

Resources for Youth Entrepreneurship in Northern Uganda

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Abstract

Youth entrepreneurship and employment depend on the availability and use of resources. This study explored how young people viewed and deployed ‘land’ ‘funds’ and ‘youth themselves’ as resources offering opportunity for youth engagement in income generating activities and self-employment. Qualitative studies were conducted with youth interest groups (YIGs) funded under a government-oriented youth livelihood programme in Gulu district. Overall, the analysis suggests that land and financing have the potential to foster youth entrepreneurship and employment, but can do so only if youth use themselves as resources through active participation. The minimal amount of youth engagement in self-employment and the failure of most YIGs are due to institutional voids, limited commitment, and lack of preparation to utilise the ‘resources’ productively. The study recommends intensive entrepreneurial training for mindset change, and appreciation of personal resources. Institutional support should go beyond financing to include training and supportive supervision in order to build a competitive and self-sustaining young generation.

Keywords: Youth entrepreneurship, livelihoods, resource, youth interest groups, post-conflict

Introduction

‘People become house builders by building houses, harp players by playing the harp. We grow to be just by doing things that are just’ (Aristotle in Benard 1990: 6). In the same way, youth become entrepreneurs by practicing entrepreneurship. At least, that is the assumption of many youth-oriented projects. World over, youth entrepreneurship is gaining attention as a force for building youth assets and action, often as a remedy for ever increasing youth unemployment. In these efforts, resources play a necessary role. This article examines the resources used by members of youth schemes such as Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP). The significant resources for them are apparently money and land. We shall argue, however, that another resource is equally necessary. Policymakers and youth themselves perceive personal resources as key to utilising these material resources. In order to make use of material resources, subjective intangible assets are necessary such as determination, self-discipline, competence, and persistence. This distinction is recognised by Hobfoll (2002:6), who suggests that resources are entities that are either centrally valued in their own right (e.g. self-esteem, close attachment, health, and inner peace) or act as

means to obtain centrally valued ends (e.g. money, social support, and credit). We take personal resources as means to ends just like the concrete resources of funds and land. Most studies associate African youth entrepreneurship with access to capital and land; youth character has yet to be robustly researched. It remains a puzzle if youth have the motivations and competence to leverage these two resources to create jobs for themselves. This article aims to fill the gap by exploring how youth in a livelihood promotion programme utilise available resources.

We begin by describing the context and the problem of youth unemployment in northern Uganda, with further reference to selected studies of this problem elsewhere in the world. After explaining our methods, we present our findings from youth engaged in agribusiness, trading, manufacturing, and service enterprises. The hindrances to success are several; we will concentrate mainly on the problems of personal resources as described by the youth themselves and other stakeholders.

The Context: Conflict and Youth Unemployment in Northern Uganda

Worldwide, youth unemployment is a serious challenge especially for youth born and/or raised during conflict. Prolonged wars and violence embedded in political, economic and social structures affect livelihoods in most developing countries (Vindevoel et al. 2014:2). The civil conflict between the National Resistance Movement' (NRM) government and leaders of the ousted past regimes began in the 1980s (Omona 2008:131). For almost two decades, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war ruined northern Uganda's social, political, and economic organization. Gulu district was the epicentre of conflict with over 48 camps for Internally Displaced People (Omona 2008:132). The conflict claimed lives of people, and paralysed cultural, economic and social fabrics of life; its effects manifest on young people's lives even up to the present (Oosterom et al. 2021:571). The breakdown in family structure affected dynamics of resource acquisition, utilisation, and allocation, in addition to increasing the social obligations and responsibilities of youth (Oosterom et al. 2021:574). Children experienced lack of quality education, little participation in economic activities both during and after conflict and poor quality of life, (Betancourt et al. 2012:545). Furthermore, war broke marriages; both children and their mothers were denied land access, ownership, employment, and utilisation (Whyte and Acio 2017; Vindevogel et al. 2014). Now, it is social healing and economic progress which determine the contribution of young people (Dixon 2021: 32). A study conducted in 24 countries showed youth unemployment as a major factor for political instability (Azeng and Yogo 2013:2). The situation, therefore, calls for approaches focusing on proper functioning of youth and eradicating extreme poverty whilst fostering socio-economic transformation. Funding, land, structure, and youth themselves as resources provide an opportunity for socio-economic transformation.

In Africa, the youth bulge is one of the highest in the world with 70% below 25 years (Ackah-Baidoo 2015:255). Youth dominate Uganda's population; 56.7% is below the age of 18 years, with 70% below 30 years resulting in high rates of unemployment and poverty; this seems to call for youth entrepreneurship (Bukonya et al. 2019:1). Government and other actors participating in youth empowerment drives recognise youth entrepreneurship as an approach to job creation (Gough and Langevang 2016:1). Government provides resources such as funding and training for entrepreneurship; however, youth continue to be perceived as problems, not as resources.

