

**DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT
UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG MEN
AND WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES
UGANDA**



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About this report

This report was developed by the International Centre for Evidence in Disability at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and the MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.

The report aims to inform Mastercard Foundation's disability and inclusion programming and strategy development. It draws on in-depth qualitative interviews with young men and women with disabilities, exploring their lived experiences related to education and employment in Uganda. This report is a part of a series developed for each of the seven countries for this project *Disability-Inclusive Education & Employment: (1) Country brief: Uganda; and (2) Understanding the context: Uganda.*

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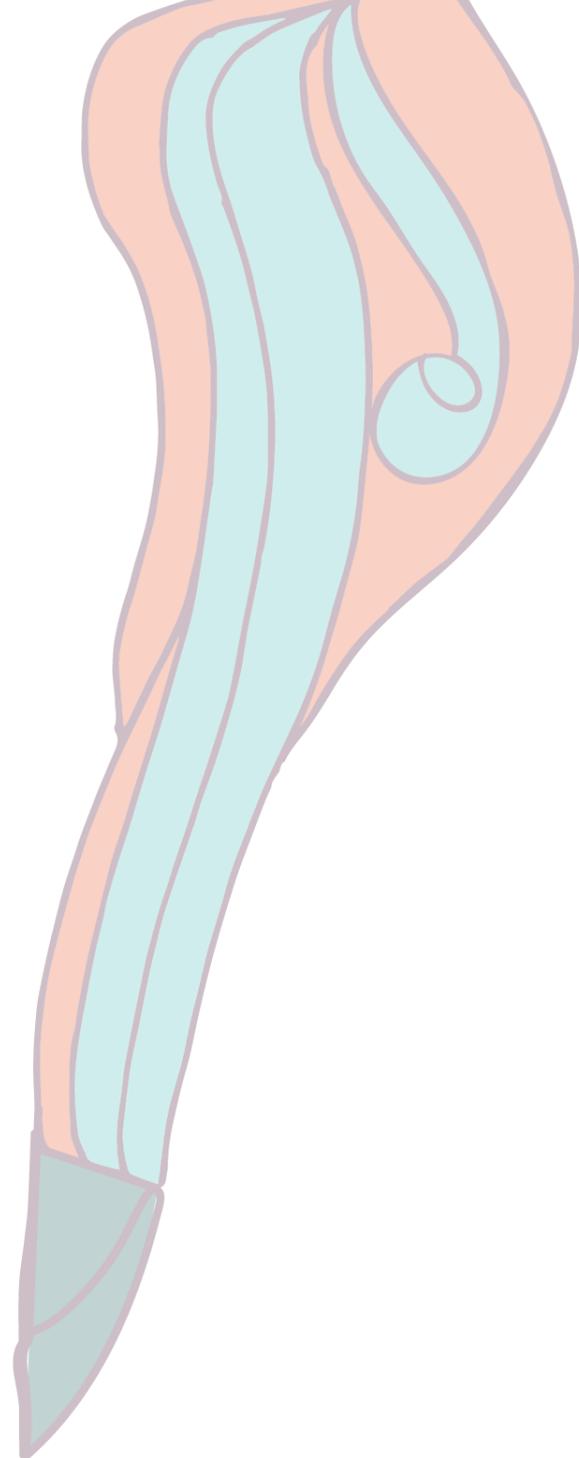
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Disability-Inclusive Education and Employment: Understanding the experiences of young men and women Uganda

Executive Summary

- This research explored the lived experiences of young men and women with disabilities in Uganda through in-depth interviews with 32 young persons with disabilities, guided by a youth advisory committee of another 12 Ugandan youth with disabilities. The study included a mix of participants with various disabilities (including physical, visual, hearing, psychosocial, and intellectual impairments), aged between 15-35 years, based in urban and rural parts of Uganda. Participants were purposively selected to reflect varied access to education and vocational training, employment in the agricultural sector, and those with refugee status.
- The youth who attended school experienced a mix of mainstream and special needs education settings. Financial, environmental, and infrastructural barriers were widely reported as limiting access to education.
- Experiences of youth with disabilities during education were mainly shaped by inaccessibility and lack of accommodations that made it challenging for students with difficulties with mobility, seeing, and hearing. These difficulties were countered by support from families, peers, and to a lesser extent, some teachers.
- Most participants took part in informal or formal vocational skill training and apprenticeships. Vocational courses were hard to join due to high costs, and many were often not accessible. The youth narratives indicated low confidence in their abilities, to which some NGOs responded by providing employability and life skills trainings.
- Many participants struggled to find jobs despite having graduated from colleges and higher education. Lack of accessible workplaces and discrimination were cited as barriers in transitioning from education to employment, as well as the need for personal networks to get a job and need for assistive products and accommodations.
- Several participants who had completed or were not in education were engaged in different income-generating activities, including tailoring, small businesses, and in agriculture. Some had formal paid jobs, some were self-employed, while others did unpaid work to gain skills so that they could eventually apply for formal employment.
- In the agricultural sector, youth with physical and visual impairments were often perceived as unsuited to farm-based work. Difficulties in advancing in the agricultural sector included challenges accessing bank loans and owning land. Good practice examples in agriculture included schemes that provide training in basic agricultural skills, business skills, and opportunities to participate in innovation challenges.
- Experiences of refugee youth with disabilities were mostly shaped by discrimination and non-disability specific difficulties such as lacking necessary documentation, language barriers (including sign language), and low knowledge of support services.
- Access to assistive products and to digital skills training were noted as facilitating factors in education and employment. Support from family members, friends, peers, and community members were also strong enablers of participation.

- Many youth participants had experienced stigma including negative attitudes and stereotypes, bullying, violence and abuse, and discrimination and exclusion in education and employment settings. Drivers of stigma included lack of awareness of the capabilities of youth with disabilities, and misconceptions around disability. The youth saw potential to reduce stigma by becoming role models to their communities. Older youth with disabilities played important and caregiving roles within their families and take up community leadership roles.
- This study also explored the intersectionality of other factors with disability in shaping youth experiences. Youth with more severe impairments experience disproportionate discrimination, and more barriers to education and work. Similarly, the visibility of a person's impairment can influence how they are perceived and treated by the community. Women with disabilities experience compounded discrimination as both disability and gender carry forms of marginalisation and stigma. Young women with disabilities reported gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health concerns, and socio-cultural expectations.
- The data indicated a gap between young people's aspirations and opportunities available to them. These were most often financial barriers.
- Recommendations included stronger policy implementation and enactment of laws to increase inclusiveness of persons with disabilities; infrastructural changes and improvement to facilitate reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities; more efforts to create awareness and sensitise communities to address drivers of stigma; and wider range of interventions and financial support options to match the aspirations of young people with disabilities and opportunities.



Introduction

About disability

According to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) people with disabilities include those who have *“long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”* [1]

Estimates suggest that there are 1 billion people (15% of the world’s population) living with a disability globally [2]. People with disabilities often experience barriers to accessing education and employment and this can cement cycles of poverty and exclusion [2, 3]. Globally, people with disabilities also face marginalisation in other aspects of society [2].

Research in Sub-Saharan Africa shows that with the right support, people with disabilities can achieve economic success. Investing in education and employment for people with disabilities should be part of development efforts, as based on an economic rationale, as well as social justice [4].

Disability in Uganda

The prevalence of disability in Uganda was estimated to be 6.4% (for persons 5 years and above) in the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey [5] and 7.8% (for persons 2 years and above) in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development Situational Analysis of Persons with Disabilities in Uganda [6]. These may be underestimates, given that the World Report on Disability estimated 15% prevalence [2].¹

Disability policy context in Uganda

In 2007, the Government of Uganda ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and this was credited with accelerating much of the legal reform on the rights of people with disabilities [8]. In 2006, the Persons with Disabilities Act came into effect, providing a framework for inclusive policy and services, including to improve school enrolment and employment opportunities. A revised version was signed and effected in 2019. This Act states that people with disabilities have a right to education and employment free from discrimination.

Research done for Phase 1 of this project involving interviews with key stakeholders (including government agencies, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, educators, and employers) revealed that despite a strong policy framework on disability inclusion, people with disabilities continue to experience exclusion from education and employment. Gaps in implementing, enforcing, and monitoring policy and programmes contribute to this exclusion [7].

¹ Disability is complex to measure. Differences in the way disability is measured and defined in different surveys may explain some of the variation in prevalence estimates. This includes the questions used, how they are asked and thresholds applied to define disability for the purposes of disability statistics. For more discussion on this, please see Box 1 in our Phase 1 reports [7].

Introduction

Education in Uganda

According to the 2016 Uganda DHS data analysed for this study's Phase 1 report, youth with disabilities were less likely to have completed primary and secondary education and attended tertiary education compared to their peers without disabilities [7]. This trend was similar for males and females, however, overall completion of each level was slightly lower among females compared to males in each group. As highlighted in the Phase 1 report, gaps and challenges in education include exclusion of people with disabilities from school at a young age, academic assessments that limit the progression of learners with disabilities, inaccessible learning environments, lack of support and training for teachers, and inadequate promotion of inclusive education models [7]. Examples of innovative and promising practices in education include teacher development programmes to promote disability inclusion, scholarship quotas for university students with disabilities, and affirmative action to reduce barriers to university admission. Policies related to education are typically spearheaded by the Ministry of Education and Sports, with contributions from other government agencies and OPDs. (See our Phase 1 report [here](#) for an in-depth analysis).

Employment in Uganda

Our analysis for Phase 1 [7], indicated that estimates on employment vary according to different data sources. In the 2016 Uganda DHS, respondents were asked if they were employed at the time of the survey; the majority of youth (19-35 years) were working, particularly men, and this was similar by disability status. For men, 90% with and 93% without disabilities were working. For females this was 69% and 72%, respectively. However, the 2019 Disability Situational Analysis Household Survey [6] found lower employment rates and slightly bigger differences by disability status. For men, 34% of youth (18-30 years) with disabilities compared to 53% of youth without disabilities were employed. For women this was 40% and 30% respectively. Reasons for different estimates are unclear but may reflect differences in the way questions on employment were asked and how employment was defined for each survey.

Development of employment-related policies are led by the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, with contributions from other government agencies and OPDs. In the earlier phases of this study, key stakeholders noted that although employment policies are in place, implementation is lacking. This is largely attributed to a lack of policies or guidelines to direct the implementation of inclusive employment [7].

Findings

The findings of this study are presented in five parts: (1) education; (2) transition from education to employment; (3) experiences in the agricultural sector; (4) experiences of refugees with disabilities; (5) reflections on cross-cutting issues that shape the experiences of young people with disabilities in Uganda. Case studies are provided throughout the report to portray stories of selected youth participants (all names and identifiers have been replaced to preserve confidentiality and privacy).

EDUCATION

In Uganda, universal primary and secondary education is intended to be freely accessible for everyone, including students with disabilities. Uganda has an Inclusive Education Policy in draft, but currently implements a two-track approach with both inclusive education and special needs education. Whilst all mainstream schools are expected to be (come) inclusive, there are special needs schools for children with specific impairments, such as primary and secondary schools for deaf students and schools for blind students, among others. Some mainstream schools also have separate units for deaf and for blind students. Despite the promotion of inclusive education, implementation remains difficult due to lack of training and resources and attitudinal barriers [9].

Out of the 32 interview participants, three had never attended school, four had stopped in primary school, nine had attained secondary and 16 completed tertiary education. A few young people reported having dropped out of school or that they did not attend school because of financial barriers and lack of inclusiveness in some schools.

Daisy

Daisy is a 32-year-old woman living in an urban area of Uganda. She is blind.

