluntarism with NGOs provides young people with a chance to gain work experience and engage with public affairs issues, making them better candidates for future employment. Youth experts agree that the NGO sector should be strengthened but also held accountable by the government's NGO Board and laws regulating NGOs.

### ***Other sectors***

The booming ICT, telecommunications, oil and tourism sectors likewise promise growing opportunities for youth employment and enterprise. A growing number of trained computer science, communications and marketing professionals in urban centres may exploit opportunities the communications industries, especially with the spread of internet access and the extremely high reach of mobile phones in Uganda. In 2011 the oil sector was predicted to create 20,000 jobs directly and indirectly over 2 years<sup>24</sup>. Meanwhile tourism is attracting ever more foreigners to various regions of Uganda and providing a growing market to be exploited by young people. Targeted quality vocational training can be particularly instrumental in preparing young people to contribute to this sector.

## **EMPOWERED CONSUMERS**

Being an empowered consumer is an integral part of participating meaningfully in an economy. This includes having the skills to practice personal and household-level financial responsibility. It involves having knowledge of opportunities for economic empowerment such as loans, scholarships and tax-breaks. Empowered consumption also depends on a framework in which the prices of everyday needs are relatively stable and important goods are available to consumers living in the economic peripheries.

Lastly, young consumers have the power to collectively catalyse Uganda's economy, especially given that they account for over half of its population. Buying local products and services rather than imported ones is a sure-fire way to stimulate an economy. Currently, a lack of quality or availability as well as a negative perception of local goods and services may explain the general public's tendency to prefer imported products.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has described the roles economically empowered young people play as jobseekers, employees, entrepreneurs and consumers. Crosscutting factors such as education, attitudes and the development of emerging industries drive youth economic empowerment. The empowerment of jobseekers and employees further requires efficient and inclusive labour market mechanisms and effective employment protection while the power of youth entrepreneurship depends on several factors including access to finance and land as well as an enabling policy framework and infrastructure. High levels of youth unemployment, poverty and economic exclusion clearly show that the Ugandan economy is currently overwhelmed by a rapidly growing youth population and public and private stakeholders have so far been unable to adequately address this crisis. There is thus an urgent need for young people to be proactive as well as pressing government, civil society, private sector and development partners to decisively promote their inclusion as assets in Uganda's economic development.

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## SECTION:

## 2

# POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

## We, the Youth,

### 1. RESOLVE to:

- a. participate pro-actively and responsibly in political affairs at all levels;
- b. lead a strong unified campaign to tackle youth unemployment;
- c. deliver civic education to all young Ugandans through concerted efforts;
- d. join other relevant stakeholders in a campaign pursuing proposed electoral reforms;
- e. establish a cooperation matrix and an efficient database of youth-targeted initiatives;
- f. collaborate with the Uganda Parliamentary Forum for Youth Affairs on youth issues;
- g. request internal accountability structures at all levels from our respective political party youth wings;
- h. negotiate for semi-autonomous status for political party youth wings;
- i. undertake our own review of, and adopt a clear position on, the status of special interest groups in Parliament;

### 2. CALL UPON:

- a. civil society organisations and development partners to support capacity-building in the Interparty Youth Platform (IYOP) and National Youth Council (NYC) focusing on information access, ideology and social platforms;
- b. the government and Parliament to amend and operationalize the Political Parties and Organizations Act to achieve fair and equitable funding for political parties;
- c. the government to make civic education compulsory, timely and continuous;
- d. youth leaders and development partners to liaise with IYOP on youth-related issues;
- e. Parliament, the government and civil society organisations to review the status of special interest groups in Parliament;
- f. Parliament to amend the National Youth Council Act from a system of electoral college to introduce adult suffrage; the government and civil society organisations to increase funding for the NYC.

## MEANINGFUL YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The young people of Uganda represent a largely unrealized asset in their country's public affairs. Meaningful youth political participation can be understood as the ability of young people, irrespective of their current position in society, to substantively contribute to and influence decision-making processes at all levels of the political infrastructure. The result of such participation is a political system that listens to young people, takes the issues affecting them seriously and is accountable to them in its responses to those issues. The Government of Uganda recognises youth empowerment and participation in decision-making as priorities through the National Youth Policy and the African Youth Charter, of which it is a signatory. However, several barriers have kept Uganda's youth from making full use of the avenues available to them for political participation. This paper discusses the cross-cutting forces hindering meaningful youth political participation as well as specifically addressing the weaknesses and potentials of the various means of participation for young Ugandans.