Youth Schemes in Uganda

Government youth schemes are crucial for youth entrepreneurship and development. They provide material, financial, and training assistance to the youth to utilise resources (Kristensen and Birch-Thomsen 2013:176). In addition to YLP, the notable schemes in Uganda include Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) under NUSAF 2006, Youth Venture Capital Fund (YVCF) (Ahaibwe et al. 2015), Emyooga, Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP), and Parish Development Model (PDM). Those specific to youth were YLP, YVCF, and YOP among others. The schemes target youth aged 16-35 and 18-30 years. The age definitions depend on the local terms, project rationale and government intentions. In 2006, Government of Uganda introduced a new component under NUSAF called YOP (Blattman, Fiala, & Martinez 2012:6). The schemes provided cash transfers to the youth groups as startups, for vocational training and tools for craft. The programme aimed to increase youth incomes, improve community reconciliation and reduce conflict in northern Uganda. The unconditional cash investments increased return on investment and social cohesion in post-conflict northern Uganda. Blattman et al. (2012:3) argue that inexperience, lack of education, and access to market information limited the success of scheme. Yet this programme was successful enough that it provided lessons for the implementation of other schemes (Bukenya et al. 2019:8). The lessons were incorporated in formulating specific youth entrepreneurship programmes.

Furthermore, YVCF worth UGX 25 bn (about US \$ 10 million) was introduced in 2011 as one of the solutions to youth employment. Individual youth acquired credit for start-up channelled through commercial banks and then refunded the money. However, the collateral security as a requirement and lack of information hindered most poor and rural youth from accessing the funds. Educated and urban youth took advantage of the scheme at the expense of rural and illiterate ones (Ahaibwe et al., 2013:13). This necessitated introduction of another youth scheme which focused on interested groups, that is YLP. In 2013, the GoU boosted youth schemes by allocating UGX 25bn (about US \$ 100 million) to YLP over a period of five years. The major pillars of the initiatives included enterprise development, job creation, and business training and development. The main objective was to empower the targeted youth to harness their business ideas, thus realising social and economic potential, and increasing self-employment and income. These active labour market programmes targeted mainly the poor, unemployed and unskilled and semi-skilled youth. Most of the schemes encourage youth participation in agriculture-related income generating activities. In most of the initiatives, educated youth take the lead in organising, guidance and holding positions in finance, chairing, and decision making. Most uneducated youth wish to identify with educated ones; thus being educated is key to income generating activities (Jones 2020:4). However, the youth portray agriculture as a side hustle and continue to ‘tarmac’, that is walk the streets of town looking for other jobs (Maura 2017:58). This attitude towards agriculture-related activities affected the productivity and success of most youth funded enterprises.

Studies postulate these schemes as channels of patronage and co-optation by the state. Macdonald et al. (2023:288) view youth livelihood programmes as targeted economic incentives that purport to promote a ‘culture of self-employment’ through microfinance, while serving as a vehicle for party-based handouts during election periods and as ‘gifts’. They are offered before, during, or after election cycles as a way of luring and attracting the constituencies to the regime (see Chemutai, this issue). Trying to become a beneficiary in youth schemes involves politics, connections and paying allegiance to the ruling party.

Linking Youth to Entrepreneurship and Resources

Youth entrepreneurship is very attractive to policy makers because of its mandate in promoting self-employment, self-reliance, and youth independence. An entrepreneur is a person who produces for the market through organising, operating and assuming the risk of starting a new business venture (Kahan 2012). Entrepreneurship is narrowly defined as the act of creating new business firms and is taken to be a key factor in creating social and economic mobility (Castellani and Lora 2014:3; Ellis and Williams 2011:9). Moreover, entrepreneurship is presented as a key process through which economy is advanced, by organising resources (Stevenson 1983:2) and production of goods and services (to those who can pay for it) and rewarding participants (Schumpeter 2012 [1934]). Young entrepreneurs identify available opportunities and exploit them to produce goods and services. Youth entrepreneurship creates self-employment and employment, through new ventures, expansion of existing ones and increase in social wealth (Ogbueghu et al. 2020:73). Many studies have emphasised promotion of entrepreneurship as an engine for youth innovation, job creation, socio-economic change and solution to youth poverty (Awasthi et al. 2006; Gupta et al. 2009; Chaudhary 2017; Setti 2017). The perceived role of entrepreneurship for economic growth and development in developed economies such as Britain, USA, Japan, and Canada has encouraged most developing countries to adopt a concept of enterprise development to deal with youth economic problems (Moa-Liberty et al. 2016:65), evidenced in Youth Enterprise Development and Youth Venture Capital Funding in Kenya and Uganda respectively. Youth entrepreneurship has become a catch word and a policy discourse for most Sub-Saharan African governments (Macdonald et al. 2023:287). Whether for economic prosperity or political gains, youth entrepreneurship continues to be seen as a suitable solution for unemployment. Leveraging on available resources for entrepreneurial success is a fundamental consideration in most entrepreneurship training and skills development aimed at ensuring constant innovation and improvement (Ogbueghu et al. 2020:73).

