

BUILDING A RESILIENT FUTURE

UGANDA'S POLICY PATHWAYS FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A Compendium of Usisi Amandla Fellowship 2024/25 Cohort Policy Briefs



NOVEMBER, 2025

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For more information, contact:

Development Eye Initiative (DEI)
P.O Box 131277, Kampala Plot 3 Ssuna Close, Ntinda
info@developmenteye.org
www.developmenteye.org

FOREWORD



Elone Natumanya Ainebyoona

Founder, Usisi Amandla Fellowship

At the heart of every policy challenge lies a number of women taking a bigger burden than any other members of society. Therefore, women have a duty to generate the solutions to these policy challenges by designing policy options that can be adapted by Governments and hold them accountable. The Development Eye Initiative (DEI) together with our partners the Centre for Policy Analysis (CEPA) and Population Social Development Institute (PSDI), organised the Usisi Amandla Fellowship to enhance the competence of young women to meaningfully participate and influence public policy both at national and regional level. The inaugural cohort of 18 Fellows which has been supported for a year since November, 2024 has thus produced the first compendium of policy briefs offering policy solutions and options to diverse issues that affect Uganda and Africa as a region. The compendium offers policy options from 18 policy briefs developed by the fellows based on their areas of expertise clustered across 6 thematic areas. These thematic areas include Agriculture; Climate Change and Environment; Population and Health; The Digital Era; Peace and Security; Trade and Employment.

The process of developing this compendium took Fellows through learning both theoretical sessions in public policy analysis that was further deepened through engagements and discussions of lived experiences with policy practitioners. These were coupled with exposure to high level policy engagements and discussions to give them a broader view of the World around them. The fellows were thus exposed to Global and Regional policy making processes helping them make a comparative analysis of where the policy options they provided have worked and where they have failed. This entire process was hinged on a very supportive and consistent mentorship plan that kept tracking the progress of the fellows to understand their unique and personal setbacks

that could hinder their success. Indeed, it is through these committed supportive mechanisms that the 18 policy briefs have been produced.

We are thus elated to unveil this deepened policy analysis generated from fellows working in various sectors of service to Uganda- civil society, public service, media, academia and entrepreneurship. Their diverse understanding of policy frameworks has helped them bond and take advantage of effective peer to peer learning. This process clearly confirms that women can indeed contribute immensely to their societies once given support and their capacity built to work together and creatively identify solutions to their challenges.

In this compendium, our readers will find solutions to agricultural transformation like improved access to seed, enhanced agricultural trade among others. Readers will also gain insights into policy solutions to the devastating climate change disasters and how the environment can be protected. The fellows have also provided policy solutions to effective public health support systems like improved access to first aid care, mental health and menstrual health care. They also provide policy solutions to mainstreaming issues like effective use of data and ensuring the meaningful participation of women in peace and security processes. They have analyzed the digital era and how safety and security for women in that space is key to development. The fellows also presented policy solutions to improved trade engagements and how that can contribute to dealing with the unemployment challenge in Uganda.

These policy briefs will continue to be advocacy tools that the fellows can use to engage policy makers and other duty bearers to ensure implementation and policy reforms as way of generating impact for this work. The fellows have been equipped with the skills on how to navigate the complex policy advocacy in today's ever changing operating environment.

We appreciate the support of our partners who have been part of this journey since we started that include the Centre for Policy Analysis (CEPA), Population Social Development Institute (PSDI), Leadership Square Africa (LSA), Civsource Africa, Enabel – The Belgian Development Agency Uganda and Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD). We are grateful to all the facilitators, mentors, guest speakers and staff of DEI who have made this work possible. Together we can bring more women into the policy influencing space and contribute to a more sustainable country and the region.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MESSAGE



Joseph Munyangabo

Chairperson, Development Eye Initiative (DEI)

At Development Eye Initiative (DEI), we aim at providing thought leadership on alternative policy engagement models for effective civic participation and engagement. Through the Usisi Amandla Fellowship, we have been able to nurture and groom the next generation of female policy influencers and thought leaders. Such a novel programme couldn't be more necessary for Uganda and Africa like it is now when there are so many policy shifts that require analytical and well thought out solutions to the challenges of our society. The investment in young women indeed affirms our commitment to fostering an environment that nurtures mutually beneficial relationships and stewardship of entrusted resources for more impactful policy outcomes.

The ideas expressed in this compendium confirm our belief that meaningful public policy influence should be approached in a manner that considers both men and women as equal actors in development. The participation of women in policy processes and development remains crucial given the burden they carry when development incurs any form of deficit.

This compendium shares key policy issues that our societies contend with on daily basis – from health management and population, digital security, climate justice, agriculture, employment and trade as well as peace and security. The proposed policy solutions bear calls for either policy and legal reforms or revision of implementation strategies. These proposed solutions are well aligned with the Government of Uganda's priorities as indicated in the National Development Plan IV, Vision 2040 among others towards the development of our country as well other regional instruments like the African Union Agenda 2063 and Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This alignment has been ensured so that the policy solutions provided contribute to the continuous call for young people to shape the Uganda and Africa we want.

We hope that the presentations in these 18 policy briefs will indeed facilitate open and informed conversations on public policy, its efficacy and what is missing for public policy to make better meaning to the ordinary citizen. We urge policy makers and all duty bearers to take time to analyse the proposed recommendations therein and take on the proposed solutions while actively engaging citizens through a collaborative manner. Together with our partners, we will continue to support the fellows to engage progressively with the various actors for a successful uptake of the proposals made within the compendium and generally building impact of this work. We thank all our partners who have and continue to unwaveringly supported us on this journey that will greatly impact national and regional development.



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Development Eye Initiative (DEI) would like to appreciate invaluable support from our Board of Directors as well as the Usisi Amandla Fellowship Advisory Council members whose strategic guidance and leadership has enabled the Fellowship to flourish.

We thank our Usisi Amandla Fellowship implementing partners Centre for Policy Analysis (CEPA), Leadership Square Africa (LSA) and Population Social Development Institute (PSDI). We also thank our development partners Enabel – The Belgian Development Agency Uganda, CivSource Africa, CivLegacy Foundation, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), Restless Development who continuously supported us in bringing this Fellowship to life.

We also thank all the Coaches who supported the fellowship and mentored them to produce this incredible work that include Dr. John Mushomi, Ms. Allen Asiimwe, Dr. Sebastian Rwengabo, Dr. Charles Katulamu, Alex Mukiibi and Ms. Roselyn Idere Idaltu. We also appreciate the great work the lead facilitators – Prosper Mubangizi, Timothy Chemonges, Reagan Wamajji and Ms. Elone Natumanya Ainebyoona.

We thank all the guest speakers who spared their time to engage and inspire the fellows in policy and practice. We can't forget the unwavering support of all the 2024/25 cohort Usisi Amandla fellows whose hard work, tenacity and commitment has produced this compendium of policy briefs.

We remain grateful to the support of all our staff members, volunteers and, service providers who have enabled us build and make this dream achievable.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACME – African Centre for Media Excellence
 AfCFTA – African Continental Free Trade Area
 AfDB – African – Development Bank
 AFRIpads – African Reusable Sanitary Pads GoU – Government of Uganda
 AGRA – Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
 AU – African Union
 B2C – Business-to-Consumer
 CAADP – Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
 CAPI – Computer Assisted Personal Interview
 CBT – Climate Budget Tagging
 CEPCOM – Community Environmental Protection and Conservation Organization
 CERT-UG – Uganda Computer Emergency Response Team
 CIPESA – Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa
 COMESA – Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
 CSOs – Civil Society Organizations
 DALYs – Disability-Adjusted Life Years
 DWFG – Deutsche Welle Focus Group
 EAC – East African Community
 EADB – East African Development Bank
 EMS – Emergency Medical Services
 EPR – Extended Producer Responsibility
 EPRC – Economic Policy Research Centre
 ESHS – Environmental, Social, and Health Safeguards
 FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization
 GAIA – Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives
 GDP – Gross Domestic Product
 GlobalG.A.P – Global Good Agricultural Practice
 GSMA – Global System for Mobile Communications Association
 HRMARS – Human Resource Management Academic Research Society
 HRNJ-U – Human Rights Network for Journalists – Uganda
 ICO – International Coffee Organization
 ICT – Information and Communication Technology
 ILO – International Labour Organization
 ITC – International Trade Centre
 KCCA – Kampala Capital City Authority
 MAAIF – Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries
 MINAGRI – Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources
 MoES – Ministry of Education and Sports
 MoFPED – Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
 MoGLSD – Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
 MoH – Ministry of Health
 MRV – Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification
 MTIC – Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives
 MWE – Ministry of Water and Environment
 N4G – Nutrition for Growth
 NAADS – National Agricultural Advisory Services
 NARO – National Agricultural Research Organization
 ND-GAIN – Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative



NDC – Nationally Determined Contribution
 NDP – National Development Plan
 NDP III – Third National Development Plan
 NDP III / NDP IV – Third / Fourth National Development Plan
 NEA – National Environment Act (2019)
 NEDS – National Export Development Strategy
 NEMA – National Environment Management Authority
 NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
 NITA-U – National Information Technology Authority – Uganda
 NPA – National Planning Authority
 NPHC – National Population and Housing Census
 OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
 OGBV – Online Gender-Based Violence
 OWC – Operation Wealth Creation
 PDM – Parish Development Model
 PET – Polyethylene Terephthalate
 PIAP – Programme Implementation Action Plan
 PPDA – Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets
 PPP – Public-Private Partnership
 PPPs – Public-Private Partnerships
 PROs – Producer Responsibility Organizations
 RECs – Regional Economic Communities
 S.I. – Statutory Instrument
 SACCO – Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation
 SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals
 SMEs – Small and Medium Enterprise
 SPP – Sustainable Public Procurement
 SSRN – Social Science Research Network
 SUN – Scaling Up Nutrition
 UBOS – Uganda Bureau of Statistics
 UCC – Uganda Communications Commission
 UGX – Ugandan Shillings (currency of Uganda)
 UIA – Uganda Investment Authority
 UN – United Nations
 UN Women – United Nations Women
 UNBS – Uganda National Bureau of Standards
 UNCTAD – United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
 UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
 UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund
 UNSCR – United Nations Security Council Resolution
 UPPC – Uganda Printing and Publishing Corporation
 URCS – Uganda Red Cross Society
 USCI – Uganda Seed Certification Institute
 USD – United States Dollar
 USSD – Unstructured Supplementary Service Data
 UTB – Uganda Tourism Board
 VSLAs – Village Savings and Loan Associations
 WASH – Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
 WB – World Bank
 WHO – World Health Organization
 WPS – Women, Peace and Security
 YLP – Youth Livelihood Programme

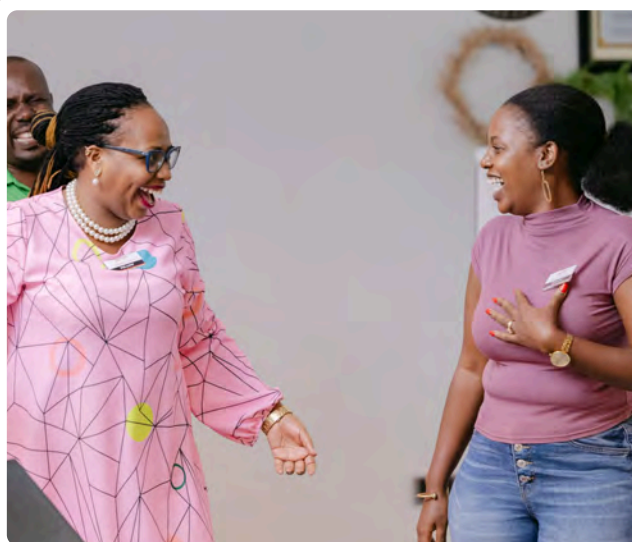


OVERVIEW

This compendium reflects a comprehensive exploration of Uganda's contemporary development priorities. The briefs developed across the six interrelated themes: Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition, Climate Change and the Environment, Population Health and Social Well-being, The Digital Era, Peace and Security, and Trade and the Unemployment Question, provide critical evidence-based insights and practical policy options to support inclusive, sustainable, and resilient growth and development.

At their core, the briefs highlight the intersections between human welfare, environmental stewardship, and economic competitiveness, emphasizing the importance of cross-institutional collaboration in addressing structural barriers to growth and development. From strengthening agricultural value chains to advancing climate adaptation, fostering people's well-being, improving digital governance, and promoting women's leadership in building durable security, the analyses collectively underscore the importance of integrated and participatory approaches to national and regional development.

The policy briefs further highlight Uganda's opportunities within continental and global frameworks, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Agenda 2063. Collectively, they make a compelling case for inclusive reform toward a more equitable and sustainable future.



THEME 1

Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition

AGRICULTURE, FOOD SECURITY, AND NUTRITION

The theme Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition, examines Uganda's and Africa's collective efforts to strengthen agricultural productivity, enhance trade competitiveness, and improve nutritional outcomes. The briefs highlight how sustainable food systems are central to economic transformation and human development. Authors emphasize the need to ensure coordinated policies that enhance agricultural value chains, promote affordable access to inputs, strengthen institutional frameworks, and leverage multi-sectoral planning for efficient and effective nutritional outcomes. Together, these analyses illuminate how achieving food and nutrition security requires not only increased production but also equitable access, efficient trade systems, and multi-sectoral engagement and strengthening.

**ACHIEVING FOOD AND NUTRITION
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ENGAGEMENT AND STRENGTHENING.**

STRENGTHENING UGANDA'S AGRICULTURAL TRADE TO ACHIEVE INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH



Victoria Babirye

PROFILE Victoria Babirye is an Agri-food systems specialist dedicated to championing policies that enhance the well-being of small-holder farmers. Currently serving as a Program Manager with Fairtrade Africa, she supports a team across Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda and leads resource mobilization efforts for the East and Central African Network. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Mechanization and Irrigation Engineering and is pursuing a master's degree in development studies.

Victoria's career spans both the humanitarian and development sectors, where she has led impactful programs focused on improving the livelihoods of refugees and host communities. Her diverse experience includes roles across various sectors with agencies such as Alight (formerly American Refugee Committee), Dan Church Aid, CARE International in Uganda, the Centre for Governance and Economic Development, and the Appropriate Technology Centre under the Ministry of Water and Environment. Her expertise in developing and strengthening export market systems has enabled her to lead teams successfully in project implementation and contribute to the strategic development of organizations and sectors. Her career ambition is to become a knowledge expert in international trade, advocating for equitable practices across agricultural value chains.

Executive Summary

Agriculture is the backbone of Uganda's economy, contributing approximately 24% to GDP and employing over 70% of the population (UBOS, 2023; MAAIF, 2020). However, Uganda's agricultural trade potential remains largely untapped due to structural barriers such as poor infrastructure, limited value addition, weak trade policies, and low market access.

With the East African Community (EAC) and African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offering expanding markets, Uganda must reform and align its trade and agriculture policies to promote competitiveness, enhance value chains, and ensure equitable growth. This brief provides policy direction and practical actions necessary for unlocking the country's agricultural trade potential; enhance trade infrastructure, strengthen value addition and certification, coordinate institutional frameworks, expand trade-oriented extension services, and promote local agro-processing.

Background

Uganda's economy is heavily reliant on agriculture, the sector that contributes approximately 24% to GDP and employs over 70% of the workforce (UBOS, 2023; MAAIF, 2020).

About 80% of the country's land considered arable, Uganda enjoys a comparative advantage in agricultural production, further enhanced by regional agroecological diversity that allows staggered and continuous supply of commodities throughout the year (World Bank, 2022).

Government and development partners have made notable investments in small-scale irrigation infrastructure through initiatives such as the Ministry of Water and Environment's (MWE) Solar-Powered Irrigation Pilot Programme which serve as scalable models for ensuring year-round cultivation and market-ready supply (MWE, 2021). Farmer institutions, cooperatives, and producer groups also provide opportunities to improve post-harvest handling, reduce losses, and ensure consistent quality and traceability for export markets (FAO, 2020).

Extension services, however, need to evolve beyond productivity enhancement. The future of agricultural trade in Uganda requires extension models that integrate market intelligence, quality standards, and compliance protocols (AGRA, 2022). International certification bodies such as Control Union and Global G.A.P. provide pathways to premium markets, but the cost of compliance remains a barrier. Public-private partnerships and donor-backed programs are therefore needed to reduce certification costs and increase farmer participation (TradeMark Africa, 2023).

Uganda's infrastructure gap continues to undermine competitiveness. An estimated 30–40% of agricultural produce is lost to post-harvest due to poor rural road networks, limited storage facilities, and inadequate cold chain systems (FAO, 2021). Addressing these challenges through targeted investment in logistics and storage would reduce losses and improve market access, positioning Uganda as a competitive hub for regional agricultural trade under AfCFTA.

Uganda's membership in the EAC, COMESA, and AfCFTA provides preferential access to large markets under harmonized regimes. With AfCFTA covering over 1.4 billion people, Uganda has the opportunity to expand its trade footprint by removing non-tariff barriers and improving trade facilitation (AfCFTA Secretariat, 2023). In December 2024, Uganda launched its AfCFTA National Implementation Strategy (2023/24–2032/33), which seeks to diversify exports, promote agro-industrialization, and leverage regional value chains for job creation and foreign exchange earnings (MTIC, 2024). An essential milestone is the commissioning of the Entebbe Free Zones Export Facility, aimed at improving certification, processing, and market access for agricultural products (UIA, 2024).

Despite its agricultural potential, Uganda's exports remain heavily concentrated in low-value, unprocessed commodities such as coffee, maize, and beans (MAAIF, 2022). For example, over 90% of Uganda's coffee is exported in raw form, earning less than 10% of the final retail price in destination markets (ICO, 2022). Structural constraints including weak value chain integration, limited certification and standardization, and poor logistics increase transaction costs by more than 30% (World Bank, 2023). In addition, Uganda lacks a comprehensive agricultural trade policy, resulting in fragmented interventions.

Smallholder farmers, who constitute more than 80% of the farming population, face exclusion from formal markets due to lack of access to finance, weak bargaining power, and poor access to certification schemes (FAO, 2021). Uganda's underutilization of opportunities under AfCFTA and EAC further reflects a disconnect between agricultural and trade policies. If these challenges persist, Uganda risks continued dependence on volatile commodity markets, stagnant rural incomes, and missed opportunities for job creation and value addition (UNCTAD, 2022; EPRC, 2023).

Policy Options

- Institutional coordination is fragmented, with no central mechanism to align the work of agriculture, trade, finance, and infrastructure sectors. This has led to overlapping mandates and duplication of efforts. Extension services remain narrowly focused on boosting production, with limited emphasis on preparing farmers for trade readiness through market intelligence, standards compliance, and certification support.
- Value addition has been prioritized in policy, but practical support for certification and agro-processing remains insufficient. Access to affordable certification services is limited, making it difficult for producers to penetrate premium markets. Similarly, investment in rural infrastructure, storage, and cold chains is still inadequate, contributing to high post-harvest losses and elevated transaction costs.
- Policy frameworks such as the National Trade Policy (2007) have become outdated and are not fully aligned with AfCFTA protocols, limiting Uganda's ability to take advantage of regional and continental trade opportunities. Finally, existing strategies have underplayed the potential of the domestic market. Public procurement and consumer campaigns that could stimulate demand for locally processed agricultural goods remain underutilized.