Her biggest challenges in primary and secondary school were accessing the different areas of the school, and in getting study materials in formats that were readable with screen-readers.

Nonetheless, she persevered and obtained an undergraduate degree in Procurement, and a postgraduate degree in Special Needs Education. The university she attended had a resource centre that provides support to blind students by developing readable versions of study materials. In addition, the university gives an allowance to students with disabilities, to buy school necessities. She was also supported by friends who guided her to the different rooms for her lectures.

Daisy is currently pursuing an online braille training course taught by an institute based in the US. She attends sessions via Zoom and emails her work to the course tutors. She has never been employed but she is interested in teaching digital skills to other people with severe visual impairments.

Access to education

Findings in this section will be presented according to key stages along the journey to access education, including (i) identifying and enrolling in schools or other educational institutions; (ii) paying for education; and (iii) reaching schools or other educational institutions.

Identification and enrolment

Identifying the right school was considered crucial for learning and this, sometimes, required considerable time and effort as evidenced by the quotes below:

“I was admitted with the support of my sister, she looked for a deaf school because I was deaf, and I was enrolled at [detail removed] Secondary School for the Deaf. [...] That school had a different environment because I started learning new things, sign language and I got new friends as well.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

“That’s when they [my parents] took me to [detail removed] School for the Blind where I was placed in Primary Six to be able to learn as a blind child how to read and write. God helped me and I learnt very fast, and I went in Primary Seven the following year.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

From the interviews it appeared common for learners with disabilities to attend mainstream primary schools in the beginning and later join special education schools to continue with primary and or secondary education. Interviews indicate that this mostly applied to learners with visual and hearing impairments. Participants who studied in special needs schools reported a sense of belonging. Others, who attended mainstream schools, also described benefits, including impacts of friendships and connections with peers without disabilities:

“In my days growing up, we went only to schools that were not for people with disabilities, and the children I knew who had disabilities in my area used to go to schools that were only for the children with disabilities, which to me is not inclusion but discrimination. Because for me, the chance of getting a job comes from the people that I grew up with in most cases. Now if I grew up with a disability and went to a school for children with disabilities, it means that my friends are going to be in a circle of persons with disabilities and we are all a marginalised group of people; so who will help the other?” (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Some students at mainstream schools also reported being able to participate in co-curricular activities such as art, music, and drama. However, this level of inclusion is not universal across mainstream schools, given issues of accessibility and attitudes within the schools. Nonetheless, there were positive impacts of attending a mainstream school on relationships with peers and view of self:

“Generally, I liked learning. I am open to learning; so, of course I had to like everything that came at school, I liked music, dance and drama, I was also very much active in the school clubs like the patriotism club, sometimes I used to feel as if I have no disability since I used so much to relate with learners who had no disabilities.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

For participants in special education schools, the progression to secondary and university levels was assisted by teachers and disability-inclusive admission processes:

“Admission at the university, I was lucky because I applied direct from secondary and was admitted directly from [detail removed] secondary school. The admission was done from school, and it was easy because teachers helped to fill in the forms after I got an invitation to go for the interviews. The interview process was inclusive because they provided an interpreter. Also, the interviewers were disability sensitive. I was admitted under affirmative action.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Here, the participant is describing the benefits of the affirmative action government scheme supporting young people with disabilities to attend university. Framed by the Universities and Tertiary Institutions Act (2001), persons with disabilities receive an additional four points to what they have acquired through Advanced Level exams [7]. It is evident that this student benefited from this programme as well as having teachers willing to help. However, it is worth noting that this may not be experienced by all students with disabilities, even those in special education schools.

Paying for education

Some participants reported having dropped out, not attending school at all or having to miss days of school due to lack of financial resources. Although government has set free education in public/government primary and secondary schools, there are costs that have to be met by parents including buying uniform and school materials. Lack of financial resources is a common driver of non-attendance in this setting, even among non-disabled learners. However, people with disabilities are on average poorer and can face additional costs associated with disability (e.g., for accessible transport and assistive products), and are therefore likely to be disproportionately affected by financial barriers to education [3, 8].

“The challenges were there right from home because of limited finances. I would go to school and students had things that they needed, including [others] who were blind. I would go to school after two weeks from the beginning of term as my parents were still looking for money, they would give me what they had...” (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Some interviews suggested that despite government support being introduced in 2007, meeting costs associated with secondary and tertiary education remained difficult for some families with learners with disabilities. As the quote here indicates, this led some to drop out of school.

“I studied up to Senior Four. When I reached Senior Four money got scarce. You know it was my mother who was my financier and the more she grew old, even the money decreased. [So] I went and stayed with some other people and I began my project of studying some computer.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

These financial challenges sometimes meant that a decision needed to be made in families with multiple children, about whose education could be funded. In some other settings, misperceptions about disability led families to choose the non-disabled child, but this pattern was not prevalent in this data.

“There was a debate whether to pay for me and I join Senior Five or to pay for my sister so that she completes Senior Six. I told my mother to give that money to my sister so that she could complete her Senior Six and join university probably she would be able to help me also. By then my mother [...] was earning so little. At first my mother didn’t want to give the money to sister at the expense of me joining Senior Five but I assured her that I was ok with it. So she paid for my sister and she was able to complete Senior Six. After six months my mother decided to enroll me at a vocational institute...” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Youth narratives mentioned financial support provided by NGOs and private sponsors, though it cannot be assumed to be widely available. Participants also referred to government scholarships which include tuition fees, a stipend, and money for a support person depending on one’s disability and support needs.

“There is this scholarship that is given to the learners with disabilities where the selected few can join some of the public universities like Makerere University. So, we filled the Public Universities Joint Admissions Board (PUJAB) forms prior to the admission, and you had to include your disability right in the form. After the results from Uganda National Examinations Board are released, they call you for an assessment and if you make it, you are awarded the scholarship in either Makerere University or Kyambogo University.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

The assessment noted in the quote is a crucial step, as it would identify the type of support needed by the student with disabilities, and would need to be considered in the financial aid.

Source: BRAC Uganda



Accessing schools or other educational institutions

Environmental and infrastructural barriers (e.g. inaccessible buildings and toilets, lack of accessible transport, difficult terrain) are widely recognised as limiting access to education for people with disabilities - this was echoed by several participants in this study.

“My mother would carry me on her back and take me to school in the morning before going to her workplace. The challenge I got was that my mother would take me in the morning but by the time school closed she would still be at her workplace and I had no one to take me back home.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Sometimes the students with disabilities would be helped by peers, and a few noted being helped by community members.

“Over time, by the time I reached Primary Two, I had got friends who would escort me back home and sometimes they would even pick me from home, and we walk to school together.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

However, it is important to recognise these supports are informal and likely unreliable, leaving people with disabilities more vulnerable to the availability and willingness of others. Further, despite these informal supports, challenges persisted, and framed their experiences in school.

“It wasn’t a bad school, but it was challenging because it didn’t have water. We had to go to the well, yet the road was bad just like the roads in the rural areas. There were many pot-holes on the road. We would have one guide for eight people who are blind. That guide was always behind so we would fall into the potholes, we would slide and fall down, and the jerry cans would fall.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)



Source: MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit

Experiences during education

For those youth with disabilities who successfully navigated access to educational institutions, their experiences, during education, were shaped by two main factors: (i) accessibility and accommodations; and (ii) teaching practices. These are in addition to the other cross-cutting enablers and challenges reported under Reflections.

Accessibility and accommodations

Accessibility and reasonable accommodations are an essential component of inclusive education, as well as a fundamental human right for people with disabilities, yet they are often inadequate, inappropriate, or entirely non-existent. For some students with disabilities, starting at university included adjusting to new challenges in addition to those experienced by new students without disabilities.

“When I joined university, it was so hard since I didn’t know sign language. I had no idea of captions. Basically, I had to read for myself to understand how everything is going on.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Youth with physical disabilities faced mobility challenges because of the inaccessible infrastructure. Buildings had staircases with no ramps, some of the washrooms and desks were raised, making them difficult to use.

“There are buildings you cannot access because most of those universities were built a long time ago, and so, they haven’t yet improvised means for the persons with disabilities to easily access buildings. So, accessing lecture rooms was not easy. Then [detail removed], where I studied from, doesn’t have a hall of residence. So, getting from where I stay to the university was another hurdle.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)



Source: MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit

There was some evidence of measures addressing physical inaccessibility, such as allocating students with physical disabilities to ground floor rooms in the halls of residence, or moving classes to accommodate these students:

“Director of [detail removed] said that for my sake, all the lessons in my course that were being conducted in classes upstairs would be shifted to the ground floor and that is what happened. The classrooms were on a [multi-]storeyed building, but for my sake the entire timetable of Computer Science class had to change. For the entire period I was there until I completed my course. He told the lecturers that all lessons had to be on the ground floor, so I didn’t have to climb stairs.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Another positive example in terms of accessibility is the Kyambogo University, one of the public universities in Kampala which includes the Uganda National Institute for Special Needs Education (UNISE). The faculty buildings are accessible for students with physical disabilities, financial allowances are given to both government- and private-sponsored students with disabilities to enable them to afford assistive devices (e.g., audio recorders, white canes). The university also has a resource room where blind students can have their work printed in readable formats.

“It’s a university that has stationed itself out to do research and also try as much as they can to put facilities to support people with disabilities in [contrast] to all other universities I know. Even there is a department called UNISE where they do most of those courses for people with disabilities. When you go there, you will find that even the way it is built, the roads the buildings all those things they are just to be able to match the standard [needs] of people with disabilities. Then they also usually give people some money, some allowances.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Even in instances where hiring support persons were an option, it was not always consistent or effective at meeting the needs of the learner with disabilities.

“The university was challenging to me at first because I didn’t have friends yet the support person that they give to us is given very little money. Getting that person was a challenge, I didn’t have him at first but now I have friends who help me go to school.” (Male, 18-24 years, has a visual impairment)

As the quote here mentions, it was common to see a reliance on peer support to address gaps in accessibility.

Teaching practices

Participants described the positive impact of supportive teachers on their experience in education, such as teachers devoting extra time to their learning. This varied by type of impairment, and even among the same impairment groups. For example, it was reported that some teachers pay special attention to learners with intellectual disabilities.

“But here even if you haven’t understood, the teacher comes and elaborates for you more so that you can understand. It has helped me because I am a slow learner. It takes me two times to understand things in class [...] You can even consult the teacher personally and he has time for you.” (Male, under 18, has a hearing and mild intellectual impairment)

However, this was not uniform across different schools, and most participants indicated that it was common for teachers to ignore and exclude learners with disabilities.

“I really feel bad when teachers ignore me, but because the schools are organised in a way that teachers are meant to come in class and teach within a period of time so that other teachers can also teach, you realise that the teachers have no time to wait for an individual like me who takes long to remember and yet she /he has a lot to cover within a specific period of time. A parent should clearly explain to the teachers about the child’s disability for example, the parent can tell the teachers that this child cannot remember very fast just like other children in class.” (Male, 18-24 years, has an intellectual impairment)

Being excluded was common among learners across different types of impairments:

“I was tortured a lot in primary [school] because I was alone and the teachers never cared about me. If they taught and you didn’t understand, they would just go ahead. Some teachers pay attention to me but with others... because they are teaching many students, they may not consider you and at times they can forget about you. A tutor can point to the blackboard trying to explain how things work, which you will not see, and you won’t understand.” (Male, 18-24 years, has a visual impairment)

In contrast to primary level institutions, inclusive teaching practices seemed to be stronger at private secondary and tertiary institutions.

“All schools I attended were private not government. At the university [...] teachers, lecturer’s attitudes were positive and supported me to study until I finished.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Some reported that teachers got better over time, as they became more familiar with the needs of their students with disabilities, while others had to manage for themselves to make up for lack of inclusive practices.