Factors facilitating youth engagement in entrepreneurship include psycho-social elements such as status and self-efficacy, demographics, cultural factors, and resources (Moa-Liberty 2016:66; Soomro et al. 2019). Setti (2017) specifies personal attributes mattering for entrepreneurial aspiration and intention including age, education, gender, competences, and motivation. Such attributes form the resource base that is conceptualised in this study as ‘personal resources’.

Resource availability can trigger socio-economic development; however, existence of resources in Sub-Saharan Africa has not transformed into youth employment (Ackah-Baido 2016). The presence of land as a resource has failed to create jobs for swelling numbers of unskilled and skilled youth. In northern Uganda, fertile and unopened land is a potential for agriculture and youth agro-entrepreneurship (Mugonola and Baliddawa 2014:123). Although land is available, it is not always accessible. Studies indicate that limited access to land constrains youth participation in investment on land (Gichimu and Njeru 2014:3; Ayai 2013:9). Issues of family/clan land associated with land wrangles affect youth decisions on utilisation. Fletschner and Kenney, cited in Gichimu and Njeru (2014:4), found that in Kenya most female youth lack land titles and control over land, and inherit small plots, which cannot stir huge investments.

In contrast, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) presents lack of capital, skills, and support and market opportunities as major challenges to youth entrepreneurship. Most young entrepreneurs in Benin, Liberia, Malawi and Togo consider lack of access to finance as a principal challenge to start-ups and entrepreneurial progress (De Gobbi 2014:310). Poor access to credit affects youth attitudes towards start-ups and entrepreneurship. Youth cannot adopt the technology

required to exploit available opportunities. Many youths do not possess collateral to access microcredit and commercial loans, hence are not able to establish enterprises. Therefore, even if resources are present, youth are not in position to adopt modern technology, and expand enterprises. Lack of land ownership and access is challenging most youth enterprises. Youth cannot pledge land as collateral security to acquire loans from microfinance institutions. Youth continuously lack credit and capital (Dixon 2021:34), and this challenges ability to utilise available resources such as land, and personal energy. This means that provision of capital would facilitate exploitation of other resources for self-employment.

Other than finance, knowledge is important when it comes to conducting entrepreneurial activities. Most youth lack information about business management, such as quality assurance, customer care, customer laws, and competence to read, write, and conduct smooth transactions (Ahaibwe et al. 2013:23). There are limited business networks that support youth to learn, access market for their products, and obtain quality raw materials (Cramer and Richards 2011:291; Ayai 2013:6). The violence in sub-Saharan Africa truncated market systems and infrastructure that would have provided valuable information. Thus, there are no proper linkages in value chains, limiting access to inputs, supplies, and free flow of outputs. Additionally, social differences such as ethnicity, language, caste, and education pose an entry barrier to business networks (Fafchamps 2004:118). Furthermore, weak enforced market institutions segment business opportunities for entrepreneurship success (Wood and Frynas 2006:260). Consequently, youth develop fear of failure and negative attitudes to start businesses (Namatovu et al. 2016:110; Dixon 2021:34). These factors inhibited the flourishing of personal resources in youth entrepreneurial orientations.

The aspect of rural-urban migration drains productive labour that could be applied in agriculture. Youth prefer to migrate to urban settings for better social amenities such as entertainment, electricity, employment, business opportunities, health, and education (Olanya 2019:149). While many agricultural promotion strategies have been implemented in Uganda, no special attention is given to youth in agriculture. The Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) was meant to foster post-conflict productivity and economic revitalisation, but self-employment did not attract youth engagement in agriculture in northern Uganda (ibid). In Kenya, youth unemployment stood at 64 per cent, yet 80 per cent of all employment opportunities were in agriculture (Gichimu and Njeru 2014:2). As in Uganda, youth find agriculture unattractive, preferring to move to towns and cities for better standards of living. Even the few youths who have access to land as a resource lack necessary motivation for investment. Thus, the existence of resources may not facilitate youth productivity if youth do not recognise themselves as a resource. The Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework emphasises character, cohesion, compassion, and care plus contribution as important for success (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg 2000:15). This study focuses on how funds, land, and youth themselves contribute to youth entrepreneurship. This demands a methodology investigating insights from the key players—the youth.

Methodology

The empirical findings were obtained from a study conducted in Gulu district, northern Uganda, from June 2019 to August 2021. Gulu district is one of eight districts in the Acholi subregion. As elsewhere in Uganda, the population in Gulu is dominated by young people with 25.2% aged 18-30 years (UBOS 2017:151). The study employed exploratory and case study approaches to youth beneficiaries from a government-oriented entrepreneurship programme: the Youth Livelihood Programme. Youth Interest Groups (YIGs) under this programme comprised members aged 18-30

years, corresponding to the definition of youth utilised by Uganda National Youth Council (MoGLSD 2013:3).