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## DRIVERS OF MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION

About 95% of Uganda's youth were registered to vote in 2011 and 60% were involved in some civic activity<sup>25</sup>. This suggests a strong desire to participate in public affairs. But what factors translate that desire into effective youth participation in Uganda's political sphere? A review of key studies and consultations with Ugandan experts in youth engagement identified a set of fundamental preconditions that drive meaningful youth political participation.

25 International Youth Foundation (2011). "YouthMap: A Cross-Sector Situational Analysis on Youth in Uganda". Henceforth referred to as YouthMap. Available online at: <http://uganda.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/YouthMap%20Uganda%20Exec%20Version.pdf>

### ***Political identity and patriotism***

Experts consulted during a focus group discussion on youth political participation stressed a lack of political identity as one of the central factors hindering meaningful youth participation in Uganda. Rather than having a unified political identity, the youth is divided along party and ethnic lines. Even though issues such as education and employment affect all young people, the convictions and perspectives on these issues are bound to be as diverse as the youth population itself. It can be argued that substantive engagement on the issues affecting young people is hampered by the dominance of personalised and ethnic politics. If the youth were able to look beyond these dividing forces, they may find a stronger collective voice on issues such as youth unemployment.

Youth experts say that spaces for common youth participation do exist but are not sufficiently exploited by young people, pointing to the National Youth Council (NYC) as one such platform. However, they admit that the NYC and other such spaces lack resources, power and good governance. They point out that the NYC struggles to evolve in line with new issues and realities among the youth,

Unifying spaces for youth participation that cut across party, ethnic and ideological divisions are instrumental in building patriotism among young citizens, another key driver of meaningful political engagement. But participation in established structures has been subject to a fear of indoctrination into the National Resistance Movement (NRM) among youths. A lack of separation between the state and the NRM in Uganda's young multi-party system perpetrates this fear.

Some experts have also suggested the introduction of mandatory military or civil service in order to ensure that all young people pass through a state structure that is separate from partisan politics, gain a sense of participation in the organs of state power, and build a new breed of patriotism. But any such state structure would be in perpetual danger of being exploited by the ruling government unless strong checks and balances are in place.

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**Unifying spaces for youth participation that cut across party, ethnic and ideological divisions are instrumental in building patriotism among young citizens, another key driver of meaningful political engagement.**

### ***Cultural barriers***

A second driver – or hindrance – of meaningful youth participation is the level to which young people are given the respect, acknowledgment and attention to make real contributions to decision-making in society. In Uganda, some youth experts worry, a culture of elders is not giving young people the political voice to participate meaningfully. Many young people report feeling excluded and dismissed by elders and senior politicians<sup>26</sup>. Traditionally, youth are seen as having to earn their political voice as they move upward in society and gain life experience. However, this custom may be called into question as youth, now the biggest constituent of the Ugandan population, is not having their issues adequately addressed in mainstream politics.

Further, the rapidly changing social, cultural and economic context of Uganda may have implications for the degree to which traditional ‘wisdom’ is adequate in tackling pressing issues as opposed to the direct experiences and knowledge of young people today. If a cultural transformation is necessary to allow for meaningful youth participation in decision-making, this will not occur without more unified and proactive youth voices. The lack of confidence among youths caused by this culture is perhaps a main reason why the youth themselves have not more actively demanded to be listened to. That conclusion would imply a need for new ideas on how to foster confidence among young people as citizens.

This exclusion from public affairs is also true for women in general. Women have traditionally been given very little authority in communities and families. Young women are thus particularly affected by the cultural barriers to meaningful political participation. The empowerment of women thus plays a central role in the political empowerment of youth generally.

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**If a cultural transformation is necessary to allow for meaningful youth participation in decision-making, this will not occur without more unified and proactive youth voices.**

### ***Formation of a critical mass***

Meaningful youth political participation ultimately requires the emergence of a critical mass of youths. While young people, particularly women, are not taken seriously enough in public affairs, the formation of a critical mass is also impinged by economic desperation and a lack of civic awareness and confidence.

Broad-based quality education is the first building block of a young population that thinks critically and has the confidence to express itself politically. Combined with poor education, the economically desperate situation of many young people in Uganda makes them susceptible to vote buying, patronage and nepotism. Rather than listening to the young population's interests, political candidates can often exploit young voters for their own benefit and political parties are not under pressure from the grassroots to take youth issues seriously. These problems are compounded by the generally low expectations of less educated rural populations. Often unaware of their human rights and their government's responsibilities, they are vulnerable to the politicization of basic public service delivery. This combines with a lack of internal accountability in a public sector plagued by corruption. New schools, clinics and boreholes can thus be used by leaders for political leverage, gaining them popularity for the delivery of services that their voters should have had access to in the first place.