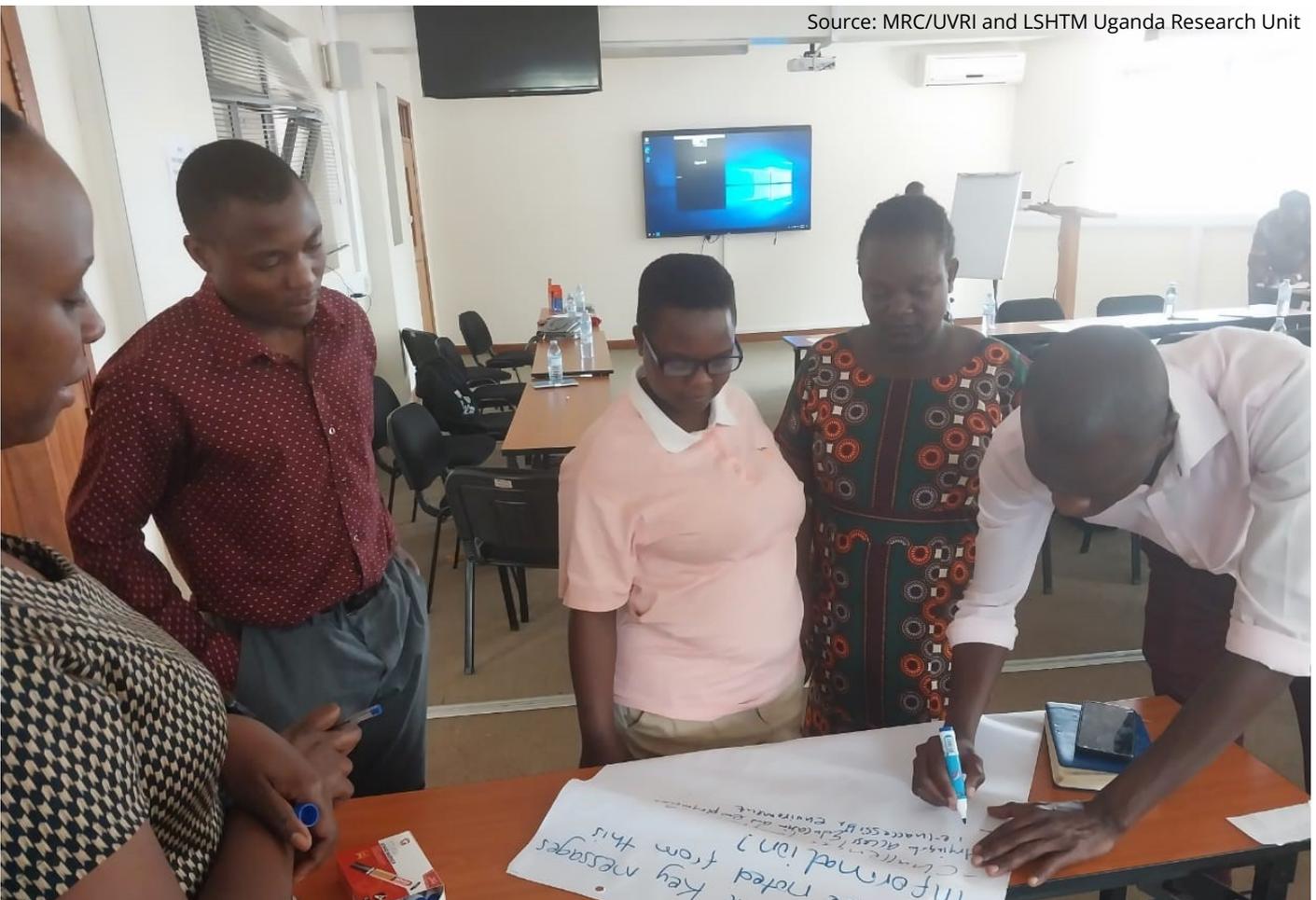
“Well, this was mostly about inclusion; most of the teachers did not know about disability; and since it was a mainstream school, you could not be given enough attention. We used to learn together, teachers could not mind whether you have heard or not, it was up to you. So that was a big challenge and I used to lag behind. So, I could try my best to sit in front and listen to as much as I could; communication was a big challenge since I was missing out on information which was really so important.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

As with structural inaccessibility, many learners with disabilities had to rely on peer support to address inaccessible teaching methods and keep up with lessons.

“They used to help me move around for example, I would tell them to take me to the toilet, they would read for me notes. By the time I finished Senior Four, we were two blind students in the school [...]. Students who weren't blind are the ones who used to read for me notes from the blackboard. They would write and read for me at the same time so that I was able to write.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

It is important to acknowledge that although peer support can enhance a disabled learner's experience by helping address lapses in accessibility and teaching practices, the responsibility of ensuring inclusivity lies with the education providers.

Source: MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit



TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT

Several participants who had completed or were not in education were engaged in different income-generating activities, such as tailoring or with small businesses. Some had formal paid jobs, some were self-employed in small-scale activities, while others did unpaid work to gain skills so that they can eventually apply for formal employment.

Milly

Milly is a 26-year-old woman with a hearing impairment. She lives with her mother and siblings in Kampala. At home, the family is very supportive, and many family members are learning sign-language to be able to communicate better with Milly.

She once attended a one-month training on digital skills organised and funded by an international NGO. This training helped improve her typing, and she learned how to navigate internet websites, and to use software like Microsoft Excel. She now applies this knowledge and uses a website to advertise the sweaters she makes.

Thus, the training had a tremendous impact on her. She missed some of the sessions because she could not always afford the transport cost to the training venue, as she was not earning at the time. She believes that providing transport and meals to attend trainings like these would make them a lot more accessible for people with disabilities. The training Milly attended was designed specifically for people with disabilities living around Kampala, so she suggests that it be made available to people with disabilities in other areas too.

Many participants struggled to find jobs despite having graduated from colleges and universities. Below is a quote from a participant who has a Diploma in Computer Science:

"Many of them are educated but no jobs; for me I spent five years at home without a job after graduating from college and if it wasn't for this place maybe I would still be job-less." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Key challenges transitioning from education to employment included stigma and discriminatory practices because of their disability (elaborated under the Reflections section of this report), and unwillingness of employers to make reasonable accommodations.

I:* What have been the challenges in finding work?

P: There is a lot of negative attitudes. When you say that you want work, people even laugh it on your face, so there is a lot of negative attitudes. People are so biased. Then the facilities. Maybe you go to a workplace, they cannot help you and pay for an extra guide.

(Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

*I: Interviewer; P: Participant

Given these difficulties securing suitable employment, this transition period seemed to be characterised by availability and accessibility of (i) vocational training; and (ii) on-the-job training.

Vocational Training

Participants reported taking part in different vocational skills trainings including shoe making/mending, hairdressing, craft making, tailoring, baking, and cooking. Participants were also specifically asked about training opportunities related to agriculture, and this is discussed under Experiences in the Agricultural sector.

Some participants were encouraged towards certain types of trainings because of assumptions made about their disabilities and capabilities, which did not always lead to productivity.

"I joined Advanced Level, and I was doing Luganda, Economics, Geography, together with Math. But I was not able to comprehend well the classroom content or academic work, my performance deteriorated. I was advised to learn a practical skill that is how I enrolled for a two-year certificate in baking in a college." (Male, 25-35 years, has an intellectual impairment)

As with other educational opportunities, many trainings were not accessible, limiting opportunities for young people with certain impairment types:

"Outside class, training opportunities are there but because of communication challenges, there is no way I can ably participate. How I wish those outside programmes can be improved by becoming accommodative." (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Participants who had participated in training organised specifically for people with disabilities reported that they were often provided for free by NGOs, which helped substantially. The most beneficial opportunities were trainings that were followed with job placements.

I: What happened after her year of training?

P: She was given a job to help the cooks here at the organisation

I: How long has she been working here?

P: We can sum all the years she has been here to four. [...] I am so happy about my child's happiness because at first, she was never happy or enjoy-ing her life while at home like how she is now [...] but ever since she joined this organisation she has been a very happy girl and indeed she enjoys herself because while at work no one abuses her or tries to humiliate her, just like while at home where some people humiliate her in different ways. [This] indeed makes me happy to see that she has where she can find peace and happiness.

(Caregiver of female, under 18, has an intellectual impairment)

In addition to contributing to wellbeing, other impacts of receiving training included feelings of security and confidence in being able to support themselves.

I: What impact has that training had on your life?

P: I have acquired a skill that can help me because now I have two skills. If my education fails, I can go to the saloon and earn some little money.

(Male, under 18, has a hearing impairment)

Apprenticeships and on-the-job training

Participants often received on-the-job training or apprenticeships as a way to get work experience. These could potentially lead to exploitation where they are not appropriately remunerated for their labour.

I: How long did it take you to learn how to make cuttings and learn how to sew clothes?

P: It took me three years because remember that I was employed first by that same person. I used to mop [and] iron clothes and he used to send me into town to buy him materials.

I: Did you have to pay for this training?

P: When he called me, he promised that he will be buy me lunch and give me 2000 Shillings every day for transport. He also used to give me 10,000 Shillings on Saturday but [a] time came when he was no longer getting that money to pay me, so he owed me a lot of money. He told me that since he wasn't making money, he was going to stop paying me, but he will teach me how to sew as compensation for the money that he would have paid me. [...] When he told me that he will be teaching as compensation for the money that he was supposed to pay me, I left and went back home. He called me again and told me to come. He mentioned that 'I know that you don't like this job, but you never know, you acquire the skills and have them that even if you don't practice, you will still have the skills.'

(Male, 25-35 years, has a psychosocial impairment)

As the quote here indicates, employment opportunities were so rare for youth with disabilities that some reported working on volunteer basis to prove their capabilities.

An important point to note is the variation in availability of opportunities during this transition period. Some trainings were offered in school, while others were through apprenticeship placement or formal training. Several were opportunities they came across through neighbours or others in their communities. Thus, the prevailing trend is that young people with disabilities are not systematically offered opportunities to support their skills development and participation in work.



Source: BRAC Uganda

EXPERIENCES IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Agriculture is the country's preeminent sector and economic driver, employing over 80% of the labour force. [8] Information on the inclusion of young people with disabilities in agriculture is limited, although one study found that young farmers with disabilities were much less likely to participate in agricultural capacity-building programmes than those without a disability [9].

Eight participants were sampled to provide deeper insight on experiences of people with disabilities working in the agricultural sector in Uganda. Of the eight participants, four had their own small farms, and four worked on family farms which were mostly subsistence farmers. The analysis highlighted three key challenges.

Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus is a 32-year-old man with a physical impairment. In his home in a rural area of Uganda, he grows vegetables like sweet potatoes, cassava, maize and keeps poultry. He has a food stall in the market where he sells his food produce, and this is how he supports his family.

He employs people to help him out, as he can't do everything because of his disability. He engages in agriculture because he knows how to treat sick poultry and has attended agricultural training organised by a government institution which offers advice to farmers in Uganda.

He finds agriculture challenging because of the high costs of commodities. He went to the bank to borrow 500,000 UG Shillings but the bank asked for an initial deposit of 400,000 UGS, meaning that they would only lend him 100,000 UGS. Luckily, Zacchaeus knows of a national disability grant that he can pay back with no interest, but he knows it may take him a whole year to secure this grant.

Challenges related to type of impairment

The type of challenges faced by youth with disabilities varied by impairment type, highlighting the importance of avoiding stereotypical judgements such as agricultural jobs being deemed unsuitable for all people with disabilities. For example, for those with physical impairments, some laborious tasks are difficult and there are sometimes incompatibilities with assistive products like wheelchairs:

"I cannot wheel myself to get the greens from the bush to give to the rabbits; so feeding them in general was really a challenge for me." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

People with physical and visual impairment encountered difficulties with monitoring the progress of their agricultural projects.

