Policy brief: Policy and Secondary data analysis on Disability and Social Protection in Uganda

Key policy messages

- It is easier to directly address concerns of vulnerable people when they are specifically included in policies for all citizens and their equal participation is consistently monitored to ensure they are benefiting at the same rates and to the same degree as all others;
- It is important that social safety nets are introduced and sustained within the budget framework;
- Poor implementation of social protection initiatives inhibits the efficacy of the good policies in place;
- Coordination of actions and efforts of all actors within the social protection sector and harmonisation of approaches and perspective are challenging and require governments to anticipate, plan and budget for variable administrative systems to ensure that all those who need this support are reached and served;
- Livelihoods are at the heart of sustainable social protection initiatives in Uganda.

Overview

In Uganda, according to the most recent statistics (2014), 12.4% of the population lives with a disability. Persons with disability, both children and adults, continue to face significant challenges achieving social and economic, and cultural equality.

While better laws and policies are often called for to reach equal rights for persons with disabilities, a critical analysis of the programmatic and policy environment undertaken as part of this project suggests that there are indeed good laws and policies in place, and there are a series of initiatives at national (policy and programmes), local and community levels to enhance the social protection of persons with disability. However, while these initiatives exist, enforcement, monitoring and on-going evaluation are sorely lacking and in most cases the reasons that such initiatives fall far short of expectations.¹

Moreover, there are also methodological variances among the actors in terms of targeting individuals in need – whether to target vulnerable persons with disability directly or address social structures and situations that exacerbates their vulnerability. Interventions for persons with disability have also been complicated by the fact that persons with disabilities often face a range of interconnected

¹ For example, only a small fraction of older persons are at the moment receive support from the SAGE programme. Even for those that receive support the amount involved is too small to have meaningful (less than US $10)
vulnerabilities including widespread poverty, lack of education, difficulty in accessing medical support and related services, as well as continuing to be regarded by many in Ugandan society as mere objects of charity.

Though the national percentage of those living in poverty has decreased from 9.8 million in 1992/3 to 6.7 million by 2012/13, people with disability, while only 12.4% of the population, constitute almost half of this number. It appears therefore that if the country’s development is to remain on course, meaningful and systemic changes in the situation of vulnerable people must include significant and robust changes to the policy, programmes and planning that include or specifically target people with disabilities.

Existing anti-poverty interventions have largely focused on the economically active population with the capacity to work. The Government has been implementing employment and social protection programmes to alleviate poverty, but many of these interventions have been generic in nature and continue to fall short of mitigating the consequences of unemployment and livelihood shocks experienced by extremely poor and vulnerable groups. The high levels of persistent poverty in Uganda suggest that a significant number of households in the country require social protection interventions to break inter-generation cycles of poverty.

In Uganda social protection aims to achieve a secure and resilient population. It is conceptualised as being provided through two main pillars: social security for all; and social care services for vulnerable groups such as children, widows, persons with disabilities, and older persons. The two pillars are complemented by other sector policies. This policy was passed in 2015 but a lot still needs to be done to make it operational, including enacting enabling laws.

The formal social insurance system in Uganda remains limited and largely benefits that small percentage of the population who work in the formal sector. Those who work in the informal sector, where most of the population is employed, are not covered by any social protection system. This renders most of the economically active population vulnerable to economic shocks.

Another component of social support comes through the health sector. Uganda has formulated a number of policies, enacted a series of laws and designed interventions which contain aspects of social protection and health. However, the high population growth rate (5.8 children per woman by 2012/13) has exerted extreme pressure on the existing healthcare delivery system. This has resulted into poor quality service delivery and the expansion of private health care sector to bridge the gap. The costs of accessing private health care services are not however, affordable by the majority of workers in either the formal and informal sector.

**Results**

The results presented here form part of a larger research project: *Bridging the Gap: examining disability and development in four African countries*. The research programme is based at the Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre, UCL, UK, and is funded by the Economic and Social Science Research Council and the UK Department for International Development. These results
and policy recommendations are drawn from analysis of national policies and re-analysis of national data sets.

As part of the *Bridging the Gap* project, core Ugandan social protection policies were analysed using a standardised framework. Policies were scored against six criteria in terms of content related to persons with disabilities: rights, accessibility, inclusivity, national implementation plan, enforcement mechanisms, budgetary concerns, and information management. Each of these criteria was scored on a scale of 1-4 depending on how disability is addressed: 1 (weak); 2 (questionable); 3 (medium); and 4 (high).

