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# What works for Youth Employment in Africa: **A review of youth employment policies and their impact in Uganda.**



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**Authors** Edward Bbaale | Peter Babyenda | Susan Kavuma  
Brenda Kiconco | Aniihah Kyamugabwa | Hennery Sebukeera  
Claire Nakigudde | Stephen Wainaina | Ramos Mabugu

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# What works for Youth Employment in Africa: **A review of youth employment policies and their impact in Uganda**

## Abstract

Youth in Uganda are facing challenges in terms of unemployment, underemployment and undignified work resulting from demand- and supply-side causes and ineffective employment policies, initiatives, and programs. This study employs a mix of methods including desk reviews and qualitative data gathered from focus group discussions and key informant interviews to investigate whether youth employment policies have been effectively implemented. The findings show that Uganda has numerous youth programs and initiatives in place that can be categorized as job matching, skilling, or seed capital provision. Existing impact evaluation studies of youth employment programs in Uganda indicate that some of the programs, such as the Uganda Youth Livelihood Program, the Uganda Women Empowerment Program, and the Presidential Women Skilling Program, have had a positive impact on youth employment creation and income generation. Field survey findings indicate that some youth, particularly those in rural areas, are not aware of these programs' existence. In areas where these programs are being implemented, marginalized groups, such as the disabled, do not benefit to the same extent as the other groups. Some programs, such as the Uganda Women Empowerment Program, are strictly for the women. In addition, some programs face several implementation challenges, such as the delayed release of program funds to beneficiaries, inadequate preparation of selected beneficiaries before program implementation, favoritism/nepotism in the selection of beneficiaries, and the misuse of program funds by both beneficiaries and some program implementers. Key program-related gaps identified include poor coordination, inefficient monitoring and evaluation, and failure to adhere to selection criteria.

**Keywords:** Youth employment, youth policies, impact evaluation, Uganda

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## Authors

### Edward Bbaale

Faculty of Economics & Management  
Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda  
[eddybbaale@gmail.com](mailto:eddybbaale@gmail.com)

### Peter Babyenda

School of Economics  
Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda  
[peter.babyenda@mak.ac.ug](mailto:peter.babyenda@mak.ac.ug)

### Susan Kavuma

Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda  
[suzkav@yahoo.com](mailto:suzkav@yahoo.com)

### Brenda Kiconco

National Youth Council  
Kampala, Uganda  
[Kiconcobrenda@gmail.com](mailto:Kiconcobrenda@gmail.com)

### Aniitah Kyamugabwa

Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda  
[aniitahkyamugabwa@gmail.com](mailto:aniitahkyamugabwa@gmail.com)

### Hennery Sebukeyera

National Planning Authority  
Kampala, Uganda  
[henrichsebs@gmail.com](mailto:henrichsebs@gmail.com)

**Claire Nakigudde**

Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social  
Development, Kampala, Uganda  
[clairenakigudde@gmail.com](mailto:clairenakigudde@gmail.com)

**Stephen Wainaina**

Development and Public Policy Consultant  
Nairobi, Kenya  
[wainainacs@gmail.com](mailto:wainainacs@gmail.com)

**Ramos Mabugu**

School of Economic and Management  
Sciences, Sol Plaatje University  
Kimberley, South Africa  
[rmabugu@gmail.com](mailto:rmabugu@gmail.com)

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## List of Abbreviations

BTVET	Business, Technical, and Vocational Education and Training
DIT	Directorate of Industrial Training
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EPRC	Economic Policy Research Centre
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GWPE	Government White Paper on Education
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KII	Key Informant Interview
LU	Labour Underutilization
MDAs	Ministries, Departments, and Agencies
MoAAIF	Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries
MoFPED	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
MoGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development
NEP	National Employment Policy
NHIS	National Health Insurance Scheme
NSG	National Special Grant
NSPP	National Social Protection Policy
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
NYP	National Youth Policy
PWDs	Persons with disabilities
SEP	Secondary Education Policy (2007)
TRUEMP	Time-related underemployment
UALFS	Uganda Annual Labour Force Survey
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WB	World Bank
YEP	Youth Employment Program
YIYA	Youth Inspiring Youth in Agriculture Initiative
YLP	Youth Livelihood Programme