"They are not able to supervise their projects. For instance, if you have a physical disability, you're farming down the valley or uphill, you're not able to go there and really monitor. Now if you have sight issues like me, you will not know whether your beans are doing well or not. You may count on someone who may not even tell you. And also, you are not able to run around and chase for money." (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

For those with intellectual impairments, it was typically the case that they helped on family farms rather than undertake agricultural work on their own. Family members reported that youth with intellectual impairments were productive and independent members of the team, but that some allowances had to be made for high- and low-functioning days, much like how non-disabled people also have high- and low-productivity days.

“She is very hardworking as I told you. When she is tired, she can be, like I am, tired. At first when we had just introduced it to her, it was a bit difficult still the issue of having a reverse brain at times [...] When it happens, you just know that the head is not functioning well and you just have to send her home. But the day she is not disturbed, she can really do good work. [...] We are trying to train her in that area also knowing that as she is growing, she is growing into a woman. Where at least she should be able to have food for her children in future and even for herself.” (Caregiver of Female, under 18, has an intellectual impairment)

It was evident from the analysis that people’s impairments were not considered insurmountable barriers to working in agriculture. Much like non-disabled people with own small farms, they too just require people to assist them with certain tasks, and these employees needed to be trustworthy and supervised. Thus, with proper assistance, success is possible for people with disabilities working in agriculture.

I: So, how is your experience as a person living with disability and doing farming at that level?

P: Now, I do tree planting. However, I bring on board the right people to help me. This requires money which not everyone may have. For instance, you are growing trees, you need a tractor for instance to plough for you, find seedlings. From there, take care of them... It is an elaborate process. Remember, you are not seeing what you are doing. If a person helping you is fishy, you will not get anything. So, you need to get the right people on board and have the money to help you. Remember, you are not doing it by yourself. You know! Like, I grow matoke, you know! You have to find the right suckers, then put in money, you have to get a tractor... because I do it in a large scale. So, you also need to get the right person to do it for you. Remember [as a person with visual impairment], you are not seeing it. So if you are not careful, there can be a lot of manipulation.”

(Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Challenges because of attitudes

It is evident from interviews that negative attitudes, assumptions, and stigma often permeate all aspects of life for young people with disabilities, including in the agricultural sector. Attitudinal barriers presented here only pertain to that of working in agriculture. (For all others, see Reflections)

In addition to facing exclusion from bank-loan schemes, youth with disabilities interested in agriculture reported struggling to convince non-disabled agricultural employers to give them opportunities to prove themselves.

I: ...what kind of challenges do persons with disabilities face for example in the agricultural sector and even at the workplaces? [...]

P: Segregation; you know as I have told you, people will always want to make it a point that you are not well and most of these people will not be accepted and given the jobs. Even if they know the potential in them. I am lucky that sometimes if I speak to people, they may know that I am able to work. May be because, they've seen me work well with them. That is the first thing; "So can you really do this?" So there is that segregation, they will always consider people who have you know, physical disability as unable to do something. It is the biggest challenge.

(Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

For those already working in agriculture, negative or overly-charitable attitudes from consumers gave them less bargaining power, which impacted their sales and income.

"The attitude of the buyers of your products towards your products and towards you with a disability. They don't look at your business as a business, but they may look at your business as a charity. Someone will say that let me just buy from her because she is disabled; you are not buying from me because I have the best product in the market, you are buying from me because of your attitude. So, that is one challenge if we are putting our products out there, let people buy from us because so and so is a person with disability, and has outstanding products and services not because out of pity."

(Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Other challenges that were not specific for people with disabilities (i.e., non-disabled people may also face these challenges) included lacking space for agricultural ventures. Many also lacked knowledge in different aspects of agriculture-related work. It is probable that youth with disabilities have more pronounced knowledge gaps because they are at greater risk of exclusion from training opportunities.



Needs

Analysis of youth narratives highlighted two key ways in which youth with disabilities may be supported in the agricultural sector. These are in addition to cross-cutting enablers like assistive products that are detailed under Reflections.

Financial support

Lack of capital was reported as one of the barriers keeping young people with disabilities from working in agriculture, including capital for start-up costs, land, and commodities.

“You are already not working because of a disability, where will you get the money for the pesticides, the hoes, where will you get money to inject in that agriculture? Definitely you will not, those are the challenges. And even the land systems, you may find that, owning land is a problem. The people who see you with a disability will wonder whether you deserve a single piece of land!” (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

As the quote above indicates, it is important to address discriminatory attitudes within the family and community, in order to combat issues of land ownership. For the disabled youth with interest in agriculture, the data indicated a need for information about how to navigate complex systems, such as land ownership and bank loans, as the latter is difficult for non-disabled youth as well.

“What I find difficult and is a challenge to my agricultural activities is the high prices of commodities. You know the price of the commodities do not segregate whether you have a disability or not. [...] You cannot go and borrow a loan in the bank because we people with disabilities cannot really borrow bank loans. Most of the banks do not trust to lend us money/loans. They just see us like we are not in position to pay back their money. They think that most of us we cannot manage work. [...] You know in most of the banks, we especially with physical disabilities cannot manage to move on the steps; if you manage to reach the bank, you are bounced like for three times. That alone makes you know that here, there is nothing good that can come out. Secondly, they don't expect you to have any assets that you can use as security.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

The quote above is indicative of the range of barriers that need to be addressed for youth to enable them to meaningfully engage in work in the agricultural sector. Inclusion needs to be reflected in policies (e.g., facilitate land ownership and bank loans), infrastructure (e.g., physical accessibility to banks); service provision (e.g., non-discriminatory practices in banks); equitable access to commodities and equipment (e.g., non-discriminatory practices among suppliers).

Training

The training needs described by youth aspiring for success in agriculture highlight clear gaps to which programmes could respond.

Most participants engaged in agriculture had had no training but had picked up skills and tips from family members. Nearly all expressed earnest desire to learn more.

I: In general, what kind of challenges do people with disabilities face in agriculture?

P: Personally, it was information, attitude, accessibility, now it is going to move from physical accessibility to accessing the farm, accessing your customers, accessing the information that you need to run the farm, the information that you need to market your farm products.

(Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Many mentioned wanting to learn how to better market their produce to help them counter the negative attitudes or stereotyping from consumers.

"The challenge would be marketing, finding market for the produce would be quite challenging for the persons with disabilities." (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Several described wanting to learn how they could expand their agricultural ventures and diversify their produce and stock.

"What I would want would be agri-business; marketing for the produce is the training I would love to get, and then also there is diversity in terms of planting. And the new animals on market what does well and what doesn't do well." (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)



Others also needed skills in business management:

"In rearing poultry, I need to get [qualifications] so that I may know that what I am rearing, how do I treat them if they become sick. Like at what time and so on. Also, in business, I want to get training on how I can manage my business professionally. Like currently I know that if I buy fresh green bananas worthy 2000 Shillings, I can get 3000 Shillings just using my brain. I want my business record keeping to be done professionally." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Model farms were suggested as a way they could learn from other experienced farmers.

I: Where do you think you can get that kind of training from?

P: Usually, districts could be having what we call model farms is the best way. Using the model farms or farmers to train other people.

I: What kind of support would you need to enable you acquire that kind of training?

P: You see, the best support is knowledge. The moment you know that there is some thing here and there, you always go and get it. Because you can want to get some thing when you don't know where to get it from. So, the first support is identifying that there is a model farm here, there is a model farm there and then you can start.

(Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)



Good practice examples

Youth narratives highlighted three examples of good practice that improved their experiences in the agricultural sector.

Information about value chain in agriculture:

One participant described the impact of just a one-day training on the possibilities of being involved in the value chain in agriculture.

I: Have you received any form of training; formal or informal relating to agriculture?

P: I received one last year, and this was in our office because, we were working on some project, and this is when this particular project was looking at agriculture as a form of financial inclusion for persons with disabilities. In that, they opened my eyes in seeing that there is a value chain in agriculture. I didn't know that; so, as far as agricultural training is concerned, I only learnt value chain.

I: What do you mean by value chain?

P: The value chain are the different stages that the products or agricultural products go through to reach the final consumer. So, for that to be inclusive, we realised that people with disabilities can be involved in these different stages. You might find that a person with disabilities is planting tomatoes, after the planting, what happens next? Maybe another person with a disability can buy from a farmer with a disability and add another value on the tomatoes; maybe make tomato sauce and sell it maybe to a company that is already in business selling. They package it and they are done. So, the chain from the farmer with a disability, to value addition and so on.

(Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Innovation challenge:

It allowed one participant to secure start-up capital to try an agricultural venture for the first time.

I: Could you tell me more about the rabbit farming you say you had started?

P: It was an innovation challenge and they asked people with disabilities to participate. I remember it was Sight Savers, Standard Bank, challenges worldwide, Light for the World and so on. So, I participated. I had a very good idea; I sat down here and looked at it because I learnt from my neighbour where I used to stay. So, the knowledge I heard was from seeing what my neighbour did. That helped me pitch a very good idea that won me 1000 US dollars.

(Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Early exposure to agricultural skills:

Another participant described receiving training in secondary school that helped substantially.

"In secondary school, I learnt agricultural basic skills and now I know how to plant cabbages. This is good because some time back I grew cabbage and maize for sale from the skills I learnt from school. It is also important to continue pushing training students in agriculture because you never know maybe if you fail to get a job, this skill can help you start a life at home, which is good. But other programs that are not in school the challenge is, they are not inclusive, it's better to make all programs disability inclusive maybe in future to help even youth with disabilities to benefit from these programs." (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Source: BRAC Uganda



EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEES WITH DISABILITIES

Uganda has a leading role in promoting the adoption and implementation of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (also known as the Kampala Convention). Refugee children and youth, like others, have the right to attend government schools [10]. However, refugees with disabilities in Uganda are largely unemployed and are vulnerable to poor working conditions [11].

A small number of interviews were conducted with refugees with disabilities, to highlight their experiences with education and employment in Uganda. These six participants were refugees from nearby countries including Somalia, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Four factors were found to shape their experiences related to education and employment. Although not all are specific to disability (i.e., non-disabled refugees are also likely to face these issues), it may be that refugees with disabilities face compounded difficulties because of their refugee status and disability status.

Assani

Assani is a 27-year-old man with a psychosocial disability. He is a refugee from Congo and has been in Uganda for 11 years. The main reason he left Congo with his siblings is when his parents and grandmother were killed during a raid, in view of the children. This trauma led to his current psychosocial difficulties which worsened with head injuries in an accident in Uganda.

He has a Diploma in Electrical Engineering. He tried to find jobs as an engineer in Uganda but was unsuccessful because of language barriers and mistrust towards foreigners. He then trained in tailoring, learning to sew different types of designs. However, his disability makes him forgetful, and he receives abuse from his employers about this. He was able to purchase a sewing machine and now works from home.

Assani suggests that refugees could be given entry tests by host countries so that they can continue with education at the level where they stopped while in their home countries.

Lack of necessary documentation

Refugees who did not study in Uganda faced challenges in finding employment because many could not provide the required documentation to verify their educational attainment levels or skills, or their academic documents do not match the equivalent to those used in Uganda. For some, this meant taking on informal jobs which were inconsistent and did not provide a stable income.