These observations call for better basic education in general, civic education to raise young people's awareness of their rights and responsibilities as citizens and the dissemination of information about the avenues they can access to take part in political processes.

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## AVENUES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

### *The vote*

The most basic avenue of youth political participation is the democratic vote and the youth's most obvious political asset is their sheer numbers. Today youth represent over half of all registered voters in Uganda<sup>27</sup>. This means that young people theoretically have a powerful voice through their votes in elections.

However, in reality a number of hurdles thwart the empowerment effect of the vote on young people. First, almost half of the voting age population did not exercise their right to vote in 2011<sup>28</sup>. This undoubtedly included many young people. Secondly, the power of the vote for young people will be limited until they begin to form a more critical mass that is aware of its rights, with higher expectations and enough security to use the vote as an exercise of independent preferences. Finally, a culture of personalized politics and ethnic allegiances takes away from the efficacy of the voting system. Driven by a lack of trust in political institutions and in the intentions of leaders from other ethnic groups, these are deep-running problems that will require institutional development and greater national unity and patriotism in the long run.

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**Young people can run for political office themselves and thus elevate the political status of their local youth constituents by representing them in government.**

### *Local Government*

Young people can run for political office themselves and thus elevate the political status of their local youth constituents by representing them in government. Youth experts see this as a powerful potential avenue for meaningful youth participation, but raise a number of issues currently faced. One serious problem is the fact that young candidates for political positions are often motivated principally by economic gain. Another issue stressed during the youth expert consultations is that the

27 YouthMap

28 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Available online at: <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=UG>

option of running for office is only available to relatively wealthy aspirants due to nomination fees and campaigning costs. This excludes many young people and means that those young people who do run for office most likely are not experiencing the same economic hardship faced by the majority of Uganda's youth.

### ***Parliament***

Youth are represented in parliament through five designated Youth MPs elected by an Electoral College composed of members of the National Youth Council (NYC). This system has been debated, with various youth leaders saying that the Electoral College is vulnerable to corruption and manipulation, that it is unrepresentative and that the campaigning process is inadequate. In consequence, participants of the youth experts consultations held for these papers voiced criticisms of the current youth MP system. They charged that the five youth MPs seats actually disengage young people by creating the general feeling that young people are already represented "at the top" and that no further engagement is necessary to bring youth issues to parliament.

In reality, five seats constitute only a tiny proportion of the total of 375 seats in the Ugandan parliament, and can be seen as disproportionate considering that youth account for more than half of the population and that the army is represented by ten seats. Further, they express concern that the youth MPs' mandate to represent the youth has often been neglected in favour of a representation of their party's interests. Finally, some experts see the current system as inhibiting other MPs from effectively raising youth issues and suggest removing the youth seats altogether, making all MPs responsible for youth issues.

To reiterate, with youth representing over half of the voting-age population, it is logical for all MPs to be concerned with their interests. However, the question of whether other MPs would take more responsibility for youth issues if the five youth MP seats

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**Youth are represented in parliament through five designated Youth MPs elected by an Electoral College composed of members of the National Youth Council (NYC).**



**The NYC is comprised of youth district representatives, student leaders, national NGO representatives, representatives of youth with disabilities and the youth MPs.**

were removed is open – this is by no means guaranteed. In any case, the interest group seats system is due to be periodically reviewed in parliament to assess whether it is having the intended impact, but this is yet to occur. These criticisms and debates show that there is need for an explicit debate amongst the youth about how they should be represented in parliament, and subsequently to push for a review and possible revision of the youth MP system.

### ***National Youth Council***

Uganda Youth Network's (UYONET) National Youth Manifesto 2011-2016 demands that the Government strengthen the NYC and engage a higher proportion of youths in policy and programming decision processes through the District Youth Councils (DYC) and other youth groups<sup>29</sup>. The NYC is comprised of youth district representatives, student leaders, national NGO representatives, representatives of youth with disabilities and the youth MPs. It is mandated to empower youth through promoting youth participation in decision making at all levels<sup>30</sup>. The original National Youth Council Act of 1993 has been amended to be independent of the NRM following the reintroduction of a multi-party system in 2005<sup>31</sup>. Despite this, many youth stakeholders still see the NYC as strongly associated with the NRM regime. The NYC is also criticised for allowing youth members to be compromised by senior politicians and following their own agendas rather than representing their fellow young people.<sup>32</sup> The debate among young people should include an