Policy Recommendations

- The Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives (MTIC), should establish a National Agricultural Trade Council to coordinate trade and agriculture institutions and streamline interventions. Trade-readiness should be integrated into national agricultural extension services, equipping farmers and traders with practical knowledge on certification, standards, and market access.
- The Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) and Uganda Export Promotion Board (UEPB) should expand affordable certification schemes, tax incentives, and financing support to promote value addition and agro-processing.

- Trade governance and digital infrastructure should be strengthened by MTIC, in collaboration with the National Information Technology Authority–Uganda (NITA-U) and the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA), through harmonized standards, alignment with AfCFTA trade corridors, and the establishment of a digital single-window trade system.
- Finally, domestic market development should be promoted by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) and Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) through strategic procurement in schools, hospitals, and prisons, complemented by a national Buy Ugandan, Build Uganda (BUBU) campaign and phased import restrictions to boost local consumption and agro-processing

Conclusion

Uganda's agriculture offers extensive potential for inclusive economic growth, yet trade performance remains constrained by fragmented policies, weak infrastructure, and limited value addition. By reforming institutional coordination, reorienting extension services, supporting certification and processing, investing in trade infrastructure, and stimulating local demand, Uganda can unlock its agricultural trade potential. Strengthened linkages to AfCFTA and EAC markets will not only expand export earnings but also create jobs, raise rural incomes, and build a more competitive and resilient agricultural economy

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ACCELERATING THE FIGHT AGAINST MALNUTRITION: OPTIMIZING EVIDENCE AND RESOURCES FOR EFFECTIVE MULTISECTORAL NUTRITION ACTION IN AFRICA



**Shirley
Kansabe**

PROFILE Shirley Kansabe is a public health practitioner with interest and experience in research, advocacy, and implementation of interventions in nutrition and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). She currently works at Kyambogo University as a Nutrition Research, Learning, and Linkage Officer (Responsible for five districts in South Western Uganda). Through her involvement in several local and international collaborative interventions, she has acquired numerous skills including design thinking, strategy development, critical analysis, and evaluation. She has a keen interest in policy, design, and implementation questions that probe failure to achieve change from interventions. She is dedicated to understanding, promoting, and supporting the role of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in attaining public health goals, especially for collaborative interventions. She does this by investigating change processes and promoting the use of evidence in intervention design and implementation. In her work, she has won several grants, published peer-reviewed articles, and mentored students, among others. She has also led advocacy campaigns that have yielded national results on nutrition and NCDs.

Executive Summary

Africa continues to experience a dual burden of malnutrition, with undernutrition declining at the slowest rate globally while overnutrition steadily increases. Malnutrition in all its forms costs the continent an estimated USD 135 billion annually and leads to a 16.5 percent loss in GDP, the highest worldwide. The slow progress in reducing malnutrition is attributed to multifaceted causes, including fragmented sectoral responses and limited optimization of available resources.

The World Bank's Optima Nutrition model has the potential to improve nutrition outcomes by reallocating resources more effectively within the health sector. However, its current scope excludes other key sectors agriculture, education, water, and social protection that significantly influence nutrition outcomes. This policy brief highlights the need to expand the Optima Nutrition model across multiple sectors, build country capacity to apply it, and promote evidence-based decision-making for nutrition investments. Such an approach would accelerate progress toward reducing malnutrition in Africa while ensuring more efficient use of scarce resources.

Introduction

Globally, the decline in the prevalence and mortality associated with undernutrition and overnutrition has been slow. Between 2000 and

2019, Africa recorded the lowest annual reduction in age-standardized malnutrition prevalence of only 0.37% (Lin et al., 2025). Yet, obesity is on the rise with a 0.87% annual increase in Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) in Africa according to a recent re-analysis of the Global Burden of Disease Data (Chong et al., 2023). Undernutrition

means growth faltering, frequent illness and death for children, while obesity is a risk factor for chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure, among both adults and children. The slow decline in under and over nutrition has a multiplicative negative effect on the human capital of Africa, as more and more people succumb to the deterrent effects, notwithstanding the loss in GDP and productivity (Africa Union Commission, 2020).

Forty-two African countries are signatory to the SUN Movement, a global coalition to end malnutrition through multisectoral interventions. Since the SUN Movement adopted the six World Health Assembly targets for ending malnutrition by 2025, none of the SUN African countries is on track to achieve these targets (Coile et al., 2021). Nor is the world on track to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) two and three to end hunger, and ensure good health and wellbeing by 2030 (World Health Organization, 2024). The African Union's Malabo declaration which ended in 2024 did not achieve its targets either. Therefore, there is a dire need to accelerate the reduction in malnutrition and mitigate its impact on development on the African continent.



Fig. 1: The Double Burden of Malnutrition

Policy Options

1. Do nothing

Existing policy solutions have not been effective in reducing malnutrition to the desired targets in Africa. The 2025 Kampala Declaration is ambitious in its third commitment, aiming to reduce the different forms of malnutrition by 25% by 2035. Its emphasis on multisectoral collaboration through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Plan (CAADP) Strategy is commendable. However, African governments have not been investing much in multisectoral nutrition interventions on their own, with much funding coming through the SUN Movement. This status quo means that the reduction in undernutrition will remain slow while overnutrition will keep increasing. Annually in Africa, malnutrition would claim lives of 824,000 children and 12,800 women if nothing is done to accelerate the reduction in malnutrition (Nutrition International, 2024). This means a high burden on health care systems, and exacerbate the loss in human capital and GDP on the continent.

2. Optimize sectoral investments in nutrition-relevant interventions

The World Bank has identified five key sectors for investment to improve nutrition, namely health, agriculture, water, social protection, and education (Shekar et al., 2024). This portfolio of interventions has also been adopted by the Africa Development Bank as priority investments through 2025 to yield a 40% reduction in stunting, among other nutrition goals (Aguilera Vasquez &

Daher, 2019). Cognizant of the resource constraints in African countries, and the need to optimize the little that is available, the World Bank developed Optima Nutrition, an open access model that supports countries to contextually optimize investments in nutrition interventions using existing data.

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Based on Optima Nutrition modelling for example, Bangladesh did not have to increase its funding but optimize it to attain a 5% reduction in stunting in a period of 12 years. This would be achieved by augmenting vitamin A supplementation and infant and young child feeding only, especially in the regions of Dhaka and Chittagong (Pearson et al., 2018). Such evidence from Optima Nutrition is crucial in guiding policy decisions and investments yet, Optima Nutrition's modelling focuses only on nutrition interventions in the health sector. As highlighted above, there is need to optimize the combined benefits of multisectoral investments for nutrition in

agriculture, education, social protection and water, in addition to those in the health sector. Optima Nutrition's expansion to model the multiplicative effect of multisectoral investments, as well as its use by policy makers in Africa will expand the evidence base and accelerate the reduction in malnutrition in Africa.

3. Pool resources and efforts into multisectoral nutrition interventions

Malnutrition is a multi-faceted public health problem whose solutions cannot be borne by the health sector alone (Bach et al., 2020), and extant research underscores the importance of multi-sectoral actions for nutrition at all levels of governance. The complexity in malnutrition has been met with a group of practitioners that are applying various approaches to address malnutrition. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization, financed by the World Bank (Hricko, 2025) are leading food systems transformation, an approach that is conceptually similar to the Scaling Up Nutrition's multisectoral initiatives. In fact, the stakeholders engaged at national level are the same for food systems transformation and multisectoral nutrition actions.

The Nutrition for Growth initiative rallies commitments towards nutrition. For example, USD 27 billion were mobilized during the 2025 Nutrition for Growth Summit in Paris (O'Connell, 2025). The United Nations Nutrition on the other hand coordinates UN actors for nutrition. These many actors promote coordinated multisectoral actions for nutrition in Africa and on other continents, leaving a trail of discordance among themselves while spending lots of resources in their silos. There is a need to harmonize approaches to avoid the misuse of the dwindling resources and duplication of efforts. However, this option creates numerous enemies and would take a long time to implement.

Policy recommendations to the World Bank

- The World Bank should expand the Optima Nutrition model beyond the health sector to include agriculture, education, water, and social protection. Developing and piloting these additional modules in a few African countries would demonstrate the potential for multisectoral optimization and generate evidence to guide continent-wide adoption.

- Countries should institutionalize the use of evidence-based models in planning and budgeting for nutrition. This means building the capacity of planning and finance ministries alongside health agencies to interpret Optima Nutrition results and integrate them into national nutrition action plans and budget frameworks.
- To avoid duplication and maximize resources, optimization approaches should be embedded into existing financing platforms such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), national food systems and nutrition strategies/plans, and World Bank-supported sector projects. This will ensure coherence and stronger returns on investment.
- Optima will prioritize high-impact, low-cost interventions in key sectors. In agriculture, countries can promote biofortified crops and nutrition-sensitive practices. In education, scaling up locally sourced school feeding programs can improve child nutrition while supporting farmer incomes. Social protection can deliver nutrition-sensitive cash transfers to vulnerable households, while water and sanitation interventions should focus on safe water supply and community-led sanitation. Governments can also introduce annual nutrition budget reviews to track spending efficiency and the impact of nutrition interventions across all sectors.

Conclusion

Three policy alternatives to accelerate reduction in malnutrition in Africa have been identified. However, the optimization of sectoral investments in nutrition is the least expensive yet, it carries huge potential in sustaining the reduction in malnutrition on the continent. It is politically friendly, takes less time to implement and more motivating to the various stakeholders involved. This is because there will not be much pressure to secure extra funding for nutrition at the sector level.

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REDUCING SEEDLING PRICES TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY



**Twikirize
Peninah**

PROFILE Twikirize Peninah is a dedicated Social Worker with experience in community development. Currently, she serves as the Team Leader at Solidlinks Initiative for Development, a community-based organization in Kasese District of Uganda. She holds a Bachelors of Social Works and Social Administration from Makerere University Kampala and currently pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Project Management. She has previously worked as a Community Development Officer at Rubirizi District Local Government and also worked as Project Manager with Center for Justice Studies and Innovations. She is passionate about engaging with marginalized groups, including youth and women, to create opportunities for skill development, economic empowerment, and climate resilience. She is committed to fostering a culture of learning where success and failure are seen as opportunities for growth and innovation, and aims to continue driving positive change within communities while contributing to broader development objectives.

Executive Summary

Access to affordable and improved seedlings remains a major barrier to agricultural productivity in Uganda, especially for smallholder farmers who make up more than 85% of the farming population (Bagamba et al., 2023). Despite interventions such as Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) and the National Seed Strategy (2018–2023), high seedling prices persist, limiting crop diversification, reducing yields, and constraining incomes. Current market prices UGX 1,000–3,500 per seedling and UGX 6,000–12,000 per kilogram for legumes are beyond the reach of many smallholders, keeping them trapped in subsistence farming and contributing to food insecurity.

This policy brief states that reducing seedling prices is essential for enhancing productivity, diversifying crop production, and ensuring food security. It proposes a mix of targeted subsidies, strengthened public–private partnerships, investment in decentralized seedling production units, and stronger regulatory oversight. Making seedlings more affordable and accessible, Uganda can boost farm productivity, create employment, and advance its goal of transforming subsistence farming into sustainable commercial agriculture.

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Introduction

Seedlings for crops such as legumes, coffee, cocoa, fruit trees, and timber are important to Uganda’s agricultural transformation, enabling farm diversification, higher yields, and climate resilience. Yet, the price of certified seedlings remains prohibitively high, often ranging from UGX 1,000 to 3,500 per seedling and UGX 6,000 to 12,000 per kilogram for legumes (MAAIF, 2023). This makes them unaffordable for smallholder farmers, who constitute over 85% of the farming population, and restricts their transition from low-yielding traditional varieties to more productive commercial crops (Bagamba et al., 2023). As a result, farmers remain stuck in subsistence agriculture, unable to increase

household incomes or adequately contribute to food security (Giller et al., 2021).

The high cost of seedlings is worsened by market failures and most licensed seed companies are concentrated in central Uganda, with only a few in northern and eastern regions, raising distribution costs for rural farmers (Bagamba et al., 2023). Weak regulatory oversight and a largely informal seed market allow counterfeit and poor-quality seedlings to proliferate (Agaba et al., 2021). Although government programs such as NAADS/OWC initially distributed seedlings freely, they lacked sustainability and coordination with local governments (Office of the Auditor General, 2020). Cost-sharing mechanisms under initiatives like the World Bank's Agriculture Cluster Development Project have expanded access, but coverage is limited to 31 of Uganda's 136 districts.

This structural imbalance has kept high-quality seedlings out of reach for the majority of smallholders, locking them into low productivity, reducing food availability, and worsening nutrition outcomes for poor households. Given that agriculture contributes 24% of GDP and employs over 70% of Uganda's population (UBOS, 2022), addressing the seedling price barrier is critical for economic transformation.

Policy Options

- MAAIF (2019, 2023) shows that Uganda's National Seed Policy and National Seed Strategy prioritize seed quality and production but do not adequately address affordability for vulnerable farmers. UBOS (2022) confirms that high input costs remain a primary barrier to commercial agriculture. FAO (2020) points to weak post-harvest handling and informal seed markets as constraints to farmer competitiveness.
- The widespread sale of counterfeit seedlings due to weak certification and traceability, while the Office of the Auditor General (2020) finds that OWC lacked a sustainable distribution model and sufficient local government involvement. International lessons provide further insights: Rwanda's Crop Intensification Program (CIP) has successfully increased
- production by subsidizing seeds for beans, soybeans, and maize (MINAGRI, 2012), while Kenya's PPP-driven Agricultural Sector Development Support Programme reduced seedling prices by 40% in three years (FAO, 2020).

These findings show that without subsidies, decentralized production, and stronger oversight, Uganda's seedling market will remain inaccessible to the majority of farmers, perpetuating low productivity and food insecurity.

Recommendations

- NAADS should conduct consultation among farmers especially targeting subsistence and small holder farmers to obtain their views on seed prices and their perceptions to inform the policy debate and discussion.
- MAAIF (Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries) in collaboration with the District Agricultural Offices, should map and register all companies supplying seedlings to regulate unregistered companies.
- NARO (National Agricultural Research Organization) should develop a seedling subsidy framework to guide companies on how and when to produce different seedlings for particular regions at specific seasons within a given pricing bracket.
- NARO should establish seed banks in every district to improve farmer's accessibility to good quality and diverse seeds.
- MAAIF needs to establish linkages between National Agricultural Research Organization and the District agricultural offices aiming at disseminating timely information on the available seedling varieties for specific areas.

Implementation Strategy

ACTION

Develop seedling subsidy framework

TIMELINE

6 months

LEAD AGENCY

MAAIF

PARTNERS

MoFPED, NAADS

ACTION

Mapping farmers to establish their views on prices of seedlings

TIMELINE

6 months

LEAD AGENCY

MAAIF

PARTNERS

NAADS, District Agricultural Officers

ACTION

Amend seed policy regulations

TIMELINE

12 – 18 months

LEAD AGENCY

MAAIF Legal Department

PARTNERS

Parliament

ACTION

Establish seed banks

TIMELINE

8 months

LEAD AGENCY

NARO

PARTNERS

MAAIF, NAADS, District Agricultural Officers

ACTION

Map and register all companies supplying seedlings

TIMELINE

10 months

LEAD AGENCY

Uganda Seed Certification Institute

PARTNERS

MAAIF, District Agricultural Offices, District Commercial Officers

ACTION

Establish linkages between NARO and the District Agricultural offices

TIMELINE

8 months

LEAD AGENCY

MAAIF

PARTNERS

NARO, MoFPED, District Local Governments

Conclusion

Lowering the cost of seedlings is an essential intervention to unlocking agricultural potential, support youth and women in agriculture, and increase Uganda's resilience to climate change. With the right policy measures, the Ministry of Agriculture can lead a new wave of agricultural change focused on fairness, innovation, and sustainability.

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CONCLUSION

Agriculture remains the backbone of Uganda's economy and a critical driver of livelihoods across Africa. Despite this acknowledgement, the industry continues to grapple with high input costs, low quality inputs, weak market integration, limited value addition, and fragmented institutional coordination. To build resilient food systems, governments must invest in affordable, quality inputs, localize agro processing at mass scale, and promote regional integration of agricultural markets. Addressing these priority areas unlock the regions' potential to create more jobs, enhance incomes, improve livelihoods, and ensure food security for all, creating a strong foundation for inclusive growth and sustainable economic development

TO BUILD RESILIENT FOOD
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OF AGRICULTURAL MARKETS.



THEME 2

Environment and Climate Resilience

This set of policy briefs scrutinizes Uganda's progress and persistent challenges in building a sustainable and climate-resilient future. The briefs address interconnected environmental priorities, including waste management, climate governance, and the enforcement of environmental safeguards. The briefs underscore an urgent need to bridge the gap between multisectoral policy and practice through stronger institutional coordination, enhanced enforcement, and inclusive, community-driven approaches. It is emphasized that sustainable environmental management is not only an aspect of ecological preservation but also a cornerstone of national development, public health, and economic stability, requiring integrated policy action, institutional accountability, and community participation.

**SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL
MANAGEMENT IS NOT ONLY AN ASPECT
OF ECOLOGICAL PRESERVATION BUT
ALSO A CORNERSTONE OF NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND
ECONOMIC STABILITY.**

STRENGTHENING UGANDA'S AGRICULTURAL TRADE TO ACHIEVE INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH



**Sophie
Brenda
Namonye**

PROFILE Sophie Brenda Namonye is a Climate Change Officer at the Ministry of Water and Environment of Uganda, specializing in carbon markets, mitigation, and adaptation strategies. She holds a Bachelors in Environmental Science, Technology, and Management, Kyambogo University. She has a deep-seated passion for addressing climate related issues, inspired by firsthand experiences with the impacts of climate change. Throughout her career, Sophie has contributed to climate action initiatives, beginning with volunteer work in Green Futures Initiative, a youth group where she advocated for climate action and carried out climate education in schools and communities across Central Uganda, enlightening over 20,000 individuals in diverse communities on climate change. Sophie is committed to enabling the ordinary people to adapt to climate change and to have climate resilient communities and she believes that this can be achieved by them understanding the crisis first. Sophie believes that transformative achievements are attainable through a shift in mindset and is engaged in the Careers Network to help young people achieve their God given potential by helping them develop a growth mindset.

Executive Summary

Uganda has developed a strong legal and policy framework for climate action, including the National Climate Change Act (2021), the National Climate Change Policy (2015), and the integration of climate priorities into NDP III and the upcoming NDP IV. Despite this progress, implementation remains weak. The country is ranked 13th most vulnerable and 160th in readiness globally (ND-GAIN, 2021), and climate shocks already cost an estimated 3–5% of GDP annually.

Government assessments reveal only moderate compliance with climate budgeting targets 54% in FY2023/24 and 62% in FY2024/25. Key challenges include weak institutional coordination, inadequate technical capacity, and limited accountability mechanisms, which prevent climate change from being fully mainstreamed into sectoral planning and budgeting. To address these barriers, this brief recommends: institutionalising sector-specific mainstreaming toolkits with mandatory use, enforcing annual climate progress reporting as required by the Climate Change Act, 2021, and introducing independent climate audits.

Introduction

Uganda faces growing climate threats such as floods, recurrent droughts, landslides, and erratic rainfall, which are already undermining food security, livelihoods, and macroeconomic stability. The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic x

reduce GDP by 3–5% annually. Despite adopting progressive climate policies and laws, the gap between policy ambition and implementation remains wide.

Government reviews consistently show weak alignment between climate priorities and budgets, limited tracking of climate-related spending, and inadequate monitoring of actions. Closing this gap is important to building resilience and supporting the country's growth.