"I came here without any academic documents, but I have the necessary electrical wiring skills. When I came to Uganda, the first thing that I did was to look for a job in [detail removed] because I was sure that I would do it. I went to their offices at [detail removed] and did an interview, but the problem was that I was not a Ugandan. I wasn't given the job and that's when I gave up on looking for an electrical job and decided to become self-employed. I had also tried to look for other opportunities with people who were constructing houses so that I wire their houses which I got but it wasn't easy. The people who do wiring know each other, it is hard to give a job to someone that they don't know." (Male, 25-35 years, has a psychosocial disability)

Communication barriers

Language barriers are a common challenge to integration among many displaced communities and these were found to affect education and employment experiences for refugees with disabilities. For example, for those attending specialist schools for deaf children, not knowing Ugandan sign language was immensely challenging.

I: What support do you need as a learner with disability to enable you complete your education?

P: I want to learn the Ugandan sign language so that I am able to fully understand even when they are teaching in class.

(Male, under 18, has a hearing impairment)

In contrast, the quote below is from a refugee child with a less severe hearing impairment type but has been enrolled in a mainstream school. His challenges are more related to lack of inclusive teaching practices with teachers being unresponsive to accommodate his needs.

P: I require help from people to elaborate for me more at school because at school those kids talk loudly so I can hear.

I: Can you give me an example of how your friends have supported you at school?

P: One day we were studying entrepreneurship, and the teacher wasn't talking in a loud voice. I told the teacher, but he didn't care about it. After the lesson, I told my friends to elaborate for me more. They used to talk louder so that I would hear, and they used to explain the work for me, and I used to understand.

(Male, under 18, has a hearing impairment)

Not knowing where to get help

A key issue common to many displaced communities is information gaps about where they can seek help. For some refugee families, relocating to Kampala gave them more security and opportunities, but they risk being lost in the system, with little knowledge of where they can go for help.

P: The leaders of my community know that these children with disabilities are there, but they do not have the capacity to help. Remember they are also refugees. Even if you talk to them, you cannot get anything. [...]

I: Do you know of any organisations that can help such young people with disabilities?

P: No, where are they? They say that 'urban refugees; you can look after yourself'. Yet for us we came to Kampala for security reasons. I would advise the registration authorities that when they identify children with disabilities, they send support. There was only one organisation that used to support us. They gave me school fees for two years and that was it.

(Caregiver of female, under 18, has psychosocial and intellectual impairments)

Discrimination

Nearly all refugee participants reported being discriminated against, which impacted their access to and experience of education and employment. Many still lived under the threat of violence. As the quote here emphasises, refugee families with disabled members face twice the discrimination (for their refugee status and disability identity) and sometimes face disability-related stigma from their own refugee communities. This, coupled with being in a foreign country where they do not know from where they could get help, leads to a distressing experience for these families.

"You know, I am a leader here in my community for the [detail removed] refugees. It is so painful. Even in the community, they say that I have a mad daughter; they will impregnate her. You see such words; it is not good at all." (Caregiver of female, under 18, has psychosocial and intellectual impairments)

Thus, while many of the factors described here may not be disability-specific, this analysis has highlighted three important points: (1) that refugee youth with disabilities often face compounded difficulties in daily life which are in addition to what local youth with disabilities face; (2) that these compounded difficulties impact their education and employment experiences and opportunities; and (3) that interventions to support them need to be holistic and address the range of difficulties they face as refugees and people with disabilities.



REFLECTIONS

Described below are reflections on cross-cutting factors that shape the experiences of young people with disabilities in Uganda.

Hadijah

Hadijah is a 34-year-old woman with restricted growth condition. She lives in an urban area of Uganda. She has seven children under her care. She has studied up to university level, and currently leads an organisation supporting people with disabilities in business.

She has a mobile foldable step-ladder that she uses to help her with things beyond her reach, like light switches, and flush handles in toilets. It was a tip she received when she was working in a shop during her school holidays. The step-ladder is not very portable, but Hadijah knows she needs it to be independent, particularly when she is alone in the office.

Assistive products

Assistive products are equipment or devices that enhance an individual's functioning in education, work, and daily life. The table below shows the type of assistive products used by the study participants, noting that this study did not involve assessing the need (or unmet need) for assistive products.

Impairment type	Number of participants	Assistive products used
 Physical	6 (Of these, 5 had mobility difficulties)	Wheelchair = 2 Walking stick/cane = 1
 Visual	6 (Of these, 4 could not see at all)	Stick/ local version of white cane = 1
 Hearing	9 (Of these, 6 could not hear at all)	Hearing aid = 5, but none were using them



ESTD 1982
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Access to assistive products appeared to contribute to education and employment in limited ways, primarily because these were typically not provided as part of their educational or employment opportunities. Overall, awareness and use of assistive products was low- that is, some participants did not know of products that might aid their functioning, some did not know where to get them, or if they were available to them for free or at subsidised prices.

Among those who had received assistive products, their availability seemed to be linked to their tenure in school or job. One participant described being provided a wheelchair as part of their education sponsorship, though a replacement was not granted after graduation. Another youth with visual impairment reported being provided the assistive software JAWS (Job Access With Speech), though they surmised this was only because they worked in a disability-focused organisation and it may not be made widely available.

I: How did you get your wheelchair?

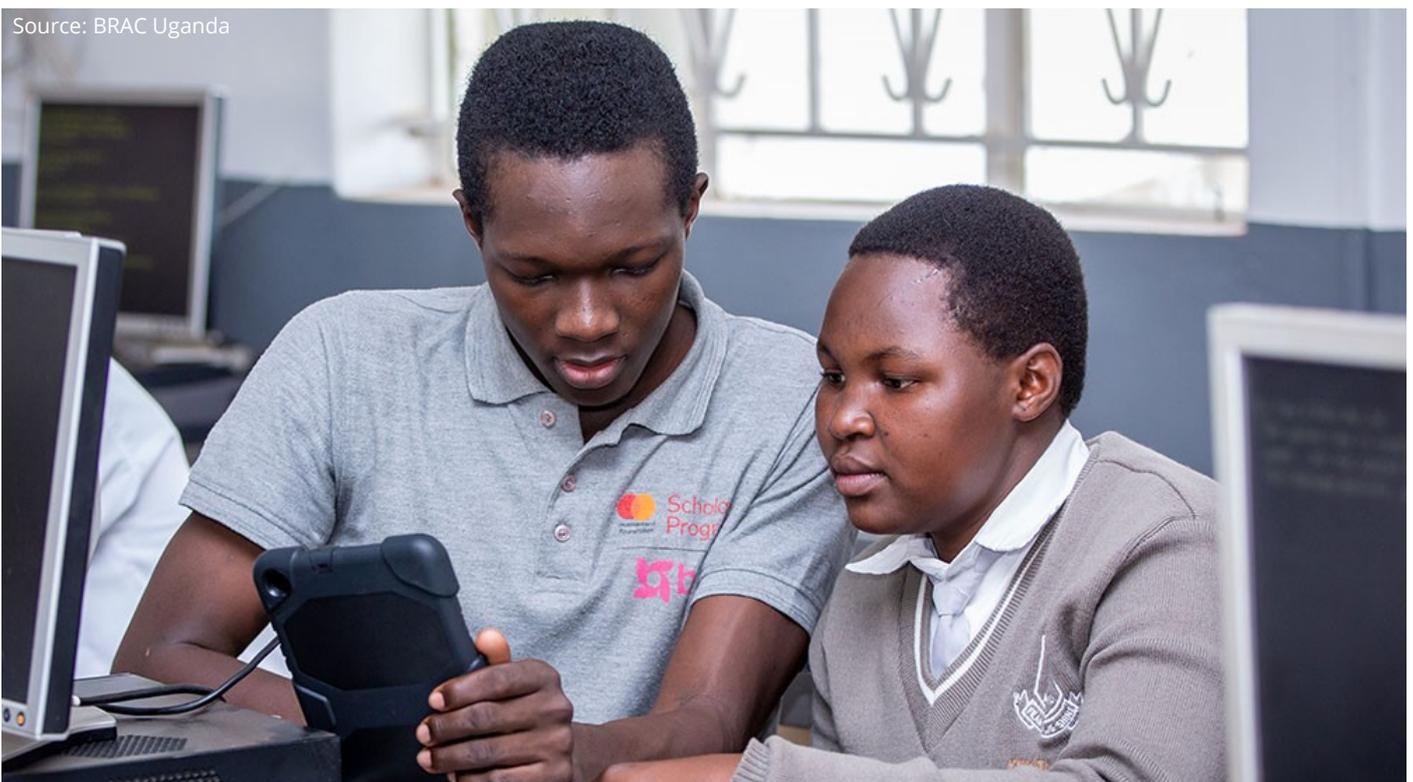
P: I have an organisation called [detail removed]. They helped me throughout my education. So, I am a product of their sponsorship. So, when my wheelchair gets old, I go back to them. Although, they recently told me that I am out of programme because I graduated long time ago. So, it is like they want to relieve themselves from that cost of finding me a wheelchair because I am no longer in their programme.

(Male, aged 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

A common response from all youth with hearing-impairments who used hearing aids was that they do not find them effective. For many, it was because they did not fit properly, or were difficult to use, and needed batteries or servicing.

Despite general low awareness, availability, and use of assistive products, there was a strong reliance on assistive features on smartphones. This was used to facilitate communication (e.g., video calls if needing to sign) or enlarge text (e.g., if vision is poor). Some used screen reading software on their computers to help with university work, but this relied on lecturers providing electronic versions of study materials. In all instances, these were features and utilities they had taught themselves, indicating how productivity and participation could be enhanced if they were provided with appropriate assistive technology, and acquired the skills to maximise their use.

Source: BRAC Uganda



Digital skills

Many interview participants indicated having had some exposure to digital skills training. However, this exposure varied greatly, ranging from being given time to practice using computers at school, to being taught basic skills like typing, to having done certificate-level and university-level courses. Participants currently or previously engaged in education recounted being taught these as part of study skills for university. While this appeared to be an enabler to educational attainment, it did not necessarily lead to securing employment; some participants were digitally skilled yet still struggled to find employment.

I: How long have you been looking for a job?

P: I graduated in 2016. So, those are roughly six years.

I: What kind of job would you wish to do?

P: A banking job, a marketing job a business strategist; those kinds of jobs.

I: What skills do you need to perform those jobs you are interested in?

*P: You have to have some accounting skills, computer skills, management skills, most of which I have.
(Male, 25-35 years, has a severe physical impairment and mild visual impairment)*

A few participants reported the benefits of being taught targeted digital skills to help with their chosen field or employment.

“During my baking course, I heard the exposure to computers. Even during accounting, I had exposure to computer. Even during my time of volunteer at [detail removed], I had access to computers where I used to work from a computer. Things like taking records, recordkeeping, and some of the accounting procedures.” (Female, 25-35 years, has an intellectual impairment)

Accessible digital skills training had the most impact for people with visual impairments because it taught them valuable skills in using screen-reading software.

I: Has the training had any impact on your life so far?

P: Yes, I am just loving my laptop. I am loving the accessibility. You know, you can have these struggles in using a computer, it is not easy. I don't know how it is for people with sight but when you don't have sight, you can struggle. Because, with us, we have to go around because we don't use the mouse. You have to keep on using keystroke combinations, to do what a mouse is supposed to do.

(Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

“I learnt how to use JAWS [Job Access With Speech] on computer and laptops. They were training us how to master the keyboard using JAWS where you press something and the JAWS read for you.” (Male, 18-24 years, has visual impairment)

For people with other impairment types, barriers to digital skills trainings were the same as for any other educational opportunity- not being able to afford trainings, and being delivered in inaccessible formats (e.g., without sign language interpreters).

P: Yes, I have some computer skills. I studied computing at university because we had it as a course unit. But at secondary, I did not get an opportunity to learn computer.

