

**The Unanswered Question; Exploring Youth Livelihood Challenges in Northern  
Uganda,**

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*Abstract*

*The persistence of youth challenges are a global concern, with unemployment biting the generation. In Uganda, the youth comprise the highest population (UBOS, 2014). The young ones are battling socio-economic challenges despite, natural resource availability, programmes from government, and NGOs. Does the availability of these capitals mean youth empowerment? Physical, financial, and human capital are a big challenge in community, however, where they are accessible the young generation have not utilised them to their benefit. This study is questioning the continued misery yet the region is endowed with natural resources and social entrepreneurial interventions. The major objective of the study is to examine the socio-economic challenges facing the youth and suggest the best social entrepreneurship measures to youth economic empowerment. The study is employing explorative qualitative mixed methods design to generate both qualitative and quantitative and qualitative data. The youth (18-30 years) as the primary respondents were randomly sampled. The findings portray that youth unemployment and poverty originated from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war which lasted for over 20 years and implanted dependence syndrome, laziness and negative attitudes towards agriculture and work. Market instabilities, limited entrepreneurial training, politicisations of livelihood, programmes, inadequate capital, communal land limited supportive infrastructure were reported to be constraining youth livelihood. The study therefore recommends concerted efforts through training, sensitisation, and access to digital information and behavioural change for enhancing individual functioning.*

**Key words:** Livelihood, entrepreneurial interventions, capitals, youth.

## **1.0 Introduction**

The youth challenge is a global concern with youth unemployment at its highest peak. Youth unemployment is a worrying issue in most parts of Sub Saharan Africa. In Uganda, youth livelihood challenges are confronting the country, as the youth comprise the highest portion (23%) of the population (UBOS, 2016). This has led to adverse consequences on society such as social instability, frustration, depression and dependence on families. The high rates of unemployment and poverty among the youths, implying the need for entrepreneurial interventions to empower this population (Bukonya, Omala, Kasigye, & Miranda, 2018). Governments issue strategic plans and devote increasing budgetary resources to youth employment and entrepreneurship programmes, sometimes complemented by bilateral and NGOs support (Fox, Senbet, & Simbanegavi, 2016). In Uganda, livelihood programmes have been designed and implemented to enhance youth capacities. The most recent is the Youth Livelihood Programme introduced 2013-14 to response to youth challenges and promote self-employment and self-reliance. Additionally, many non-governmental organisations rolled out interventions to create a self-sustaining youthful population. The interventions were intended to enhance economic outlook of the youth. Northern Uganda, unlike other parts of Uganda, had many initiatives intended to uplift the lives of the youth. The reason is based on the two decades of war that devastated the region. Since 2006, a wave of peace prevailed and youth participation in entrepreneurship and development is expected. The funding and other interventions are available, land is fertile and abundant, and the climate is favourable. Basing on empowerment theory connecting youth with local resources, and sustainable skilling for positive change is fundamental. To sum up, the ‘capitals’ are present, however, the youth continue wallowing in socio-economic problems. Therefore, there are multiple reasons explaining this situation, thus, this paper focus on exploring the socio-economic challenges, and propose way forward for improved livelihood.

## **2.0 Background to the study**

Youth born and growing in conflict areas have limited access to opportunities and fail to build skills and assets, therefore, they are at a disadvantage to transit to adulthood. With increasing population and lack of access to quality education many youth entering the labour market become a challenge (Fox et al., 2016) Although research shows that levels of education are rising in SSA,

