REIMAGINING BEING AND BELONGING IN UGANDA
A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK TO FOSTER OUR SUSTAINED DEVELOPMENT

UGANDAN NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

The Ugandan National Academy of Science (UNAS) has released a series of consensus study reports to articulate a robust vision for Uganda's development, focusing on mindset shifts for country ownership of national development agendas. This study on equity and inclusion was conceptualized in response to the disparities that were highlighted by the coronavirus pandemic, and will undoubtedly form the next logical area to interrogate to complement UNAS' existing body of work as it fulfills its mandate to provide unbiased, apolitical, evidence-informed advice to the nation.

NATIONAL UNITY AND CREATING AN EQUITABLE SOCIETY

A nation that tolerates exclusion in all its manifestations engages in self-sabotage. In intentionally crafting inclusive and equitable development programs, Uganda has an unprecedented opportunity to imagine and actualize a sense of belonging across its diverse peoples and cultures. National unity, clarity of development purpose, and cohesive boldness in reaching our goals will constitute the outcome of such an approach. Anything that erodes belonging—exclusionary policies and practices in particular—threatens the survival of a community and individual.

Sciences For Prosperity

THE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

It is essential to fill the gap between policies and implementation and create an equitable foundation on which to stand as the country reaches to achieve their Sustainable Development Goals. Communities constitute the foundation of any African development agenda and drive ownership of national development, making the community the focal point for equity and inclusion. Structures inherited from colonial times continue to perpetuate historical imbalances, biases, and exclusionary practices and must be evaluated across all aspects of equity.

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BEING AND BELONGING

When creating a vision for a state of holistic belonging in Uganda, equity and inclusion should be discussed in terms of **climate change, urbanization, post-colonialism, post-conflict reconstruction**, and with a particular focus on Uganda's most **vulnerable populations**. These themes must permeate through all other categories (agriculture, economy, culture, etc.) and be evaluated through a gendered lens. The national development agenda of UNAS aims to protect the country and its people by focusing on climate change, lessening poverty, and improving the lives of all who inhabit Uganda through an equitable approach. The foundation that Uganda lays now for developing a strategic development agenda prioritizing inclusive urban governance, promoting social belonging, and encouraging equitable climate adaptation, will play a significant role in predicting the well-being and cohesiveness of future Ugandans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Incorporate equity and inclusion into Uganda's climate action plan and urbanization strategy, policy, and implementation plan. Existing strategies should be fully implemented to promote the welfare of indigenous communities.
- Develop policies and programs on climate adaptation by prioritizing the lived experiences of the most geographically and socially marginalized communities, and ensure they are addressing the potential impacts of climate change on other sectors.
- Improve infrastructure in urban and rural areas, with an emphasis on urban planning and implementation of guidelines within cities that are inclusive of the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Enact policies and interventions that tackle the issue of gender-based violence in all its manifestations. These interventions should build on existing child protection programs and initiatives that eliminate gender-based violence.
- Post-conflict reconstruction policies should focus on giving vulnerable populations ownership and control over their survival.
- Increase investment in digital technologies as a tool for the older and disabled population to be more integrated into daily life and experience more freedom.
- Address the stigmatization of the elderly and those with disabilities through an intersectional lens, increase awareness of mental health, and promote equitable service delivery, training communities to recognize and cater to these vulnerabilities.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The World Bank has found East Africa to be a region especially vulnerable to climate change. Thus, there is a need to prioritize reducing social inequalities and encouraging community participation when developing sustainable climate adaptation and mitigation strategies in Uganda.

URBANIZATION

Rapid-paced urbanization, which is taking place in Uganda and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, can pose many risks to already vulnerable populations. It is essential to develop equitable and inclusive strategies to support and manage the challenges urban growth presents, all while converting it into an opportunity to promote well-being, economic development, and belongingness in Uganda.

DECOLONIZATION

British colonial systems perpetuated discontent and distrust as a control mechanism, excluding Africans from decision-making processes and emphasizing differences among Ugandans rather than celebrating their commonalities. Uganda is now actively taking steps towards decolonization to critically examine existing social inequalities and combat these inherited structures, which pose a threat to the cohesion, self-determination and overall development of the nation.

POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION

The conflict, insecurity, and economic mismanagement that characterized much of Uganda's post-independence period through the late 1980s sabotaged its post-independence development plans, exacerbating extant inequalities and challenging current Ugandan development efforts. Mechanisms to overcome challenges present in a post-conflict context will need to be embedded in Uganda's development agenda.

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The report will emphasize Uganda's most vulnerable communities -- refugees, migrants, older persons, youth, the disabled, women, and mothers, and their heightened risk to the detrimental outcomes of a lack of equity as well as their essential roles in creating an equitable society.

GENDERED LENS

It is impossible to discuss this report without looking at all aspects of Uganda's development agenda through a gendered lens. Gender inequalities and gender-based violence are one of the greatest barriers towards the realization of an equitable and inclusive society in Uganda; tacking these inqualities will play a essential role in the actualization of any development strategy.