Uganda has the right policies on paper but faces major implementation challenges. The National Climate Change Policy (2015) set the direction for integrating climate risks across sectors, while the Climate Change Act (2021) assigned legal obligations for mainstreaming and reporting. The Third National Development Plan (NDP III) embedded climate action across sectors, and the recently launched NDP IV places even greater emphasis on resilience and low-carbon growth. Uganda has also updated its NDC commitments and introduced Climate Budget Tagging (CBT).

However, implementation has been inconsistent. Many sectors and districts lack practical tools and technical capacity, resulting in fragmented actions. While CBT has helped identify spending, accountability for results remains weak, with most entities reporting expenditures rather than outcomes. Monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems are underdeveloped, undermining Uganda's ability to demonstrate progress domestically and internationally. These gaps limit

the effectiveness of Uganda's otherwise solid policy and legal frameworks.

The main barriers can be summarised as:

- (i) budgetary and resource constraints, with climate interventions underfunded and poorly aligned;
- (ii) limited technical capacity among sector teams, leading to weak integration of climate priorities in planning; and
- (iii) inadequate monitoring and accountability mechanisms, including the absence of systematic audits or performance reviews of climate actions.

Policy Options

- Uganda has established a fairly comprehensive climate governance framework that lays the groundwork for mainstreaming climate action. The National Climate Change Policy (2015) set the vision for integrating climate risks into all sectors and levels of government. The Climate Change Act (2021) gave these obligations legal backing, assigning clear responsibilities to ministries, agencies, and local governments to plan, budget, and report on climate actions. Climate priorities have been embedded in the Third National Development Plan (NDP III) and are expected to be even more central in NDP IV, which positions resilience and low-carbon growth as core development objectives. The country's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) further commits Uganda to adaptation and mitigation actions across key sectors including agriculture, water, energy, forestry, transport, and health. In public finance, the rollout of Climate Budget Tagging (CBT) provides a mechanism to identify climate-related expenditures in the budget system. These frameworks demonstrate that Uganda has a strong policy foundation and political commitment to addressing climate change.
- Climate change is still widely perceived as an environmental issue rather than a cross-cutting development risk, which limits ownership by non-environment sectors such as finance, infrastructure, and health.
- Mainstreaming tools are not applied consistently across ministries, departments, and districts. While some sectors have begun integrating climate actions, others lack user-friendly guidance, technical skills, or incentives to follow through.

- The Climate Budget Tagging initiative has improved visibility of climate spending but does not adequately measure outcomes. As a result, resources may be recorded without clear evidence of whether they are reducing vulnerability or supporting Uganda's NDC targets.
- Another important gap lies in accountability and enforcement. The Climate Change Act (2021) requires annual progress reporting to the Climate Change Department, yet compliance is weak and reporting is often fragmented or incomplete. Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems remain underdeveloped, undermining Uganda's ability to track results, learn from implementation, and credibly report progress at both national and international levels. Limited technical and financial capacity at the sectoral and local government levels further compounds these challenges, creating a cycle where climate commitments exist on paper but struggle to be realised in practice.

The above shortcomings emphasize the need for practical operational tools, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and clearer lines of accountability to bridge the gap between Uganda's climate policy frameworks and the realities of implementation.

Policy Recommendations

- Institutionalize sector-specific mainstreaming toolkits. The Climate Change Department, together with the National Planning Authority and Ministry of Local Government, should design and enforce sector-tailored toolkits with simplified checklists, indicators, and MRV templates. Compliance should be tied to the approval of ministerial and district plans.
- Enforce annual climate progress reporting. The Climate Change Department should issue binding templates and link reporting compliance to budget releases, in line with the Climate Change Act (2021). Reports should feed into national tracking systems and Uganda's Biennial Transparency Reports.
- Introduce independent climate audits. The Office of the Auditor General, working with the Climate Change Department, should institutionalise annual audits of climate-related programmes. These audits should evaluate both financial compliance and programme outcomes, strengthening transparency, accountability, and credibility with citizens and development partners.

Conclusion

Uganda has the policy instruments, legal frameworks, and political commitment to enhance climate resilience. Yet weak implementation undermines progress. Stronger enforcement, clearer accountability, and better coordination are essential. The NDP IV implementation period provides a critical opportunity to institutionalise climate governance across planning and budgeting. Acting now will secure a more resilient and sustainable future for Uganda.

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MANAGING KAMPALA'S SOLID WASTE CRISIS: TURNING A GROWING CHALLENGE INTO AN OPPORTUNITY



**Atuhaire
Baseka
Patience**

PROFILE Atuhaire Baseka Patience is a dedicated SDG advocate passionate about sustainable development, community empowerment, and strong leadership. She is currently serving as Head of Finance and Resource Mobilization, Bricks Environment and Climate Hub Initiative (a youth-led, gender-balanced advocacy group focused on community-driven environmental sustainability and socio-economic transformation). She also serves as a Programs Officer of the Guild Presidents Leadership Academy (leadership development program nurturing current and outgoing university guild leaders into strategic national leadership positions). She holds BA in Public Administration and Resource Governance, Kyambogo University. She has actively participated in various SDG and sustainability forums and collaborated with local and international organizations. She generally aims at driving transformative change through sustainable development, community empowerment, and strategic strong leadership.

Executive Summary

Kampala is facing a deepening solid waste management crisis driven by rapid urban growth, inadequate infrastructure, and weak enforcement of existing policies. The city produces more than 3,000 tonnes of waste every day, yet only about half is collected, leaving large amounts to accumulate in drains, open spaces, and illegal dumpsites (Mugambe et al., 2022). This contributes to floods, environmental degradation, public health risks, and greenhouse gas emissions. Although Uganda has established frameworks such as the Constitution, the National Environment Act, 2019 and the KCCA Solid Waste Management Ordinance, enforcement and community participation remain limited. Waste collection is still centralized and excludes informal actors who play an essential role in recycling and waste recovery.

This policy brief highlights the urgent need for a more inclusive and decentralized model of solid waste management. Lessons from other African cities such as Kigali, Nairobi, and Dar es Salaam show that success is possible through stronger regulation, community involvement, and public-private partnerships. Kampala should adopt similar approaches by formalizing the role of informal waste collectors, promoting household-level waste sorting and recycling, and investing in safer landfill and waste-to-energy options.

Introduction

Solid waste management has become one of

Kampala's most urgent urban challenges. The city, with a resident population of more than two million people that swells to nearly four million during the day, generates between 1,500 and 3,000 tonnes of solid waste every day (Mugambe et al., 2022).

Yet only 40 to 60 percent of this waste is collected formally. The rest is discarded in drains, dumped illegally, or openly burned, particularly in informal settlements where access to municipal services is most limited (Ssemugabo et al., 2020). The Kiteezi landfill, Kampala's only designated disposal site, has been operating far beyond capacity for years and lacks basic environmental safeguards such as leachate control and gas capture systems (Komakech et al., 2013). Its partial collapse in 2024, which killed and displaced residents, revealed the scale of the risks that inadequate waste management poses to human life (Kyambadde, Sewante & Namatovu, 2025).

Uncollected waste blocks drainage channels, triggering floods during heavy rains and intensifying seasonal outbreaks of cholera and diarrhoeal diseases. Open burning and informal dumpsites contribute to air and water pollution, exposing residents especially those in low-income areas to respiratory infections and other health hazards (Ssemugabo et al., 2020). Beyond health risks, poorly managed waste also contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, undermining Uganda's commitments to climate resilience and sustainable development (Muheirwe et al., 2023).

Uganda has adopted a range of policies intended to address this problem. The National Environment Act (2019), the National Environment

(Waste Management) Regulations (2020), and the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) Solid Waste Management Ordinance set clear standards for collection, recycling, and disposal. These are complemented by broader legal instruments such as the Constitution and the Public Health (Amendment) Act 2023, which commit the state to safeguard the environment and public health (Republic of Uganda, 1995; Republic of Uganda, 2019). On paper, these instruments provide a comprehensive framework for integrated waste management.

In practice, however, enforcement is weak, infrastructure is outdated, and community participation remains minimal. Many households, particularly in informal settlements, do not pay for waste collection and often view the responsibility as belonging solely to the Government (Ssemugabo et al., 2020). Informal waste collectors and recyclers, who play a vital role in recovering plastics, organics, and other materials, are excluded from the formal system and operate without recognition or support (Komakech et al., 2013).

The persistence of these challenges highlights a growing disconnect between Kampala's policy frameworks and the realities of urban waste management. Without urgent action to bridge this gap, the city faces worsening floods, public health crises, and environmental degradation threatening both the resilience of its residents and the sustainability of its development.

Policy Options

- Uganda has developed a comprehensive set of policies and laws to guide solid waste management. The Constitution of 1995 commits the state to promoting sustainable development and environmental protection (Republic of Uganda, 1995). Building on this, the National Environment Act of 2019 and the National Environment (Waste Management) Regulations of 2020 establish the legal framework for waste prevention, reduction, reuse, recycling, and safe disposal (Republic of Uganda, 2019; Republic of Uganda, 2020). These instruments prohibit unsafe dumping and burning, regulate the use of plastics, and provide for licensing of waste handlers. At the city level, the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) Solid Waste Management Ordinance sets out the duties of the city administration in ensuring proper waste collection and disposal (Republic of Uganda, 2000).
- On paper, these frameworks provide a strong platform for sustainable waste management. They set standards for recycling, composting, and disposal, and extend responsibility to waste producers and handlers. They also allow partnerships between government, the private sector, and communities in managing waste (Muheirwe et al., 2023). However, a closer analysis reveals gaps in implementation, financing, and inclusivity that continue to undermine their effectiveness.
- Enforcement remains weak. While laws clearly prohibit open dumping and unsafe handling of waste, penalties are rarely enforced (Ssemugabo et al., 2020). In many neighborhoods, especially informal settlements, residents continue to dispose of waste in drains or burn it openly without consequence. Weak enforcement undermines compliance and signals that waste management laws lack credibility (Ojok et al., 2013).
- The system is centralized and underfunded. KCCA still relies on a limited fleet of trucks and a single overstretched landfill at Kiteezi, which is operating far beyond its intended capacity (Komakech et al., 2013). As a result, underserved communities, particularly in slums and peri-urban areas, remain outside the formal collection system (Mugambe et al., 2022). While policies emphasize safe disposal, they have not been backed by adequate financing mechanisms or decentralized models to extend services equitably (Muheirwe et al., 2023).
- Opportunities for recycling and composting are missed. Over 70 percent of Kampala's waste is organic and suitable for composting or biogas production (Komakech et al., 2013). However, the absence of systematic source segregation and the lack of material recovery facilities result in valuable resources being wasted (Mugambe et al., 2022). Although policies call for reduction and recycling, implementation remains limited (Republic of Uganda, 2019).
- Informal actors are excluded. Informal waste collectors and recyclers handle a significant portion of waste recovery but remain outside formal frameworks (Muheirwe et al., 2023). They work without licenses, protective equipment, or access to structured markets, despite their vital contribution to collection and recycling (Ssemugabo et al., 2020). Their exclusion undermines the potential for building an inclusive circular economy.

- Infrastructure development is lagging. The Kiteezi landfill lacks essential safeguards such as leachate control and gas capture systems, and it has already exceeded capacity (Komakech et al., 2013). Plans for a new landfill have been delayed, and investment in alternatives such as waste-to-energy plants or decentralized composting centres has been minimal (Kyambadde, Sewante & Namatovu, 2025). Policies recognize the need for safe disposal facilities, but progress remains slow.
- Uganda has not suffered from a lack of policy instruments, but rather from poor enforcement, insufficient financing, weak infrastructure, and limited community engagement. This disconnection between strong frameworks on paper and weak outcomes in practice justifies the urgent need for reforms that emphasize decentralization, inclusion of informal actors, and stronger enforcement supported by adequate investment.

Policy Recommendations

- To address Kampala's solid waste challenges, Kampala City Council Authority (KCCA) should expand and decentralize collection services to reach underserved areas, particularly informal settlements. This requires increasing the municipal fleet, introducing free communal collection points, and strategically locating transfer stations to reduce transport distances and collection times.
- Informal waste collectors, who play an important role in waste recovery, need to be formally recognized and supported by the City Council authorities. Providing them with licenses, training, protective equipment, and access to markets would improve both their livelihoods and the efficiency of waste management. Creating cooperatives or platforms that connect these actors with recyclers and buyers would also strengthen the recycling value chain.
- Government investment in infrastructure is essential. KCCA should ensure that Kiteezi landfill is urgently upgraded with liners, gas capture systems, and facilities for recycling and incineration. Planning and constructing a new landfill that meets international sanitary standards is critical for long-term sustainability. Exploring waste-to-energy options and decentralized material recovery facilities, as seen in Dar es Salaam, can provide practical and affordable models for Kampala.

Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), in collaboration with Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), should promote recycling and composting at both household and community levels. Mandatory segregation of waste at source, supported by durable bins and regular collection, would make recycling more efficient. Incentives such as tax breaks and grants could be provided by Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) to encourage private firms to invest in recycling, while scaling up composting centres would link organic waste to agricultural productivity.

KCCA, together with National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), should strengthen public awareness and enforcement. City-wide campaigns can shift perceptions and emphasize that waste management is a shared responsibility. Linking compliance to business licenses and construction permits, alongside visible enforcement of environmental bylaws, would reinforce accountability.

Conclusion

Kampala's solid waste crisis demands urgent attention. Without decisive reforms, the city risks worsening health outcomes, recurring floods, and further environmental degradation. However, with inclusive policies, stronger infrastructure, and community-driven solutions, Kampala can turn waste into an opportunity promoting a circular economy, creating jobs, and building a cleaner, more resilient city for the future.

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STRENGTHENING ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLIANCE MECHANISMS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND HEALTH SAFEGUARDS (ESHS) IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN UGANDA



**Patricia
Ikuret**

PROFILE Patricia Ikuret is an experienced procurement and supply chain professional with experience in strategic sourcing, contract management and logistics optimization. She currently works as a Senior Officer Performance Monitoring at the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA). Her role involves ensuring effective regulation of the public procurement and disposal function through monitoring performance and compliance in accordance with the set law, regulations and guidelines. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Procurement and Supply Chain Management from Makerere University and is a member of the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply. She has a proven track record of delivering cost savings, improving supply chain efficiency and ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements.

Patricia is committed to using the platform that PPDA has given her to create awareness among the local communities to increase participation of Youth, Registered Associations of Women and People with Disabilities (PWDs) in public procurement through encouraging and sensitizing these groups to take advantage of the reservation schemes provided for under the PPDA (Guideline No. 11 of 2024).

Executive Summary

Uganda's Vision 2040 identifies public procurement as an essential driver of development, yet Environmental, Social, and Health Safeguards (ESHS) remain weakly enforced. Although the PPDA Act, 2003 and the National Environment Regulations provide a legal framework, compliance is low due to limited capacity, weak monitoring, and lack of penalties. Contractors often ignore safeguards such as proper waste management and worker safety, while procurement officers and contract managers lack the skills and tools to ensure enforcement. As Uganda invests heavily in infrastructure and extractive projects, these gaps pose risks of environmental damage, unsafe labour practices, and erosion of public trust.

This policy brief provides policy direction and practical actions and calls for strengthening NEMA to build capacity, enforce compliance, and improve monitoring, while empowering PPDA to revise bidding documents, integrate sustainability standards, and train procurement officers. With stronger enforcement, Uganda can turn procurement into a tool for sustainable development, protect communities and natural resources, and promote transparency and accountability in service delivery.

Introduction

Public procurement is widely recognized as one of the most powerful instruments available to governments for delivering essential public services, including roads, schools, hospitals, and water systems (Fazekas & Blum, 2021). Beyond its immediate role in service delivery, procurement decisions carry significant social, health, and environmental implications that extend throughout the project lifecycle (Etse et al., 2021). When managed effectively, procurement can safeguard communities, promote public health, and reduce negative impacts on the environment. However, weak or poorly enforced procurement practices often result in environmental degradation, unsafe working conditions, social exclusion, and declining public confidence in government institutions (Rothstein, 2024).

Uganda already has several laws and policies that recognize the importance of Environmental, Social, and Health Safeguards (ESHS). The Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets (PPDA) Act, 2013 requires government entities to consider environmental protection and social inclusion in procurement. The National Environment Act, 2019 and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations of 2020 also provide tools for safeguarding people and the environment. These efforts are in line with

international commitments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and regional frameworks like the African Union's Agenda 2063 (United Nations, 2015).

Despite this, there is still a wide gap between what the laws say and what happens in practice. Many procurement officers lack training and knowledge to apply ESHS requirements. Contractors often ignore rules such as planting trees, managing waste properly, or ensuring worker safety. Contract managers also fail to report on compliance, leaving violations unnoticed. Because penalties are weak or missing, many contractors get away with breaking rules. This has resulted in problems such as environmental degradation, unsafe working conditions, gender-based violence, and increased risks to public health.

The urgency of the problem lies in Uganda's significant investment in large-scale infrastructure and extractive projects, which present considerable social and environmental risks. Without stronger enforcement mechanisms, Environmental, Social, and Health Safeguards risk remaining legal provisions that are not translated into practice. Weak compliance undermines sustainable development objectives, fuels corruption, contributes to project delays, and diminishes public trust in government institutions.

Policy Options

- Uganda has several international, regional, and national frameworks that aim to integrate Environmental, Social, and Health Safeguards (ESHS) into public procurement, but their overall impact remains limited due to weak implementation and enforcement.
- At the international level, the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework (2017) requires governments to address environmental and social risks before projects receive funding (World Bank, 2017). This has improved transparency and consultation in Bank-funded projects by ensuring that communities are engaged and risks are assessed early. However, its influence is restricted to donor-supported projects, leaving domestically funded procurements with weaker compliance standards.
- Regionally, the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the East African Community (EAC) procurement guidelines emphasize sustainability and inclusive growth, calling on governments to integrate social and environmental safeguards into procurement and planning (AU, 2015; EAC, 2018). While they provide important normative direction, they lack enforceable mechanisms at the national level, and implementation depends largely on domestic political will, which has been inconsistent.
- At the national level, three frameworks stand out. First, Section 66 of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets (PPDA) Act, Cap 205 requires Procuring and Disposing Entities to consider environmental protection, social inclusion, and innovation in procurement (PPDA Act, 2003). While progressive on paper, this provision faces serious weaknesses. Awareness among procurement officers and contractors about the specific ESHS requirements is low, and the Act does not provide clear sanctions for non-compliance, meaning contractors can ignore safeguards without facing consequences.
- Second, the National Environment (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations of 2020, developed under the National Environment Act of 2019, provide a framework for assessing environmental, social, and health risks in new policies, plans, and programs (National Environment Act, 2019). Achievements include stronger stakeholder engagement, development of guidelines by NEMA, and more rigorous screening of projects to detect risks early. They have also institutionalized the integration of safeguards into decision-making. However, compliance remains inconsistent and fragmented across agencies, with weak attention given to social and health aspects such as displacement, human rights, and occupational safety. Enforcement is further undermined by limited institutional capacity and political interference.
- Third, the Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) Action Plan 2022–2026 sets national goals for greener and more inclusive procurement (MoFPED, 2022). It emphasizes sustainability and fairness in procurement processes. Yet implementation has been slow due to inadequate funding, weak coordination among institutions, and limited technical expertise within procurement entities.
- Put together, these frameworks demonstrate that Uganda has made progress in building a strong legal and policy foundation for ESHS in procurement. Achievements include raising awareness, developing guidelines, and promoting consultation and transparency. However, persistent weaknesses remain in practice. Poor monitoring, limited training,

weak enforcement mechanisms, and lack of accountability mean that safeguards are often disregarded. This analysis indicates the need for strengthened accountability systems, enhanced institutional capacity, and enforceable compliance mechanisms, thereby justifying the recommendations of this study

Recommendations to NEMA

- NEMA needs to urgently build capacity at both national and local government levels to carry out Strategic Environmental Assessments. Local governments, civil society, and communities also need access to pollution monitoring equipment and scientific data so that they can play a stronger role in environmental decision-making. Investment in digital tools, including geospatial tracking and online databases, would help make project data more transparent and accessible.
- NEMA should strengthen the legal and institutional framework for enforcement. This can be done by turning safeguard commitments into binding conditions in contracts and permits, and by clearly defining the roles of agencies responsible for monitoring compliance. Institutions that currently lack enforcement capacity should be supported or created to provide accountability, especially for projects that carry major social, health, or environmental risks.
- NEMA should improve compliance monitoring practices by combining self-reporting, third-party audits, citizen monitoring, and modern technology. Enforcement should be proactive, regular, and backed by clear penalties for violations. Public participation should also be encouraged, with affected communities given meaningful opportunities to raise concerns and access grievance mechanisms.
- NEMA should promote better coordination across government by creating a single process for environmental permits and ensuring that data is shared across all relevant agencies.