## I. Introduction

The Constitution of Uganda defines youth as persons aged 18-30 years. According to data from the World Bank, half of Uganda's population of 45,700,000 people are 15 years or under (World Bank, 2019). Like many other African countries, Uganda is dealing with increasing youth unemployment. The 2019/2020 Uganda National Household Survey reported that pre-COVID-19, the national unemployment rate was 9.2% and that of youth aged 18-30 was 13%. The unemployment situation was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. To address the unemployment problem, the Ugandan government adopted several policies and initiatives. The institution that is responsible for spearheading and coordinating labour- and employment-related policy initiatives in the country is the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MoGLSD). Some of the critical Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) that support youth employment policies include the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), the National Planning Authority (NPA), the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE), and the National Association of Trade Unions (NATU). Additionally, both the 2011 National Employment Policy (NEP) and the Third National Development Plan (NDPIII) strongly recommend establishing a national-level employment council (NEC) to ensure the coordination of actions undertaken by various employment creation stakeholders. The NEC should be supplemented by structures at the district and sub-county levels.

Improving Ugandan youth's job prospects and productivity, especially among those most vulnerable, is a crucial priority for the government (NPA, 2018). This is reflected in national policies that prioritize youth employment and are aligned with NDPIII's overarching frameworks for 2020/21 to 2024/25 and Vision 2040. NDPIII acknowledges the challenges associated with implementing youth labour policies and proposes an intervention under the Human Capital Development Programme (HCDP) to "reform and strengthen youth employment policies and programmes towards a demand-driven approach." Policies such as the 2001 National Youth Policy (NYP), the NEP, the National Action Plan for Youth Employment (NAPYE), the Uganda Gender Policy (2007),

the National Policy on Persons with Disability (2007) and the National Equal Opportunities Policy (2006) are in place to systematically address and mitigate some of the challenges associated with youth employment.

Some of the youth employment programs and initiatives that have been implemented by the government and other stakeholders include the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP), youth skilling programs, presidential youth initiatives, donor-funded youth employment and skilling programs, cultural institution-supported youth initiatives, and private youth employment and skilling programs that are largely sponsored by politicians, churches, and charity organizations (Bechange et al., 2021; Atwiine, 2013; NPA, 2018). Several studies have evaluated some of the existing YEPs (Economic Policy Research Centre, 2015; Sekabira, 2017; and Bechange et al., 2021). While they have found that certain programs, such as the YLP, continue to exhibit moderately positive performance, they also highlight several challenges that affect some programs. Some examples of these challenges include poor transport facilities, a lack of coordination between financial institutions and stakeholders, inadequate funding of the monitoring and evaluation process, an overall lack of transparency and accountability, and the originality of the YLP and its top-down approach (Atwiine, 2013; Sekabira, 2017).

It is in this context that this study analyzes and evaluates Uganda's YEPs and empirical studies of their impact. The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section two provides an overview of youth labour market outcomes. Section three delves into the methods used in this study. Section four reviews Uganda's YEPs from both a normative perspective and a positive one. Section five presents the main results of the fieldwork. Finally, Section six concludes this study.

## II. Overview of Youth Labour Market Outcomes in Uganda

Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 78% of its populace under 30 years old (UBOS, 2020). The country also has a high youth unemployment rate of 13.3%, which is above the average national unemployment rate of 9.2% (UBOS, 2021). The youth unemployment rate is believed to be 10% higher for female youth than male youth (Sekabira, 2017). The 2019 youth employment statistics released by UBOS indicated that 43% of youth who were actively in employment were own account workers (self-employed). Thirty-nine percent of those youth were male, and 31% were female. The share of youth in paid employment in urban areas, on the other hand, was 45%, which was much higher than the share of youth in rural areas, which stood at 28% (see Table 1). Those youth who were in employment were also found to be experiencing inadequate earnings, low productivity, and challenging working conditions such as not having access to protective gear (Gemma, 2015). The percentage of youth who were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) was estimated to be 39% in 2020, and this percentage was expected to increase due to COVID-19 pandemic (NPA, 2021). The pandemic was expected to worsen youth unemployment or increase youth employment in undesirable work (UBOS, 2018). Additionally, according to a 2021 NPA report, the share of young women NEET was nearly twice that of young men, at 50.5% and 29%, respectively. Furthermore, in Uganda, ratio of youth NEET is found to be higher mainly in the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area, Northern Uganda, and Western Uganda (UBOS, 2020). One of the reasons why youth find themselves NEET is that some of them believe undertaking any job search is pointless (NPA 2018).