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EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Patterns of inequity in education and employment are a result of circumscribed preparation during the formation and implementation of policies, and of geographical and financial barriers. Enrollment rates in rural areas and post-conflict regions demonstrate a striking imbalance in access to education. Furthermore, in parts of the country where traditional patriarchal systems of power dominate all family and community decisions, girls undertake most household chores at the expense of schooling. When developing educational policies increasing access and quality, it is essential to target vulnerable and historically disenfranchised communities. A lack of availability and accessibility to quality education serves to reinforce inequitable power structures and gender disparities, and can affect the employability and economic security for vulnerable populations. Decent work creates a pathway for inclusion by enabling people to contribute to their communities and empowers them economically by providing earnings, an environment for developing skills, and social connections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The budget allocated to the education sector must be reconsidered; first, increased, and secondly, made more flexible and fluid. Education should be seen as a critical social service and indispensable for the government as all other development depends on the success of this social service.
- The Ministry of Education and Sports should regularly inspect schools to maintain minimum professional standards. They should follow the Ministry's policy frameworks and guidelines while ensuring teachers receive the requisite financial and scholastic support.
- The government should invest in increasing infrastructure to support e-learning.
- The Ministry of Education and Sports, in consultation with communities, should consider reframing universal access to education in terms of the quality of education students receive.
- Create an enabling environment for women and youth to secure their livelihoods and strengthen platforms through which communities and civil society actors can enhance intergenerational and cross-gender cohesion and partnership within their communities..
- Transition from informal to formal employment, with the goal of increasing the quality of all forms of employment and enabling government investments to strengthen decent rural employment opportunities at all stages of the value chain, while adequately enabling maximum gains and opportunities for goods and services produced in the informal sector.

ECONOMY AND GOVERNANCE

Despite Uganda's robust anti-corruption framework, patronage and corruption have continued mainly due to the failure of anti-corruption institutions to enforce an effective framework. Political corruption occurs at the highest levels of political authority involving politicians, government ministers, senior civil servants, and other elected public office holders. This level of corruption, in addition to the tax system, contributes to inequitable living standards for the country's most vulnerable groups. Unfair and exploitative tax systems serve to further reinforce inequalities among vulnerable groups and their exclusion from the formal economy. Given the importance of the informal economy to community livelihoods in developing countries like Uganda, mainstreaming mechanisms to ensure the economic security and wellbeing of those working within this sector will be essential to any development agenda. Especially from a gendered perspective, as the informal sector may cover up to 70% of women's employment in Uganda, formalizing worker protections and promoting economic autonomy is crucial.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government, the private sector, and the civil society should advocate, provide, and support the collecting, analysis, and reporting of disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data that raises awareness of gaps and challenges, profiles innovative approaches, and supports monitoring, evaluation, and learning regarding intersectionality, equity, and inclusion.
- The policy development process should engender an inclusive approach, enabling the consideration of multi-dimensional approaches to empowerment, inclusion, and equity, providing the space for meaningful participation and engagement of all segments of the population, and provisioning for equitable power-sharing among all members of the populations.
- Civil society actors should hold government, private society, and fellow civil society leadership accountable to ensure the implementation of equity and inclusion interventions and, through this, enhance belonging and trust, especially amongst vulnerable populations.
- Government should ensure equitable distribution of infrastructure development so that all sections of the population can benefit from it (irrespective of geographic location, gender, age, socio-economic status, etc.). These include public goods, such as water, electricity, internet, transport, and communication.

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UGANDA'S NATURAL RESOURCES

Water, energy, and food are intricately connected, and among the most vital resources for people's physical, mental, and economic well-being. By considering how these systems operate and interact, the nexus approach aims to maximize synergies and minimize trade-offs, improve resource-use efficiency, and internalize social and environmental impacts. This approach strengthens cross-sectoral integration and improves management outcomes to enhance water, energy, and food security, ultimately contributing to the development agenda. Especially given the context of rapid-paced urbanization and intense climate vulnerability, ensuring the sustainable and long-term output of these natural resources must be a development priority. Agriculture has yet to actualize its potential as a driver of development in Uganda, although reforms in this sector, particularly surrounding coffee and livestock production, will be essential to Uganda's future. Developing climate-smart and inclusive mechanisms to improve agricultural productivity and sustainability will be vital aspects embedded in this nexus approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries, should establish partnerships with the private sector, and civil society organizations to enhance delivery of agricultural extension and technical services.
- The Government, through the Ministry in charge of Karamoja Affairs, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, should commission a comprehensive study to develop and implement a comprehensive peace plan for the Karamoja cattle region.
- The Ministry of Water and Environment, in partnership with development partners and community-based organizations, should ensure availability of water for food production through the establishment of boreholes and valley dams in water-stressed areas.
- The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, in partnership with community-based organizations, should invest in more affordable, safe, and accessible energy sources to close the equity gap.
- The Ministry in charge of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development should ensure that the land acquisition fund is fairly implemented to promote equity and inclusion in resettlement and compensation of resource-constrained land occupants.