Recommendations to PPDA

- The Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) is the body responsible for managing procurement processes. To strengthen enforcement of ESHS, PPDA should review and update its rules, documents, and practices to make sustainability a core part of procurement.

- The first step is to revise the Standard Bidding Documents so that they include clear sustainability requirements, such as the total cost of ownership and specific environmental and social obligations. PPDA should also involve environmental, health, and safety experts in procurement processes to assess risks and advise on mitigation measures.
- Capacity building should also be given priority. PPDA should develop training materials and manuals on sustainable procurement and provide specialized training for procurement officers, contract managers, auditors, and policy makers. Communication strategies should be developed to increase awareness among contractors and the public. This could include workshops, media campaigns, and use of digital platforms.
- Monitoring and risk management must also be strengthened. PPDA should ensure that environmental and social risks are identified early in the project cycle and that measures are put in place to reduce them. This includes conducting environmental assessments of proposed projects and integrating ESHS considerations into site selection, design, and planning. Ongoing monitoring should track performance throughout project implementation, and clear accountability systems should be in place to deal with violations.

Conclusion

Uganda has developed strong legal and policy frameworks to integrate Environmental, Social, and Health Safeguards (ESHS) into public procurement, yet weak enforcement, limited capacity, and poor monitoring continue to undermine their effectiveness. With growing investment in large infrastructure and extractive projects, the risks of environmental harm, unsafe labor practices, and loss of public trust remain significant. Strengthening the roles of NEMA and PPDA by embedding safeguards into binding procurement processes, building institutional capacity, improving monitoring systems, and enhancing accountability will be essential for transforming procurement into a tool for sustainable development and for meeting both national and international commitments.

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IMPROVING PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT IN UGANDA: CRITICAL ACTIONS NEEDED



**Edna
Kanyesigye**
Wabwire

PROFILE Edna Kanyesigye is a dedicated Programs Officer at Faraja Africa Foundation with over seven years of experience in youth empowerment, advocacy, and policy engagement, including expertise in climate justice projects. She coordinates impactful initiatives, such as the Youth-Led Advocacy in Legislation project, mobilizing youth leaders across Uganda to engage in policy dialogues and legislative processes. Edna holds a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science Technology and Management from Kyambogo University and a Level One Certificate in Project Planning and Management from Ms-TCDC in Tanzania. Her expertise spans project management, stakeholder engagement, and climate justice, with a focus on gender inclusivity and empowering marginalized groups. Committed to sustainable development, Edna aims to bridge the gap between youth and decision-makers, ensuring young voices shape Uganda's policy landscape.

Executive Summary

Uganda has some of the strongest plastic management laws in the region, including the National Environment Act of 2019 (NEA) and the 2020 Waste Management Regulations, which restrict thin plastic bags and embed Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). Yet, enforcement is weak, fragmented, and underfunded. The result is an inconsistency of tough rules coexisting with clogged drains, plastic-choked wetlands, and microplastics in Lake Victoria. Uganda generates about 600 metric tons of plastic waste daily, with less than half collected. In Kampala alone, 136,000 tons are generated annually, much of it uncollected or leaking into waterways. This brief examines the enforcement gaps and proposes reforms, including implementing EPR in practice, introducing a deposit-return system for PET, strengthening surveillance, aligning fiscal incentives with recycling, and professionalizing municipal waste collection.

Introduction

Uganda has established a strong legal foundation for managing plastic waste (Muheirwe et al., 2023). The National Environment Act (2019) and the Waste Management Regulations (2020) ban thin plastic carrier bags (below 30 microns) and embed Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) frameworks to hold producers accountable for plastic waste (Lubogo, 2024). These laws were intended to promote sustainable waste management and protect ecosystems, human health, and water resources. Yet, despite express

legal mandates, enforcement has remained weak and inconsistent. The ban on plastic carrier bags has frequently been undermined by poor implementation, court injunctions, and limited monitoring at the local level (NEMA, 2022).

In Kampala alone, plastic waste management remains chaotic, contributing to clogged drainage systems, breeding sites for disease vectors, flooding, and pollution of urban wetlands (Mensah, 2024). Estimates suggest Uganda generates around 600 metric tons of plastic waste every day, but less than half of this waste is properly collected and processed (New Vision, 2025). This implementation gap has resulted in a paradox where Uganda's plastic policy is progressive on paper but regressive in practice. Despite some awareness campaigns and periodic enforcement operations, the widespread leakage of plastic waste into the environment persists (Vanapalli et al., 2021). The plastic pollution crisis reflects deeper institutional failures, unclear mandates, and chronic underinvestment in waste infrastructure (Vandenberg, 2024). This situation is a major obstacle to advancing Uganda's transition toward a circular economy and poses risks of long-term environmental degradation, making it imperative to close the gap between policy and practice through stronger compliance, adequate resource allocation, and robust accountability mechanisms (Kaur et al., 2024).

Policy options

- The National Environment Act (2019) formally banned thin plastic carrier bags, introduced EPR provisions for plastic producers, and empowered the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) to enforce plastic standards (Ainebyoona, 2024).
- NEMA has implemented awareness campaigns, policy dialogues, and enforcement operations, including widespread seizures and destruction of banned plastic bags (NEMA, 2022).
- Civil society organizations have partnered in campaigns aimed at litter reduction and public sensitization, while Nairobi-based activists, including Leah Namugerwa, have mobilized youth movements to push for enforcement of the ban (Dauvergne, 2023).
- However, these efforts have not translated into systemic progress. Inconsistent enforcement remains a major barrier, as courts have issued temporary injunctions halting the plastic carrier bag ban, and enforcement often targets downstream actors such as vendors rather than upstream producers.
- Monitoring and border controls are weak, allowing non-compliant and imported plastics to bypass regulatory scrutiny (New Vision, 2025). The EPR mandates remain largely theoretical, as few manufacturers have established functional recycling or take-back systems.
- Data on plastic collection and recycling is fragmented, but one industry estimate suggests that only around 6% of the plastic waste generated in the country is collected and recycled (Ainebyoona, 2024), leaving the vast majority unaccounted for.
- Initiatives such as community-based PET collection projects have shown promise; for example, the CEPCOM Women's PET recycling project collects and bales around 60,000 kilograms of PET monthly and provides livelihood opportunities for local women (CEPCOM, 2024). Nonetheless, such projects remain limited in scale and lack integration with national systems. Despite legal and policy frameworks, Uganda's plastic pollution response remains reactive, localized, and under-resourced, without a robust system for reducing plastic leakage at scale.

Actions needed at the national (systems) level

1. Operationalize extended producer responsibility (EPR)
 - (a) The National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) should create a mandatory producer registry and require annual reporting on plastic recovery.
 - (b) Producers and importers should meet phased recovery targets through accredited Producer Responsibility Organizations (PROs).
 - (c) Compliance should be monitored by both NEMA and the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS), with penalties for non-compliance.
2. Introduce a phased deposit–return system for PET bottles
 - (a) The Ministry of Trade and Industry, in collaboration with beverage companies, should launch a pilot in Kampala and progressively expand to regional municipalities.
 - (b) A refund mechanism should be established to encourage consumers to return bottles, targeting an 80% collection rate within three years.
 - (c) Private waste collection firms should be integrated into the system to enhance efficiency and inclusivity.

Actions needed at the local government level

3. Strengthen Municipal Waste Management Systems
 - (a) Local governments should sign performance-based contracts with private operators to improve collection, sorting, and recycling of plastics.
 - (b) The Ministry of Finance should allocate a ring-fenced budget line for urban solid waste management, ensuring predictable financing.
 - (c) Partnerships with community organizations and informal waste pickers should be formalized to improve service delivery and livelihoods.

Actions needed at the regulatory and fiscal level

4. Align policies and incentives with circular economy goals

(a) Uganda Revenue Authority and UNBS should strengthen customs and border inspections to block banned and substandard plastics.

(b) Eco-modulated fees should be introduced to discourage non-recyclable plastics, while levies on virgin plastics should encourage recycled alternatives.

(c) The Ministry of Education and NEMA should lead nationwide awareness and school-based programs to promote behavioural change on plastic use and disposal.

Conclusion

Uganda's plastic management framework is already in place, but weak enforcement continues to undermine its effectiveness. In order to reduce plastic leakage, protect ecosystems, and create green jobs, the country must commit to fully implementing Extended Producer Responsibility, adopting a deposit-return system, aligning fiscal incentives with recycling, and strengthening municipal delivery. With such reforms, Uganda can transform its current paradox into a model of effective environmental governance and circular economy leadership.

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CONCLUSION

Uganda has made significant strides in establishing comprehensive legal and policy frameworks for environmental management and climate action. However, the enduring challenge remains weak implementation, inadequate enforcement, and limited institutional capacity. To advance environmental resilience, the country must translate its policies into coordinated, adequately funded, and accountable action across all sectors. A decisive shift from policy commitment to practical implementation will determine Uganda's ability to protect its natural assets, safeguard public health, and secure a climate-resilient future for generations to come.

TO ADVANCE ENVIRONMENTAL
RESILIENCE, THE COUNTRY MUST
TRANSLATE ITS POLICIES INTO
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THEME 3

Population Health and Social Well-being

POPULATION HEALTH & SOCIAL WELL-BEING

This collection of policy briefs, under the theme 'Population Health and Social Well-being,' underscores the key challenges affecting the quality of life of people in Uganda. The distinct but interconnected dimensions of social well-being — menstrual health, emergency preparedness, mental health, and timely evidence-based planning — are examined below to understand the need for integrated, inclusive, and well-funded public health systems. By strengthening preventive care, improving access to essential services, and enhancing timely, data-driven decision-making, Uganda can advance its commitments to universal health coverage and the global Sustainable Development Agenda.

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BY STRENGTHENING PREVENTIVE CARE, IMPROVING ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES, AND ENHANCING TIMELY, DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING, UGANDA CAN ADVANCE ITS COMMITMENTS TO UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE AND THE GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA.

CLOSING UGANDA'S MENSTRUAL HEALTH GAP WITH FREE SANITARY PADS IN SCHOOLS



**Nancy
Ongom
Akello**

PROFILE Nancy Akello Ongom, is a Humanitarian and youth activist from Northern Uganda. She currently works as the Protection Network Coordinator with ActionAid International (IHART) coordinating the ActionAid Regional Protection Networks in Africa with 16 countries and Asia with 12 countries. She holds Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from Uganda Christian University, Mukono. Nancy is deeply committed to Human Rights and advocating for meaningful youth participation and engagement. Nancy loves to write about issues affecting young people and is passionate about menstrual health.

Nancy has previously volunteered with youth-led organizations like Restless Development and served as a global youth Compact champion with the Compact. She is an Alumna of the YALI RLC Regional Leadership Program and also served in the Teach for Uganda fellowship, where she worked in an underserved rural school in Mayuge. She was also one of the 6 youth contributors who contributed to the development of the Young Humanitarian Handbook which has just been launched this October 2024.

Executive Summary

In Uganda, period poverty remains one of the most persistent yet under-addressed barriers to girls' education, with thousands of schoolgirls missing class or dropping out altogether because they lack access to affordable and reliable sanitary products. Research shows that up to 64% of girls miss school during menstruation, while only 22% have reliable access to sanitary pads (Auditor General, 2024; Joy for Children, 2024). The absence of a dedicated national menstrual health policy has left interventions fragmented, relying mostly on NGOs and ad-hoc government actions. Period poverty fuels absenteeism, school dropouts, early marriages, and risky coping mechanisms such as transactional sex for pads, making it hard for Uganda to achieve its education and gender equality goals.

This brief calls for a national policy on free sanitary pads in schools, backed by improved WASH infrastructure, scaling up local pad production, and awareness campaigns. The above measures would reduce absenteeism, support gender equality, and align Uganda with global best practices from countries like Scotland, New Zealand, and Wales.

Introduction

Menstrual health is a fundamental but often overlooked dimension of public health, education, and gender equality. Globally, an estimated 500 million women and girls lack access to adequate menstrual products (World Bank, 2025).

In Uganda, this challenge manifests as persistent period poverty, which undermines girls' rights, restricts educational opportunities, and transforms a natural biological process into a driver of exclusion.

Nearly half of adolescent girls miss between one and three days of school each month due to menstruation (Miiró et al., 2018). The Office of the Auditor General (2024) reported that 64% of female learners had missed school because of inadequate sanitary products and poor WASH facilities. Joy for Children (2024) further revealed that only 22% of girls have consistent access to pads. These barriers not only cause absenteeism but also contribute to higher dropout rates, weaker academic performance, and entrenched gender disparities in education.

While Uganda has various education and health frameworks that indirectly reference menstrual hygiene, interventions remain fragmented and largely dependent on NGOs and short-term projects. The President's 2016 pledge to provide free pads has never been implemented, leaving many girls to rely on unsafe alternatives such as old clothes, newspapers, or banana fibers (Mugume, 2021). These practices expose girls to infections and long-term reproductive health risks.

The consequences extend beyond health. Studies show that school absenteeism rises to 28% during menstruation, compared to just 7% on other days (Miiró et al., 2018). Nearly one in four girls between the ages of 12 and 18 drops out of school soon after menarche (Leah, 2019). Period poverty also fuels early marriages and transactional sex,

leaving girls vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and teenage pregnancy.

These realities undermine Uganda's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 on health, SDG 4 on education, and SDG 5 on gender equality. Without deliberate government action, Uganda risks sacrificing the potential of an entire generation of girls to preventable barriers rooted in menstrual health. A coordinated national policy is urgently needed to secure dignity, equity, and educational opportunity for all.

Policy options

Dependence on existing education and health frameworks

- Uganda has frameworks such as the School Health Policy (2008), the Gender in Education Sector Policy (2016), and the National Sexuality Education Framework (2018). These documents encourage safe learning environments, promote gender equality, and address health and sanitation issues in schools. Their strength is that they already provide an institutional base for integrating menstrual health. However, they do not explicitly mention sanitary pads, nor do they create a budget line for menstrual health management (Ninsiima et al., 2020). This policy silence means that implementation remains weak, uncoordinated, and unable to meet the scale of need.

NGO- and Donor-led interventions.

- Non-governmental organizations and donor projects have piloted innovative solutions such as reusable pad distribution, menstrual education, and WASH improvements (Schmitt et al., 2021). These interventions have demonstrated that community-based approaches can improve girls' school attendance and reduce stigma (Wynne, 2022). Yet, the gap lies in their sustainability and reach. Because they depend on external funding, they cover only selected districts and collapse when projects end. Reliance on this approach creates inequity, leaving the majority of schoolgirls unsupported.

Political commitments without institutionalization

- In 2016, the President pledged to provide free sanitary pads to all schoolgirls, a promise that raised public expectations. However, in the

absence of legislation, dedicated funding, or implementation guidelines, this pledge has not materialized (Crawford & Waldman, 2020). The gap here is the lack of institutional commitment: without a formal policy framework, political statements remain rhetorical and fail to deliver results. This undermines public trust and leaves girls in the same vulnerable position.

Establishing a dedicated integrated National Policy

- A comprehensive national policy would mandate the provision of free sanitary pads in schools, backed by upgraded WASH infrastructure, integration of menstrual health into education and health policies, and sustainable financing (Sommer et al., 2017). This approach addresses the gaps in existing frameworks by creating accountability, ensuring equitable access, and reducing fragmentation. Although resource-intensive and requiring cross-ministerial coordination, international experience from Scotland, New Zealand, and Wales shows that such policies are both feasible and transformative, significantly reducing absenteeism and promoting gender equality (Coles et al., 2014).

The current mix of policies, NGO projects, and unfulfilled political promises has left menstrual health management in Uganda fragmented, inequitable, and unsustainable. These gaps justify the need for a dedicated, integrated national policy as the only viable pathway to addressing period poverty at scale.

Policy Recommendations

- Introduce a National Policy on free Sanitary pads in schools. The Government of Uganda through the Members of Parliament and the Ministry of Education and Sports should introduce a new National policy mandating schools to provide free pads for all primary and secondary school girls.
- Upgrade WASH infrastructure in schools. The Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) should allocate sufficient budgetary resources to ensure that all schools, starting with government-aided institutions, are equipped with clean, private toilets, reliable access to water, disposal bins, and soap. These improvements are essential to support menstrual hygiene management and a dignified learning environment for all learners.

- Support and scale up local reusable sanitary pads production. The Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives and the Ministry of Education and Sports, should partner with local social enterprises such as AFRIPads to decentralize production and distribution of reusable sanitary pads. This approach would reduce costs, and improve access to affordable menstrual products for school-going girls, especially in rural areas.
- Launch National awareness campaigns. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, should lead nationwide awareness campaigns using mass media, schools, and community platforms. These campaigns should promote menstrual health education, engage boys and men, challenge harmful cultural norms, and encourage open dialogue to destigmatize menstruation. The campaigns should also demonstrate the government's commitment to ending period poverty and ensuring dignity for all girls and women.

Conclusion

A national policy on free sanitary pads in schools would significantly reduce absenteeism and dropout among girls, supporting Uganda's commitments under SDGs 3 (Health), 4 (Education), and 5 (Gender Equality). Improved menstrual health management reduces vulnerability to early marriages and unsafe practices such as transactional sex for pads. International examples from Scotland, New Zealand, Wales, and Northern Ireland prove the feasibility and positive impact of such policies. Uganda must now act to ensure dignity, equality, and brighter futures for its girls.

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STRENGTHENING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS WITH MANDATORY FIRST AID TRAINING IN UGANDA



PROFILE Nantongo Bashira is a proactive young woman leader passionate about girl child education, youth empowerment and engagement in global issues. She currently works as a Part-time lecturer at Islamic university in Uganda, females' campus. She holds a Masters' degree in education management and administration from Islamic university in Uganda. Bashira has been exposed to youth networks, politics and civic spaces. Bashira is a Guild president emeritus of Islamic university in Uganda, females' campus. She is also a founder of "TALK TO BASHIRA" initiative which nurtures young people in communities and schools through talks that motivate, guide, build their capacities and reshape their future.