The participants were purposively selected, due to their prior organisation, and only those who were members of the YIGs at the time were considered for the study. Youth engagements were divided into agriculture-related ventures, manufacturing and extractive enterprises, and trading. All youth worked in groups since government supported only youth associations. Youth businesses had prior organisation or started immediately after funding. All businesses needed additional resources and youth energies to flourish and operate on a very small scale.

The data was gathered through six in-depth interviews with YIG leaders, 10 Focus Group Discussions with YIG members, and 11 key informant interviews with district and NGO management and youth political leaders involved in YLP. To ensure an in-depth inquiry, data collection involved field observations as well as interviews. Because of language differences, it was necessary to hire competent research assistants. They were trained to translate conscientiously. Tools were translated and back translated as a check. Data was organised verbatim, transcribed, sorted, cleaned, and coded. The emerging codes led to creation of categories and finally themes developed. Quotations represent voices of participants. Ethically, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity were honoured throughout the study⁸.

Entrepreneurial Engagements

Agri-enterprises

In both rural and urban areas, participants reported agri-enterprises as dominant ventures, congruent with agriculture's significance as the backbone of Uganda (UBOS 2016). The frequently mentioned enterprises were in livestock (piggery and poultry projects), floriculture, horticulture, and crop production. Some youth groups had a combination of agroforestry, floriculture, and aquaculture, termed as 'mixed farming'. The scheme had more options in agribusiness than other sectors. The enterprises required zeal, concentration, and patience as characteristics for resourceful youth. For some youth, the enterprise was a personal choice while the majority were encouraged and/or directed by government offices to engage in particular agriculture enterprises.

In 2016, almost all groups were directed by district officials to engage in either piggery or poultry or animal traction despite lacking technical skills in modern agriculture practices. Furthermore, district business lists included mostly agricultural ventures, though some youth had other business ideas. (Youth Councillor, Gulu Municipality).

The above suggests government had a role in directing the entrepreneurship ventures.

Access to land was crucial for these enterprises. Most youth attested that they were not owning but utilising small land provided by a member's family.

My family gave us two hectares of land where we established our piggery project. Part of it was used to heap and plant sweet potatoes

⁸ The study obtained clearance from Makerere University School of Sciences research ethics committee and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology granted final approval under protocol number SS5112.

to feed our animals. Remember, as youth we do not own land since we are still young. The land remained a property of family. (YIG Leader, Unyama Subcounty)

Rural youth engaged in growing of crops such as beans, sesame, soya beans, maize, and vegetables on members' family land. However, crop production was reported to be affected by drought and price changes thus affecting returns on investment. In urban settings, one group operated a mixed farm with horticulture, floriculture, and fish farming. The youth operated home gardens and yard farming near houses and in compounds. We observed fishponds, a variety of fruits (guava, avocado, mangoes, and papayas), flowers, and nursery beds on one or two acres of family land in Layibi division, Gulu Municipality. The participants in that youth group revealed that they had operated the business since 2007 and applied for youth livelihood funds to expand the business to sizeable margins and introduced innovations.

Produce business

Although produce business is mainly concerned with trading, this study categorised it under agriculture-related enterprises because youth were dealing in agricultural produce. Participants often reported cereal buying and selling as one of the profitable ventures. Only two groups carried out this economic activity. Youth reported that the business venture had potential market and quick gains compared to crop production and livestock. The business was common in rural areas due to proximity to stock at cheaper cost during harvesting season. Youth purchased agricultural products such as beans, maize, soybeans, sesame, groundnuts, sorghum, and millet. One enterprise had over 25 sacks of produce each of 102 kilogrammes in stores. The products had shorter lead-time in business, and enterprise was more rewarding to the owners. The business was valued and flourishing as observed in store and records provided. One project member owned a retail shop near the store making it easy for suppliers/ farmers to deliver products at any time of the day. With self-confidence, a member explained:

We are dealing in produce buying and selling as you can see. We deal in maize, beans, soya, and sesame. As an individual, I also have my retail shop near our store to target suppliers every time. We are also cultivating for members, we used to cultivate for money before livelihood programme (Income Generating Activity Member, Awach Subcounty, 2019).

This type of business directly depends on land for supplies and stock. Furthermore, discussions suggested that youth dealing in produce business were prosperous. To supplement their earnings, youth practiced joint/group cultivation for members to contribute part of the harvest to increase stock. An increase in price of stock motivates youth to sell and buy more from farmers. However, the business requires a strong network with farmers, large-scale produce dealers and regular working capital to meet the market demands. Therefore, the value chain is fundamental in fostering entrepreneurial success.