**Table 1: Employment Status of Youth by Background Characteristics (%)**

Background Characteristics	Employee	Employer	Own Account Worker	Contributing to Family Worker	Not Stated	Total
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	38.9	3.9	48.4	8.0	0.8	100
Female	31.0	4.6	35.6	28.1	0.7	100
<b>Residence</b>						
Rural	28.4	3.4	43.4	23.5	1.3	100
Urban	45.3	5.2	42.1	7.3	0.1	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>42.9</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Number ('000)</b>	1,532	180	1,851	720	33	4,317

Source: Annual Labour Force Survey (2018/19)

Table 2 shows that 5.2 million youth were in the labour force in 2019, more of whom were males than females. The older a child is, the higher the likelihood is that they are in the labour force. Most (58%) of the youth in the labour force resided in rural areas (UBOS, 2019).

**Table 2: Distribution of Youth in the Labour Force by Age and Residential Status**

Background Characteristics	Male	Female	Total
<b>Age group</b>			
18-19	13.6	14.4	13.9
20-24	34.1	41.1	37.4
25-30	52.3	44.5	48.7
<b>Residence</b>			
Rural	62.1	53.7	58.2
Urban	37.9	46.3	41.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Number ('000)</b>	2,751	2,427	5,178

Source: UBOS (2019)

Education mismatch is a labour market situation in which an individual's level of education does not match the level of education required for their job. Almost half (46%) of youth were undereducated for their jobs, although 41% of them had a level of education that matched the requirements of their job (Table 3).

**Table 3: Background Characteristics of Employed Youth in Uganda**

<b>Background Characteristics</b>	<b>Matched</b>	<b>Over- educated</b>	<b>Under- educated</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	42.5	13.8	43.7	100
Female	39.2	11.5	49.3	100
<b>Residence</b>				
Rural	34.8	8.2	57.1	100
Urban	49.5	19.0	31.5	100
<b>Education Level Attained</b>				
No primary education	38.0	0.0	62.0	100
Primary	19.4	0.0	80.6	100
Secondary	76.0	13.3	10.7	100
Post primary/secondary specialized training	57.2	42.8	0.0	100
<b>Sector of Employment of Main Job</b>				
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	37.6	4.7	57.7	100
Production	33.6	19.9	46.5	100
Services	46.2	15.9	37.9	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>41.1</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>46.1</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: UBOS (2019)

Although the official youth unemployment rate seems relatively low, it is blinded by disguised unemployment in terms of the jobs held by the majority youth. The high youth population is increasing demand for decent jobs and putting additional pressure on the education sector and social protection systems. Most youth are self-employed, and the government should thus support initiatives that help them to create decent jobs. There is also a need to tackle the issue of youth being NEET by addressing realities such as low educational attainment, deprived neighborhoods, and barriers to full labour force participation such as early pregnancy and disability.

### III. Methods

This study used a mix of research approaches that considered quantitative and qualitative primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained from national- and subnational-level focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). Prior to these events, an extensive desk review was conducted to collect secondary data.

The desk review was both positive and normative. Newspaper articles, and employment policies, programs and legislation were reviewed to identify what is known and where there are knowledge gaps. Furthermore, we examined YEP reviews published by key development partners such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank (WB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These organizations regularly analyze Uganda's labour market and are actively involved in initiating and funding some interventions meant to address employment issues facing youth, such as underemployment, indecent employment, and unemployment. Media reports and evaluation reports, especially ones from Uganda's Office of the Auditor General on YEPs, were also reviewed. The desk review helped to obtain policy and program descriptions as well as background data and identify empirical reviews of policy impact evaluations.

Primary data were obtained through KIIs and FGDs conducted at the national and subnational levels. Primary data were collected in nine districts across the country, including Kampala, Wakiso, Masaka, Mbarara, Hoima, Jinja, Mbale, Lira, and Gulu. A total of 83 KIIs and 12 FGDs were conducted. The KIIs and those who attended the FGDs included stakeholders drawn from the youth organizations, private-sector companies, funders, and policymakers that are involved in initiating and implementing youth employment policies and programs. Table 4 shows the disaggregated characteristics of the KII and FGD samples.