Nantongo Bashira

Executive Summary

Uganda continues to face high rates of preventable deaths and severe injuries, with road traffic accidents as the leading cause of hospital admissions and fatalities. The 2023/2024 Uganda Health Sector Performance Report shows that weak pre-hospital care, very few advanced ambulances, and low first aid knowledge among citizens have placed enormous strain on the health system. Most ambulances are concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural communities at greater risk, while the lack of widespread first aid skills mean victims often miss the critical golden hour when timely care can save lives.

This policy brief recommends a national strategy for mandatory first aid training to empower citizens as immediate responders. The approach includes integrating first aid into school curricula, requiring certification for driving licenses, strengthening workplace safety standards, and creating a National First Aid Training Fund for sustainability. Learning from global best practices in Europe, Asia, and Africa, Uganda can build a culture of readiness that reduces fatalities, improves survival rates, lowers healthcare costs, and strengthens community resilience.

Introduction

Uganda is facing a growing crisis of preventable injuries and medical emergencies, which now rival common diseases as leading causes of death (Kaawa-Mafigiri et al., 2021). Road traffic accidents are the most severe contributor, claiming thousands of lives and overwhelming hospitals every year (Ahmed et al., 2023). In 2024

alone, more than 25,000 crashes were recorded, resulting in over 25,000 injuries and 4,400 deaths (Rojek et al., 2024). These figures illustrate the scale of the problem and its deep impact on families, communities, and the country's development.

The challenge is worsened by Uganda's weak emergency care system. By 2023, the entire country had only four advanced ambulances, most stationed in Kampala (Opiro et al., 2024). Rural areas depend on ordinary vehicles or even police trucks to transport victims, often without trained medical staff. This not only delays treatment but also increases the risk of long-term disability or death. As a result, many patients miss the golden hour the critical first hour after an injury when rapid care could save lives (Newgard et al., 2015).

Other emergencies, including convulsions, drowning, fractures, shock, and gender-based violence injuries, further increase the burden. With little knowledge of basic first aid, most citizens are unable to act when such crises occur. This leaves hospitals to manage preventable complications, straining an already overstretched health system (Mahmoudjanlou et al., 2024).

The root of the problem is not only the shortage of ambulances or health workers but also the absence of a national program to equip citizens with first aid skills (Abdul-kadir, 2015). In countries where first aid training is mandatory in schools, workplaces, and driving license systems, survival rates are significantly higher because bystanders can intervene before professionals arrive (Okandeji-Barry, 2024). In Uganda, fear, lack of knowledge, and absence of legal protection often leave people powerless in emergencies. The outcome is needless deaths, higher healthcare costs, and growing inequality between urban and rural areas.

Uganda therefore needs a shift in approach. Expanding ambulances alone will not solve the problem; the country must empower its people to become first responders. Training citizens in basic life-saving skills would not only reduce deaths but also ease the burden on hospitals and strengthen community resilience in the face of emergencies.

Policy options

- Uganda has made some progress in strengthening emergency response and first aid, but current efforts remain fragmented and limited in scope. The Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) runs voluntary first aid trainings at different levels, including refresher courses and road safety skills (Opiro et al., 2024). While these programs have helped some communities, they reach only a small portion of the population, rely heavily on donor funding, and lack consistent follow-up. As a result, the majority of Ugandans still lack basic first aid knowledge and cannot act effectively during emergencies. Recently, URCS also introduced a blended learning app to expand access, but challenges such as the cost of practical sessions and limited monitoring of long-term skills retention reduce its impact (Friedman, 2019).
- The Ministry of Health has introduced an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) policy and taken steps to standardize ambulances and improve call and dispatch systems (Ningwa et al., 2020). However, Uganda still faces a shortage of ambulances, poor distribution across regions, and low public awareness of emergency numbers. Rural areas in particular remain underserved, meaning many victims do not get timely help. These system-level reforms are important, but without community-based first aid, many emergencies go unmanaged before ambulances arrive.
- There have also been efforts to reintroduce first aid into school curricula. While the Ministry of Health has proposed restoring practical lessons, most schools currently offer only limited theoretical instruction, with little hands-on practice. This is partly due to a lack of resources and trained instructors. Reviving first aid education in schools will require a systematic framework that provides curriculum guidance, teacher training, and adequate resources.
- Overall, Uganda's current policies demonstrate political will but fall short in reach,

sustainability, and enforcement. They tend to be voluntary, urban-focused, and unevenly implemented. This leaves gaps in citizen preparedness, particularly in rural areas where emergencies are most common and professional help is least available. These weaknesses highlight the urgent need for a mandatory, nationwide first aid training strategy that is integrated into schools, workplaces, and driving license systems, supported by clear standards, refresher training, and sustainable funding.

Recommendations

- Mandate first aid certification for driving licenses. Revise traffic laws so that all new and renewing drivers, including boda boda riders, must complete a certified first aid course. Uganda already has the Uganda Driver Licensing System and accredited trainers (e.g., Uganda Red Cross Society, St. John Ambulance) to deliver this training.
- Integrate practical first aid into the national curriculum. The Ministry of Education and Sports should embed standardized, age-appropriate first aid lessons in schools and universities. Since a national curriculum framework already exists, this would only require strengthening practical lessons and training teachers. The government should mandate first aid training in all learning institutions and provide resources to teachers.
- Strengthen workplace first aid regulations. Enforce the Occupational Safety and Health Act (2006) by requiring workplaces, especially in high-risk industries such as transport, construction, and manufacturing, to have certified first aiders and updated kits. Monitoring can be done through existing labour inspections.
- Launch a national public awareness campaign. Use radio, television, and social media to spread knowledge about first aid and emergency response. Uganda's strong culture of community radio makes this approach cost-effective and far-reaching, especially in rural areas.
- Create a national first aid training fund. Establish a fund supported by government allocations, donor contributions, and small levies on driving license fees or vehicle insurance. This model is already used in other health and road safety programs.

Conclusion

Uganda's weak emergency preparedness continues to cause preventable deaths and overwhelm families, communities, and the health system. A clear solution lies in adopting mandatory first aid training, which would shift the country from a reactive to a proactive response model. Training citizens as first responders would save lives, reduce complications, and ease pressure on hospitals, while fostering a culture of safety and resilience.

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OPERATIONALIZING UGANDA'S MENTAL HEALTH ACT 2018: INTEGRATING MENTAL HEALTH INTO PRIMARY HEALTHCARE



**Uwera
Juliet**

PROFILE Uwera Juliet is a dedicated academic specializing in regional integration, focusing on the intersection of law and public policy. She holds a Bachelor of Laws degree from Uganda Christian University, a Post Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice from Law Development Centre and a Master of Laws (LL.M) in Regional Integration and East African Community Law from the University of Dar es Salaam. As a law lecturer, she has dedicated her career to educating the next generation of leaders on the complexities of public policy and its role in fostering regional stability and development. This experience has deepened her appreciation for the importance of effective public policy in addressing societal challenges and promoting collective well-being. In the classroom, she emphasizes the critical relationship between law and public policy, encouraging students to think critically about how legal principles can be applied to real-world issues. Through research and teaching, she aims to inspire students and communities to recognize the power of public policy in shaping equitable and sustainable futures, reinforcing their belief that informed citizens are essential for effective governance and social progress.

Executive Summary

Uganda faces a worsening mental health crisis, with nearly one in three citizens experiencing conditions such as depression, anxiety, or substance use disorders (Opio, 2020). Despite the enactment of the Mental Health Act in 2018, its implementation has been minimal. Services remain highly centralized at Butabika National Referral Hospital, and rural communities are left without access to care. The consequences of inaction are grave, including escalating health costs, deepening social inequality, and reduced national productivity.

This policy brief examines the scale of Uganda's mental health burden, critiques the weaknesses in the current system, and considers potential policy responses. Undertaking policy reforms in integrating mental health services into primary healthcare offers the most sustainable and equitable solution. The recommended actions include full operationalization of the Mental Health Act 2018, mainstreaming mental health at primary care level, expanding the workforce, increasing funding, investing in community and school-based programs, and tightening regulation on substance use.

Introduction

Mental health disorders have become one of the leading public health challenges in Uganda, with more than 14 million people currently

affected (Strong Minds, 2023). Depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance misuse are common, particularly among youth and conflict-affected groups (Bapolisi et al., 2020). Untreated mental illness contributes to rising suicide rates, poor school performance, unemployment, and lost economic productivity. While the Mental Health Act of 2018 established a legal framework for decentralizing care and safeguarding the rights of patients, its provisions remain largely unimplemented (Atim, 2023; Republic of Uganda, 2018). Six years after its passage, services are still heavily concentrated in urban areas, funding remains inadequate, and stigma continues to prevent many people from seeking help.

In addition Uganda's mental health burden is among the highest in Africa, and the problem is worsening (Opio et al., 2022). The Ministry of Health reported a 25 percent increase in cases over the last four years, with adolescents and young adults particularly vulnerable (Ministry of Health, 2024). Depression affects nearly one in five teenagers, while substance abuse, especially alcohol consumption, exacerbates the crisis. Uganda has one of the highest per capita rates of alcohol use in the region, a factor strongly linked to mental health problems (Nalwadda et al., 2018).

Despite this scale, mental health continues to receive less than one percent of the national health budget, far below the five percent recommended by the World Health Organization (Ssebunnya, 2017). Most resources are directed to

Butabika National Referral Hospital, which remains overcrowded and under-resourced (Moses et al., 2024). With only about 53 psychiatrists serving more than 45 million people, Uganda's mental health workforce is critically inadequate, and rural populations are almost entirely excluded from care (Dwanyen et al., 2024). Stigma and cultural perceptions further reduce willingness to seek treatment, leaving millions without support.

The implications are wide-ranging. Untreated mental illness undermines human capital development, creates financial burdens for families, and weakens the country's ability to achieve its national development goals. Unless policymakers act urgently, Uganda will face increasing costs, lower productivity, and widening health inequalities.

Policy options

- Uganda's Mental Health Act of 2018 was a landmark step that established a legal framework for protecting patient rights, decentralizing services, and integrating mental health into general healthcare (Eaton, 2024). On paper, the Act is progressive, but implementation has been weak. The Mental Health Advisory Board remains non-functional, district mental health units have not been activated, and frontline health workers often lack the training to diagnose or manage mental health conditions. As a result, the system continues to depend heavily on Butabika Hospital and a few regional psychiatric units, reinforcing inequities between urban and rural areas (Sharapova, 2024). Access is further constrained by stigma, poor supply of psychotropic medicines in lower-level facilities, and the exclusion of mental health from the National Health Insurance Scheme (Eaton, 2024). These gaps highlight the need to move beyond the current framework and pursue more practical, inclusive policy options.
- Several alternatives can be considered. The first is maintaining the status quo, which avoids immediate financial costs but would allow the crisis to deepen, increasing long-term expenditures and placing further strain on the health system. The second is strengthening specialized facilities, such as Butabika and regional psychiatric units. While this could improve care for severe cases, it would reinforce centralization, limit access for rural communities, and require large investments in infrastructure and specialized personnel (Sharapova, 2024). The third is integrating

mental health into primary healthcare, which offers the most sustainable and equitable solution. This involves training primary healthcare workers to recognize and manage common mental disorders, ensuring essential medicines are available at Health Centres III and IV, and incorporating mental health indicators into the national health information system. Although this requires upfront investments in training and supplies, evidence from other low- and middle-income countries shows that integration is cost-effective, expands access significantly, and reduces stigma (Eaton, 2024).

- Taken together, the analysis reveals that while Uganda has a solid legal foundation, poor implementation and centralization undermine its impact. Without reform, inequities will persist, and the mental health burden will rise further. Integration into primary healthcare emerges as the most viable and cost-effective pathway to improve access, equity, and sustainability.

Policy Recommendations

- Uganda should urgently operationalize the Mental Health Act 2018 by establishing the Mental Health Advisory Board, activating district-level units, and ensuring enforcement of patient rights in line with international standards. Mental health must be systematically integrated into primary healthcare so that frontline health workers are trained to identify and manage common conditions, psychotropic medicines are consistently stocked, and monitoring systems track progress.
- The mental health workforce should be expanded through increased training programs in psychiatry, psychology, and psychiatric nursing, supported by scholarships and rural deployment incentives by the Ministry of Health. Task-shifting to community health workers should be institutionalized to extend coverage in underserved regions.
- Funding should be increased to at least five percent of the national health budget, and mental health services must be included in the National Health Insurance Scheme to reduce financial barriers by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

- Community and school-based interventions should be scaled up to support young people, while stigma reduction campaigns should be rolled out nationwide to encourage help-seeking and change public perceptions by both civil society organisations and concerned Government Agencies. The government should also invest in digital health innovations, such as teletherapy platforms and mobile applications, to expand access to counselling and support in remote areas.
- Strict regulation of alcohol and cannabis use is needed, including age restrictions, enforcement of sales limits, and public health campaigns on the risks of substance misuse. Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Health and other relevant Government entities should collaborate to support young people become more productive and avoid resorting to drug and alcohol abuse as a means of dealing with their mental health.

Conclusion

The way Uganda responds to its mental health crisis will determine the wellbeing of its citizens, the productivity of its workforce, and the country's overall development trajectory. In order to achieve equitable access to quality care and safeguard human capital, the provisions of the Mental Health Act 2018 should be fully implemented, with mental health integrated into primary healthcare. This requires commitment from government, communities, and development partners to increase funding, expand human resources, and scale up community-based and digital interventions. Only through such reforms can Uganda build a resilient, inclusive health system that secures long-term social and economic stability.

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IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF POPULATION-CENSUS DATA COLLECTION FOR ENHANCED EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING IN UGANDA



**Ritah
Nakato
Nayiga**

PROFILE Ritah Nakato Nayiga is a statistician with training in economics and is passionate about data analysis. She currently works as a graduate trainee in data analytics with Enermech Uganda Limited. She holds a Bachelors Degree in Economics and Statistics from Kyambogo University and is currently pursuing a certification in Foundation and Advanced data and business analytics from Regenesys Business School. She has ably managed and led a data collection team, has interest in working with both the private and governments sectors to grow her career, strengthen her skill set and have an impact in these spaces. She strongly values integrity, authenticity and hard work. Her goal is to make a significant, transformative impact on the economy and careers of numerous individuals, through strategic leadership and collaborative effort.

Executive Summary

Population censuses are the foundation of planning, budgeting, and policy-making. They provide the demographic data needed to allocate resources fairly across health, education, and infrastructure, and to monitor progress toward Uganda Vision 2040 and the Sustainable Development Goals (UBOS, 2024). Uganda's 2024 National Population and Housing Census, the country's first fully digital census, revealed major weaknesses. Data collection was disrupted by technical failures of tablets, poor internet connectivity, and limited training of enumerators. Recruitment processes were marked by irregularities, including nepotism, while errors in reporting ethnicity and religion further damaged confidence in the results (Daily Monitor, 2024; Nile Post, 2024; New Vision, 2024). These shortcomings undermined both data quality and public trust in national statistics. This policy brief calls for strengthening existing systems by making recruitment more transparent, improving training, reinforcing digital data collection with reliable backups, and enhancing community oversight. These actions are essential for ensuring credible and inclusive census data to guide Uganda's development priorities.

Introduction

Population censuses are widely recognized as the foundation of evidence-based planning and decision-making. They generate essential data

that guide how governments allocate resources for health, education, housing, and infrastructure, and they provide benchmarks for measuring progress toward national and international goals, including Uganda Vision 2040 and the Sustainable Development Goals (UBOS, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Uganda has conducted national censuses since 1911, and each has provided a clearer picture of demographic growth, social change, and economic needs. Yet the usefulness of census data depends heavily on its accuracy, completeness, and the level of public trust in the process. Without these, the census cannot serve its purpose of guiding national development.

The 2024 census, Uganda's 11th and the first to rely fully on digital enumeration Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) Tablets, was expected to strengthen the reliability of demographic data. However, it instead exposed serious weaknesses that undermined both the quality of results and the credibility of Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) as the institution responsible for national statistics. The use of malfunctioning tablets, unreliable internet connectivity, and poorly prepared backup systems disrupted data collection, especially in rural areas where network challenges are common (Daily Monitor, 2024). Enumerators were insufficiently trained, receiving only a short orientation that did not adequately cover the use of digital tools, ethical considerations, or culturally sensitive engagement with local communities. This lack of preparation limited their effectiveness and contributed to errors in data collection (Nile Post, 2025).

Recruitment further weakened the credibility of the process with reports of nepotism and

favouritism in the selection of enumerators reduced transparency and inclusiveness, while delayed payments and poor working conditions discouraged many who had been hired to carry out the work (SoftPower Uganda, 2025). These frustrations were compounded when UBOS admitted to errors in reporting population figures by ethnic and religious groups, which deepened public skepticism and raised doubts about the overall credibility of the census (Nile Post, 2024; New Vision, 2024). Such mistrust not only threatens civic participation in future censuses but also undermines the legitimacy of official statistics used for political representation and development planning.

These challenges come at a critical time for Uganda, with its population reaching 45.9 million in 2024 and growing at nearly 3 percent annually (UBOS, 2024). Reliable and trusted data is urgently needed to plan for a youthful population, provide services such as schools and hospitals, and manage limited resources effectively. Unless reforms are introduced to address recruitment, training, technology, and oversight gaps, future censuses may face the same problems, making it difficult for Uganda to achieve its national development goals and weakening confidence in the country's statistical systems.

Policy options

- Uganda has several frameworks and institutions that guide the conduct of population censuses. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) Act of 1998 gives UBOS the legal authority to organize censuses and sets standards for data collection and management (UBOS, 2024). The National Development Plan (NDP IV) and Uganda Vision 2040 emphasize the importance of accurate data for planning and budgeting (NPA, 2007). In addition, the 2024 census was supported by structures such as the National Census Council and the Census Steering Committee, which were tasked with overseeing implementation and mobilization. The government also committed nearly full financial support for the 2024 census, reducing reliance on donors and demonstrating political will (UBOS, 2024).
- However, despite these frameworks, the 2024 census revealed serious gaps in implementation. The UBOS did not provide strong safeguards against irregular recruitment or nepotism. As a result, many enumerators were hired through patronage rather than merit, undermining professionalism and inclusiveness (Daily Monitor, 2024).
- The National Development Plan and Vision 2040 highlight the role of statistics in development (World Bank, 2023), but allocate limited resources for strengthening human capacity, training, and technology. Funding for the 2024 census was adequate in size, but little was directed toward improving training programs, developing backup systems, or building community trust. This created a gap between the ambitions of policy and the realities of implementation.
- The 2024 census also exposed the risks of over-reliance on digital data collection without proper safeguards. While modernization was a key objective, the lack of paper-based backups in areas with weak internet connectivity meant that technical failures translated into data losses and delays (Daily Monitor, 2024). UBOS did not provide for hybrid approaches that could combine digital tools with manual systems, leaving the census vulnerable to disruption.
- Finally, although UBOS has policies on dissemination of data, less attention has been given to building public trust in statistics. Errors in reporting ethnicity and religion in the 2024 census were not only technical issues but also political and social concerns, yet the frameworks in place did not anticipate strategies for community engagement, rapid correction, or transparent communication (Nile Post, 2024; New Vision, 2024). This gap has left citizens doubts about the accuracy of official data, which may undermine cooperation in future censuses. Therefore, this requires reforms to ensure that future censuses are credible, inclusive, and effective data collection and dissemination.

