

# Evaluation of the Uganda National Youth Policy

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## Executive summary

With one of the youngest populations in the world, Uganda's youth are marred with diverse contexts and adverse realities of poverty, inadequate education and skills, unemployment and exploitation, low political participation and unhealthy social practices with gender imbalances. The government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) revised the 2001 National Youth Policy (NYP) in 2016 to guide different stakeholders to address these challenges and enhance the competencies of the youth for improved participation in the national development. This paper attempts to analyze the outcomes and implementation challenges since the policy revision in 2016. The study finds that the government has made steps in responding to most of the youth pains especially within the legal and policy framework however, the implementation of the National youth policy has fallen short in several aspects such as funding, lack of central coordination, low awareness of youth opportunities, enhancing vocational and entrepreneurial skills and increasing youth participation. Drawing from successful policies such as the Bahrain national youth policy, the Swedish youth policy and the Korean youth policy, we suggest that building and strengthening institutions for effective coordination of all youth interventions/programmes, investment in the skills sector and promoting inclusion and ownership of the programmes by youth can be success factors for the policy implementation.

## Background

With 75.2% of Uganda's 39 million population under 30 years of age, Uganda emerges as one of the world's youngest age structures. This is a result of the reducing mortality rates and the still-high fertility rate of 5.4 children born per female as of 2018 (National Population Council, 2018).

Youth in Uganda are not homogenous and are marred with diverse contexts and adverse realities of poverty, inadequate education and skills, unemployment and exploitation, low political participation and unhealthy social practices. In terms of poverty, 80% of Uganda's youth live in rural areas that are poverty-stricken and yet 10.9% of young males aged 10-24 are heading households. With regards to education, high school dropouts lack skills to initiate and invent, teachers lack skills and resources to handle students with disabilities and 8.8 million youth are not engaged in education, employment or training (United Nations Population Fund, 2017).

In reference to employment, the youth share of unemployment in Uganda is at 53.4% with the majority of the employed being underemployed while 57% are self-employed with entrepreneurial challenges (MGLSD, 2016). The youth are mostly marginalized, and their involvement is seen only as beneficiaries of national programmes rather than as active participants in the development process which has resulted in low leadership participation and decision making at all levels especially amongst the illiterate. Youth also have limited access to and use of technological devices like phones, computers and the internet since the majority of the youth are in rural areas with low/no internet connection (MGLSD, 2001).

The social-economic development of the youth in Uganda is impeded by some social practices, especially for the girl child. These include early marriages for bridewealth, female genital mutilation and cattle rustling. The teenage pregnancies rate is at 25% with most of these pregnancies unintended.

There are high health risk behaviours amongst the youth such as alcohol and drug abuse and early sexual activity with 9,600 adolescents newly infected with HIV/AIDS annually. Unfortunately, only 10% of the health facilities provide youth-friendly health services. (United Nations Population Fund, 2017).

In view of these realities, the government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) revised the National Youth Policy (NYP) 2001 to guide different stakeholders in the provision of quality services to the youth to enable them enhance their competencies for improved participation in the national development (MGLSD, 2016). This study aims to evaluate the steps the Ugandan government has made towards solving these challenges through its National Youth Policy.

### **The National Youth Policy**

The revision of Uganda's National Youth Policy (NYP) in 2016 was after consultation, participation and inclusion of key stakeholders with the aim of increasing access to information of the NYP in a more youth-user friendly manner with clear objectives, principles, core programme areas and implementation framework. The rationale of the Ugandan National Youth Policy (2016) is to address a range of challenges that the youth face in the development process as well as to harness their potential to contribute towards national development. More so, to provide a basis for holistic integration and inclusion of the youth in Uganda's development while appreciating the current impact of globalization. The Ugandan National Youth Policy is hinged on the vision of "An empowered, industrious, inclusive and prosperous youth population". The goal is to provide a framework for harnessing the full potential of the youth for improved productivity and equitable socio-economic and political development and has the following objectives. (MGLSD, 2016).

The objectives of the policy include; improving youth access to quality services, enhancing the productivity and employability of youth for sustainable livelihood, promoting equitable participation in decision-making processes that have an impact on youth, and promoting effective coordination and programming of youth interventions at all levels (MGLSD, 2016). The policy set five key priority areas to achieve its objectives. These included; sustainable livelihoods, employment promotion and enterprise development, skills training and entrepreneurship development, youth participation and good governance, access to resources and services and management coordination and partnerships.

Implementation of the policy was meticulously planned. The implementation strategy was to build the capacity of youth and service providers, undertake direct youth empowerment interventions through multi-sectoral programmes and finally coordinate with local, private and international agencies to mainstream youth issues at all levels. The successful implementation of the Youth Policy depended on cooperation and partnership among the various stakeholders such as: Sector Ministries, Departments and Agencies, office of the Prime minister, Local Governments, National youth council, Parliament, political organizations, development partners, civil society and faith-based organizations, private sector and the youth. These partnerships would help promote youth advocacy activities and mobilize human and financial resources to implement policy interventions. The Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (MGLSD) would spearhead the implementation, coordination, monitoring, evaluation and review of the policy. The Policy would be implemented through the National Action Plan for Youth which details strategies, activities, target groups, time frame and the budget lines.