**Table 4: KII and FGD Sample Distribution**

Category	Location	Male	Female	Total	Percentage (%)
KIIs	Upcountry	38	18	56	67.47
	Kampala	8	6	14	16.87
	National Level	8	5	13	15.66
	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>54 (65%)</b>	<b>29 (35%)</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100</b>
FGDs	Kampala	<b>4</b>			<b>33</b>
	Upcountry	8			<b>67</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>			<b>100</b>

Source: Authors' own computations

Surveys were administered during face-to-face interviews conducted with 83 key informants and stakeholder engagement workshops held during FGDs. Our field study began May 1, 2022, and ended May 24, 2022. We conducted the KIIs and FGDs concurrently. Key informants included MoGLSD representatives; youth leaders; university student leaders; local government officials (for example, labour liaison officers, youth employment liaison officers, and youth representatives in parliament); and economists from the World Bank, UNDP, IMF, and ILO. FGDs were held with YEP beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in Uganda, including members of marginalized groups – women, refugees, and persons with disabilities (PWDs). Each FGD had a maximum ten participants from different backgrounds: male youth, female youth, youth with disabilities, and refugee or internally displaced youth. FGD participants were selected so that the sample reflected the youth population's dynamics and characteristics in accordance with Krueger and Casey's (2002) guide.

## IV. Review of YEPs

In Uganda, YEPs incorporate both demand-side interventions and supply-side interventions that largely involve skill-building. YEPs are sometimes known as business climate interventions because they provide program beneficiaries with access to financing to create jobs for themselves and others. Most YEPs target the general labor force, only a few focus solely on youth. These latter YEPs provide opportunities for young people, including disadvantaged youth, to gain financial knowledge, skills, and access to the resources one needs to effectively manage their finances throughout adulthood. They also cover a wide range of occupational skills, skills development and the training required to successfully transition into adulthood and a career. The YEPs that were reviewed as part of this study are summarized in Table 5 along with their description, objectives, target group, impact, and implementers.

More specifically, Column 1 of Table 5 provides the names of the YEPs selected. The programs' start and end dates are indicated in Column 2, their main objectives are presented in Column 3, and their target groups are mentioned in Column 4. Column 5 presents the programs' outcomes, while Column 6 presents their implementers. In this case, Columns 1- 4 cover the programs' normative parts, while Columns 5 and 6 present their positive parts.

**Table 5: Youth Employment Programs in Uganda**

<b>Program Name</b>	<b>Started</b>	<b>Ended</b>	<b>Main Objectives</b>	<b>Target Groups</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Implementors</b>
Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP)	2014	Ongoing	Improve the income structures of the country's unemployed and under-privileged youth in all districts	Unemployed and poor youth aged 18-30	Youth interest groups (YIGs) of 10-15 people receive YLP support in the form of revolving funds (soft loans with friendly terms) that they pay back within an agreed-upon period	The MoGLSD, local governments, and the Kampala Capital City Authority
Uganda Women Empowerment Programme (UWEP)	2015	Ongoing	Empower Ugandan women for economic development	Women aged 18-65, survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), women with disabilities, women living with HIV/AIDS, women heads of households, and women slum dwellers	Women improve their income sources	The MoGLSD, local governments, and the Kampala Capital City Authority
Green Jobs Programme	2015	2020	Create decent green jobs, increase labor productivity, and reduce poverty among educated and uneducated women and youth	Educated and uneducated women and youth	Workplace re-skilling and skilling, and resource efficiency and social safeguards at work are promoted among educated and uneducated women and youth; workers and enterprises enhance their productivity	The MoGLSD

National Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities	2020	Ongoing	Promote the wellbeing of PWDs through livelihood building and income generation for national development	PWDs, including youth	Some PWDs have set up businesses, low uptake, limited impact	The MoGLSD and local governments
Presidential Initiative on Skilling the Girl Child	2017	Ongoing	Providing young girls with hands-on skills that will enable them to create jobs and generate wealth	Girls aged 17-35	Baking, ladies' tailoring, hairdressing, makeup, knitting, shoemaking, weaving	The Office of the President and the State House
Youth Apprenticeship Program	2013	Ongoing	Improve the employability and skills of unemployed youth by providing opportunities to work (via volunteering) with micro and small-scale businesses	Fresh graduates and unemployed youth	Record keeping skills; stock management skills; customer service, sales, and marketing skills; innovative-ness	Uganda Investment Authority (UIA), Vantage Communications Limited (VCL), the Directorate of Industrial Research, and the MoES
Youth Inspiring Youth in Agriculture Initiative (YIYA)	2017	Ongoing	Increasing youth employment in agriculture by fostering young agri-preneur role models	Youth, both male and female	Youth champions, youth peer-to-peer support activities, technical training, agricultural product exhibitions, policy dialogue	The MoAAIF and the Food and Agriculture Organization