Policy Recommendations

- Strengthen transparency in recruitment processes. Although UBOS already has recruitment systems in place, they should be made more transparent and accountable. This can be achieved by publishing clear criteria for selection, and conducting independent audits
- Expand and deepen training programs. Training of enumerators should go beyond the current short sessions of 9 days. UBOS should strengthen training by extending its duration, introducing practical simulations, and incorporating modules on ethics, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement. This will ensure enumerators are better prepared for fieldwork.

- Improve the reliability of hybrid data collection systems. While Uganda has adopted digital census methods, these need to be strengthened with reliable backup systems. UBOS should institutionalize paper-based tools in hard-to-reach areas, invest in offline-compatible software, and maintain technical support teams to quickly resolve device failures.
- Enhance community oversight and trust-building mechanisms. UBOS already engages communities during census activities, but this should be strengthened by forming permanent district-level oversight committees that include civil society, local leaders, and the media.

Conclusion

Uganda's 2024 census highlighted serious weaknesses in recruitment, training, technology, and community engagement, which threaten the credibility of national statistics. Strengthening existing systems by making recruitment more transparent, improving training, reinforcing hybrid data collection, and enhancing community oversight will restore trust and ensure accurate, inclusive, and timely census data. Reliable statistics are essential for fair resource allocation, effective planning, and achieving Uganda's national development goals.

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CONCLUSION

Enhancing population health and social well-being requires a holistic and coordinated approach that tackles both immediate service gaps and underlying systemic weaknesses. The briefs underscore that effective health policy must extend beyond clinical care to encompass education, social protection, gender equity, and robust emergency systems. To achieve this, stronger institutional frameworks, increased investment, and improved implementation of existing laws and policies must be implemented. Achieving this vision will depend on sustained political will, cross-sectoral collaboration, and a firm commitment to timely, evidence-based policy planning and implementation.

**EFFECTIVE HEALTH POLICY MUST
EXTEND BEYOND CLINICAL CARE TO
ENCOMPASS EDUCATION, SOCIAL
PROTECTION, GENDER EQUITY, AND
ROBUST EMERGENCY SYSTEMS.**



THEME 4

The Digital Era



This theme examines the opportunities and challenges that are shaping Uganda's transition into a digitally driven society. As technology transforms governance, communication, and economic participation, new policy questions emerge concerning human rights, digital safety, and media freedom. These briefs collectively assess how Uganda can establish a secure, inclusive, and rights-based digital environment. They highlight the need to strengthen legal and institutional frameworks, promote gender-responsive digital safety, and align broadcasting regulation with constitutional and international standards to ensure that digital transformation advances both innovation and human dignity.

UGANDA CAN ESTABLISH A SECURE, INCLUSIVE, AND RIGHTS-BASED DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT BY STRENGTHENING LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS, PROMOTING GENDER-RESPONSIVE DIGITAL SAFETY, AND ALIGNING BROADCASTING REGULATION WITH CONSTITUTIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS.

STRENGTHENING THE RECOGNITION, PROTECTION, AND PROMOTION OF DIGITAL HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL ERA IN UGANDA



**Ruth
Aber**

PROFILE Ruth is a Lawyer by profession with an LLB Degree from the School of Law, Makerere University and a Diploma in Legal Practice from the Law Development Centre, Kampala, and is an Advocate of the High Court of Uganda. She currently works as a legal officer at Evidence and Methods Lab, a civic tech organization that collates public information on human rights, transparency and accountability.

Ruth is a committed, hardworking, self-driven, result-oriented and problem solving team player. An all-round person with team spirit, good organizational, communication and interpersonal skills.

Ruth was part of the Rule of Law Champions initiative organized by Center for Public interest law (CEPIL) in 2019 and was a program mentor in 2021. She is also a member of the Network of Public Interest Lawyers (NETPIL). Ruth is committed to promoting civic awareness and participation through the work she does.

Executive Summary

The digital age has opened powerful spaces for economic growth, education, innovation, access to information, and social interaction. In Uganda, however, digital platforms are increasingly associated with human rights violations, including cyber harassment, surveillance, fraud, offensive communication, and online gender-based violence.

Over the past three decades, Uganda has made notable progress in digital transformation through policies such as the National ICT Policy, establishment of the National Information Technology Authority, and laws including the Computer Misuse Act, 2011 and the Data Protection and Privacy Act, 2019. Internet use expanded rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic, but gaps in legal and policy frameworks continue to undermine the recognition, protection, and promotion of digital human rights. This brief provides policy direction and practical actions to reform laws, raise awareness of existing protections, and increase investment in the digital sector.

discourse into the digital sphere (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated digital adoption, with restrictions such as lockdowns and remote work making online platforms central to daily life (WHO, 2020). In Uganda, internet penetration grew rapidly during the pandemic, rising from 37.9% in January 2020 to 48.3% by January 2022 (UCC, 2022). Mobile money transactions increased by more than 20% in value in 2020 (GSMA, 2021), while e-commerce and online services such as Jumia and SafeBoda expanded their reach (World Bank, 2021). Despite these gains, the recognition and enforcement of digital human rights remain weak. Unlike physical rights enshrined in treaties, the Constitution, and national laws, digital rights are often selectively enforced. Rising abuses particularly OGBV, cyber fraud, and surveillance have not been matched with strong legal remedies or enforcement mechanisms. Women and girls are disproportionately affected. They face barriers to accessing digital opportunities and protecting themselves online due to economic inequality, cultural norms, and lower levels of digital literacy (UN Women, 2022).

Introduction

Globally, digital transformation has reshaped how people access services, trade, and exercise their rights. This has expanded the human rights

Policy Options

- Uganda is party to international and regional human rights instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Maputo Protocol among others. Domestically, Article 20 and Chapter Four of

the 1995 Constitution guarantee fundamental rights including freedom of expression, association, property, education, privacy, and liberty. While digital rights are not explicitly defined in law, many of these constitutional rights extend to the digital space.

- Since the introduction of the internet in 1993, Uganda has progressively developed ICT policies and institutions. The milestones include the National ICT Policy (2003), the Rural Communications Development Policy, the establishment of NITA-U (2009), the Electronic Transactions Act (2011), the Computer Misuse Act (2011), and the Data Protection and Privacy Act (2019), which created the Personal Data Protection Office. These frameworks collectively regulate online interactions and digital commerce.
- Despite this progress, major shortcomings persist in the protection of digital human rights in Uganda. One of the most pressing concerns is the overbroad criminalization of online expression. Provisions in the Computer Misuse Act and related laws have been used to suppress dissent and restrict freedom of expression, with Section 25 controversially applied in the prosecution of Dr. Stella Nyanzi. While intended to curb harmful speech, its selective enforcement has overshadowed other human rights concerns such as cyber fraud, hate speech, and bullying.
- Weak safeguards against surveillance also remain a challenge, as ICT and e-government instruments have prioritized service delivery and security but lack enforceable checks on state surveillance. Although the Data Protection and Privacy Act (2019) introduced important data protection obligations, oversight is still weak and vulnerable to executive overreach.
- Equally important is the issue of inadequate funding. Budget allocations to the digital sector continue to prioritize infrastructure, leaving limited resources for protecting digital human rights. In this gap, civil society organizations such as CIPESA, Defenders Protection Initiative, and Unwanted Witnesses have taken on much of the responsibility for advancing digital rights advocacy, though their efforts cannot substitute for comprehensive state-led investment and enforcement.

Policy Recommendations

- Reform and enforce digital rights legislation. The judiciary, Parliament, Uganda Law Reform Commission, and Ministry of ICT should review and amend ambiguous provisions of laws such as the Computer Misuse Act. Reforms should balance enforcement with rights protection and establish transparent procedures for state access to communications, backed by independent oversight.
- Bridge the awareness gap. Institutions like the Uganda Human Rights Commission, UCC, NITA-U, and ISPs should conduct nationwide campaigns to increase awareness of digital rights. Legal information should be simplified and disseminated through social media, community forums, and public service announcements. Empowering citizens with knowledge will promote safe and responsible digital engagement.
- Increase budgetary support. The Ministry of ICT should advocate for greater allocations from the Ministry of Finance. Although Ushs 245.9 billion was allocated for digital transformation in FY 2025/26, much of it targeted infrastructure rather than rights protection. Increased investment is needed to support oversight bodies, awareness campaigns, and capacity building.

Conclusion

Uganda has made important strides in developing ICT laws and institutions, but the recognition and enforcement of digital human rights remain inadequate. Legal reforms, stronger safeguards against surveillance, citizen awareness campaigns, and increased budgetary allocations are essential to bridge this gap. Through adopting these measures, Uganda can foster a secure and inclusive digital environment that protects rights, enhances trust, and empowers citizens to fully participate in the digital economy.

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ENHANCE DIGITAL SAFETY AMONG WOMEN FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN UGANDA



**Faith
Kwera**

PROFILE Kwera Faith is a dynamic leader and advocate for youth and girl-child empowerment in Uganda, with expertise in management and partnerships. She holds a degree in Human Resource Management from Makerere University Business School and is currently the Partnership Expert at Milima Security, contributing to the cybersecurity sector. As the founder of Quera Tickets, she is revolutionizing Uganda's digital ticketing by partnering with major sports organizations. Her brand, Quera Innovations, also provides branding, communication, and PR services.

Kwera's impact extends to Wikimedia Uganda, where she co-led initiatives like Wiki Gap, Wiki Loves Folklore, and Wiki for Boxing these initiatives help reduce the gender gap and promote cultural heritage in Uganda. A Tony Elumelu Foundation Hub Leader since 2019, she has supported entrepreneurship, participated in EAC election observations for member states, and contributed to policy discussions on labor, social protection, cybersecurity, and ICT inclusion for women. Kwera is a 2023 EAC Youth Fellow and recipient of the EAC Women Leadership and HiPipo Women in Fintech Awards.

Executive Summary

Uganda's rapid digital transformation has expanded opportunities for women in mobile money use, online markets, and e-services. However, many women especially in rural areas remain highly vulnerable to cyber threats such as phishing, impersonation, and mobile money scams. Limited digital literacy, weak enforcement of cyber laws, and urban-centered awareness programs deepen this risk. Research shows that 65% of women surveyed reported falling victim to digital fraud, with financial losses ranging from UGX 50,000 to 500,000 (Mashek, 2021). These attacks erode women's trust in digital platforms, limit their participation in the digital economy, and reinforce socio-economic exclusion. Current policies, including the Computer Misuse Act (2011) and the Data Protection and Privacy Act (2019), exist but are poorly enforced at the grassroots level.

This brief calls for gender-sensitive and community-driven directions and proposed measures including localized cybersecurity workshops, simplified reporting systems like toll-free Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) codes, integration of digital safety into empowerment programs, and stronger public-private partnerships. Through closing the cybersecurity awareness gap, Uganda can protect women, strengthen household resilience, and promote inclusive digital growth.

Introduction

As Uganda advances its digital agenda, women are increasingly engaging with mobile money services, e-commerce platforms, and digital communication channels (Museba et al., 2021). This digital shift has opened new opportunities for economic empowerment, access to services, and participation in the knowledge economy. However, it has also exposed women to growing risks of cybercrime (Khan, 2025). Threats such as phishing, impersonation, identity theft, and mobile money fraud have become widespread, with women particularly those in rural and underserved areas bearing the greatest vulnerability. Their lower levels of digital literacy, limited access to reliable information, and weaker institutional support systems make them easy targets for online exploitation (CERT-UG, 2023; Ministry of ICT, 2023).

Uganda's cybersecurity awareness gap is now recognized as a national challenge. Only 35% of Ugandans can identify phishing attempts, while more than 60% of cyber incidents are linked to social engineering attacks that exploit human behaviour rather than technical flaws (CERT-UG, 2023). Women often fall victim to scams involving fraudulent SMS prompts, mobile money reversals, or impersonation by trusted contacts. The consequences are far-reaching: victims lose savings critical for household welfare, withdraw from online platforms out of fear, and suffer reduced trust in digital services. These experiences erode confidence in technology and

stall progress toward Uganda's goals of financial inclusion and digital innovation (GSMA, 2022).

The economic and social costs of cyber insecurity are particularly damaging for women, who are often the primary managers of household finances and small-scale business operations. Financial losses ranging from UGX 50,000 to 500,000 can disrupt children's education, compromise food security, and weaken women's economic independence (Mashek, 2021). Beyond financial harm, the psychological toll of fear, anxiety, and withdrawal from digital platforms deepens the cycle of exclusion. If unaddressed, these risks will widen gender inequalities and undermine national development priorities.

Although Uganda has introduced progressive laws such as the Computer Misuse Act (2011) and the Data Protection and Privacy Act (2019), enforcement has been inconsistent and largely urban-centered (Chiumbu, 2024). Reporting mechanisms remain complex and intimidating, discouraging victims from seeking redress. Meanwhile, public awareness campaigns have disproportionately targeted urban populations, leaving rural women without access to crucial knowledge and tools for protection (NITA-U, 2022). This urban bias creates a widening gap where the very populations most at risk remain unprotected.

If urgent, gender-sensitive measures are not implemented, Uganda risks deepening its digital divide. Women will continue to experience economic and social harm, while the country's vision of an inclusive digital economy will remain incomplete. Bridging this gap is therefore not only a matter of safety but also a prerequisite for sustainable development and national resilience in the digital era (World Bank, 2022).

Policy Options

- Uganda has developed several legal and policy frameworks aimed at addressing cyber threats. The Computer Misuse Act (2011) and the Data Protection and Privacy Act (2019) provide important safeguards for digital users by criminalizing cybercrime and protecting personal data. However, these laws are not gender-responsive and fail to address the unique vulnerabilities faced by women, especially those in rural areas. Enforcement remains weak, with limited grassroots implementation. Reporting mechanisms are often complex, time-consuming, and inaccessible to women with low literacy levels.
- Awareness programs have been rolled out by both government agencies and NGOs to improve digital safety. For example, the Ministry of ICT and civil society organizations have launched training and sensitization campaigns (Chang & Coppel, 2020). While these efforts are commendable, they remain largely urban-centered and fail to reach women in rural and underserved communities who are at greatest risk. Many rural women have never attended a cybersecurity awareness session and continue to rely on informal networks for information, leaving them more vulnerable to scams and fraud (Ministry of ICT, 2023).
- Uganda also benefits from institutional support through agencies such as the Uganda Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-UG), which monitors and reports on cyber threats. While CERT-UG provides valuable technical oversight, its work does not adequately extend to community-level interventions. Victims often describe the reporting process as intimidating, bureaucratic, and stigmatizing, which discourages them from seeking help. This weak link between national institutions and local communities has contributed to underreporting of cyber incidents and continued victimization.
- At the community level, structures such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and women's groups present opportunities for grassroots awareness. These groups already serve as trusted platforms for financial literacy and empowerment, making them natural entry points for digital safety education (Barazzoni, 2022). However, they remain underutilized in current cybersecurity programs. Without deliberate partnerships and investment, their potential to act as local champions for digital safety will remain untapped.
- Overall, while Uganda has established a legal framework and initiated awareness programs, critical gaps in gender sensitivity, accessibility, and community-level outreach persist. These shortcomings highlight why new and strengthened policy actions are urgently needed.

Policy Recommendations

- The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), in partnership with telecom companies, NGOs, and women's organizations, should launch community-based digital safety workshops. These workshops would bring practical cybersecurity knowledge directly to women in both rural and urban settings, closing the awareness gap left by urban-centered campaigns.
- Computer Emergency Response Team – Uganda (CERT-UG), in collaboration with Uganda Police Force Cybercrime Unit, should introduce simplified reporting mechanisms, such as toll-free USSD codes. This would give women an easy, stigma-free channel to report cyber fraud without navigating complex procedures.
- Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) should leverage existing community structures such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and women's groups as local champions. By training these groups to act as digital safety ambassadors, knowledge can be spread and sustained within trusted community networks.
- Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, in collaboration with Parliamentary Legal and Policy Committees, should amend Uganda's cyber laws to include gender-responsive provisions and integrate mandatory digital safety training into schools and community programs. This would strengthen existing policies while ensuring that women's unique vulnerabilities are addressed.
- Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, together with Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), should allocate at least 10% of the national cybersecurity budget to rural-focused awareness campaigns and enact a Cybersecurity Awareness Bill mandating annual nationwide training with provisions for women's inclusion. These measures would guarantee sustained investment and a long-term commitment to inclusive digital safety.

Conclusion

Protecting women from cyber threats is not only a matter of safety but also a pathway to inclusive growth. Strengthening women's digital resilience will reduce financial losses, build trust in technology, and enhance participation in Uganda's digital economy. Through implementing community-driven, gender-sensitive, and well-enforced policies, Uganda can ensure that no woman is left behind in its digital transformation journey.

Author Note: The Data used are available on request from the author.

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BROADCASTING POLICY AND REGULATION IN UGANDA: KEY LAWS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDIA FREEDOM



**Charity
Ngabirano**

PROFILE Charity Ngabirano is a lawyer and a journalist, with a keen interest in Human Rights, social Justice, good governance, and human rights. She holds a Bachelor of Laws Degree (LLB), an Advanced Diploma in Legal Practice and is currently a Master of Arts in Journalism and Communication Candidate. Charity is currently a writer with The New Vision, and an interviewer with Africa in Dialogue. She also does legal work at a law firm in Kampala; Barireere & Co. Advocates.

Charity boasts of experience on advocacy, communications, and human rights. She has worked with CSOs, media houses and literary associations, to influence change in society. Her roles, over the years, have revolved around community mobilization, advocacy, offering legal aid to the poor, implementing projects and reporting stories. She has written and published research papers, creative stories, interviews, and articles.

Executive Summary

Uganda's broadcasting sector has expanded rapidly since the liberalization of airwaves in 1993, but its growth is constrained by restrictive laws and regulatory practices that undermine media independence and freedom of expression. Although the 1995 Constitution guarantees these rights, vague legal provisions and broad discretionary powers granted to regulators have created an unpredictable environment marked by censorship, harassment, and self-censorship.

Civil society organizations have worked to defend press freedom, and courts have struck down some unconstitutional provisions, but significant gaps remain. This brief provides policy direction and practical actions necessary for reforming Uganda's broadcasting framework in order to strengthen independent regulation, revise restrictive laws, and align broadcasting policy with constitutional guarantees and international human rights standards.

has occurred within a restrictive regulatory framework that prioritizes political control over media independence (ACME, 2024).

Although the 1995 Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression in Article 29 and access to information in Article 41, these rights are curtailed by Article 43, which permits restrictions based on vaguely defined notions of public interest and morality (Republic of Uganda, 1995). This uncertainty has provided the basis for a series of laws and regulatory measures that limit broadcasting freedoms. The Computer Misuse Act of 2011 has been used to prosecute government critics, the Uganda Communications Commission Act of 2013 grants broad discretionary powers to suspend licenses, while the Penal Code and Anti-Terrorism Act criminalize defamation and other vaguely defined offences (Asasira & Kwizera, 2018; Kimumwe, 2020). These provisions have created a climate of fear, harassment, and self-censorship that weakens media independence and narrows democratic space.

Introduction

Uganda's broadcasting sector has expanded significantly since liberalization in 1993, with the number of radio and television stations multiplying and providing diverse platforms for communication (Cohen & McIntyre, 2020; Selnes, 2020). Broadcasting has become an essential tool for citizen participation in governance, dissemination of development information, and promotion of accountability. However, this growth

Policy Options

→ Over the years, some efforts have been made to safeguard freedom of expression and media independence. Civil society organizations such as the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME, 2024) and the Human Rights Network for Journalists (HRNJ-U) have documented media repression, trained journalists on safety mechanisms, provided legal support, and challenged restrictive provisions in courts.