in northern Uganda, the two decades of war, affected the children access to education and other human capital opportunities. This explains why there is high unemployment, and poverty among the youth in post conflict northern Uganda. For almost two decades (1986-2006), the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) a rebel group waged war on government and this ravaged northern Uganda, claimed lives of people, and paralysed the economic and social fabrics of life. Scores of people lost their lives, property destroyed, economic activities retarded, poverty deepened and human life suffering deepened (Otunnu, 2002). It is believed that over 12,000 people were killed, 20,000 children kidnapped as soldiers and slaves, spies and over 1.5million people displaced to Internally Displaced People's camps (Nampindo, Phillipps, & Plumtre, 2005). The youth were greatly affected by the war, which retarded their social and economic status (Reinke, 2016). The impact of war on the youth included being frontline soldiers, fighters, perpetrators (Barber, 2009), sex slaves, cooks and porters. Many people were denied quality education, quality employment, participation in economic activities (Betancourt et al., 2012). Several studies indicated that the youth are a target during war and are greatly affected by this war with unemployment, poverty, HIV/AIDS, psychological trauma, conscription into war as evidenced in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Yemen, Palestine and Colombia (Utas, 2003; Lai & Thyne, 2007; Leonardi, 2007; Bizouras & Birger, 2013; Cherewick et al., 2015). The youth are greatly affected since they are confined in Internally Displace Camps than engaging in productive work. As the guns go silent, the battle is reconstruction, economic recovery and increasing productivity commenced. Studies indicated that many programmes were designed towards promoting youth livelihoods in post conflict, as is evidenced in Sierra Leone. The 11-year civil war greatly disrupted the availability and quality of livelihood opportunities in the country. As a result, a number of the youth had fewer employable skills; less prepared for the job market and faced difficulties in transition to adulthood (*National Youth Commission of Sierra Leone and UNDP, 2013*). UNDP initiated the Youth Employment and Empowerment Programme (YEPP) in 2011 to provide business development and career advice to the youths in Sierra Leone. The programme provided entrepreneurial skills in business such as in turning industrial and domestic waste into energy-efficient cooking fuel, agribusiness, carpentry, and management skills to over 200 youth-led businesses. These skills are central in solving social and economic problems, and prevent engaging in future violent conflict (Galtung, 1996).

In Liberia, the government and NGO-Landmine Action (LMA) ran intensive best practices agricultural training programmes for ex-combatants, affected rural youth and other high-risk youth. LMA gave the youth seven months' skills training, counselling, microcredit, business planning, which gave them a peaceful, sustainable, and legal alternative to extract resources, easy reintegration and employment (Blattman & Annan, 2011). These activities were advanced by the Youth Enterprise Development Programme (YEDP) and Youth Professional Training and Employment Project (YPTEP) in Liberia and Guinea-Bissau respectively (Izzi, 2013). Similarly, training equipped, motivated and inspired the youth to engage in agricultural activities, such as farming, produce buying and selling, agro-processing and value addition. Agriculture is major a source of self-employment and income for rural youth (Blattman & Annan, 2011). Other activities can as well be targeting entrepreneurship is all inclusive and provides interdisciplinary and practical skills to the youth (Boschee, 2001). Thus, this empowered the youth to become engines for future socio-economic development in their community (Izz, 2013). All programmes recognise the youth at the key stakeholders in development in our communities.

## **2.2 Who are these youth in Ugandan context?**

Defining the concept youth is quite debatable as a number of scholars, organizations and countries tend to provide their perspectives basing on culture, purpose and challenge at hand. UNESCO defines youth as the transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of the interdependence as member of the community. UNESCO further argues that the category youth is more fluid than the fixed age groups, as it involves leaving compulsory education and finding the first job. However, the definition ignores youth who are neither educated nor employed. The United Nations for statistical reasons defines the 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 years to 24 years, without prejudice to other member states' definitions (*United Nations Youth*). The UN further recognises other definitions across societies of the world. African Youth Charter defines "youth" as every person between the ages of 15 years to 35 years. Even in Uganda, there is no consensus on the definition of youth. The National Youth Council that derives its authority from the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda defines 'Youth' as any person between the ages of 18-30 years. On the contrary, other legal documents of Uganda define youth differently. A case in point is the National Youth Policy, 2001 which defines youth as 'All persons; female or males aged 12 to 30 years undergoing a period of great emotional, physical and

psychological changes that require societal support for a safe passage from adolescent to full adulthood' (*Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2001*). The Common Wealth focuses on 15-29 years. Additionally, the definition of youth can be socially constructed in terms of societal expectations and responsibilities from social groups in the country (*Society for International Development, 2015*). Some societies in Uganda define youth as anyone who is married or can manage a family regardless of age bracket. Therefore, such diversities in the definition raise issues on which age bracket to consider exploring youth challenges and when implementing youth programmes and/or conducting studies on the youth. Therefore, there is no limitation on the understanding of the youth. The study adopted the definition by National Youth Council, which focuses on 18-30 years. These youth are legible for government programmes, and have legal backing. Henceforth these youth benefit from programmes such as Youth Livelihood programme (YLP), and other NGO interventions, and have the capacity to utilise the available resources.