The Uganda Youth Venture Capital Fund	2013	Ongoing	Provide venture capital debt financing to viable projects proposed by young entrepreneurs and enable youth to benefit from associated mentoring services from participating banks	Youth, both male and female	Viable and sustainable private-sector SMEs	The MoGLSD
Young Africa Works	2008	Ongoing	Provide 3 million Ugandan youth with dignified employment	Smallholder farmers, teachers, out-of-school youth, and agricultural youth across the country	Youth in tourism, agriculture, and SMEs	Mastercard Foundation
The Parish Development Model (PDM)	2021	Ongoing	Boost household income and improve Ugandans' quality of life by transforming subsistence households (on- and off-farm, rural and urban) into the money economy	Women (30%), youth (30%), PWDs (10%), older people (10%), and men / the general population (20%)	Still new, no evaluation studies available yet	The Ministry of local Government and the MoFPED

Although several YEPs exist, there are program-related implementation gaps. The gaps identified include design gaps, coordination gaps, and poor monitoring and evaluation frameworks and follow-ups to ensure programs are implemented in accordance with their initial design. There are also challenges in term of the timely release of funds, especially for those programs that involve granting beneficiaries access to financing, and failure to adhere to the originally designed selection criteria. These gaps affect the effectiveness and efficiency of YEPs and, in turn, their intended objectives. They need to be quickly addressed to ensure the programs achieve their desired targets.

## **V. Key Findings of the FGDs and KIIs**

This section presents the main findings drawn from the KIIs and FGDs. The questions asked during the KIIs and FGDs focused mainly on the existence of YEPs, program awareness, the beneficiary selection process, implementors, target groups, benefits, challenges, and how YEPs can be improved to achieve their targets.

### **5.1. Benefits of YEPs in Uganda**

The findings of both the KIIs and FGDs indicate that some YEP beneficiaries have been empowered. For instance, one female FGD participant noted that *“things have really changed for women compared to men due to these programs especially the women empowerment fund.”* One key informant from Kampala remarked that *“women who have benefited from youth programs have been able to become empowered and independent due to increased access to financial services.”*

According to most FGD participants it is evident that women and youth who receive funding from employment and empowerment programs become financially

independent and able to save money and obtain loans from village savings groups or other financial institutions. Women and youth who can save money are able to improve their business skills and in turn access affordable loans. Increased income levels have reduced dependency syndrome, and hence, beneficiaries are able to decide independently how to use their income. *“When people get some income, become self-reliant the burden on others decreases the dependence burden,”* said one of the key informants. Another key informant explained that *“[w]omen have become empowered, independent, sustaining their lives and are no longer beggars for ‘Kameeza’ home money and live on their own finances to take care of their own personal needs.”*

*Employment leading to a source of income:* Most beneficiaries who obtained funding to start or expand their business are now self-employed or employing others and thus earning an income. Most of the programs trained their beneficiaries to save money and, as a result, incomes have increased, as have beneficiaries’ savings. As one FGD participant explained, *“From the profits that I get, I have to save some money in the group, save some for self and invest more in the business.”* Blattman et al. (2014) demonstrated that providing financial incentives to organizations that help young people develop business plans has a significant and long-term impact on placing the unemployed in non-agricultural occupations, increasing income, and lengthening workdays. This is consistent with the findings of this review study.

Respondents also noted that YEPs have helped to reduce crime rates. The programs have encouraged youth to work, and since they are a little bit busier, crime rates have decreased. In addition, the programs have increased employment opportunities. Youth who utilized the funds as intended were able to create jobs for themselves and for some other youth, increase their income-generating activities. According to one of the key informants, a youth officer, *“there are many beneficiaries who have opened up businesses on shoe making, bread making and soap manufacturing that have created jobs for themselves and their fellow youths.”* This has also helped the economy to generate more revenue and hence improve service delivery. This is consistent with Kluve & Schmidt’s (2002) finding that entrepreneurship programs are effective at increasing employment rates.