- Judicial interventions, such as the Constitutional Court's nullification of Section 25 of the Computer Misuse Act in 2023, demonstrate progress in aligning domestic law with constitutional guarantees (Nanfuka, 2023). International partners such as the European Union and UNESCO have supported media freedom initiatives in Uganda, thereby reinforcing advocacy efforts (European External Action Service, 2021).
- Nevertheless, key gaps persist. The Uganda Communications Commission continues to exercise sweeping regulatory powers under Section 5 of the Communications Act, 2013 suspending or penalizing broadcasters without transparent procedures (Kimumwe, 2020).
- The Access to Information Act of 2005 remains ineffective due to high access fees, broad exemptions, and long delays in information release, limiting its use for investigative journalism (Kimumwe, 2020).
- Broad provisions in the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2002 and Anti-Pornography Act, 2014 enable arbitrary prosecutions, while the Penal Code's defamation provisions have been weaponized to silence journalists and encourage self-censorship (Nassanga & Tayeebwa, 2018). Despite the constitutional framework, Uganda's regulatory environment remains unpredictable, politically influenced, and detrimental to independent broadcasting.
- Parliament of Uganda should amend or repeal overly broad provisions in the Computer Misuse Act, Penal Code, Anti-Terrorism Act, and Anti-Pornography Act that criminalize legitimate expression (Asasira & Kwizera, 2018).
- Parliament, together with Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, should revise the Access to Information Act, 2005 to reduce fees, shorten response timelines, and limit exemptions, making it a more effective tool for accountability.
- Judiciary of Uganda should exercise oversight in determining whether broadcasts threaten national security, public order, or morality, replacing discretionary executive control to ensure impartial adjudication and protection of freedom of expression.
- Civil society should be empowered to continue advocacy, national dialogues, and awareness-raising to reinforce freedom of expression as a cornerstone of democracy and development.

Recommendations

- Parliament of Uganda, in collaboration with the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, should undertake legal reforms to strengthen Uganda's broadcasting framework by aligning laws with constitutional and international standards. The institutional separation of policy-making and regulation should be prioritized to prevent political capture of regulatory bodies.
- The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) should operate independently, with transparent appointment processes overseen by Parliament, and be provided with adequate resources to function credibly and regulate broadcasting effectively.

Conclusion

The growth of Uganda's broadcasting sector presents opportunities for strengthening democracy and development, yet restrictive laws and political interference continue to undermine its potential. To ensure broadcasting contributes to national progress, Uganda can build a regulatory environment that guarantees independence, protects media freedoms, and upholds citizens' right to information. Achieving this requires decisive reforms that repeal restrictive provisions, align laws with international human rights standards, and foster transparency and accountability. With such commitment, broadcasting can become a driver of democratic governance, citizen participation, and inclusive development.

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CONCLUSION

The digital era presents unprecedented potential for economic growth, civic engagement, and innovation in Uganda. To harness this potential to fruition, political will, commitment, and action are essential to promote human rights, digital safety, and media independence. These efforts will ensure the integral importance of accountability, inclusivity, and ethical standards in the country's digital transformation agenda, thereby spurring economic growth and development.

THE DIGITAL ERA PRESENTS
UNPRECEDENTED POTENTIAL FOR
ECONOMIC GROWTH, CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT, AND INNOVATION IN
UGANDA.



A woman with dark hair, wearing glasses, a pink t-shirt, and jeans, is speaking into a microphone. She has a name tag that reads 'FELLOW' and is wearing a watch on her left wrist. The background is slightly blurred, showing a whiteboard with some writing.

THEME 5

Peace and Security

This policy brief, developed under the theme, Peace and Security, examines the critical role of women's leadership in advancing sustainable peace across Africa. The brief explores how women's representation in peacebuilding efforts at higher levels continues to be undermined despite their key performance in grassroots peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The author here emphasizes that inclusive participation is not only a matter of rights but a prerequisite for durable and legitimate peace.

**INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION IS NOT ONLY A
MATTER OF RIGHTS BUT A PREREQUISITE
FOR DURABLE AND LEGITIMATE PEACE.**

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN AFRICA



**Kevin
Karlo
Lakot**

PROFILE Kevin Karlo Lakot is a passionate women's rights activist, politician, and businesswoman dedicated to advancing women's empowerment and rights across Africa. Currently, she serves as the Country Representative for the Young Women of Africa (YWOA) in Uganda and as the Country President of the African Diplomatic Organization (formerly known as the African Union Youth Assembly) in Uganda. Additionally, she holds the position of Deputy Speaker of the Global Youth Parliament in Uganda. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from Makerere University. Kevin's career spans government, civil society, and the business sector, where she has worked with renowned organizations such as UN Women, UN OCHA, and the African Union. Her diverse experience has empowered her to champion policies and initiatives that support gender equality and the development of young women across Africa. She is an alumna of prestigious leadership programs including the Aspire Leaders Program at Harvard University and the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). Kevin is an inspiring role model to many young girls and women, and her leadership continues to inspire change and progress within her community and beyond.

Executive Summary

Women in Africa continue to be systematically excluded from formal peace negotiations, despite their crucial roles in grassroots peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Between 1992 and 2019, women represented only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories globally, with African cases reflecting similar gaps. This marginalization undermines the legitimacy and sustainability of peace agreements, as evidence shows accords are 35% more likely to endure when women participate meaningfully. This policy brief calls for urgent action to strengthen women's leadership in African peace processes by mandating gender quotas, building negotiation and mediation capacity, expanding women's roles in uniformed sectors, and institutionalizing women-led networks. Such measures are essential to move beyond token representation, ensure women's meaningful influence, and achieve durable, inclusive, and just peace across the continent.

Introduction

Human security and sustainable peace in Africa depend critically on the inclusion of women in peace and security processes. Women are deeply involved in conflict dynamics as combatants, peacebuilders, and community negotiators yet they remain marginalized in formal peace negotiations (O'Reilly, 2024). According to the Council on Foreign Relations, women constituted

only 14% of negotiators in African peace talks between 2015 and 2019, and just 13% of negotiators globally from 1992 to 2019, reflecting persistent underrepresentation despite international commitments (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019).

In South Sudan, women's minimal involvement in the 2018 updated peace agreement meant that gender-based violence and displacement issues received inadequate attention in the peace framework, illustrating how male-dominated negotiations often fail to address women's lived experiences and priorities (Osei, 2024).

Despite frameworks such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), the Maputo Protocol (2003), and various national and regional Women, Peace and Security (WPS) action plans, women's participation in peace processes remains largely symbolic. Discriminatory gender norms, weak institutional designs, and mediation frameworks that favour male leadership systematically exclude women from decision-making spaces. Gender-based violence, insecurity, and the lack of meaningful protection mechanisms further prevent women from engaging fully in peace efforts. Even where women are included, their roles are often symbolic rather than influential, with limited impact on outcomes. This persistent exclusion denies women their political rights and undermines the legitimacy, sustainability, and effectiveness of peace agreements. Evidence from Burundi and Mali demonstrates that when women are sidelined, agreements are less inclusive, less responsive to affected populations, and more prone to failure (Hanmer et al., 2024).

The marginalisation of women in peace negotiations is therefore not simply a matter of inequality but a fundamental weakness that threatens durable peace across Africa.

Policy options

- A growing body of evidence demonstrates that women's involvement in peace processes is essential for achieving sustainable peace (Adjei, 2019; Nazary et al., 2020). According to UN Women, peace agreements are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years when women meaningfully participate (UN Women, 2015). Case studies from Liberia, Burundi, and Mali show that women's inclusion strengthens peace frameworks by ensuring provisions for social welfare, justice, and reconciliation (Saiget, 2016). Conversely, male-dominated processes often fail to address the gendered impacts of conflict, leaving post-conflict societies vulnerable to recurring instability.
- Empirical research also shows that when women's civil society groups are involved in peace talks, agreements are substantially less likely to collapse, illustrating the strategic value of women's participation beyond ethical considerations (Krause et al., 2018).
- Despite this evidence, women's participation in peace negotiations across Africa remains limited. Existing policies and initiatives have sought to improve inclusion but face persistent gaps, such as weak enforcement, limited funding, and tokenistic implementation. The following policy alternatives highlight possible pathways to address this challenge, along with their expected outcomes and limitations that inform the need for stronger recommendations.

Table 1: Institutional roles and policy options for inclusive peace negotiation

POLICY ALTERNATIVE

Voluntary Inclusion Policies

RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION

United Nations

DESCRIPTION

Encourage member states to include women in peace processes through global guidelines, advocacy campaigns, and technical support

EXPECTED OUTCOME / LINE OF SOLUTIONS

Increased visibility of women in negotiations and mediation; states adopt inclusive practices without waiting for enforcement

POLICY ALTERNATIVE

Targeted Capacity Building

RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION

African Union

DESCRIPTION

Mandate minimum representation of women in negotiation teams, mediation groups, and post-conflict governance

EXPECTED OUTCOME / LINE OF SOLUTIONS

Measurable increase in women's participation; enforceable regional compliance mechanisms

POLICY ALTERNATIVE

Comprehensive Gender Mainstreaming

RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION

National Governments

DESCRIPTION

Integrate gender perspectives in all stages of peace processes, including conflict analysis, negotiation strategies, and monitoring

EXPECTED OUTCOME / LINE OF SOLUTIONS

Peace agreements become more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable

POLICY ALTERNATIVE

Binding Regional Frameworks

RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION

RECs / AU

DESCRIPTION

Ratify enforceable protocols or treaties requiring member states to include women in peace processes, with penalties for non-compliance

EXPECTED OUTCOME / LINE OF SOLUTIONS

Regional accountability ensures consistent inclusion of women in negotiations

POLICY ALTERNATIVE

Women-Led Mediation Networks

RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION

National Governments / AU

DESCRIPTION

Establish and fund independent networks of women mediators and advisors to operate alongside formal peace processes

EXPECTED OUTCOME / LINE OF SOLUTIONS

Women's grassroots perspectives and expertise directly influence negotiations, even if state-level commitment.

The above options highlights a range of strategies already promoted at global, continental, and national levels. However, gaps remain across all approaches. Voluntary inclusion policies raise visibility but lack enforcement, while capacity-building initiatives expand the pool of skilled women yet fail to guarantee their inclusion in actual negotiations. Legal quotas create representation but risk tokenism if women's voices are not empowered. Gender mainstreaming promises inclusivity but is often underfunded and poorly implemented. Binding frameworks could create accountability, but political resistance from member states limits enforcement. Finally, women-led mediation networks offer grassroots perspectives but risk being sidelined without institutional linkage to formal processes.

Table 2: Actions Needed by Institutions

LEVEL OF ACTION

United Nations (UN)

CURRENT GAPS

Women make up less than 25% of delegates in UN-led peace negotiations. Limited representation of women in senior peacekeeping positions.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish a minimum quota of 50–70% women in all UN mediation teams and delegations.

Increase deployment of women in uniformed roles (military, police, corrections).

Allocate specific funding for women's peace networks.

PROPOSED TARGETS

50–70% women in delegations by 2030.

30% women in uniformed UN peacekeeping by 2030.

LEVEL OF ACTION

African Union (AU)

CURRENT GAPS

Only 5 out of 55 AU Member States have legislated gender quotas in peace processes. Limited women mediators in AU panels.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt a continental gender quota policy requiring 50% women in all AU peace missions and delegations.

Establish an AU Women Mediators Roster for rapid deployment.

Strengthen AU Peace and Security Council gender mainstreaming.

PROPOSED TARGETS

50% women in AU mediation and peace missions by 2030.

All AU-led delegations to include at least 1 woman mediator by 2027.

LEVEL OF ACTION

Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

CURRENT GAPS

Women underrepresented in regional conflict prevention and mediation teams. Lack of harmonized gender standards.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop regional action plans to operationalize UNSCR 1325.
Harmonize gender quotas across RECs to ensure minimum 50% women representation.
Fund women-led CSOs in peacebuilding at the regional level.

PROPOSED TARGETS

50% women in REC mediation teams by 2030.
Regional standby forces to have 30% women in uniform by 2030.

LEVEL OF ACTION

National Governments

CURRENT GAPS

Few countries have legislated quotas for peacebuilding roles.
Women underrepresented in defense, police, and security sectors.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislate gender quotas of 50–70% for peace negotiation delegations.
Scale up recruitment of women in uniform across defense, police, and security forces.
Fund national action plans on WPS (Women, Peace, Security).

PROPOSED TARGETS

50–70% women in negotiation delegations by 2030.
At least 30% women in security and defense forces by 2030.

Conclusion

Sustainable peace in Africa depends on women's leadership at every stage of negotiations, agreements, and implementation. Mandated representation, negotiation training, stronger roles in security and reintegration, and support for women-led networks are critical. Without these measures, peace processes will remain incomplete. Women's participation is not only a rights issue but also a strategic necessity for building peace that is inclusive, durable, and just.

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CONCLUSION

Ensuring sustainable peace and security in Africa requires the complete and meaningful inclusion of women at all stages of peace processes. Women are central to the key challenges brought about by insecurity and are affected the most. Therefore, institutionalizing and streamlining their balanced integration into all peace-building processes extends benefits not just to women but to the entire society, including men and children. Thus, strengthening women's leadership is not only a matter of justice but a strategic investment in Africa's long-term stability and resilience.

**STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP IS NOT ONLY A MATTER
OF JUSTICE BUT A STRATEGIC
INVESTMENT IN AFRICA'S LONG-
TERM STABILITY AND RESILIENCE.**



THEME 6

Trade and the Unemployment Question

TRADE AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT QUESTION

The policy briefs here address three critical areas: youth employment, tourism marketing, and business competitiveness. They examine strategies to reduce unemployment, analyze approaches to strengthening Uganda's tourism marketing and global position as well as pathways to enhance the business environment and regional integration in East Africa. Together, the briefs provide actionable policy insights to support inclusive growth, job creation, and sustainable economic growth and development. Investment in tourism and trade as well as enhancing business environment bridges the gap between unemployment and equitable economic growth.

INVESTMENT IN TOURISM AND TRADE AS WELL AS ENHANCING BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT BRIDGES THE GAP BETWEEN UNEMPLOYMENT AND EQUITABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH.

REFRAMING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN UGANDA THROUGH SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, APPRENTICESHIPS, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



**Claire
Dorothy
Nabuko**

PROFILE Nabuko Claire Dorothy is a dynamic and purpose driven youth advocate and social entrepreneur. She is a certified Life Skills Coach working with KIFAD. She is also the founder of Cladona Fashions, a fashion enterprise empowering young women and girls through skills training and employment and Mbuubi Mind Developers, a Climate Change initiative promoting environmental awareness and youth-led action. Claire holds a Bachelors Degree in Social Sciences from Makerere University. Claire mentors young people in personal development, leadership and career readiness. Her work bridges youth empowerment sustainable development and climate resilience making her a rising leader in community transformation and Inclusive innovation.

Executive Summary

Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, with over 70% of citizens below the age of 30. Yet, youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge, with estimates suggesting that more than 60% of young people are unemployed and about 400,000 new entrants join the labour market annually (World Bank, 2023; UBOS, 2023). This high level of unemployment not only undermines economic growth but also fuels poverty, inequality, and social unrest. The government has introduced several initiatives to address youth unemployment, including the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP), Emyooga, the Presidential Skilling Initiative, and the Parish Development Model. While these programs have created opportunities, they face serious challenges such as corruption, poor coordination, limited reach, and inadequate alignment with labour market demands.

This policy brief analyzes the persistent challenge of youth unemployment in Uganda and calls for comprehensive action. It emphasizes strengthening skills development aligned to labour market demands, expanding structured apprenticeship opportunities, and scaling entrepreneurship support systems.

Introduction

Uganda is a country with one of the youngest populations in the world, with 78 percent of its

citizens below the age of 30 (UBOS, 2023). While this youthful demographic offers great potential for innovation and economic transformation, it also presents serious challenges, especially in terms of employment. Youth unemployment and underemployment remain persistent and widespread, with unemployment rates estimated between 13 and 18 percent nationally, but significantly higher in urban areas such as Kampala (Isabirye, 2017).

Each year, more than 600,000 young Ugandans enter the labor market (AfDB, 2019), yet only a small fraction manage to secure formal employment. The mismatch between the supply of young labour and limited job opportunities has left many youths reliant on informal sector activities characterized by low productivity, low income, and lack of social protection (Byamugisha et al., 2014). In rural areas, underemployment is even more prevalent, deepening cycles of poverty and vulnerability. Many young people turn to vocational and technical training as a survival strategy, but without strong support systems, they struggle to transition from skills acquisition to sustainable enterprises (McGrath & Powell, 2016).

The government, alongside donors and development partners, has initiated a range of youth-targeted interventions such as the Youth Livelihood Programme, Youth Skilling Programs, Presidential Youth Initiatives, Parish Development Model, Emyooga, and donor-funded skilling initiatives (Bechange et al., 2021; Atwine, 2013; NPA, 2018). Despite these efforts, the scale of the unemployment challenge continues to undermine Uganda's socio-economic growth.

Its consequences are far-reaching, contributing to inequality, frustration, corruption, and even political instability. Without meaningful and sustainable employment, Uganda risks losing the demographic dividend that its youthful population represents.

Furthermore, youth unemployment in Uganda is a complex and persistent challenge with both structural and systemic roots. According to the World Bank, unemployment and underemployment among youths range from 16.1 percent to as high as 60 percent, depending on the metrics used (World Bank, 2020). While government programs exist to address the challenge, their impact has been weakened by poor coordination, limited coverage, and implementation gaps.

A key driver of the problem is the mismatch between skills supplied by educational and training institutions and the skills demanded by the labour market. Many youths complete studies without marketable vocational, technical, or entrepreneurial skills, leaving them ill-prepared for decent employment or business ventures. This mismatch has contributed to the growing trend of young Ugandans seeking low-skilled work abroad, particularly in the Middle East, often under risky and exploitative conditions (Namuliira et al., 2024).

Access to quality skills development, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship support including mentorship, startup financing, and business incubation remains inadequate, especially in rural and marginalized areas (Mukul & Sheeri, 2024). This limits the ability of young people to transform skills into sustainable livelihoods. Furthermore, most of those who find employment are absorbed into the informal sector, which is dominated by low-value jobs with little security or growth potential. High youth unemployment perpetuates poverty and widens inequality, while also fuelling social unrest and insecurity. The frustration of an idle but energetic population can manifest in rising crime rates, corruption, and political instability. In addition, Uganda risks missing out on the economic benefits of its demographic dividend if this productive age group is not meaningfully engaged in the economy (Kizza et al., 2020).

This situation points out the urgent need for innovative and scaled-up interventions that align skills development with labour market demands, expand access to apprenticeships and practical training, and strengthen entrepreneurship support systems.

Policy Options

Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP)

→ The YLP, launched over 11 years ago, operates in all 112 districts with the objective of empowering young people to harness their socio-economic potential and increase self-employment (Rabello, 2021). Each youth group is eligible to receive UGX 12.5 million as an interest-free revolving fund, provided repayment is made within 12 months. By 2021, the programme had disbursed UGX 162.97 billion to 20,522 youth projects, benefiting 245,870 young people. Recoveries stood at UGX 39.1 billion out of UGX 75.2 billion disbursed, with 335 projects fully repaying funds and transitioning into small and medium enterprises. The YLP has contributed to employment creation, improved financial inclusion, and strengthened social capital through its group-based approach (YLP Programme Update, 2021).