### **2.3 Youth and livelihood in the northern Uganda**

According the sustainable livelihood approach there are 'capitals' required for building capacities and assets of the youth (Chambers& Conway, 1992). Livelihoods are the capitals for the poor. The livelihood are capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living (Chamber, 1992). Livelihood assets (capitals) are categorised in human, social, financial, physical and natural capital. Such include materials, social resources and activities required for a living. The capitals like assets, resources, skills are meant to generate a decent living for the population. In northern Uganda, the capitals include the fertile soils and abundant land, conducive weather and the financing organisations including government and NGOs. Such interventions are intended to afford the youth with the opportunity to be youth (Helene Perold, Nico Cloete, Joy Papier). The resources can be utilised to alleviate suffering and social problems (Zimmerman, 2000). The presence of such capital would be opportunity to alleviate poverty among the youth and generally improve the quality of life ((Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). Many resources, energy and passion for people are needed after the war to improve livelihoods (Lederach, 2007). To this end, government and other organisations to capacitate the youth have adopted a number of initiatives. The specific government programmes include Prosperity for All, NUSAF I 2002-2009, NUSAF II 2009-2016, now NUSAF III 2015-2020, NAADS 2001 (Now Operation Wealth Creation), Youth Livelihood 2013/2014 to 2017/2018. These aim at building

the assets of the youth and enhancing the capacity of communities to earn a living and better socio-economic standards. These social entrepreneurial interventions are appropriate for sustainable peace in the sub-region. Surprisingly, the youth continue to face challenges, and it is not clear if the youth have been fully linked to local resources. Nonetheless, the youth continue to face misery, suffering and chronic poverty. This study therefore, intended to examine the socio-economic challenges facing the youth amidst presence of natural, financial and human capitals in northern Uganda.

### **3.0 Methodology**

I used survey with 288 youth under the youth livelihood programme and one NGO to collect data. I was able collect data from a sample of 225 youth. Further 11 Focus Discussions, and 11 Key informant interviews were conducted for qualitative data. The questionnaires were semi-structured and administered by the researcher and research assistants in Gulu district. The semi-structured questions allowed respondents to express their views during the survey. The study was in Gulu district as a central and one of the biggest districts situated in Acholi subregion northern Uganda, with a population of over 67,048 youth i.e. 18-30 years (UBOs, 2014), this makes up 25.2% of the entire population in the district. Interviews were conducted with youth leaders, district YLP focal persons and youth experts from the NGOs, while the FGDs were carried out on youth income generating activities. The young men and women were drawn from those benefiting under YLP and few benefiting from a local NGO. The data collected was on youth's educational level, marital status, level of dependent, employment status, and socio-economic challenges faced. The focus groups and interviews focused more on social and economic factors limiting youth prosperity. The analysis involved simple frequencies, and thematic analysis for quantitative and qualitative respectively. The explorative qualitative mixed methods permitted me to contextualise the livelihood challenges within in social, economic, political and institutional context to reconcile the views from youth, youth leaders, and experts and technocrats. The presentation of data is concurrent, with qualitative data supported by quantitative data. Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) cleared the study. Individual consent was obtained; anonymity and confidentiality of the participants maintained throughout the study.

## **4.0 RESULTS**

### **4.1 The Socio-economic Challenges**

The key question in the study was on the challenges facing the youth in northern Uganda. The analysis of this question yielded many codes, which were organised into themes (see the illustration below summary of results). Throughout various interviews, focus groups and survey, the participants and respondents expressed concepts in their narratives that reflected social, economic, personal, and political and environment issues limiting youth potentials. All the participants demonstrated many challenges facing the youth in northern Uganda. The different participants' stories, ideas, pragmatic views and interpretations have been conceptualised and summarised as youth livelihood challenges. The categories highlight unique components of participant experience fundamental for open learning. The direct interview quotes are used to highlight and personalise data, the quotes are edited for grammatical clarity and all names changed to protect identity. The responses are coded, and categorised into sub-themes, these are summarised, closely linked and presented as economic vulnerabilities, institutional barriers, socio-cultural factors, personal challenges and. The examination of the themes is supported by descriptives such as frequencies from survey.