### Evaluation of the National Youth Policy

Drawing from the youth intervention programs directed to address three of the key priority areas of the Uganda National Youth Policy, this paper analyzes the outcomes and implementation challenges since its revision in 2016.

The outcomes of the priority area of sustainable livelihoods, employment promotion and enterprise development include; Programme for Green Jobs and Fair Labor Markets (PROGRE) to offer internship programs, Youth Venture Capital Fund, Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP), Agricultural Credit Facility, and broad initiatives like Operation Wealth Creation (OWC). 119,857 youth have directly received technical and financial support for 9,438 projects worth USD19 more so, several government agencies and the private sector are currently providing internship opportunities for graduates (Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Youth Affairs, 2018). The programmes are impressive, but they encounter many implementation challenges, some of which are: PROGRE being underfunded to the tune of USD.14,335,754; YVCF which requires bank accounts remains redundant as most youths don't have the bank requirements; YLP has accountability gaps and has faced budget cuts in MGLSD worth USD 2.2M affecting many youth programmes. These constraints have left many youths disgruntled about being left out of all the government planning and priorities.

The outcomes of the priority area of Skills training and entrepreneurship development include USD 4M to establish incubation centres; National Youth Service Scheme to promote patriotism, mentoring and skills to youth; USD 0.6M provided to sensitize and support the youth on farming as a business; Youth co-operatives; Uganda Skills Development Project (USDPA); and, the Reform Task Force (RTF). The presidential initiative on Youth Skilling has supported approximately 1,791 youth in the informal sector to acquire vocational skills (Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Youth Affairs, 2018).

The programs whose implementation targets are still lagging behind due to inadequate funding include the incubation centres, the National Youth Service Scheme Bill and, the campaign to start Youth Co-operatives (Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Youth Affairs, 2018). However, these programs also have no clear plans for resource allocation. Additionally, the process of youth skilling lacks central coordination. This leads to the duplication of efforts. For instance, the Uganda Skills Development Program and the Presidential Skilling Initiative are both mandated to do the same things. Moreso, many youths remain unattracted to vocational skills as they prefer white-collar jobs.

Lastly, the outcomes of the priority area of youth participation and good governance include; National Youth Council Act amendment bill and specific positions for youth officers at government offices to cater for youth engagements (Uganda Parliamentary forum on Youth Affairs, 2018). However, the MGLSD has not indicated plans to amend the National Youth Council Act and most of the government agencies do not have designated officers to cater for youth engagements. Presently, under the local government structure, youth positions are still being undertaken by elderly community development officers instead of recruiting youthful officers. Additionally, there is no intention to increase the youth budget allocations. The combination of these two problems renders most of the district youth councils redundant and ineffective at best. Furthermore, many youths suffer a victim mentality which limits their interest in public and political engagements.

The outcomes document that the government has made steps in responding to most of the youth's pains, especially within the legal and policy framework. However, the implementation of the National youth policy has fallen short in several aspects such as funding, central coordination, awareness of youth opportunities, enhancing vocational and entrepreneurial skills, and increasing youth participation.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Uganda can learn a lot from successful cases of youth policies such as the Bahrain National Youth Policy that instated a National Youth Parliament, a National Youth Commission, a National Youth Development Fund, and an Inter-Ministerial Committee for youth affairs. This shows coherence in their youth policy which Uganda lacks. The Swedish youth policy further illustrates that strong institutions with youth interventions highly mainstreamed, and well-integrated with national policy planning and budgeting processes and regular monitoring of the living conditions of youth are key for a successful youth policy. Good evaluation systems such as with the Korean youth policy, and strong youth departments in ministries as is the case in most Latin America states' youth policy, can go a long way in transforming the lives of the youth (World Bank, 2006).

Going forward, the government of Uganda should be more proactive in *building and strengthening institutions* for effective coordination of all youth interventions/programmes. All government agencies should be encouraged to harness and support youth development by reviewing the plans and implementing them with a bias towards youth development.

The implementation status of the programmes should also be highly observed in the parliamentary processes.

The MGLSD should *fast track investments in the skills sector* and more so in innovation and technology through coordinated efforts with donors and the private sector in order to contribute to job creation. The Ugandan National Youth Policy should also diversify the resource base of its organizations for example by letting the youth work on different government and donor projects and have a portion of their salaries directed to the youth programmes. Tax paid by all employed youth could also be directed towards funding youth programmes.

The Government of Uganda *needs to promote inclusiveness and ownership of the programmes by youth*. This would further develop the youth's leadership capacity while increasing the youths' general participation and involvement. With this in place, the youth should be more intentional about supporting their colleagues in special interest youth groups, this would allow the strong to lift the weak, providing equal opportunities for all the youth, abled and disabled. Youths in leadership would be better able to provide connect fellow youth to business opportunities and markets through their growing networks.

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