29 Uganda Youth Network (2011). "Youth Voices Count: National Youth Manifesto 2011-2016". Available online at: [http://www.eac.int/gender/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_download&gid=118&Itemid=131](http://www.eac.int/gender/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=118&Itemid=131)

30 National Youth Council website. Available online at: <http://www.nycuganda.org>

31 Danish Youth Council (2010). "Young People's Possibilities for Influence in Uganda". Available online at: [http://duf.dk/uploads/tx\\_tcshop/Young\\_People\\_s\\_possibilities\\_for\\_influence\\_in\\_Uganda.pdf](http://duf.dk/uploads/tx_tcshop/Young_People_s_possibilities_for_influence_in_Uganda.pdf)

32 *ibid.*

examination of the efficacy and representativeness of the NYC as an independent state organ for youth participation, and how the gaps outlined should be addressed.

### ***Party Youth Wings***

The youth wings of Uganda's political parties lack institutional autonomy from their senior counterparts, resulting in a tendency to subservience, experts worry. The general desperation for employment experienced by the youth has contributed to a high prevalence of patronage in the political parties, reinforcing this lack of independence. To add to this, youth leaders have little access to training in leadership qualities and a lack of assertiveness. It has thus been difficult, say youth experts, for the party youth wings to shape and influence the senior party's ideology and policies.

A broader debate about youth participation in political parties emerged during the youth expert consultations. The central issue raised was the motivating factors for youth participation in party politics. Poor young people may see potential benefits in political participation as the current system has afforded them little economic opportunities. But this group is often poorly educated and desperate for a better life, making them vulnerable to manipulation and corruption, or too occupied with their day-to-day struggles for survival to commit time to meaningful political participation. The better educated, less desperate and more free middle class youth, on the other hand, often do not judge political participation to be potentially beneficial to them. Rather, having obtained decent economic opportunities and security in the current system, they tend to value protection of the status quo over political engagement to change the system. In addition, the high prevalence of nepotism in the job market means that an employee faces the danger of losing their job if they express political convictions that conflict with those of their employers. The causes for this are likely to be high youth unemployment and a lack of labour law enforcement.

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**The better educated, less desperate and more free middle class youth, on the other hand, often do not judge political participation to be potentially beneficial to them.**

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**About 3000 civil society organisations in Uganda work on youth issues, but most of these are district or sub-county-level community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), many of which are not permanently operational.**

Youth experts also expressed the concern that political participation is seen mainly as competition for power among the middle class youth. Those who do participate in party politics are thus mainly concerned with their personal rise to power rather than an ideological passion for public affairs. At the root of this problem lies the non-ideological nature of current party politics in Uganda. A lack of ideological identity amongst political parties, youth experts say, is leading young people with ideological motivations to participate in civic life through other avenues, mainly identifying with their traditional kingdoms, religious affiliations or other civil society clubs and associations.

This fundamental weakness of party politics in Uganda necessitates a broader discussion on political ideology in which youth experts call for a reorientation towards traditional philosophies and local realities.

### ***Civil Society Organisations***

About 3000 civil society organisations in Uganda work on youth issues, but most of these are district or sub-county-level community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), many of which are not permanently operational. Nevertheless, youth across the country have considerable opportunities to participate in civil society organisations. Youth-focused organisations work on a broad range of issues with HIV/AIDS, education, poverty and unemployment, peace and conflict resolution, governance and anti-corruption, human rights and child rights receiving the most attention.<sup>33</sup>

Funding and donor dependency is an issue reported by almost all civil society organisations. The lack of reliable funding drives organisations to set priorities in line with funding opportunities rather than what members perceive to be the most pressing issues. Alternative funding from member contributions is

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33      *ibid.*

usually insufficient, especially if the majority of members are young people. Further, many youth organisations lack financial management and project management capacity, leading a lack of impact despite high levels of motivation.

This results in a rural-urban and income-divide among youth organisations, with urban, middle- and high-income youth much better able to take part in decision making processes than their rural, lower-income counterparts. In addition, youth with disabilities and other vulnerable groups tend to be particularly marginalised.

Civil society actors have further complained that youth leaders are often co-opted by political parties and end up representing party interests rather than the interests of the young people they were mandated to represent in their civil society organisations.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Ugandan youth, in its sheer numbers, poses immense challenges for the country's development but also represents a potentially powerful political asset. Efforts to realize that asset and foster meaningful youth political participation will have to critically examine the current avenues for youth participation and address several underlying barriers. Factors contributing to the success of such efforts will undoubtedly include greater unity among the youth as a constituency, more pressure on the government to deliver its promise of greater inclusion of young people, and concerted initiatives for civic education.