## YOUTH LIVELIHOOD CHALLENGES



**Source: Author's Diagram, 2019**

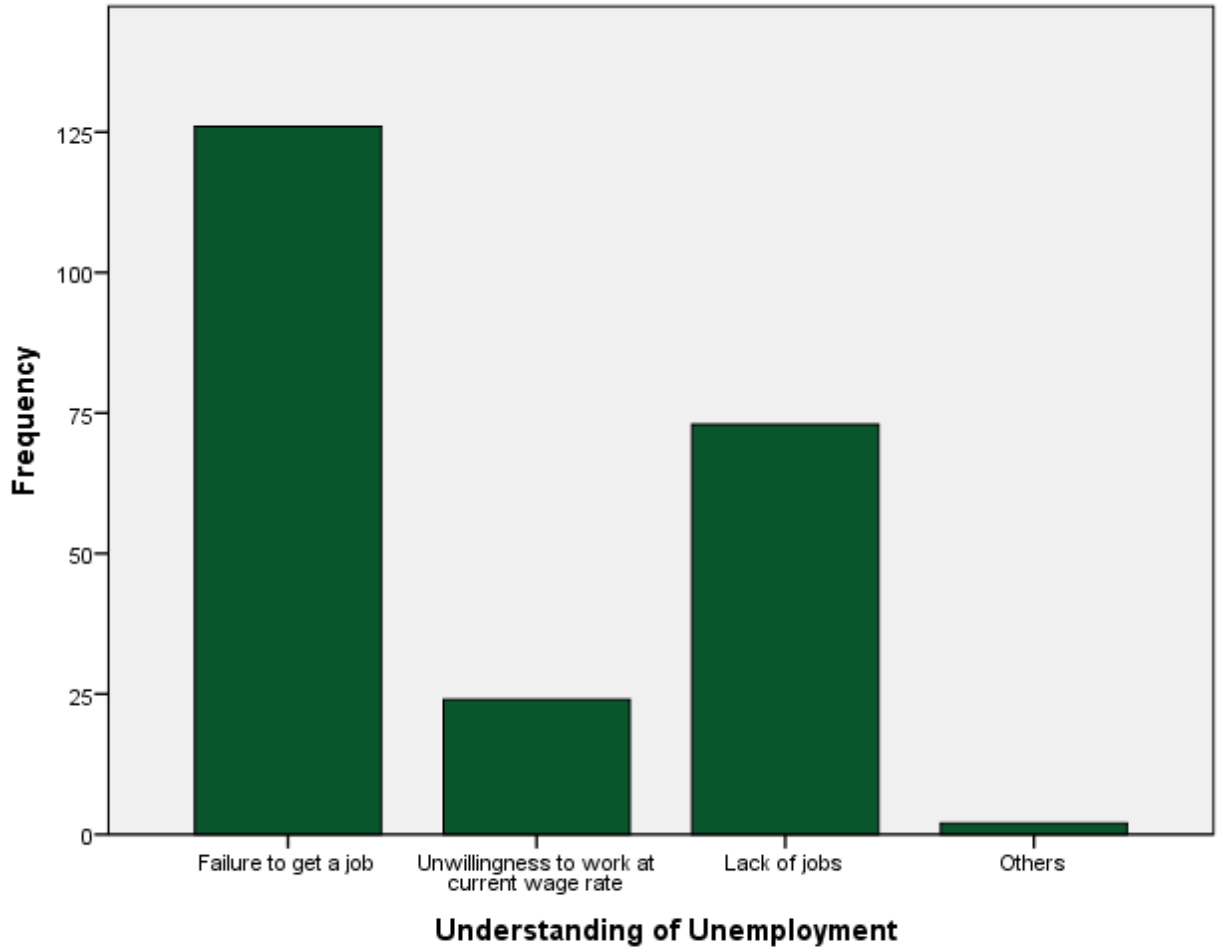


#### **4.1.1 Economic Vulnerabilities**

This theme captures the sentiment that many participants expressed as they decried the youth economic woes. Economic vulnerabilities is an umbrella term used in this paper to describe the economic challenges to youth livelihood. The participants emphasised that the youth face multiple economic constraints limiting utilisation of their potentials. The youth lamented that they are exposed to many economic risks related to production, distribution and consumption. My study conceptualised these as unemployment, market instabilities, and poverty as major risks in northern Uganda. They noted that such challenges limit them from utilising the available opportunities. The respondents revealed heavy consequences on lives, potentials and endeavours toward attaining their aspirations.