I: I want to know what helped you to participate in the computer training.

P: Maybe I would say [the] reasonable accommodation of a sign language interpreter because the lecturers were only speaking which helped me participate well. I had the interest to learn computer which makes things easier for me to continue, the lecturer guided the training well.

(Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Being able to afford digital skills training was found to be a major challenge for youth with disabilities.

"Well, it is a lot of money but for me I begged and begged and begged. You know, this course [digital skills course] has about 8 modules and each module costs about \$3500 but me, I sent in my emails. I kept on begging and begging till they cut everything for me till \$1,000. She decided to cut down everything to each module for just \$100." (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Some people with certain impairment types were overlooked for digital skills training, because of the nature of their impairment.

I: Has she ever gotten a chance to train in computer?

P: She hasn't gotten a chance. Because... it was because of her computer aspirations that took us to [detail removed]. Well, they even have computer lessons here. Maybe they haven't realised that she loves computers. They first began with necklaces and door-mats and now, they are learning tailoring. Maybe the computer will be next.

(Caregiver of female, 18-24 years, has an intellectual impairment)

Source: Flickr/Brian Wolfe



A few learned some skills from family members, while others were self-taught on smartphones. However, this access to devices was not available to everyone.

Several participants had received no training on digital skills, and most expressed a desire to learn. Some reported having had brief opportunities to start learning but could not complete.

"I went and stayed with some other people, and I began my project of studying some computer. When the person who was teaching me got the students he wanted, he stopped me. You know I used to pay him on a daily basis. If you get 2000 Shillings, you first pay and so on. So, I did not study that much; I only got just some few hints in computer. [...] I was studying from an individual. [...] He had started his computer library. [...] I got a chance in that he was just starting-up. When he wanted some people to keep his place busy, that is the chance I got." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Youth narratives related to digital skills indicate how expanding their access to digital skills could be a powerful enabler in their education and employment prospects. This is further supported in our findings presented under 'Assistive products', about their ability to utilise what is available to them (e.g., smartphones) to teach themselves skills.

Stigma

Youth participants described experiencing stigma in many aspects of their lives, including from family members, peers, teachers, prospective employers, and the community at large. Below, we outline the ways in which stigma affects education and employment, highlighting key forms of stigma that young people with disabilities often experience including (i) negative attitudes and stereotypes; (ii) bullying, physical violence, and sexual violence; and (iii) discrimination and exclusion.

Negative attitudes and stereotypes

For some young people, negative attitudes are experienced first within their own family. Participants described assumptions and stereotypes from family members that they are not capable of doing well in education or employment, refusing to pay school fees because of the belief that they would "be of no importance" (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment), lack of support from siblings in daily life, and being treated differently than family members without disabilities.

"I went through lots of difficulties at school. Parents should care for children who have disabilities. Some parents think that even if they educate us, we won't be of any use. If parents stop thinking like that and get to know that we are studying just like any other children, give them what they need without bothering about their disability, they can also live a good life at school. Parents should get rid of thoughts like 'even if I educate her, how is she going to be of any importance.' Parents who have children with disabilities need to be educated to know that a child with disability is as important as one without. Some parents lock their children inside houses saying that they aren't of any importance, yet he/she is as important as the others. He/she can even do what the other person can't do." (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Negative attitudes within the home and family can have significant consequences as to whether young people with disabilities can progress in their education. For those young people given the opportunity to pursue an education, participants described experiencing negative attitudes from peers and teachers in school.

"I was tortured a lot in primary because I was alone, and the teachers never cared about me. If they taught and you didn't understand, they would just go ahead. They would never beat me or tell me to pay attention. They would just say that 'let's leave that one alone, he has a problem.' They used to pity me a lot. Primary [school] was so hard, I never used to care a lot." (Male, 18-24 years, has a visual impairment)

Although in very few cases, some participants described facing stigma and negative attitudes both at home and in school. As many young people with disabilities rely on family members and peers to support them with challenges in school, those without this support both from home and in school may face more challenges.

Bullying, violence, and abuse

The young people interviewed also described experiencing bullying, (i.e. derogatory language, harassment, being demeaned by peers); physical abuse (i.e. being beaten), and sexual violence (i.e. sexual assault, rape, and threat of sexual violence) in school. For example:

P: There was a time they beat her up and she was all full of blood. Someone pushed her on a sharp stone, and she was like one who was cut with a panga [blade].

I: Did you try to go and talk to the teachers?

P: All the director said was that that child should be taken to some other school. That she cannot stop my school from progressing.

I: How would she make others fail to concentrate on their studies?

P: He did not want to condemn the other kids who beat this girl up.

(Caregiver of female, 18-24 years, has an intellectual impairment)

Participants reported how painful this bullying and abuse is and how it can also impact their self-esteem.

"Like in the community or when going to school and children start shouting 'look a lame person, look a lame person' and yet really, we wouldn't like to be referred to as 'lame'. So, it affects your self-esteem. Sometimes they even start imitating how you walk, and you really feel so bad, you ask yourself so many questions, 'why me?' So, such things can really hurt, though of course other people may encourage you and say, 'don't mind those people', but generally such jesting is painful." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Another participant highlighted the way stigma can negatively affect the young person's view of themselves and their capabilities.

"If we are in the same school or institution of learning and your attitude towards me with a disability is really negative, automatically, it will affect how I look at myself. It will affect how I look at my capabilities, and in the end, it will affect how I look at everything." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Discrimination and exclusion

Discrimination and exclusion based on disability is a pervasive form of stigma highlighted by many of the participants. In the interviews, young people cited examples such as parents or family members refusing to pay school fees, schools denying the young person enrolment, and lack of support from family, peers, and teachers while in school.

"I experienced marginalisation. My parents said, 'Now you are deaf, you drop out of school.' So, they refused me to continue with school." (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

The young people also reported discrimination in their pursuit of employment including being denied a job because the employer was 'ashamed' to hire a person with disabilities, assumptions that the young people are not capable of performing the work, and employers being unable or unwilling to provide reasonable accommodations and support.

"There is a lady who owns a restaurant, I asked her if she could give me some job to work in her restaurant and she told me that she feels ashamed to employ someone like me." (Female, 18-24 years, has a physical impairment)

As the quote here indicates, youth with disabilities face this discrimination despite being highly skilled and having proven their abilities through educational attainment.

"I graduated in 2016, with a Bachelor's degree in International Business from [detail removed] University. I am a person with a disability, I am a wheelchair user, I am not employed. I have failed to get employment since I graduated. [...] Many organisations do not want to employ people with disabilities because they generally see them as a liability. They don't understand us." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Source: MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit



Dora

Dora is a 33-year-old woman with a visual impairment. Her education stopped after primary school. Her father refused to pay her school fees saying that even if she was educated, she wouldn't be of any use or importance because of her disabilities.

Many people in her community refer to her as 'the blind', even though she is often seen managing tasks like collecting water, with the help of her child. Some people harass her when she is walking on the street. When she tells them not to do it, they get angrier and verbally abuse her. Her partner sold an item that she owned, took all the money and she never heard from him again. He doesn't help take care of their children.

Dora realised that people with disabilities in her community were being cheated of their voting rights. By the time they got to the voting table, their names were already marked as having voted. She raised this issue with a disability representative and asked it to be raised in council meetings.

Drivers of stigma

Understanding the drivers of stigma towards people with disabilities can highlight ways to address it, to better include young people with disabilities in education and employment.

Lack of awareness of capabilities of people with disabilities to get an education, engage in work, and contribute to the community plays a key role in limiting opportunities.

"You know, in the community way back, people looked at the disability that someone has, and they disregarded the capability of someone. They would ask my parents, 'why are you wasting money on that one? Will she live? Even if she lives, how will she be of benefit to you?' That often brought me depression, but my parents did not give up amidst all that." (Female, 25-35 years, has an intellectual impairment)

This leads to being perceived as objects of pity or charity, rather than being recognised for the skills and capabilities they can contribute.

"If you are talking of jobs for persons with disabilities; how many organizations are employing persons with disabilities? How many of us have gone to school and have even graduated and are just wasted in the village? The way you people perceive us is not good! We don't want you to employ us because of pity but it should be on merit." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Assumptions around capability can be complex. The assumption that people with disabilities are not capable often excludes them from opportunities where they might positively contribute. However, assumptions that people with disabilities have no limitations or support needs can prevent needed provision of reasonable accommodations or creating accessible environments.

Another driver of stigma is stigma itself- that is, the way in which discrimination can perpetuate negative attitudes, stereotypes, and misconceptions around disability, leading to further stigmatisation.

"First of all, there are students who may not want to associate with you for no reason. Someone may show you a bad attitude and yet you have not even talked to them, completely for no reason. [...] Because they have a bias about person with disabilities, others think that it is a curse and stuff like that. You may be excluded from some groups, you may want to associate with some people, but you can't because they don't want to associate with you." (Male, 25-35 years, has a severe physical impairment and mild visual impairment)

So how can these be addressed? The young people interviewed suggest that sensitisation on disability may be an important part of the path forward, but emphasise the inclusion of people with disabilities in delivering these lessons.

"You cannot sensitise people about disability without involving the persons with disability. They should be involved together with other people without any disability. Because how can you tell a story about being totally blind when you are seeing fully? If I can say that even if I'm not able to see I can take care of my children, I am able to clean the compound, I am able to take care of my people. [...] The people with disabilities can also do things just as anyone else can. You cannot have people who are able, teaching about disability. Do you even know what they are going through? You don't. So, it should be a partnership." (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Participants described how inclusion and perseverance in education or employment led to feelings of empowerment, confidence, and increased respect from members of the community.

"...The only solution to go by this stigma and bullying discrimination, it was after realising that education is the best way. So, I appreciate all those who helped me to go to school and empowered me to this level. So, whenever people come to bully you and you use English, people shy away, and they leave you there. Whenever people try to shun me out, I speak out." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

For several of the participants, showing their capabilities through education, skills attainment, and employment allowed them to combat and resist negative attitudes and assumptions.

"Sometime back, the situation was bad and negative, but with time, I went to school and came back as a totally different person. Now the community knows that [own name] went to school and I have qualifications and skills. So now they see me as a different person, so their mindset has changed a little bit, but I believe they need more sensitisation." (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

One young person described gaining respect from his community and resisting oppression by proving his capabilities through work in agriculture:

“For me I think I am okay; people see that Mr. [own name] is able. The man has a home, a farm to practice agriculture, at the same time has a car but other people do not have any. It is impossible to undermine me or oppress me because I am enjoying it independently. I also give jobs to other people there in the community, they come to ask for work, and I give it to them like digging, building and so on. So, they have respect for me, and I have no challenge.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Several participants highlighted the potential to change negative attitudes by demonstrating leadership skills, capabilities in employment, and becoming a ‘testimony’ to their community:

“Their attitudes as a whole would have been bad but what helps me is that since my brain is sane, their attitudes have changed in that I am a living testimony to them. You know they wonder ‘can he manage to lead? Can this disabled man manage to work?’ So, at the end of the day, one who could have made fun of you would just respect you instead.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

It is evident that stigma remains a significant issue for young people with disabilities in Uganda. As such, it is imperative that any intervention to support education and employment for these youth also address these beliefs held by family members, community, educators, and employers.



Support structures

Despite the pervasive stigma and discrimination people with disabilities continue to face, the young people also described numerous examples of positive attitudes and support from family, friends, teachers, and community members.

Family

Positive attitudes and support within the family can have a significant impact on young people's self-esteem, belief in their capabilities, and resilience toward challenges.