On social protection, the strongest score on the National Social Protection Policy was the ‘right to social protection’ (3) and in the National Youth Policy the strongest were also the ‘right to social protection’ and ‘accessibility’, each scoring 3. On the National Policy on Older Persons, the highest was on ‘national implementation plan’, with a score of 4. A criterion that scored lowest (1) under social protection was ‘management information system’ and this was in the National Youth Policy.

**Key messages**

1. **Policies are key, but they must be implemented**

While the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all national policies and programmes should be inherently a right of all citizens and are guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Uganda in 2008, it is crucial to ensure that this inclusion is routine in all national policies and programmes.

A ‘twin track’ approach, in which disability is included in all general policies and programmes and people with disabilities are targeted through additional ‘disability-specific’ policies and programmes, would help improve equal access. Unfortunately, a reanalysis of national data in these areas found a striking lag between what is called for and how policies are actually implemented. National policies reviewed showed a range levels of disability inclusion, the most inclusive being the National Policy on Older Persons and the Special Needs and Inclusive Policy.

This should not be surprising as these policies directly deal with vulnerable populations in general and specially with people with disabilities. It is surprising, however, that the National Policy on Older Persons scored higher than the disability-focused Special Needs Policy. The criterion which consistently scored high is the right to service. The criterion which consistently scored lowest is Management Information Systems. Data on how people with disabilities are being reached and included while policies are being implemented is not being consistently collected or analysed.

2. **Social safety nets must be introduced and sustained within a budgetary framework**

We note that the Special Assistance grant for older persons, which also includes many with disabilities, is heavily donor-funded. Its sustainability depends on regularisation within the budget framework and would be further enhanced by its inclusion within local government planning frameworks. The major
challenge however is that budget for the social development sector (where social protection falls) remains critically low, and is in competition for government funds with others sectors such as infrastructure, education and security/defence.

3. Poor implementation inhibits the efficacy of good policies

The high level of poverty within Uganda’s population suggests that sustainable efforts to enhance social protection among the most critically vulnerable (such as children, persons with disability and women) requires support in areas of livelihoods to enable them to meet their needs more sustainably. The review of policies shows that social assistance programmes must be well administered if they to provide real benefits over time. This issue is not only who qualifies for social protection, but also who is actually able to enrol and receive the needed benefits. Long-term planning is needed for transformational social protection systems which aim to build the capacity of individuals and families to withstand economic shocks and develop greater resilience.

4. Coordination at the Government level is critical.

Although elaborate polices have been developed within the social protection sector, implementation is still limited, with many good policies are not put to good use. Government must take the lead in anticipating, planning and budgeting for vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities – and coordinating the range of policies and programmes available. Only a small fraction of older persons are currently receiving support from the SAGE programme. Even for those who receive support, the amount involved is too small to have meaningful impact (less than 10 US$)

5: Coordination of actions and efforts of the actors within the social protection sector and harmonisation of approaches and perspective is complex.

Non-governmental organisations have their own approach, as does the central Government, with donors also involved with their own interests and sets of conditionality. Moreover, within all this, there is also the question whether the Government genuinely supports such programmes, and whether there is adequate political will to unequivocally support the programme.

Recommendations

In view of the above key issues, our recommendations include:

- There is a need to develop and work towards creating a transformational social protection programme, and generate community, and district and sector interest and participation within the framework of the decentralisation programme.
- More efforts are needed for policy implementation and the attention to the information system framework.
- More robust implementation of social protection initiatives are needed
- The is a need to lobby government for increased allocation to the social sector in general, and social protection in particular. Disabled people’s organisations should take the lead in such
efforts, but they need support and collaboration from a wide range of advocacy groups, academic institutions and other leading voices in Ugandan society.

Further reading

For more information on this research, visit the project website: gap.leonardcheshire.org

Research team

Dr Eric Awich Ochen, Dr Julius Omona, Dr Sarah Kamya, Dr Andrew Elias State and Dr John Bosco Asiimwe. Makerere University.

Principal Investigator: Professor Nora Groce, Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre, UCL, UK

Bridging the Gap: Examining disability and development in four African Countries is a three-year research programme funded by the ESRC/DFID Poverty Alleviation Research Grant programme. The programme is based at the Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre, University College London. For more information about the programme, visit gap.leonardcheshire.org

This research has been funded by UKAID through the UK Government. However the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government’s official policies.