##### **Unemployment.**

Results from both the survey and interviews indicate one hundred percent agreement that youth unemployment is a major challenge affecting the youth in region. I explored the youth's understanding of unemployment, and results indicate failure to get a job, lack of jobs, unwillingness to work at current wage rate and others as associates of youth unemployment. The findings indicate 56% (n=126, SD=0.936) of the youth view unemployment as failure to get a job, 32.4%, (n=73), simply lack of jobs, 10.7%, (n=24), The results further portray unwillingness to work at the current wage rate as the meaning of unemployment, while others are reported at 0.9% (n=2). These are presented in the figure below:



Source: Field Survey, 2018/2019

The above results indicate that many youth understand unemployment as failure to get a job, this was mostly reported by those who are actively looking for the job but fail to find work (Hall, 2010). However, self-employed youth in consider themselves unemployment, an indication of a narrow perspective of unemployment. Despite the presence of interventions and ‘capitals’, youth unemployment is very high in northern Uganda. Those who were unemployed were asked about the causes of unemployment, 46.9% (n=38) cited low levels of education, 3.7% (n=3) do not prefer to work, 21.0% (n=17) indicated discrimination in the labour market, 28.4% (n=23) cited limited start-up capital). Loss of skills and increased crime were the most reported consequences of unemployment with 36.4% and 31.7% respectively, with many females indicating domestic violence than males (13.5% and 7.4%). Unemployment increases poverty among the youth.

## **Poverty**

In seeking to investigate and analyse another major challenge, I considered the notion of poverty. The respondents indicated that it is a serious problem despite the presence of fertile land, and many development initiatives in the region. The findings specified that majority (60.4%, n=136) of the youth understand poverty as lack of basic needs of life, while others view poverty as simply being poor (31.6%, n=71), (7.6%, n=17) perceived poverty as failure to enjoy better life, and the least number (0.4%, n=1), perceive poverty as normal. In one of the personal interviews with youth, I observed the hopelessness, loss of self-confidence, a sense of helplessness, anger as the youth were dressed in lags, smoking and drunk as early as 2.00pm. During the field visits, many urban youth were sitting in betting centres, verandas of bars and shops while playing cards. One youth explained the worrying situation at home:

You see me here, sometimes I sleep hungry, i stay at my sister's place who is also very poor, our parents very poor too, you can also see the kind of shirt I am putting on. Attimes I feel like committing suicide but I come here for comfort, when friends have some 'waragi' I can taste and have sleep (FGD, Male participant).

Respondents attributed poverty to lack of access to resources such as land (41.8%, n=94,), limited education (27.6%, n=62), lack of participation in decision-making (2.7%, n=6), limited skills (5.8% n=13) and laziness (22.2%, n=50). Furthermore, results indicated that many youth boys and girls have resorted to prostitution, crimes, betting and other unsocial behaviours to earn a living. Such behaviours have exposed many to HIV/AIDS, and consequently death.

## **Market Instabilities**

The study findings show that the youth engaging in agrienterprises reported the pain felt from price fluctuations, very low prices for the harvest and counterfeits inputs leading to losses. This was mostly reported by youth dealing in crop production, produce buying and selling, horticulture and floriculture. The urban youth dealing in extractive and manufacturing decried the challenge of limited market for their products due to competition from imported products. Similarly, they operate at a small scale, in this case not able to access orders from big customers such as institutions. Such market failures impede the efforts of the youth for the most part of motivation depends on rate of return on investment.

Price fluctuation after harvesting-There is no available market for our maize, soya beans and beans, we give it away anyhow-at a very low price locally known as "lap lap (FGD Female Participant, 2019).

Therefore, the youth are discouraged from participating in agriculture, since the return on investment is very low. This renders them unemployed and very poor amidst the natural resources, and funding opportunities.

#### **4.1.2 Socio-cultural Factors**

As for the study, I conceptualise socio-cultural factors as shocks/barriers stemming from cultural practices and responsibilities in a given society where the youth live. The intention was to establish whether the society encourages or discourages youth empowerment. What role does the society play in fostering youth livelihood? Several respondents commented on cultural issues especially in the rural areas. The emerging subthemes are cultural practices and parental responsibility.