Animal traction

Ox-plough cultivation is directly attached to land as a resource. Youth kept cattle that were used to plough land for other community members for a fee, in addition to their own gardens. Indeed,

animal traction was listed among livelihood support components in the YLP document (MoGLSD 2013:22). This enterprise was only operated by rural youth, where land for grazing and tilling was available and abundant.

Our group deals in ox-plough cultivation, where we are hired to plant seeds. We use them in our own gardens, and we cultivate an acre at UGX 70,000. We share the ox-plough among the members, we cultivate gardens, we have four bulls (and four ox-ploughs). Each bull was bought at UGX 900,000 and ox-ploughs at UGX 260,000 (YIG chairperson, Unyama Subcounty).

The youth took advantage of available land to graze their animals on free-range system. The bulls moved freely from one corner of the community to the other while grazing. Free-range system of cattle keeping was necessary because youth do not own grazing space for their animals. The challenge reported here was loss of animals as they crossed to Omoro or Pader districts and mixed with other animals, bush fires, enemies killing them and contracting animal diseases. It was most likely that these cattle would destroy crops thus evoking reaction from community members.

Manufacturing and extractive undertakings

Manufacturing played an important role for urban and peri-urban youth where access to land was not guaranteed. Youth engaged in processing raw materials to finished products ready for consumption. Activities included small bread and cake making, weaving, carpentry and joinery, and tailoring. The manufacturing enterprises were found to be on a very small scale and informal in nature, particularly making cakes on order and small bread and pancakes (locally known as *Lagalagala*) for sale in trading centres and market centres during market days. Youth did not own premises such as workplaces but baked from their homes to save direct costs on rent and electricity. One participant explained:

We deal in bakery through making cakes at members' homes and selling in trading centres and Gulu town. At times, we receive orders from customers and make cakes for them... (Group Chairperson, Bungatira Subcounty).

The activity was not a stand-alone business, but part of activities performed by the group to generate more income and sustain the enterprise.

Some participants engaged in extractive activities such as brick making, carpentry and joinery, and mould⁹ and concrete making. Those involved in carpentry and joinery were observed making wooden doors, windows, different sizes and designs of beds, tables, chairs, and art on order and for the open market. Knowledge and skills fundamentally contributed to the success for these enterprises. The educated, skilled leaders influenced and attracted the commitment and development of youth personal resources. In one IGA, the leader who was an ICT graduate commanded respect and zeal from other members. The educated gained identity and had comparative advantage to chair meetings, attend training sessions and committees (Jones, 2022). Being educated makes one powerful and ascend to prominence e.g., a case of leadership-chairperson, association secretaries, treasurers, in Awach and Bungatira. Such subjectives made

⁹ These are concrete designs used on verandas and walls for house beautification.

them take advantage of uneducated. The whole youth resourcefulness depends on ones perceived education.

These businesses relied on extracting timber and sand supplies from the villages. Those in brickmaking used a portion of a parent's land. In addition to generating income, youth gained life skills for peer training and learning, employment and improved social welfare. Educated youth recruited and trained fellow youth to work in same IGA, as one participant noted:

I do train new boys and girls who join our group; they come here voluntarily, acquire skills, and when they feel they are equipped with skills and knowledge, some decide to remain here, while others go to take up private work. The biggest challenge we have is timber supply. We get it from the community. Sometimes during wet season or restrictions on tree cutting, the supply goes down and youth here may remain redundant (Youth project manager, Pece division, Gulu City).

As the above statement shows, skills' training is not enough. Projects depended on local resources for entrepreneurial survival. Very few groups dealt in carpentry and joinery, due to the huge start-up capital required, skills needed and nature of the market. The few engaged in brickmaking utilised family land or had to rent space for operation. Some family members never allowed youth from other families to utilise their clan's land, thus affecting group cohesion, commitment, and achievement of set targets.

Retailing enterprises

This kind of trading business indirectly depended on land as a resource but mostly exploited youth themselves as 'resources'. Our findings indicate that small-scale retailing enterprises were also prevalent among youth. Surprisingly, trading was reported more in rural than urban settings. The business venture involved purchasing manufactured/industrial goods such as soap, sugar, stationery, maize flour and general merchandise for resale. Other than manufactured goods, some youth in the municipality stocked charcoal near kiosks as 'side businesses', what is commonly regarded as 'side hustling' (Mwaura 2017). The venture necessitated energy, synergy and skills in accounting, record keeping, customer care, resilience, and character. Youth used part of the proceeds from the retail activities to buy produce during harvesting season. They expressed that retailing ventures generated quick and daily revenue compared to agriculture and manufacturing. The participants further contended that prices of merchandise were more stable than agricultural products' prices.