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## SECTION:

## 3

## SOCIAL SERVICES – HEALTH AND YOUTH AT RISK

### We, the Youth,

1. **RESOLVE**, and **CALL UPON** other political and civil society youth leaders, to:
  - a. identify, in partnership with civil society organizations, gaps in youth-friendly social services in the areas of violence against women and men, family planning, HIV/AIDS, persons with disabilities (PWDs), youth affected by conflict, and other vulnerable youth groups;
  - b. sensitize youth throughout the country, through packaged messages and in a co-ordinated manner, on the issues affecting vulnerable youth groups, their causes and consequences, and the avenues open to address them;
  - c. network with religious groups, media, cultural leaders, civil society, and the government to achieve greater nationwide awareness on these issues;
  - d. gather scientific information and contribute to research on the issues affecting vulnerable youth groups;
  - e. engage parents, teachers, religious and cultural leaders in constructive dialogue on the cultural and traditional barriers to effective social services for vulnerable youth groups on issues such as HIV/AIDS, family planning and violence against women;
  - f. collaborate with youth civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders to evaluate current empowerment programmes for the youth and re-strategize with value addition;
  - g. raise our own awareness of the issues affecting vulnerable youth groups and adopt a positive attitude to become effective advocates;

- h. encourage the promotion of small-scale business and entrepreneurship among the youth through group support, mentoring, investment clinics and youth fairs;

2. **CALL UPON:**

- a. the National Curriculum Development Centre to update the primary school curriculum to include topics on vulnerable youth groups to ensure that it accounts for the current realities of the youth;
  - b. the relevant Ministries to integrate into guidelines for senior women teachers, senior male teachers and counsellors information on vulnerable youth groups;
  - c. the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development in partnership with the Ministry of Finance and civil society organisations to construct rehabilitation centres and remand homes at sub-regional level as well as improving existing services;
  - d. youth-focused civil society organisations to streamline youth advocacy based on countrywide research mapping the focus areas of youth-targeted interventions;
  - e. all youth to assume personal responsibility for family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention;
  - f. the government to support all vulnerable youth groups with scholastic materials and other educational costs;
  - g. youth civil society organisations and the government to ensure that all national youth activities and public institutions are inclusive of, and accessible for, all vulnerable youth groups;
  - h. all Ugandans to change their mind-set towards corruption and begin to fight it themselves;
  - i. Parliament to exercise political will in the fight against corruption and pass the Anti-Corruption Amendment Bill.
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## YOUTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES – HEALTH AND YOUTH AT RISK

The International Youth Foundation's YouthMap survey found the availability of youth-friendly services in Uganda to be "unacceptably low". This paper analyses the needs for youth-targeted social services with a focus on the areas of HIV/AIDS, family planning, persons with disabilities, violence on women, youth in conflict and post-conflict situations, and other vulnerable youth groups. The root causes of the inadequacies of youth-friendly social service provision in these areas need to be understood and addressed. As such, particular attention is paid to the roles of the subjugation of young women, the stigmatization of disabled and HIV-affected youths as well as sex workers, the effects of cultural customs and norms on youth vulnerability and the socioeconomic and political causes of vulnerability. The paper highlights areas that require particular stakeholder attention as well as some suggested courses of action for the future.

### *HIV/AIDS*

The HIV prevalence rate in Uganda hit a low point of 6.4% in 2006, but has been rising since then and currently stands at 7.2%. It is one of the biggest health threats affecting young people. Uganda made immense progress in lowering the HIV infection rate in the 1990s and early 2000s. The recent increase can be explained by a number of factors. First, free antiretroviral drugs became available in Uganda in 2004<sup>34</sup>, meaning less people with HIV die every year while new infections continue to occur. With the dual effect of prolonging life once infected and lessening the visible and felt health effects of HIV/AIDS, people with HIV who are being treated have a greater chance of being sexually active for a longer time and spreading the virus. A further suspected unintended effect of the availability of antiretroviral drugs has been that it reduces people's fear and urgency to get tested for HIV and thus leads to a greater

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**The HIV prevalence rate in Uganda hit a low point of 6.4% in 2006, but has been rising since then and currently stands at 7.2%. It is one of the biggest health threats affecting young people.**

prevalence of risky sexual behaviour. Despite the rise in access to retroviral drugs, only 62% of adults living with HIV are receiving treatment and only one third of children eligible for treatment are able to access it<sup>35</sup>.