HEALTH SECTOR

Health is the cornerstone to equity and inclusion in Uganda. Without equitable health access, there cannot be a culture of belonging. Within the current model of health financing itself in Uganda, the allocation of funds is inequitable and overall fragmented. Ugandans experience poor quality of service and gaps related to provision of resources and healthcare access. Facilities that deliver care are oftentimes lacking the physical and human resources infrastructure to meet the needs of the communities they are intended to serve. Despite these challenges, progress has been made around disability inclusion, including the dissemination of wheelchairs, disability awareness, and the renovation of health facilities to be accessible for all modalities. Maternal, neonatal, and child health have also experienced improvements. The Health Sector Development Plan (HSDP) prioritizes improvements in MCH indicators and recognizes poor policy implementation, among other factors, as the main contributor to the high mortality. Male involvement in health enhances maternal and child health outcomes, yet there is still cultural work to be done on this topic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The healthcare sector budget needs to be increased and made flexible and dynamic to meet the needs for preventative, curative, and access-based interventions.
- The Ministries in charge of Health and Finance, Planning, and Economic Development should make equity and inclusion an explicit goal in the implementation of the Universal Health Coverage in Uganda.
- In conjunction with development partners, the Ministry in charge of Health should address the critical infrastructure and human resource needs within government-operated health centers. Existing plans to upgrade facilities, augment pay, and ensure the availability of essential health services should receive priority.
- Civil society organizations with expertise in communications for development should sensitize the public regarding teenage pregnancy to reduce stigma in schools and society.
- Civil society organizations should target men and boys in MNCH education to develop male allyship for girls, mothers, and women.
- Government should secure funds to provide affordable, feasible, and age-friendly access to health care services for vulnerable populations.

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CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

The Uganda National Culture Policy is a framework for the preservation, promotion, protection and development of culture and creative industry, and empowers cultural contribution through research and development, performing arts, indigenous knowledge, language and literary art, cultural beliefs, traditions and values, and cultural sites and monuments. Historically, national identity creation and economic development were separate in many African countries, however, more recently the Arts Industry has been recognized as an effective economic development strategy. The creative industry is crucial for community development opportunities in countries like Uganda. which is characterized by poor education, youth unemployment, and unbalanced opportunities in formal institutions, among other challenges. Artistic expression has been used not only to communicate but also to heal societies and bring them together, such as was seen during the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Furthermore, promoting cultural traditions and the use of local languages in educational practices not only has been shown to enhance literacy levels, but also celebrates and preserves the rich cultural diversity upon which Uganda was built.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Local philanthropists, cultural institutions, and development partners who promote indegenous cultures should establish a governance structure that celebrates, commissions, and disseminates cultural expression and cross-pollination in local languages.
- Reimagine and invest in the implentation of the Uganda National Culture Policy.
- The National NGO Forum, funding partners, research regulators, and community development officers should formulate and implement clear ethical guidelines for using the performing arts in communications for development.

ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief is based on a consensus study entitled Equity and Inclusion for National Development by the Uganda National Academy of the Sciences (UNAS). This study was designed to articulate a vision for Uganda's development, while providing evidence-informed actionable recommendations to stakeholders in business, government, civil society, and international development. This report will act as a guide to recognizing and addressing some of the challenges Uganda faces today, emphasizing citizen engagement and promoting country ownership. The full report is available from the UNAS.

EPIDEMICS AND EMERGENCIES

Pandemics, epidemics and national emergencies threaten the successful realization of Uganda's development agenda. COVID-19 has exposed inequities and vulnerabilities within Uganda's social, political, and economic systems that need to be addressed in order for inclusive and sustainable growth and development to occur. Additionally, the current outbreak of Ebola virus, as well as the four previous outbreaks that have occurred since 2000, challenge trust in Uganda's health system and in promoting health-forward behaviors in the population. However, as seen in the many unifying aspects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, national emergencies can transcend social, political, class, cultural and economic boundaries, bringing societies together as they unite to combat threats to their health and safety. These types of national emergencies strain existing institutional capacity, amplify disparities within populations, damage economic growth, increase food insecurity and resource limitations, reverse or reduce gains made in educational and employment sectors, exacerbate gender-based violence and gender inequities, limit access to essential health services, and adversely impact mental and physical health for the population at large. Thus, any development agenda must be prepared to tackle the challenges these types of emergencies present and establish a robust preparedness plan to ensure the security and wellbeing of their citizens.

HOW SHOULD DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS BE IMPLEMENTED?

The Academy's report on governance and partnership systems highlighted the intrinsic value of trust in charting a development path, formulating strategies, and implementing policies in a genuinely inclusive manner. One pervasive idea emerges from an analysis of the Academy's consensus reports: communities must be the focus of any development agenda. Their involvement in planning, implementing, and assessing development priorities transforms communities from beneficiaries of development programs to active agents in their development. Therefore, policy must be revised, written, and implemented in partnership with the communities, allowing each community to have a voice and presence in the process. Once formulated in an inclusive manner, policies and institutions must adhere to ongoing sustained implementation while continually engaging with key stakeholders. Creation of data collection, tracking, and monitoring systems should be used to track accountability to goals and policies where appropriate.