##### **Cultural Practices**

With regard to this, a survey was conducted testing the youth about the existence of cultural factors limiting their empowerment. Results reveal that 66.2% n=149, acknowledged to the statement while 33.8% n=76 disregarded cultural factors as an obstacle to youth empowerment. Majority (66.2%) of the youth consider early marriage, restricted land ownership and social exclusion from meetings and opportunities as blockades to achieving goals and ambitions. Females are the most hit by this challenge since they are prone to divorce, and separation. The female participants claimed that they are not permitted to own land, participate in economic activities such as operating a butchery, construction, boda boda (motorcycle Taxi) and operating recreational venture such as bars. Communal land ownership was reported a major obstacle to investment in agriculture, one of the male participants argued that family members inhibit individual youth from utilising the land. However, a large number of youth disagreed with this, revealing that in their families they are able to utilise the land. During interviews, female participants lamented that the children they produce while at parents' home are discriminated and denied rights to land ownership, such children are regarded as '*foreigners*', likewise, the divorced ladies are denied land for farming since they belonged to another family (husband's home). Land ownership and utilisation is not an entitlement to them but the prerogative of family members:

Once we leave our homes for marriage, we are not supposed to own land. The culture proposes that we should only own at our husbands' homes. In case of divorce, the children we produce are also denied land that they are bastards; we are just like this.... (FGD, Female Participant, 2019)

In the same way, AK emphasised this;

Culturally, the children born out of divorce are denied land, thus remaining landless and poor. They are treated as foreigners locally referred to as 'cal lutino luk', however, hardworking one is, no land for productive agriculture, so they remain miserable and take refuge in towns, and you know the life there (FGD Female Participant, 2019).

This signifies that the culture is deep rooted in resource ownership and use, and affect development in the areas. The male youth with entrepreneurial competences and invest prospects requiring land are prohibited and discouraged by cultural silo mentalities.

Study discovered that parents are failing to play a leading role in enhancing youth empowerment. Some parents in rural areas fail to educate the girl child, confine them with domestic duties such as house chores, and garden work. The members of the society too were reported to be against the youth initiatives. The study revealed some cultures entertain early marriage, and shield defilement cases justifying that early marriage shape family lives of women. Furthermore, it was reported that the children are left to attend night parties, own shelter (at 14 years) and enjoy discos in town and market days without parental control. Such freedom exposes the youth to risks such as HIV/AIDS, and early pregnancies. The acts violate the girls' right to education and better life. Referring to this issue, one key informant had this to explain:

The issue of cultural is affecting some youth. The issue of defilement is very high, girls are defiled, they are married off when they still young and parents conceal information. The conservative parents say that girls are supposed to get married when they are still young before they are spoilt... (Key Informant-ACDO, 2019)

Such practices explain why early marriages and teenage pregnancies are common in rural northern Uganda, and this explains why poverty is high and persistent among the females. Connecting to the above, some rural families look at girl child education as a waste of time; girls are confined to domestic, implying low levels of education hence compromising the quality of life. Other youth are denied opportunities due to the age deficit (that they are still young to manage). Majority of female participants recorded primary level of education, and I observed young girls in rural areas attending interviews with children. Surprisingly, even those who are educated are discouraged and denied work opportunities by family and other community members (husbands), and thus, confining them on domestic work.

Then also culturally, we have educated women who are restricted by husbands from taking certain job opportunities. I had an issue with one of the girls who was working in one of the companies here in Gulu; the company decided post her to new branch in Lamwo as a head. The woman is a hardworking person; however, the husband refused that for arguing that she cannot work far thus leaving him alone. You see!! (Key Informant-District Youth Chairperson, 2019).

Therefore, this social injustice creates an economic imbalance between male and female in families, yet families are supposed to be building blocks for safe, motivated, and sustainable communities (Gillies, 2008), parents and other family members are supposed to foster and transmit core values to the young ones. The consequent mistreatment retard social development not only on females but also on also entire community.

#### **4.1.3 Institutional Barriers**

When discussing institutional challenges to youth livelihood, the key questions focused on organisational dysfunctionality in government and NGOs and the influence on youth socio-economic situations. The perceptions of the problem were organised into three common sub-themes, there are:

- i) Politicisation of government programmes with political manipulation and lack of clear representations at all levels,
- ii) There exists persistent corruption whenever youth opportunities prevail for exploitation and utilisation, and youth do not get a fair share of their needs; and,
- iii) There is limited supportive infrastructure to sustaining youth livelihood activities and ensure profitability.

#### **Political Manipulation**

Concerning politics, the study explored the extent to which the political environment limits the youth potentials. Most of the participants recounted that political influence is among contemporary challenges to livelihood interventions right from the inception of programmes.