"About my parent's support; you know raising up a child and then putting them up in the right position, there are a lot of things that happen where if the child has done something wrong, you have to let them know that they have indeed done what is wrong. I appreciate them in that they never at any one point left me behind because of my disability. They were always in support of me." (Female, 25-35 years, has an intellectual impairment)

Several participants reported how actions like parents paying for school fees strengthened their belief in themselves and resilience toward challenges faced in school.

"What I liked about the support was that my parents always paid my support on time, they never delayed. My father used to tell me that all you have to do, is to study. I had never been chased away from school, at times he would pay for me school fees for the whole year." (Male, 25-35 years, has a psychosocial impairment)

Friends and peers

Positive attitudes and support from friends or peers in protecting the young people from bullying set a precedent that discrimination would not be tolerated, and ultimately fostered an environment for more meaningful participation.

"Friends were always there for me. For example, if someone insulted me that 'see this lame' boy, then my friends would intervene and ask that person 'why are you abusing him?' and things like that. My life rotates so much around friends, to this moment my friends have been so helpful even much more than my siblings." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Peer support in school also impacted their social lives and integration, sometimes protecting them from bullying and exclusion.

"My friendship with the school Head Girl helped me in that other students started fearing to tease or bully me because they knew that if they did, they could easily be punished or banished from the school. That helped me to be safe in the school. When that girl completed Senior Six, she left the school but by then I was already used to the school environment and could take care of myself." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

While this informal support was reported on positively, it is important to acknowledge the complexities of these relationships. There is the potential for this reliance to create power imbalances with peers which can be exploited and risks disempowering people with disabilities. Nevertheless, peer to peer support may offer a support alternative for schools in low-income countries as shown in other studies in Uganda [13].

Community

Familiarity and inclusion in the community can also contribute to positive experiences and support. A number of youth mentioned that once known in their communities, people tended to be helpful, such as helping them cross the road and looking out for them on a daily basis. This is in line with other research where we have noted the importance and support families and communities can give each other [14,15].

"I am lucky in the sense that people in my community really love me. I have good relations with people around and they know me even much more than they know my parents. They care about me, they guide me and shield me against trouble." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

One participant described how local taxi drivers knew her needs and offered support:

"I just sit on a wheelchair just like any other person does and I move to the roadside and wait for the taxi to come. Luckily on the road in my area now, I have lived here for 8 years and the taxi drivers around this area are familiar with me. So, when they find me, they just stop and most of them now know how to help me out. So, if there is someone seated on the front seat, they will ask the person to relocate to another seat and leave the seat for me. They help me to lift my legs because I can lift my upper body, but I can't drag my legs up because from the wheelchair the taxi is a bit high." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

The quote here emphasises the impact of being known in the community, having needs recognised and attended to, in place of systemic inaccessibility. Belonging to a family, poverty, and Ubuntu or humanity towards all, are key factors in disability inclusion and studying disability in Africa [13]. The sense of belonging to a larger community which has the responsibility to take care of all its members can be enabling and help negotiate support for persons with disabilities in communities which may not have the financial and material resources to provide typical reasonable accommodations or services available in middle- and high-income countries.

Belonging with other persons with disabilities

Many of the young people interviewed are actively involved with OPDs and report the positive impact of engaging with other people with disabilities, encouraging one another, and working to be role models for others.

“So far, I am not so much in leadership positions, but I support in giving advice to my fellow youths and children with disabilities. Because actually, when young people with disabilities look at me, and I share with them my experience, they really become positive towards their lives. Even those who had lost confidence, gain the confidence because they know that if I do this, I can achieve this or otherwise. Secondly, I try as much as I can to approach the responsible people or the leaders. I try to maximise every opportunity that I get or going to the radio station or anywhere else, I use it to make sure that the people with disabilities benefit.” (Female, 25-35 years, has an intellectual impairment)

Participants working or volunteering with OPDs also described the positive impact of engaging with people who understand disability and the challenges they face, and building relationships that are encouraging and empowering for the community.

“Though it is a voluntary job but there is a lot that am learning here. Even just being amongst other persons with disabilities is an encouragement to me. I have learnt a lot from my bosses, for example how to speak in public, how to handle people with different kinds of disabilities. I had never seen people with hearing impairments and even the blind, but I have met them here in my workplace. I have learnt so much from them and am very grateful.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Self-belief

The data shows that stigma can have a powerful impact on self-esteem, belief in one’s capabilities, and internalised stigma.

“Because of my experience. I thank God I came out of that through lived experience. There is a point where I reached, and I was like ‘society doesn’t like me’ and I internalised it. After internalising it, I started acting that way and I was like even if I go to school, they don’t like me. Even if I do this or the other, they won’t accept me. Even if I apply for this job, they won’t give me. But, sometimes, it is just those negative attitudes towards yourself that are visible to society, and they will be like ‘that one is hopeless; even if we give her [opportunities], she will not come.’” (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Similarly, positive attitudes can contribute to self-acceptance, improved self-esteem, and confidence in pursuing opportunities in education and employment. For some participants, these experiences motivated them to pursue leadership opportunities and act as an ‘agent of change.’

“People with disabilities themselves; if you change your attitude towards yourself and show society that you are capable of all that you are telling people that you can, then society will open up. Even if not the entire society opens up, even if one or two people open up and give you a platform where you can show to the world what you are good at, you can shine.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Findings of this study has shown how the support experienced by youth with disabilities from their family, friends, peers with and without disabilities significantly improve their experience and participation in education and employment. While they are important levers for success, they may not replace policies and commitment to inclusive practices.

Source: BRAC Uganda



Intersectionality

How, where, and in what ways young people with disabilities are included or can participate in education and employment varies greatly based on factors like gender, location, severity and type of impairment, and other aspects of identity. It is important to examine this intersectionality, to better support their inclusion.

Type of impairment

The type and severity of impairment can impact a young person's experiences. Those with more severe impairments experience disproportionate discrimination, and more barriers to participation in education and work. Similarly, the visibility of a person's impairment can influence how they are perceived and treated by the community, as evidenced by the contrasting quotes below:

"From the time I started school, things were not very easy. It is challenging where you move on the road and the whole public comes on the road to look at you as if you are not a human being, as if you are a cinema. It affected me so much whenever I could be in public, you look different..." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

P: By the way, many people don't know that I have a disability, I try to hide it. You won't know if we don't talk or if you don't become close to me. At times I fall down when the trauma is triggered but I will lie [and say] that I got an accident, but I know the problem that I have.

I: Why do you hide your disability?

P: When you say the truth, people disrespect you.

(Male, 25-35 years, has a psychosocial impairment)

Some struggled with not being believed when the impairment is not visible or when it does not match other people's expectation of what that impairment should look like:

P: The challenge that I have faced is that when I tell people that I have hydrocephalus, they don't believe because they expect you to have that big head. So, when you talk to them, they say that 'I think this one was just paid to say that.'

I: Are you sure?

P: Yes. So, people want that evidence. Of course, we have the evidence, the scars, and things of that kind. Those who believe, actually believe. And those who can't, equally don't. Some people perhaps don't want progress, they want to really see you stuck.

(Female, 25-35 years, has an intellectual impairment)

People with mental disorders and psychosocial impairments reported being called 'mad' or 'cursed' and thought of as being contagious.

*"At the school where I was, when I was in Senior Three, I was denied the chance to join the school. They chased me out when they got to know that I have a mental problem."
(Female, 15-25 years, has a psychosocial impairment)*

Gender

Women with disabilities experience compounded discrimination as both disability and gender carry forms of marginalisation and stigma. The data highlighted that young women with disabilities face unique challenges such as gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health (SRH) concerns, and socio-cultural expectations that differ based on gender.

*"Some people don't allow us to marry or get married just because we have disabilities, but there is need for community mindset change. We are not what they have always thought we are, we have also gone to school got education and can do many things."
(Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)*

Gendered experiences such as these permeated not only their access to education and employment but also access to health.

*"When it comes to hospitals, it is even worse; I remember when I was giving birth, I could not access the beds, even the medical officers were like 'even this one can give birth! Who wasted time to be with you?' Imagine a medical professional in [detail removed] telling you those words! And yet you expect them to be informed. They assume that we have no right even to give birth; and yet when God was creating us; no matter the way you are; we are all equal before the eyes of God. But when it comes to hospital; we mothers of short-stature, we are not treated equally by the medical team..."
(Female, has a physical impairment)*

GBV including sexual harassment, assault, and rape was a major concern for several of the young women with disabilities.

*"Generally, the community looks at her in a bad way because there are some men who at times want to defile her, like sometime back around a certain place here when she had gone to fetch water where an unknown man raped her and ran away behind a certain church..."
(Caregiver of female, 25-35 years, has an intellectual impairment)*

GBV and sexual assault brings numerous concerns around access to SRH services, such as being able to access contraception, prevent unwanted pregnancy, as well as prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS.

*"If a woman who is deaf cannot access contraceptives, for instance, or cannot even go to hospital and communicate their issues, then we are leaving some women behind."
(Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)*



Source: Flickr/Michell Zappa

In the interviews that included caregivers of young people with severe impairments, their fear in keeping the young people safe was very evident.

“As a parent, what do you do to keep her safe? I usually make sure she stays at home or stay somewhere where I can keep an eye on her.” (Caregiver of female, under 18, has a hearing impairment)

“But then now the fear every parent would have is that as she grows, what kind of friends does she make? When it comes to the opposite sex, when I am not around, I tell her not to open the gate. But at times she says that so and so came. ‘Did you open?’ And she is like ‘yes’ and I get scared. In case men come and they realise her condition, they may take advantage of her. I cannot easily send her out of home. If I do it, I have to be very careful, ‘where has she gone? Has she gone for greens in the garden? Who is in the garden?’ Like, to protect her from rape.” (Caregiver of female, under 18, has an intellectual impairment)

Issues around gender-based violence and safety are critical in the conversation on disability, as they can contribute to increased isolation within the home and may limit participation in education and employment.

Voice and agency

Voice and agency in decision-making varied among the young people with disabilities. Again, this varied by impairment type and for some, meant dependence on family, which sometimes came with less agency.

“It wasn’t my choice and when you do something that is not your choice, there will be side effects. I viewed life in such a way that I planned to go back to school, I had planned for so many things, but I ended up accepting things that I hadn’t decided myself.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a psychosocial impairment)

In some cases, communication barriers excluded them from decision making in the household. However, as the quote below shows, these young people are driven to make themselves heard.

“This is a good question. At a family level, I can participate though this is limited because of the communication challenge. Sometimes we have meetings involving important decisions, but I’m left out because of communication. There is no interpreter, and all family members don’t know sign language. I try to look for a solution to the communication challenge by using written communication, sending messages, or using local signs to make sure I can be included.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

There were several examples of young people with disabilities playing important and caregiving roles within their families.

“When I talk about my family, I am the first born. Everybody recognises me despite my disability. They let me take decisions on matters of concern that are crucial, like when we are organising the week’s meals. I’m the one who plans most of the things, being the eldest. So, I participate positively at home. When you come to the community, being a peer educator, I engage actively.” (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Tendo

Tendo is a 15-year-old boy with a hearing impairment. At home, he takes care of his siblings and does other household chores. He helps his mother with her work and works in a men's saloon to earn money to help his mother with household expenses. He and his family are refugees.

His mother informed his school that he has a hearing impairment. He is supported by teachers and his friends who do things like repeating things he misses because of his hearing impairment. He is Head Boy of his school, and recounts proudly of an instance where the school administration listened to his suggestion about constructing a bore hole at a spot that was leaking water in the school grounds.

Tendo is an active member of an organisation for people with disabilities, going around the community collecting clothes that the organisation donates to refugees. He also helps identify refugees with disabilities within his community.