We started this shop because our cash was idle for some time as we wait for harvest, so we decided to operate a retail shop, so we keep the money in use, and we are able to get what to pay back. Then, during harvest, we pick money from the shop to buy produce (Enterprise Chairperson Palaro Subcounty).

These youth found produce trading to be intermittent since it is seasonal. So, they took the initiative to start a shop that could generate income more continuously.

Factors Limiting Youth Entrepreneurship

Social limitations hindered youth ability to access and utilise resources necessary for successful entrepreneurship. Studies by ILO on youth and entrepreneurship corroborate this finding suggesting social and cultural barriers to youth start-ups (Schoof, 2006). In Gulu, these barriers were pronounced in connection with access to land. As previous studies have shown, elders control over land limits youth choices on utilisation (Gichimu and Njeru 2014:3; Whyte and Acio 2017:23).

Socio-cultural patterns of land access affected rural male and female youth differently. The ability to operate a profitable business was inhibited by market factors and limited supportive infrastructure and training. Finally, and perhaps most striking, was the emphasis interlocutors placed on personal resources or 'mindset' as a limitation.

Gender and access to land

Several participants reported on cultural issues as hindering youth entrepreneurship mostly in rural areas. These cultural factors limited access to resources and decision-making arenas. They mostly mentioned early marriages, single motherhood, restricted land ownership and social exclusion from opportunities. Female youth were affected by these challenges since they were prone to divorce, separation, single motherhood, and marginalisation. The female participants were not permitted to own land and undertake investments on land. Those who were married mostly relied on their husbands for decision-making. Their husbands had powers of how to utilise even the funds provided by government. Female participants indicated that children they produced while at parents' home were discriminated and denied rights to land ownership; such children were regarded as 'foreigners'¹⁰. Some divorced women were denied land for farming since they belonged to another family (husband's home), yet these homes disregarded them. Land access and utilisation were not an entitlement for them but a prerogative of clan members:

Once we leave our homes for marriage, we are not supposed to own land. The culture proposes that we should only own at our husbands' homes. In case of divorce, the children we produce are also denied land that they are 'bastards', we are just like this...uncles and brothers tell us that we take them where they belong (FGD Female Participant, Bungatira Subcounty).

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

Communal land ownership was reported a major obstacle to investment in agriculture; one male participant emphasised that family members inhibit individual youth from utilising available land. However, some male youth disagreed, revealing that in their families they can utilise the land. Access to land was a greater challenge for young women, who were expected to marry and gain land through a man. For those who did marry, their husbands often tried to exert control over

¹⁰ Stereotyping on children who are born while women are not officially married or divorced.

funds, thus demotivating them. Children who were not recognized by their fathers faced difficulties in accessing land. The prohibitions, discrimination, and cultural rigidities around land made this resource uncertain for young people (Whyte and Acio 2017:23).

Structures affecting business operations

Market has both formal and informal functions in entrepreneurial decisions and success of enterprises. A major reason for youth reluctance to invest in some of the economic activities mentioned was market instability. This challenge threatened entrepreneurial progress most especially in agriculture, and other primary production activities. While some youth struggled to engage in agri-enterprises and carpentry, market for their products was very low amidst high input costs. Youth dealing in crop production, horticulture, and produce business felt the pain from price fluctuations, very low prices at harvest leading to losses. The youth dealing in extractive and manufacturing activities decried competition from imported products, and products (such as bread) from Central Uganda. They operated at a very small scale, and were thus unable to access orders from big market customers such as institutions and supermarkets. Such market problems impeded the efforts of youth, hence discouraging them from investment.

We suffer from price fluctuation after harvesting; there is no available market for our maize, sesame, soya beans and beans, we give it away anyhow—at a very low price locally known as *lap lap* (Female Participant, Paicho subcounty).

The key informants reiterated that market constraints retarded activities of most youth ventures. Furthermore, participants explained that at times, young agri-entrepreneurs face competition from other large-scale producers and produce from neighbouring countries.

Then the other final thing is marketing. Markets are very challenging these days with the influx of produce from neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Tanzania. Youth can grow a lot of maize then prices fall. Last year maize prices dropped during second season as low as UGX 300 (USD 0.085) per kilogramme from average of UGX700 (USD 0.20). Really, you do not see anyone making money from those crops. When there is a lot of influx of maize from Kenya and Tanzania, maize here loses value. When Kenya goes out of production our prices shoot high (NGO Programme Manager).

Youth lacked access to marketing and value addition opportunities to fetch higher prices from agricultural products. These findings corroborate other studies postulating limited business networks and market linkages as challenges to youth entrepreneurship (Namatovu et al. 2012:16; Shittu 2017:96; Cramer and Richards 2011:281; Wood and Frynas 2006:260).