→ However, persistent challenges undermine its effectiveness. These include group disintegration leading to project failure, corruption and bureaucracy within implementing agencies, low repayment rates, and misuse of funds by beneficiaries. (Rabello, 2021). These weaknesses highlight the need for stronger capacity building in group management, enhanced transparency, and stricter accountability mechanisms.

Emyooga (Presidential initiative on wealth and job creation)

→ Launched in 2019, Emyooga targets low-income earners, including youth, with the aim of transitioning 68.9 percent of subsistence households into the money economy (Homonchuk et al., 2024). The program operates through specialized SACCOs, each receiving UGX 30 million as seed capital, with flexibility depending on district demographics. Beneficiaries include boda boda riders, youth leaders, and performing artists (Homonchuk et al., 2024). The revolving fund structure has facilitated broader financial access and provided startup capital to many previously excluded groups.

→ Despite these gains, the program has been marred by corruption, mismanagement, and embezzlement, which have limited its effectiveness and sustainability. Without strict enforcement of accountability measures, funds risk being diverted, undermining the intended socio-economic transformation.

Presidential youth initiative on skilling the girl and boy child

- Initiated in 2018, this program provides six-month vocational training courses in trades such as tailoring, shoemaking, baking, embroidery, and weaving. The initiative has enabled disadvantaged youth to acquire marketable skills with the goal of self-employment.
- Nevertheless, many graduates have struggled to establish businesses due to barriers such as limited startup capital, high taxes, and rental costs. Furthermore, the training has focused primarily on technical skills while overlooking essential soft skills such as resilience, communication, decision-making, and entrepreneurship that are critical for sustaining self-employment. Without addressing these gaps, the program risks producing skilled but unemployed graduates.

Parish Development Model (PDM).

- Launched in 2022, the PDM seeks to increase household incomes and improve quality of life by promoting total economic transformation through seven pillars: agricultural value-chain development, financial inclusion, infrastructure and services, social services, community mobilization, parish-based information systems, and governance. Each parish receives UGX 100 million to support local initiatives. The program has helped many communities establish or expand businesses, contributing to socio-economic development.
- However, the model has faced criticism for applying a uniform approach that overlooks demographic and economic variations across parishes. For instance, Kampala with nearly 1.8 million residents differs significantly from sparsely populated Kalangala with just over 66,000 people (UBOS, 2023). Treating all parishes equally creates disparities in impact and reduces program equity. Tailoring resource allocation to local contexts is essential for the PDM to achieve its goals.

These policy options demonstrate the government's commitment to tackling youth unemployment through financing, skilling, and local development programs. Nonetheless, their limitations including corruption, weak accountability, poor repayment mechanisms, limited access to startup capital, lack of soft skills training, and inequitable resource distribution undermine sustainability and inclusiveness. Addressing these gaps is essential for maximizing

program impact and ensuring Uganda's youthful population contributes meaningfully to economic growth and stability.

Policy Recommendations

- Benchmark and adopt best practices from successful international models. Uganda should draw lessons from countries such as Singapore, whose SkillsFuture Singapore program, launched in 2015, promotes lifelong learning and job skills enhancement. Through initiatives like education funding, SkillsFuture Credits (which give every Singaporean aged 25 and above a credit balance for approved courses), and subsidies for mid-career professionals, the program has enhanced workforce adaptability and employability (ASK Training, 2024). Uganda can adapt this model by introducing targeted skills financing mechanisms, continuous learning incentives, and inclusive skilling programs tailored to local labor market needs.
- Strengthen institutional frameworks and accountability mechanisms. Youth-focused institutions such as the National Youth Council should be empowered by Government with clear mandates, measurable key performance indicators, and accountability frameworks. Strengthening these institutions will improve coordination of youth employment programs, reduce duplication, and ensure transparent implementation.
- Improve the youth employment ecosystem through technology and innovation. Uganda needs to foster an enabling environment for innovation, creativity, and youth-led enterprises. The Ministry of Education and Sports revision of the education curriculum to produce more job creators than job seekers is central to this shift. It will also require leveraging technology to expand access to markets, financing, and training will further support youth enterprises. The forthcoming National Startup Policy under the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Cooperatives which proposes tax holidays, grants, and competitive platforms for startups should be fast-tracked and integrated with youth employment initiatives to catalyze sustainable job creation.

Conclusion

Youth unemployment in Uganda remains one of the most pressing barriers to inclusive economic growth and social stability. Addressing it requires deliberate, innovative, and scalable solutions that go beyond traditional programs. Through benchmarking successful models such as Singapore's SkillsFuture, strengthening institutional frameworks with accountability, and enhancing the innovation ecosystem through technology and entrepreneurship support, Uganda can transform its youthful population into a driver of productivity and national development.

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ENHANCING MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR UGANDA'S TOURISM SECTOR



**Immaculate
Comfort
Masika**

PROFILE Immaculate Comfort Masika is a Library and Information scientist and Counsellor passionate about reading, and engaging in community development activities. She currently serves as Program Coordinator at Kasese Tourism Investors Forum (KTIF) which focuses at promoting tourism and providing community development services in Uganda hence fostering community growth and social impact. Masika holds a Bachelor degree in library and information science from Makerere University, a Certificate of Proficiency (COP) from Insurance Training Institute and she is currently pursuing Certification in Counseling. Her expertise spans program planning and coordination, public speaking and community counselling. Her background includes roles from other organizations like Prudential Assurance Uganda Limited and One stop Centre-Kasese Municipality where she executed number of duties thus expanding her working, communication and interpersonal skills. Masika is dedicated to creating inspirational narratives that promote hope and growth especially for women in suburban and rural communities.

Executive Summary

Well known as the Pearl of Africa, Uganda is endowed with world-class attractions ranging from gorilla trekking in Bwindi and adventure sports on the Nile to vibrant cultural festivals and UNESCO heritage sites. Despite this richness, the country has struggled to translate its natural and cultural assets into sustained tourism growth. Uganda's international visibility remains weak compared to regional competitors like Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania, largely due to underfunded and fragmented marketing efforts. Past branding campaigns, including Gifted by Nature and Friend a Gorilla, generated publicity but collapsed due to lack of coordination, limited resources, and minimal stakeholder ownership.

The newly launched National Destination Marketing Strategy (2024–2029) by the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) offers an opportunity to redefine the country's tourism identity and increase revenue. However, without substantial reforms in marketing approaches, investment in digital storytelling, and diversification beyond wildlife tourism, the strategy risks repeating the shortcomings of earlier initiatives. This brief analyses Uganda's marketing challenges and policy gaps and proposes concrete recommendations for strengthening UTB, broadening branding, and adopting innovative marketing tools to reposition Uganda as a premier African destination.

Introduction

Tourism is one of Uganda's most important economic sectors, contributing significantly to GDP, foreign exchange earnings, and rural livelihoods (Bugonga et al., 2022). With attractions such as gorilla trekking, the Rwenzori mountains, and cultural sites like the Kasubi Tombs, Uganda has the potential to become a leading destination in Africa (Krantz, 2020). Yet despite this strong endowment, the sector has remained underdeveloped. The core issue lies in weak, inconsistent, and poorly coordinated marketing, which has prevented Uganda from achieving visibility in global tourism markets (Otundo Richard, 2024).

Over the past two decades, Uganda has attempted several branding campaigns to boost its image abroad. Gifted by Nature in 2005, Friend a Gorilla in 2009, and Seven Wonders in 2011 were designed to create strong destination identities (Tukamushaba, 2013). However, each of these initiatives failed to achieve sustainable results. Analysts point to chronic underfunding of the Uganda Tourism Board, which has long operated with marketing budgets far below international standards, making it impossible to sustain global advertising, attend travel fairs consistently, or build strong digital platforms (Daily Monitor, 2025). In many cases, the campaigns collapsed soon after launch, leaving little long-term impact.

At the same time, Uganda's reliance on gorilla and safari tourism has created a narrow branding focus. While gorilla trekking is a unique selling point, this singular narrative has overshadowed

other opportunities such as agro-tourism, cultural festivals, and adventure experiences in less visited regions (Spanaki, 2018). The result has been a concentration of tourist arrivals in southwestern Uganda, while large parts of the country remain excluded from tourism benefits. Negative publicity has further compounded the problem, as international media often highlight political instability, health crises, or governance challenges, which shape perceptions and discourage travel (Daily Monitor, 2025).

The Uganda Tourism Board has made attempts to reposition the country with the launch of the National Destination Marketing Strategy (2024–2029), which promises to increase revenue through sustainable tourism and diversification (UTB, 2025). However, like earlier efforts, the strategy faces risks of inadequate funding, weak coordination with private stakeholders, and limited adoption of modern marketing tools such as influencer campaigns and digital storytelling (Nile Post, 2025). Unless these structural weaknesses are addressed, Uganda will remain unable to fully leverage its tourism potential.

Policy Options

- Uganda already has in place a range of policies and programs intended to guide tourism promotion. The Uganda Tourism Policy (2014) set the foundation for sustainable tourism, emphasizing marketing as a strategic pillar. Similarly, the Tourism Development Master Plan (2014–2024) identified international visibility as a key driver of sector growth, calling for stronger branding and participation in global travel fairs. More recently, the Uganda Tourism Board launched the National Destination Marketing Strategy (2024–2029), which aims to increase revenue to US \$5 billion by 2029 through product diversification and regional equity (UTB, 2025).
- Despite these frameworks, significant gaps remain. The Uganda Tourism Policy and the Master Plan recognized marketing as a priority but failed to secure adequate funding to operationalize their ambitions (Mugarura et al., 2025). Without ring-fenced resources, most of the outlined activities were not implemented, and UTB remained financially constrained (Daily Monitor, 2025). The Master Plan also relied heavily on wildlife-based tourism and did not adequately develop strategies for promoting cultural, agro, or community-based tourism. The new Destination Marketing Strategy is more ambitious, but experts note

that it risks falling into the same trap if financial resources, institutional coordination, and innovative approaches are not prioritized (Nile Post, 2025).

- Furthermore, existing policies indicate limited use of modern marketing techniques. While global competitors invest heavily in influencer-driven campaigns, digital platforms, and familiarisation tours for travel agents and journalists, Uganda has yet to institutionalize such practices. A recent familiarisation tour for Turkish media influencers showed potential, but such initiatives remain one off rather than integrated into UTB's core programming (Krantz, 2020). Similarly, the digital presence of Uganda's tourism sector is weak, and negative narratives continue to dominate international perceptions due to the absence of counter-strategies (Akaranga, 2021).
- Uganda's tourism policies recognize the importance of marketing, but their implementation has been undermined by underfunding, over-reliance on limited branding, and lack of innovation. This analysis justifies the need for reforms that not only strengthen UTB's capacity but also diversify Uganda's branding and institutionalize innovative marketing practices to achieve sustainable tourism growth.

Policy Recommendations

- The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) should first increase investment in the Uganda Tourism Board and provide the financial and technical capacity necessary to implement the National Destination Marketing Strategy. This should be accompanied by stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure that funds are used efficiently.
- The Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) and Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities should diversify its tourism branding beyond gorilla trekking by integrating cultural festivals, adventure sports, and community-based tourism into national campaigns.
- Uganda Tourism Board should institutionalize familiarisation tours, influencer partnerships, and structured media engagements to increase visibility in target markets.
- Uganda should adopt robust digital storytelling strategies, including video marketing and virtual tours, to reshape its international image and counter negative publicity.

Conclusion

Uganda has the natural and cultural endowment to become a leading African destination, but its potential has long been undermined by weak and inconsistent marketing. Existing policies and plans such as the Tourism Policy, Tourism Development Master Plan, and the National Destination Marketing Strategy provide a framework, yet their effectiveness has been limited by underfunding, narrow branding, and lack of modern approaches. By reforming UTB, diversifying its tourism narrative, and embracing digital and innovative marketing tools, Uganda can reposition itself globally and ensure that tourism benefits are spread equitably across the country.

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BUSINESS IN EAST AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND POLICY PATHWAYS



PROFILE Kebirungi Hellen is a multifaceted individual who wears many hats. She holds a Bachelor's Degree of Arts in Education from Kyambogo University and various Certificates in other trainings. As a teacher she is passionate about educating and empowering others does not stop at profession by also an executive direction of eco-justice warriors, a fierce advocate for environmental justice and sustainability. In her work as an entrepreneur she has been so innovative and determined to succeed while advocate for fair trade practice. Hellen also has passion for politics that drives her to create positive change in her community. She is an Alumni of the Uganda Democracy Academy.

Hellen Kebirungi

Executive Summary

Businesses in East Africa contribute significantly to economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction. Yet they face persistent challenges including limited access to finance, weak infrastructure, burdensome regulations, political fragility, and environmental shocks. These constraints reduce competitiveness and slow inclusive development. This challenge is significant because the region depends heavily on small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which employ the majority of the population. When SMEs cannot access credit, navigate fragmented markets, or cope with climate shocks, livelihoods and long-term growth suffer. Inefficiencies in taxation, corruption, and inadequate human capital further weaken the business ecosystem.

This policy brief argues that strategic investments in financial inclusion, infrastructure, regulatory reforms, digital transformation, and youth entrepreneurship reinforced through stronger institutions and regional integration are essential to unlock East Africa's potential for sustainable and inclusive growth.

Introduction

East Africa comprising Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and Ethiopia remains one of the continent's most dynamic regions. The private sector makes substantial contributions to GDP and is an important driver of employment and innovation. However, businesses in this region are still constrained by systemic weaknesses that undermine competitiveness and

sustainability. Entrepreneurs face high borrowing costs, poor transport networks, expensive energy, and slow digital connectivity, while weak institutions and political instability compound these problems. Although the East African Community (EAC) was established to enhance regional integration, market fragmentation persists because of non-tariff barriers and inconsistent regulations, limiting efficiency in cross-border trade. The consequences are wide-ranging from reduced economic opportunities, slow job creation, persistent youth unemployment, gender exclusion, and heightened vulnerability to environmental risks. If these problems are not resolved, East Africa risks losing competitiveness in global markets and failing to fully harness its demographic dividend.

Furthermore, one of the most serious bottlenecks facing businesses is access to finance. Small and Medium Entities (SMEs) continue to encounter lending rates averaging around 25 percent, strict collateral requirements, and limited venture capital. Infrastructure gaps such as poor roads, unreliable railways, congested ports, high energy costs, and weak ICT systems further limit competitiveness, especially in rural communities where digital divides remain severe. Institutional barriers compound these problems with complex business registration procedures, corruption, weak enforcement of contracts, and inefficiencies in taxation reduce investor confidence and discourage long-term investment.

Political and social challenges also further weigh heavily on businesses. Youth unemployment and skills mismatches reduce productivity, while women and minority entrepreneurs face persistent barriers to finance and markets. Environmental shocks such as floods, droughts,

and climate variability regularly disrupt operations, especially in agriculture, which remains a critical sector for livelihoods and exports.

Policy Options

- Some policy responses have achieved notable progress. Financial inclusion programs, particularly mobile banking, have expanded access to credit and improved participation in the financial system. Infrastructure investment through donor-funded projects and public-private partnerships has created new opportunities for connectivity and business growth. Regulatory reforms have also introduced digital platforms for business registration in certain countries, helping to reduce some administrative hurdles. Regional integration under the East African Community (EAC) has lowered tariffs, facilitating trade and cross-border collaboration. In addition, youth and women empowerment initiatives have been rolled out, offering targeted support to historically marginalized groups.
- However, these interventions remain inadequate in addressing the structural barriers facing SMEs. Despite greater financial access, high interest rates and limited guarantee mechanisms continue to restrict meaningful borrowing. Infrastructure development has been uneven, with many projects delayed or underfunded, reducing their long-term impact. While digital registration platforms exist, corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies still discourage formalization. Regional integration efforts are undermined by persistent non-tariff barriers and misaligned policies, slowing down the benefits of trade liberalization. Youth and women empowerment programs, though important, are fragmented and under-resourced, preventing them from scaling effectively.
- These gaps evidence the need for stronger and more coordinated interventions that combine financial, infrastructural, institutional, and social solutions. Through aligning efforts across these domains, policies can move beyond partial fixes and deliver more sustainable, inclusive outcomes for SMEs and broader economic growth.

Policy Recommendations

- Governments should expand access to affordable finance by scaling up credit guarantee schemes, encouraging fintech innovation, and leveraging domestic capital from pension funds and sovereign wealth funds.
- Infrastructure development should be prioritized through public-private partnerships targeting transport, energy, and ICT, with a focus on digital inclusion for rural communities.
- Regulatory institutions in the member states should be strengthened by digitalizing business registration, harmonizing tax regimes across the region, and ensuring reliable enforcement of contracts.
- Investment in human capital is essential and should include reforms in education and vocational training that align with market demands, while also providing targeted support for youth and women entrepreneurs.
- Regional integration should be deepened by removing non-tariff barriers, harmonizing standards, and promoting intra-African trade opportunities that expand markets for local businesses.

Conclusion

East Africa's businesses can drive economic transformation and inclusive prosperity if systemic barriers are addressed. Through coordinated reforms, stronger institutions, and investments in finance, infrastructure, and human capital, the region can build a resilient, competitive, and innovative business ecosystem that advances sustainable development.

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CONCLUSION

To unlock sustainable economic growth and development, governments need to invest in their human capital, digital infrastructure, and entrepreneurship ecosystems that are poised to overcome today's economic challenges while leveraging the existing global markets that will enhance comparative advantage and business competitiveness. This way, productivity and attractiveness to local and foreign investment will substantially grow, harnessing sustainable solutions to address today's trade and unemployment challenges faced by Uganda and its neighbors' young people.

TO UNLOCK SUSTAINABLE
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ECOSYSTEMS.



OVERALL CONCLUSION

The policy briefs in this compendium converge on a shared vision: a prosperous, peaceful, and resilient Uganda that leverages evidence-based policies, technological innovation, and inclusive governance to secure sustainable development. Despite the variation in thematic areas, from food and nutritional security, environmental protection, and population well-being to national security, trade facilitation, digital transformation, and human rights, they are unified by a shared commitment to improving livelihoods and strengthening institutional capacity.

The briefs in unison advocate for “a no one should be left behind” approach, where interconnectedness among communities and governance players is key for successful policy implementation. For this to happen, national priorities should be aligned with regional and global frameworks to enhance coordination among government ministries and agencies, thereby harnessing community participation in policy making, implementation, and monitoring.

Authors have evidently shown how these problems are interconnected, and therefore, the solutions should be as well. In sum, these contributions may not deliver the desired Uganda individually; however, their collective implementation would spur an economically vibrant, socially just, health-wealthy, environmentally conscious, and globally competitive Uganda. As far as political will and commitment, adequate financing, and sustained investment in research, human capital, and infrastructure are justified, this success will be history.

THE POLICY BRIEFS IN THIS
COMPENDIUM CONVERGE ON A
SHARED VISION: A PROSPEROUS,
PEACEFUL, AND RESILIENT UGANDA
THAT LEVERAGES EVIDENCE-BASED
POLICIES, TECHNOLOGICAL
INNOVATION, AND INCLUSIVE
GOVERNANCE TO SECURE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.





**DEVELOPMENT
EYE INITIATIVE**

info@developmenteye.org
+256 392 228 160

Plot 3 Ssuna Close, Ntinda P.O Box 131277, Kampala

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