*Improved youth employability and market access:* The skilling programs and exposure afforded to beneficiaries have equipped them with skills to become productive. Some have also received support to access markets for their products, especially those involved in carpentry, tailoring and design, cosmetology, and shoe repair. *“With the skilling and funds received, some youths have been able to improve the quality of their products due to increased demand,”* said a female FGD participant in Kampala.

*Increased confidence for PWDs:* The inclusion of PWDs as employment program beneficiaries has increased their confidence. One FGD participant with a disability commented that *“[m]ost of the beneficiaries have been able to engage themselves in income generating activities [rather] than begging money for survival hence earning respect for themselves.”*

*Fewer cases of domestic violence, especially among Women Empowerment Fund beneficiaries:* Most of the time, domestic violence is tied to poverty. A household member who benefitted from the program highlighted that, she was able to increase her income, and this enabled her to better provide for her dependents. *“[B]ehaviors like pick pocketing, drug abuse, child abuse and GBV have reduced among the youths since YEPs have made them innovative and changed their mindsets,”* one of the key informants recalled.

## **5.2. Common Challenges Affecting YEPs in Uganda**

*Misuse of YEP funds:* This was highlighted in FGDs and KIs as a major challenge that affects most of the employment programs and has deeply impacted their performance. The programs’ funds were revolving, which means when they are misused, the misused funds are gone and will not be repaid, and the outcome of the program is potentially impacted. The misuse of funds has been attributed to a lack of financial literacy and inadequate enterprise management training. It was reported that beneficiaries were trained for one day in enterprise management and record keeping, and this is very inadequate. One key informant explained that *“[m]ost of the youths that*

*received the youth livelihood fund were extremely poor...so you give a youth who does not even have what to eat four million shillings, they used that money for survival hence misused the fund.*" The review findings are consistent with experimental evidence from Uganda's YLP, that hypothesized that young people spent their revolving funds on consumption rather than (re)investment in basics such as health and education (Blattman, Fiala and Martinez, 2014).

*A lack of effective monitoring and supervision:* Most YEPs are not monitored and supervised. This creates loopholes, a lack of follow-up leading to the misuse of funds, and projects failing to achieve their intended objectives. Kluve & Schmidt (2002) emphasized the importance of conducting evaluations to assess the effectiveness of employment programs. One of the key informants from Nakawa Division noted that *"on monitoring and evaluation, the implementers should involve the local leadership because the local council is very key when it comes to the implementation of Youth employment Programs, so leadership councilors, local councils are all involved in the process of selection."*

*Political interference:* Most of the program implementors had to deal with political interference, especially when trying to recover funds. Most employment programs are launched during presidential election campaigns, and this has greatly affected recovery rates. One key informant reported: *"I remember YLP came in, when the president was campaigning, and he told the youth that I have given you money. So, how can you approach such a group to return the money after hearing from the fountain of honor that I have given you money."* This is also a challenge that has really affected the implementation of YLP.

*Overwhelming demand for support:* The demand for employment programs is always greater than the target number of beneficiaries due to the resource envelope being inadequate. The number of people who apply and register to benefit from the programs is always high. One of the key informants remarked that *"the Industrial hub has just started... the numbers of youth who applied have applied are 2,000 over and above the required number of 300 youth."*

*High failure rates when it comes to repaying YEP revolving loans:* Most of the employment programs are challenged by low repayment rates, and according to some interviewees, it has been alleged that most beneficiaries think that government has given them free money and most of the groups do not pay back the money they receive. One FGD participant noted that *“most of these monies are given either towards or immediately after the presidential and parliamentary general elections which make many of the youth to think that the money is a thank you from the president.”*

*Poor group dynamics:* Employment program beneficiaries are advised to form groups to access funding, and most groups are formed only for the purpose of accessing funds and later disbanded. There has been a tendency for group leaders to steal the money and leave the other group members to struggle to pay back the funds or for group members to withdraw the money and share it amongst themselves. This has greatly affected the recovery rate of program funds. A key informant in Mbale city commented that *“many of the beneficiaries have disbanded groups, some group leaders withdrew money without the knowledge of their colleagues, and they disappeared with the money, so it has been a problematic program.”*

*Delayed release of funds to youth groups and beneficiaries:* Another challenge encountered with employment programs was delayed payment due to there being a lot of bureaucracy involved in program implementation. The period between applying and receiving funds is very long, and sometimes beneficiaries receive funds after one year. *“[U]sually, the process takes long if one is to fulfill all the terms and conditions which delays the funding . . . the whole process is time consuming,”* a respondent said.