Dealing with these problems might have been easier with commercial and institutional infrastructures to support their entrepreneurship ambitions. However, interlocutors reported lack of extension services, information, and business incubation centres. Some areas (such as Palaro subcounty) were quite remote with poor telephone network and feeder roads, as well as limited health, education, and business facilities. Furthermore, there were very few technical and professional personnel within communities to offer technical support, guidance, mentorship, and

assistance to youth in best agricultural practices and business management. Technical teams from local government failed to ascertain youth needs. Expressions like “*Wa pee ki ngat moo ma tiro wadok miniwa kony*” (*we lack guidance and support*) stemmed from all youth enterprises visited. Most of the youth rarely saw any extension worker, government or district/subcounty official visiting youth ventures. Several rural youth enterprises in Palaro, Patiko and Paicho Sub-counties had never been visited, advised, or supported during their operation; even urban enterprises were not monitored. The youth declared that they only received phone calls from officials demanding repayment or progress reports on projects.

We report cases of animal diseases, fights, conflicts, mismanagement of funds to the subcounty, district, but officials keep a deaf ear. When you call the veterinary officer, he asks for transport allowance. We were not helped at all until our group dissolved (FGD male participant, Paicho Subcounty).

We were given a telephone number to call in case of any problem; when we call the subcounty Community Development Officer or Agricultural Officer either promises to come or sends inexperienced interns. Sometimes we asked these interns questions, and they fail completely; the interns were even working under NGO arrangement (FGD male participant, Patiko Subcounty).

This implied that government had limited extension officers to build youth resources. A municipal councillor reiterated:

People get money to go and monitor, instead they move in two or three groups, just go, and relax. The youth councillors are being facilitated but the facilitation is not doing the right thing; you find youth leaders within municipality get money for monitoring but divide it within a few minutes. He/she does not go to the field for monitoring, they are not even informed, when you ask about something, they just go to the Community Development Officer and inquire.

District officials acknowledged this finding explaining that they rarely conduct quarterly monitoring due to limited facilitation such as fuel, motorcycles for field movements, and safari day allowance for the exercise. They claimed that some places were so remote that one required more than one week visiting all YIGs in the subcounty. Officers were overloaded with multiple roles; one works both as a probation officer and YLP focal point officer. Youth were left to struggle on their own and ended up with production and market deficiencies. Thus, even if resources existed, youth had no guidance, information, and technical rectification of business failures. Many agricultural projects such as piggery, poultry, crop production, and animal traction necessitate constant monitoring by a team of animal and agronomic specialists to assess performance and offer necessary support.

Most participants felt youth were not fully prepared to use available resources. Youth hastily formed groups whenever they heard about funding opportunities without entrepreneurial orientation, awareness of technical aspects and consideration of local resources. A case in point is Gumperon Youth Livelihood Produce business and Waryemo Village Savings and Loan

Associations (VSLA) in Awach Subcounty, which failed immediately after receiving funding, yet the area is gifted with fertile land. YIG leaders took advantage of members' ignorance and unpreparedness and mismanaged finance. Youth lacked self-awareness and information about opportunities. Youth claimed they were not trained and motivated to utilise available resources.

The 30-minute training we received at Sub County was limited, insufficient, very brief, and we were not able to acquire enough skills, knowledge, and inspiration about business processes (YIG Chairperson, Bungatira subcounty, Gulu District).

The above quotation suggests the training was insufficient. Most youth projects were started without clear strategic plans, vision, and purpose. Many youths were unaware of their responsibilities, basic entrepreneurship principles, and market needs. Thus, they were unable to utilise their own potentials in bringing about socio-economic transformation.

Mindset

The importance of mindset surfaced in all the interviews. Attitude, character and motivation were personal resources captured by the term 'mindset'. The success of youth enterprises was attributed to hard work, determination, availability, readiness, resilience and passion. In 2018 'Openyu' and his group received funding from YLP, determined members worked hard, and they were able to pay back credit and obtain additional funding. 'We are now few members', 'who know what to do', 'willing to work', and 'happy', were expressions of the successful youth enterprises. This positive example was overshadowed by many negative ones:

Our youth have bad attitude, they are not committed to work, and want to enjoy free things. We started our group in 2016 when we were 15 members; many lazy ones have run away, we are now only six (Male Participant, Awach Subcounty).

Indeed, it was observed that some youth projects were neglected. For example, we found unattended piggery enterprises in Bungatira and Unyama Sub counties, and a retail shop in Palaro County which was closed all day, yet owners were idle in trading centres, while others were relaxing at home.