The youth lament that the politicians exploit, influence decisions and mislead them during campaigns. The ineffective communication creates confusion, mistrust and social exclusion from the interventions. Consequently, those who do not subscribe to a particular political dance are barred from technical, material and financial assistances. Most importantly, the programmes meant for the youth are channelled to specific adults (beyond constitutional age) amidst youth political leadership. Participants overwhelmingly reported that they lack leadership and representation at sub counties and municipal divisions since most leaders satisfy personal interest:

Lack of representation at the subcounty is another challenge we face. People who are elected represent their own interests and forget us. Even the youth leaders we have do not come to us to seek for our own views and learn about challenges we face. Therefore, no one knows what we go through (FGD, female participant rural subcounty, 2019).

Such assertion implies that politics often gets into way of doing what is best for the youth. Decisions are repeatedly made without clear understanding of needs of target audience (youth). The lack of transparency and authentic climate disregards the voices of the youth hence failure to addressing the most intractable social problems (Collins & Clay, 2009). With limited youth involvement in policy decisions and communication, a big hoopla is made since the end result of the policy is not addressed effectively.

### **Corruption**

Study found out that corruption is a common characteristic in most government offices. In this case, the youth claim that most government resources and programmes are not equally distributed. Further investigation shows that youth with business ideas are left out, in addition to embezzling resources before they reach the youth. Sometimes the officials solicit for bribes before accessing any job or funding at district level (the participants repeatedly termed it as ‘kickback’). The participants lamented that the inability to raise bribes, excludes them from empowerment programmes and other opportunities, hence limiting their capacity to utilise available opportunities.

### **Limited supportive infrastructure**

The findings reveal that youth who would have operated Income Generating Activities (IGAs) successfully cannot access extension services, information, business incubation centres and market. During the reconnaissance, and data collections, it was observed that some villages (Palaro subcounty, Omel parish) are so remote with poor telephone network, social services such as health, education, absent business incubation centres, impassable feed roads, and no vocational or market centres. The study established that are very few technical and professional persons within communities to offer technical support, guidance, mentorship and assist the youth in best agricultural practices, business management and procurement, and management information systems.

#### **4.1.4 Personal Challenges**

The previous sections examined the revelations of social, economic, institutional challenges depicting the discourse of the study as factors of the outside world affecting youth livelihoods. The respondents acknowledged youth behaviours are detrimental to personal growth and development.

The responses ranged from attitude to lifestyle and attributing youths' woes to personal responsibility.

### **Personal Attitude**

Firstly, the study intended to establish how attitude limits one's ability and potential to exploit the available opportunities. The findings revealed that most youth are arrogant, lazy, have 'poverty of the mind', fear risks, lack confidence, values and positivity. It was further reported that the youth prefer to spend on alcohol, dancing, betting, sexual behaviour than investment. More so, more youth spend time on social media charring than searching for opportunities. Respondents from active projects and key informants reported, the youth are disrespectful, negative towards work, prefer freedom to work, and have morally degenerated. There is too much fascination for money yet the preference to work is negative:

..... youth down there are very lazy, they have laziness, even if there is an activity, they cannot participate, they prefer watching movies, dancing at market places, (FGD, Female Participant).

The participant stood up with a loud voice and reaffirmed the above, lamenting that the youth are responsible for their own suffering amidst the available fertile land, government and NGO funding. With unemployment, poverty institutional barriers, personal challenges and socio-cultural barriers the presence of opportunities may not necessarily transform into improved livelihood. We proceed to discuss the findings linking it to literature and the way forward for online learning opportunities.

### **5.0 Discussion.**

Globally, youth unemployment is a major challenge facing the youth; it is particularly high in developing economies like Uganda (Betcherman, 2015). High and persistent levels of unemployment are of great concern, the negative consequences extend to both educated and uneducated youth (Caliendo & Schmidl, 2016) both male and females. Though limited resources constrain the youth to employment, in northern Uganda, land is fertile, available and abundant. What is key is that the youth despise farming as a profession for villages, illiterate and dirty job. The presence of such natural resource has not contributed to improved livelihood. Programmes have been initiated for youth, but laziness, greed for quick cash; cultural factors hinder them from land utilisation and investment in agriculture. Limited expertise, professional and personal immaturity are cited in literature as reasons limiting young from jobs. Additionally, organisations