*Corruption:* Most of the participants pointed out that there was a lot of corruption in the implementation of employment programs. This has led to unintended beneficiaries being selected and ghost groups being formed to access funds. *“Any group that has not given in money cannot go through . . . files cannot pass. Because when taking the application papers to the sub county, they ask for some money ‘kintu kidoogo and the one who pays, his file moves to the next level.’ They don’t mind whether the group fulfilled all the requirements but whoever pays the money is the one whose file goes forward,”* one FGD participants explained.

*Lack of accurate information, or information asymmetry:* Most of the youth are still not well informed about these programs and lack information about how to benefit from them. Most of the young people are also afraid to participate in YEPs because they fear that they will be arrested, or their properties will be sold if they fail to pay back the money. A key informant from Mbale district commented: *"I think that we also need to provide enough information to the youth and as well prepare them properly before we can be able to involve them in any program; we need proper preparation they need to be sensitized and appropriately trained on how to manage or sustain the program, which is very important otherwise for us this has been very rushy; it was politics time and everything was rushed. So, we did not prepare the people properly, of course now it was like fire, have the people got the money or not?"*

## **VI. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

This study analyzed and reviewed Uganda's existing youth employment programs and policies through a desk review and field surveys that incorporated stakeholder validation. The study findings confirm the existence of YEPs in Uganda. These YEPs organize, train, and provide revolving funds or seed capital to selected youth groups as a way of empowering youth to become self-employed and employ other youth. This echoes the government's resolve to minimize youth unemployment in the country. Some of the empirical studies reviewed show that even though some youth employment programs have reported positive performance, a lot still needs to be done, especially in terms of program implementation and beneficiary preparation. Also, there is little empirical research to back up the implementation of these programs, yet policies in response to youth unemployment should be based on understanding the fundamental reasons for youth unemployment and pursuing a policy package that addresses those reasons. This requires empirical investigations to gather evidence. Furthermore, most economies experience youth unemployment as a combination of structural, cyclical, and

frictional unemployment. Policies tackling youth unemployment should be balanced accordingly, which could easily be guided by evidence from empirical research.

What is clear from this study is that several youth employment programs exist, but their implementation and program-related gaps need attention. Both the desk review and the field survey very clearly point to the need to reduce political interference in the bureaucratic youth employment program implementation process; it encourages resource misallocation for political gain. Political interference could be reduced by assigning different stakeholders to different program processes, for example, financial institutions to fund disbursement. It is also necessary to always be accountable for how program funds are being used. Transparency and accountability promote good governance at all levels of program implementation, including when it comes to reducing program inefficiencies, empowering beneficiaries, and improving service delivery and budget utilization. Moreover, whereas the various policy initiatives introduced have given the public hope youth unemployment will be tackled, they have suffered from three major drawbacks in addition to other labour market gaps. **First**, policy initiatives to address youth unemployment have been piecemeal, ad-hoc, underfunded and poorly implemented. **Second**, they have not been rooted in a wider framework that has the structural transformation of the Ugandan economy at its core and considers its real (rather than projected) constraints. **Third**, most policy initiatives have not been SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). Overall, youth employment policies are disjointed, and there is no detailed procedure for integrating and coordinating national and local actions in employment policies.

Therefore, it is necessary to enhance youth employment programs' monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning process; incorporate business development services for beneficiaries; develop a clear resource mobilization strategy when designing youth employment programs; expand youth employment programs into new locations with updated priority areas – the new programs should be clear and connected to the country's national development plans, such as NDP III's broader objectives, Vision 2040 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals; and benchmark programs against those of other countries – benchmarking against youth employment programs

that have been successfully implemented in other countries makes it possible to share success stories, learn from others' experience, and finally, improve the employability skills of youth by providing them with internationally certified technical and vocational education and training.

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