While progress has been made in access to HIV/AIDS treatment (though big gaps still exist), HIV prevention policies have failed significantly lower the number of new infections in recent years. The government, development partners and non-state actors have for some time been active in behaviour change campaigns to prevent the spread of HIV. The ABC (Abstain, Be faithful, use a Condom) campaign had a significant effect and the recent exclusively focus on abstinence has been widely criticised, not least because of the rising infection rates. Human Rights Watch has accused abstinence-only campaigns of increasing the practice of unsafe sex because while sexual activity is inevitable, they have neglected to educate young people about safe sexual behaviour. The Government of Uganda has actively spread the message that delaying sex until marriage is the only way to curb HIV infections. Civil society organisations dependent on the government for funding have followed the same agenda<sup>36</sup>.

43% of new infections occur among heterosexual married couples, and only 13.7% of Ugandans report using a condom during their last sexual activity. At age 18, 60% of girls and nearly 50% of boys have had their first sexual experience. Only 39% of young people aged 15-24 years have comprehensive knowledge of HIV and HIV prevention<sup>37</sup>. 26% of young women and 74% of young men engage in high-risk sexual activity<sup>38</sup>.

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**26% of young women and 74% of young men engage in high-risk sexual activity**

35 *ibid.*

36 In addition, PEPFAR, a major US programme funding HIV prevention in Uganda required at least one third of prevention spending to be directed towards abstinence-until-marriage programmes. This has since been revised so that if more than 50% of its funds are allocated to non-abstinence promotion measures, the US Global AIDS coordinator must report to Congress.

37 [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/uganda\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/uganda_statistics.html)

38 International Youth Foundation (2011). "YouthMap: A Cross-Sector Situational Analysis on Youth in Uganda". Henceforth referred to as YouthMap. Available online at: <http://uganda.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/YouthMap%20Uganda%20Exec%20Version.pdf>

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**HIV prevalence among sex workers was 35% in 2011, they are reluctant to go to health clinics to get tested or treated as their work is illegal, and only 80% use condoms as clients pay more for sex without condoms**

These statistics do not support the government's current strategy. Youth experts consulted during focus group discussions say a culture of avoiding to talk about sex needs to be overcome and call for a renewed focus on sexual and reproductive health education in schools. They also suggest local information and call-in centres as well as measures to improve the expertise and responsibility of the media in spreading information about sexual health. In addition, more funds should flow into access to contraceptives and a smarter strategy for distributing these to young people is necessary<sup>39</sup>. Finally, religious leaders should be engaged on the issue of banning contraception as this has serious negative impacts on the sexual health of young people.

A number of dimensions of gender relations also contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Firstly, early sex among girls is prevalent due to prostitution and 'sugardaddy' relationships. Young leaders should think about whether there is a debate to be had about the illegal status of prostitution, which currently means that sex workers fear seeking out help and are demonized by society in general. HIV prevalence among sex workers was 35% in 2011, they are reluctant to go to health clinics to get tested or treated as their work is illegal, and only 80% use condoms as clients pay more for sex without condoms<sup>40</sup>.

Secondly, young women who get married, as a result of cultural customs, to older, sexually experienced men means that they are exposed to a risk of infection at an early age. Lastly, the disempowerment of women in a patriarchal society robs of the ability to make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and contributes to the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Root causes such as the economic dependence of women and their lack of acknowledgment in public as well as private life need to be addressed according to youth experts. While a transition to a more gender-balanced

39 In particular, they say that the social spaces of young people such as bars, schools and universities have not been made use of to get contraceptives to the youth.

40 Avert Uganda. "HIV and AIDS in Uganda". Available online at: <http://www.avert.org/aids-uganda.htm>

economy that is already underway is bound to change gender relations in general, affirmative action to involve more women in civic life is needed to speed up this process.

### ***Family planning***

Many of the causes of the plague of HIV/AIDS in Uganda are also hindering factors to fair access to family planning among Ugandan youths. Notably, the empowerment of women is most likely the biggest driver of effective family planning. Apart from the issues already discussed above, youth experts call for family planning campaigns to target girls and young women more to give them information about, and access to family planning options<sup>41</sup>. Further, while abortion is illegal in Uganda, approximately a quarter of all young people surveyed by the National Youth Foundation in 2011 “reported having a close friend who attempted to end a pregnancy”. To add to the alarming statistics, “only 50% of young women gave birth in a health facility or with the assistance of a skilled provider”.<sup>42</sup>

In general, youth experts and studies perceive a lack of youth-friendly services, with most health workers inadequately trained to work with young people. To compound the lack of adequate facilities and health professionals to cater to the needs of young people, it appears as if the dominant cultural norms on women, sex and family planning perpetuated by elders and political leaders are severely out-of-touch with the realities of the youth today.