This study aligns with one in Nigeria, which stressed appropriate entrepreneurial attitudes to participate and successfully exploit entrepreneurial opportunities (Aja-Okorie and Adali 2013:119). Participants emphasised weak entrepreneurial spirit among youth. They repeatedly mentioned lack of commitment, patience, passion, determination, and dedication to economic activities. The interlocutors reported that youth behaviours were detrimental to personal growth and development. The youth leaders, youth themselves, and government officials attributed some youth woes to personal responsibility. Youth themselves were to blame. The interlocutors claimed that most youth were arrogant, lazy, and averse, had 'poverty of the mind', and lacked positive values. Participants from active youth projects/IGAs and key district stakeholders reported that youth were disrespectful, immoral, negative towards some agricultural work, and preferred freedom to work. They pointed out that youth spend most time on gambling and prostitution, sitting in trading centres, spending what they earn on alcohol and drug abuse, and sports betting. The greed for quick cash characterised most youth in the area, they said.

The youth are not very patient; they want quick returns; they do not want to wait. If the project is taking long to yield productivity, they find it a problem, so they prefer something with quick results like sports betting (District YLP Focal Office).

The youth political leaders agreed, positing that youth are negligent, and waste time and energy meant for productive work.

We have uncommitted youth, some youth in *Bardege, Layibi, Laroo* divisions did not dedicate their time, energy, and power towards work. Even if opportunities are available, they prefer betting, watching football until late, more than going for work (Female Municipal Youth Leader).

... youth down in our communities are very lazy. Even if there is an activity or programme, they cannot participate. They prefer watching movies, dancing at marketplaces, sitting at shop verandas, bars, betting houses and frequenting trading centres and towns for leisure (Municipal Female Youth Councillor).

Programme implementers thought that youth did not accept the basic premises of youth livelihood programmes. Whereas government emphasises socio-economic transformation and wealth creation, youth take project funding as free government money, a way of making quick cash and meeting their daily needs. They asserted that youth did not commit their total effort towards self-employment as entrepreneurs. Educated youth considered agriculture as a 'side hustle' and continued seeking for paid jobs.

One of the biggest challenges with our youth is attitude. Youth do not look at agribusiness and agriculture as very critical activity in getting them out of poverty and getting them employment. Therefore, it takes time to convince the youth to take farming as a business, as something that can get them out of poverty. Therefore, that attitude thing needs a lot of mindsets changing. Of course, it is linked to laziness and how they look at certain enterprises. They have access to productive resources such as land but look at farming as a village dirty job (Key Informant Technoserve¹¹).

While many interlocutors, including young people themselves, pointed to mindset as the reason for the failure of so many youth livelihood projects, they were not concerned about why the uncommitted mindset existed and what could change it.

Conclusion

Under the Youth Livelihood Programme, young people in Gulu District engaged in different enterprises based on personal choice, skills, competences, and district guidance. Produce

¹¹ NGO dealing in training youth in Agriculture-related enterprises in northern Uganda.

businesses were most successful due to less labour and operational costs involved; most youth could not afford the capital requirements of agriculture and manufacturing. All enterprises operated on a micro level, and on rented premises or family land. Agriculture-related ventures dominated in the YLP; however, these were small scale since most youth lack rights to use large amounts of land (Ayai 2013:9; Gichimu and Njeru 2014:3). No youth venture owned land; they either got land access from parents and clan members or used community land (for cattle grazing). Youth mostly engaged in piggery, poultry, and horticulture, which do not require much land space. Some youth engaged in buying and selling of agricultural produce such as cereals, beans, sesame, and maize. The youth believed that crops were available, accessible, and cheap, and had ready market from intermediaries. Retailing utilised mostly government funding and youth as 'resources' since commitment, synergy and personal contribution play an important role towards success. However, only one group had a retail shop supplementing their produce business.

In terms of resources, the YLP participants all had access to financing for their entrepreneurial endeavours. Access to land, a critical resource for agricultural projects, was more problematic, especially for female youth. Still, many groups were able to use family land of their members. The resources that were least available, according to many study participants, were the personal resources of character, commitment and competence. It was very striking that so many blamed the youth themselves for the weak performance of enterprises. This detracts attention from another resource that was also lacking in the situation: technical infrastructure.

People become entrepreneurs by practicing, as stated in the beginning of this article. They become competent by hands-on training. But support for learning by doing was not forthcoming for most groups. The study established lack of supportive infrastructure and inefficiencies in monitoring and extension services to youth projects. Youth were left on their own; even if animals developed sickness, no veterinary officer attended to them, leading to the collapse of most piggery and poultry enterprises. The extension workers resorted to telephone communication, at the expense of physical field visits. Although mobile telephone technologies are emphasised to be ideal for agriculture extension service for rural farmers (Mugabi et al. 2018:969), some areas are so remote that mobile networks are inaccessible. The importance of managerial skills and knowledge for successful operation of new ventures has been considered in other studies (Ejiogu and Nwajiuba 2012:10). Skills and knowledge are acquired through supervision and mentorship. It could be said that institutions for training, support supervision and problem-solving are also a resource for young entrepreneurs. If that resource had been more available, youth competence and commitment could have developed more robustly. In the absence of that resource, youth who are inclined to self-employment feel discouraged.

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