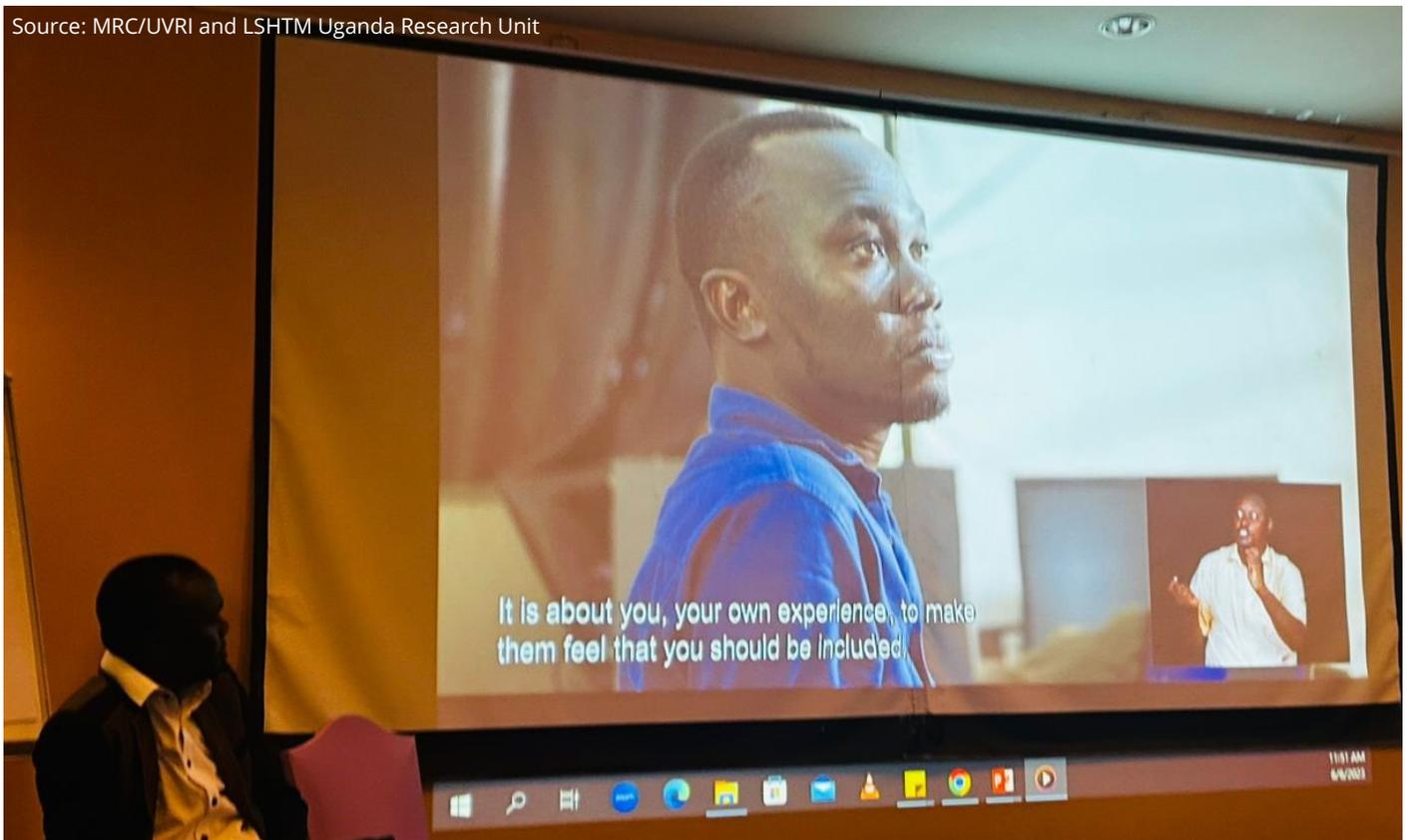
It was encouraging to note that youth with different impairment types held these roles in the family.

"With household activities, luckily, I live here, and I am the head of this household. I live here with my younger brother, and he is at university. And he is under my care. So at least my family knows that I have the capability to take care of my younger brother without overlooking my disability. So, at household level, I feel I am fully included, from decision-making to any other thing in my family. In the societal level, there is still a challenge, but we are getting there." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

These have sometimes translated into similar roles of leadership in their communities, which some attribute to being included in education and employment.

"With the education she gave me, in the country, I have become someone responsible and important. [...] I mean, who am I to lead the persons with disabilities in [detail removed]? Out of over 100 people, I'm in the first position. I have been the chairperson for 10 years now." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Notably, these positive reflections of voice and agency are from older age groups (those aged between 25-35 years), suggesting a need to focus on developing these abilities in younger people with disabilities.



Aspirations and opportunities

The data indicated a gap between young people's aspirations and opportunities available to them. These were most often financial barriers, such as needing funding as start-up capital or to expand their work. While this may be a common barrier to the non-disabled population too, it is likely to be particularly challenging for people with disabilities who face extra costs of disability and are on average poorer [3].

I: Five years from now, where do you hope to be?

P: If it all goes well, I would like to buy my own plot. [...] I wish to increase on how much I am farming. Like, I increase the land I am using.

I: What will help you to achieve that target?

P: Let's say I am farming maybe a small portion; I would like to farm in a whole hectare.

I: What will help you to be in position to achieve that?

P: Self-sacrifice.

I: Self-sacrifice! What kind of support do you need to see to it that you achieve that?

P: Getting money. [...] It will be of help in purchasing the required items in the farm. If I get that, I will be sure that I am on the right track.

(Female, 18-24 years, has a visual impairment)

Many described wanting more training opportunities and education, which were again related to funding.

“The support I require is that I really want assistance with capital in what I am doing because if you don’t have the financial muscle, you cannot really do much. I need to beef up my knowledge in what I am doing as well.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Scarcity of opportunities, real or perceived, seemed to also contribute to mismatch of aspirations and opportunities. These may range from having only certain types of trainings being made available (e.g., one participant was given training on crafts despite a keen interest in computers), to limitations in choice of schools.

I: So, you left the school even though you were the Head Boy?

P: Yes, I had to leave that school because the sponsor demanded that I join a special school for children with disabilities. That is why I ended up in [detail removed] school for the physically handicapped.

(Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Aspirations varied greatly, ranging from wanting to be doctors, counsellors, political leaders, and small business-owners. Some, who had experienced exclusion, had goals to simply be given an opportunity to prove themselves.

P: Honestly, I don’t know where I will be five years from now. Because, I have always wanted a job which I am not getting. So, I don’t know where I will be.

I: What do you aspire to be in the next five years?

P: I want to be an independent person running my own stuff [...]

I: So, what support do you need to help you achieve your aspiration?

P: If I could maybe get someone to give me capital while I am looking for a job so that I start up something. Or someone to give me a job and I kickstart my career.

(Male, 25-35 years, has a severe physical impairment and mild visual impairment)

For others, their goals were to become self-sufficient, and be able to support their families.

I: What support do you need to be able to get your parents out of rent?

P: I need someone to help me out with money. I need to get a job where I am self employed. You know with this job I just get the money for my child to study, eat and for paying rent. If I can start my own job, I can be able to get some money and even save some.

(Female, 18-24 years, has a hearing impairment)

Most were keenly aware of how education and training would expand opportunities for employment, and their ambitions demonstrated drive and commitment to hard work.

"I need education. If I could only get a scholarship, which I know is hard, I would go and study, I could be the first disability inclusion disability advisor who is female. Remember gender also plays a role. Because currently, the disability advisors whom we have in this country are male. If it is for an international organisation, I want to be head of programmes. I want to be looked up to and then they will say like 'let's send her to Malawi to go and help out that office abroad. Let's send her to South Sudan.' I want to be that woman with a disability." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

The most striking commonality among nearly all youth with disabilities interviewed for this study was that they all wanted to improve the lives of other people with disabilities (e.g., through employing them, teaching them). This highlights that it is young people with disabilities that will be the drivers of change for their peers to thrive in their communities and be respected.

We want a generation of persons with disabilities who look beyond what to eat; we want to be responsible citizens in this country. Let it be because my farm pays taxes that are able to buy medicine in the hospital, not because you are buying from me out of pity." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)



Source: MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit

Recommendations

This study has built on findings from past phases of this research, highlighting several areas for change to promote inclusive education and employment for young people with disabilities in Uganda. These include:

- **Stronger policy implementation** and enactment of laws to increase inclusiveness of persons with disabilities by all sectors in the country including education and agriculture.
- **Infrastructural changes and improvement** to facilitate reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities, including schools and workplaces.
- **More efforts to create awareness and sensitise communities** to address drivers of stigma, and on capabilities of persons with disabilities as active and productive members in the community.
- **Wider availability of training** in agricultural and digital skills to enable young people with disabilities to improve their employability and productivity.
- **More interventions and financial support** to better match the aspirations of young people with disabilities with opportunities.



Source: Flickr/Michell Zappa

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Appendix: Methodology

This report is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 32 young men and women with disabilities in Uganda to explore lived experiences of education and employment. On education, we collected data from youth currently in education (secondary, tertiary, vocational), those who were educated but not working, and those not in education and not working. The research focus for Uganda was the agriculture sector and experiences of refugees, selected in discussion with the Mastercard Foundation.

Qualitative data collection

In Uganda, the interviews were conducted by four research assistants (Regina Namuloki, Aminah Nambuusi, Jackie Akoth), among whom two are young people with disabilities. Some of the interviews were conducted with support of a sign language interpreter (Ruth Najjuuko). The team was led by Dr Femke Bannink Mbazzi and Dr Agnes Ssali from the MRC/UVRI & LSHTM Uganda Research Unit. Prior to data collection, the research team participated in training workshops (jointly with other country teams) facilitated by LSHTM that covered ethical protocols, interview techniques, maintaining data quality, and in-depth discussion of topic guides. Draft topic guides were pilot-tested, and research teams participated in feedback workshops after conducting the pilot interviews.

Topic guides for the interviews were developed in discussion with the broader project team, Mastercard Foundation and Youth Advisory Groups comprising youth with disabilities based in Uganda and Ghana. Interviews were conducted in English, Luganda, and Ugandan sign language between September to December 2022.

Ethical approvals for the study were obtained from the Research Ethics Committees at the Uganda Virus Research Institute and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Research clearance was obtained from the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology. All participants were provided with information about the study and written informed consent was obtained before the interview. Interviews lasted between 30-120 minutes. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and were either audio- or video-recorded (if sign language was used) after informed consent was given by the participant. Interview recordings were transcribed in English by two youth with disabilities, Charles Akello, who has a visual impairment, and Naume Adong, who has a hearing impairment and transcribed the video recordings of the interviews conducted in sign language.

After data collection and transcription, the research team participated in a data analysis workshop held in Uganda with other East African country teams to discuss approaches to coding and analysis. A coding scheme and codebook were developed based on the study objectives and emerging themes. Transcripts were coded using the NVivo software and analysed thematically. Findings were validated with the Ugandan Youth Advisory Group.

Participants were identified in collaboration with local organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) in Wakiso and Kampala districts and through snowball sampling.

Table 1. Breakdown of participant characteristics

		Male	Female
Age	15-17 years	1	4
	18-24 years	4	7
	25-35 years	8	8
Impairment type (Note: Some participants had multiple impairments, therefore these totals are different from actual total)	Physical	3	3
	Visual	2	4
	Hearing	4	5
	Psychosocial	2	4
	Intellectual	3	3
	Currently in education	4 (1 refugee)	5 (2 refugees)
Education	Educated but not working	2	2
	Not in education, not working	0	3
Employment	Working in Agriculture	4	4
	Working refugees with disabilities	1	1
	Working in other sectors	2	3
Location	Urban	5	11
	Rural	8	8
Total		13	19

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