### ***Persons with disabilities (PWDs)***

There are an estimated 3.5 million young people with disabilities in Uganda. Poverty and disability are mutually reinforcing forces. Poor people have little access to preventive healthcare.

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41 For instance, they explain that the shunning of the subject of sex in schools must be overcome to make family planning education a priority and open the discussion on the provision of options such as female condoms and contraceptive pills to schoolgirls.

42 *YouthMap*



**At least 56% of women overall have experienced physical violence.**

On the other hand, people with disabilities often do not have access to quality education and training and it is hard for most to access mainstream employment. This is compounded by the widespread social exclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs). Although the Government of Uganda promises to create opportunities for PWDs, the actual results for PWDs have been very limited. Youth with disabilities surveyed by the International Youth Foundation reported suffering from “stigma, discrimination, physical abuse, neglect from their own families and society, and a lack of educational and government resources”<sup>43</sup>.

Youth experts say the cultural stigmatisation of PWDs has led to a lack of policy enforcement to provide inclusive services for them. A lack of information about available schemes and programmes further compounds the issues of marginalisation. They call for greater mainstreaming and inclusive rather than exclusive services for disabled youth<sup>44</sup>. It is clear that more funds and greater political commitment towards inclusive social services for young PWDs is necessary.

### ***Violence against women***

At least 56% of women overall have experienced physical violence.<sup>45</sup> The Government of Uganda affirms its commitment to achieving gender equality and protecting women against violence through laws such as the Domestic Violence Act<sup>46</sup>. However, enforcement of such laws has clearly been grossly inadequate. Police and other officials need training on the human rights and laws protecting women. Further, youth experts say that the subjugation of women in domestic and public life and

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43 *YouthMap*

44 The current trend is to build separate schools and other social services for blind, deaf and otherwise disabled young people. However, youth experts exclaim that the provision of separate social services is in itself a form of discrimination, reinforcing entrenched social attitudes towards PWDs as ‘others’.

45 *ibid.*

46 Domestic Violence Act 2010. Available online at: [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---ilo\\_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms\\_172625.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_172625.pdf)

a culture of silence on violence are mutually reinforcing. Much greater and more innovative sensitisation efforts are thus necessary to educate young women about their rights and the avenues available to them to protect themselves from gender-based violence.

Finally, the culture of male dominance is entrenched in traditional beliefs perpetrated by customs such as cross-generational marriage and a lack of modern education. Economic modernization and education can lead to the liberation of women, giving them the economic independence, confidence and civic awareness to speak up about their subjugation and subjection to violence. The question for today's young leaders is how to accelerate the empowerment of women and the sensitivity of men to their human rights while economic modernization occurs.

### ***Other vulnerable youth groups***

The National Youth Policy calls for special attention to be paid to a list of 22 vulnerable youth groups. Orphans, juvenile offenders and substance abusers are among those to be especially prioritised. There are an estimated 1.7 orphans and vulnerable children in Uganda, 73% of the country's prison population is under the age of 30 and Uganda was recently found to have the world's highest alcohol abuse rate<sup>47</sup>. Despite government commitments and civil society efforts<sup>48</sup>, a large gap persists between the scale of the needs of at-risk youth and the services available.

Deteriorating family structures, changing cultural values, orphanhood, unemployment, a lack of career guidance and a shortage of livelihoods alternatives have forced many children and youths to fend for their survival on the streets. Many resort to irregular and informal labour, theft and prostitution.

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**There are an estimated 1.7 orphans and vulnerable children in Uganda, 73% of the country's prison population is under the age of 30 and Uganda was recently found to have the world's highest alcohol abuse rate.**

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47 *YouthMap*

48 E.g. The Uganda Youth Development Link provides counseling, guidance, and drug and alcohol abuse prevention campaigns for youth, children, and OVCs.

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**Young juveniles in prisons are unable to access practical skills and exposed to serious criminals. Once released, they are thus often unable to make a living and tempted to re-engage in criminal activities.**

Once exposed, a lack of social safety nets as well as easy access to alcohol and drugs perpetuates these young people's vulnerability. Young juveniles in prisons are unable to access practical skills and exposed to serious criminals. Once released, they are thus often unable to make a living and tempted to re-engage in criminal activities.

Youth experts see a pressing need for sensitisation of parents and teachers on how to prevent the hopelessness and exposure that leads youths to engage in illicit activities. Further, gaps in law enforcement that allow these activities must be addressed and adequate safety and rehabilitation services need to reach more vulnerable children and youths. Finally, the stigmatisation of vulnerable youth groups continues to impede the effective implementation of policies aimed at protecting them and reinforces their social and economic exclusion.