are reluctant to invest resources in training since they can hire adult employees (Sara Elder, 2014; S Elder & Koné, 2014; Grant, 2012). This also chimes with the findings of Baah-Boateng who reported that labour markets in developing countries often lack available jobs suited for entry-level skills, with most job postings requiring significant working experience (Baah-Boateng, 2016). There are limited online training for the youth to access the online opportunities, where youth centres exist information is not shared via digital platforms. Therefore, youth unemployment remains high despite the presence of capitals. Similar studies in Kenya indicated that unemployment is leading socio-economic issues in 21<sup>st</sup> century (Wanjohi, 2014). The youth point at unemployment as leading cause of poverty among the youth. However, poverty is a dynamic process of economic, social, political and cultural deprivation that affects the youth at individual and community levels often posing barriers to accessing basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care and water.

The economic, institutional and social barriers can as well accelerated poverty. In addition, the youth feel powerless, isolated, desperate, hopelessness, and socially excluded (Lubaale, 2019). The initiatives intended to link the youth to local resources have failed to avert this powerless situation. The presence of resources probably cannot yield positive results with limited knowledge, skills, exposure and positivity. Most significantly, the boy child is discriminated more than girls are; such treatment exemplifies gender-based discrimination (Dibaba, 2017). The society stereotyping, labelling, and nicknaming discourages the youth, deny them opportunities towards contributing to economic development This incapacitation restricts not only access to income and basic needs of like but fundamental freedoms of choice, decision making and inability to lead the lives the youth reason to value (Sen, 1987, 1992). Information gap suffered in all the discussions, in the modern era face-to-face information exchanges appear to be expensive and inaccessible, do such interventions use social media, as youth dealing to exchange information?. The youth lead challenges such as lifestyle (alcohol and substance abuse, sexual intercourse, sports betting), personal attitude (negative attitude towards work, laziness, arrogance, pride, greed for cash) contribute greatly to youth misery. The mushrooming sports betting centres in the area are theatres of misfortune and hinder productivity. All the above justifications concur with previous reports which portray northern Uganda as the most deprived region, with Acholi subregion as second poorest region in Uganda (Levine, Muwonge, & Batana, 2014).

## **6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

Our work has led us to conclude that among the most significant challenges highlighted by the study, unemployment and poverty take the lead. Youth livelihood continues to be a dilemma despite the implementation of youth livelihood programmes and presence of capitals. The youth continue to experience chronic poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, drug and substance abuse, illiteracy among others. Though institutional, societal, structural and economic factors inhibit the youth from exploiting the available opportunities and achieve the inspirations, personal challenges stemming from laziness, negativity, alcoholism, love for quick cash, and prostitution stage an additional barrier towards sustainable livelihoods. Experience shows high significance between the personal attitudes towards work and levels of poverty among the youth. In as much as youth challenges are similar everywhere in Uganda and Africa, youth in northern Uganda grew up in civil war, which presents a unique challenge. The experiences from IDPs retard ones access to quality education, training, and mentorship. The many programmes were designed to overcome this condition, but youth still face the above challenges. Therefore, the presence of physical, financial and natural capital may not cause any positive social change if these challenges are not tackled holistically. There is need for mind-set change, sensitisation, distinct training, mentorship and special funding so as to building a strong and productive youthful generation. Organisations and training institutions should avail online learning opportunities for the youth to access at conveniently. Such learning opportunities are platforms to share the youth challenges as presented above, and discuss ways how to overcome them. Social media and other additional youth friendly applications would serve the purpose. This calls for concerted effort of parent, community, government, academia, third sectors in systematically analysing youth challenges, jointly design frameworks towards behavioural change, motivation and enhancing youth aspirations. The effective communication through online changes on phone, messaging reminding the youth and parents on the role on livelihood improvement is key.

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Biography

Kitambo Enos is an accomplished teacher, social worker, researcher and trainer who has taught at Gulu University from 2010 –to date. He is pursuing PhD Studies in Social Work at Makerere University, focusing on Social Entrepreneurship and Youth Socio-economic Empowerment. Born from a rural peasantry family in Kabale, Southwestern Uganda, he has passion for youth entrepreneurship education. He holds MA. International Peace Studies (Social Entrepreneurship), BA. Public Administration and Diploma Vocational Studies (Business Education).

He taught Entrepreneurship Education in High School for over eight years. He focuses on topics like Youth Empowerment, Conflict Management, Microenterprise Development, and Third Sector.