### ***Youth affected by conflict***

Exposure to long-term violent conflict and insecurity in Northern Uganda and Karamoja are the most pressing threat to the prospects of young people in those regions. As a result of 23 years of conflict in Northern Uganda, young people in this region have the least access to education and economic opportunities in the country. Likewise, youth in Karamoja face drought, famine, a lack of social services and isolation from the rest of the country. 75% of youth in this region are inactive - neither in school nor employed. Further, the entire population, particularly in Northern Uganda, suffers from the psychosocial impacts of decades of traumatic conflict. Meanwhile, the risk of violent conflict still lingers in Karamoja. Young women in particular are threatened by rape, HIV/AIDS and early pregnancies.<sup>49</sup>

Youth in Northern Uganda are in need of more long-term psychosocial and rehabilitation support. Many donor, civil society and government programmes have ended, leaving those that remain unable to meet the needs of vulnerable young people affected by years of violence and war crimes.<sup>50</sup>

The insecurity experienced in Karamoja is due to weak governance structures and a lack of law and order as well as food insecurity. Young people perceive a lack of state protection, forcing them to look for other alternatives<sup>51</sup>. The government must tackle the social, political and economic isolation and strengthen local governance in this region. In addition, the disenfranchisement of young people and women in land inheritance customs is a lead cause of food insecurity that needs to be addressed. The general shortage of social services in education and health are also a pressing concern that jeopardises the inclusion of a generation of Northern Ugandan and Karamajong youths into the national economy and society.

The fallbacks in economic development caused by long years of conflict and insecurity in Northern Uganda and Karamoja is also a main reason for the perpetuation of the situation. Youth experts explain that a lack of livelihood skills and opportunities lies at the core of continuing antisocial behaviour and violence among youths in these regions. YouthMap participants “reported feelings of alienation, hopelessness, and insecurity, which led them to engage in negative alternatives such as petty theft, prostitution, organized criminal activities, and cattle raiding”. Young people themselves have called for a greater incorporation of livelihood components such as relevant vocational training into youth-targeted programmes, explaining that psychosocial care alone is not sufficient.<sup>52</sup>

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**YouthMap participants “reported feelings of alienation, hopelessness, and insecurity, which led them to engage in negative alternatives such as petty theft, prostitution, organized criminal activities, and cattle raiding”.**

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50      ibid.

51      ibid.

52      ibid.



## CONCLUSION

Young people in Uganda suffer from a wide range of vulnerabilities with various context-specific causes, consequences and response efforts of mixed success. But the above discussion of a selection of such vulnerabilities shows that a relatively small number of cross-cutting problems account for the lack of effective prevention as well as responses to the threats putting young people at risk. These can be tentatively summarised as follows: the social, economic and political disempowerment of women; the stigmatisation and consequent marginalisation of various vulnerable groups; the persistence of conservative cultural norms out-of-touch with the changing realities of young people; the lack of economic and livelihood opportunities; a weakness of governance and law enforcement; and severe shortages in quality youth-friendly social services. The onus falls on empowered young people and all other stakeholders in the prospects of Uganda's youth to better understand and address these issues in their various contexts.

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## ABOUT THE SPONSORS

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**Konrad  
Adenauer  
Stiftung**

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a German Political Foundation promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights. In more than a hundred countries all over the world, the foundation is also engaged in policy expertise on Social Market Economy and sustainable growth. In Uganda – where KAS has been active for over three decades – the focus is on fostering the multiparty democratic system reintroduced a few years ago and supporting a dialogue on economic and environmental policies. Within its mandate KAS recognises the critical relevance of the youth in political processes and therefore supports the establishment of the Interparty Youth Platform as a cross-party forum for dialogue, networking and leadership development at the level of the young people and future leaders.



The Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) was established in response to the aspirations of the 1995 Constitution and Uganda's National Development Plan (NDP) for 2010/11 - 2014/15, and in view of the governance deficits identified in among others the APRM Programme of Action. Funding Development Partners of DGF are Austria, Denmark, the European Union Delegation, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. This facility's aims is to harmonise support to selected public institutions and civil society organisations with a particular emphasis on the latter.

Interparty Youth Platform  
**[www.iyop.ug](http://www.iyop.ug)**

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A decorative graphic consisting of multiple thin, overlapping wavy lines in shades of grey and white, creating a sense of movement and depth across the bottom of the page.