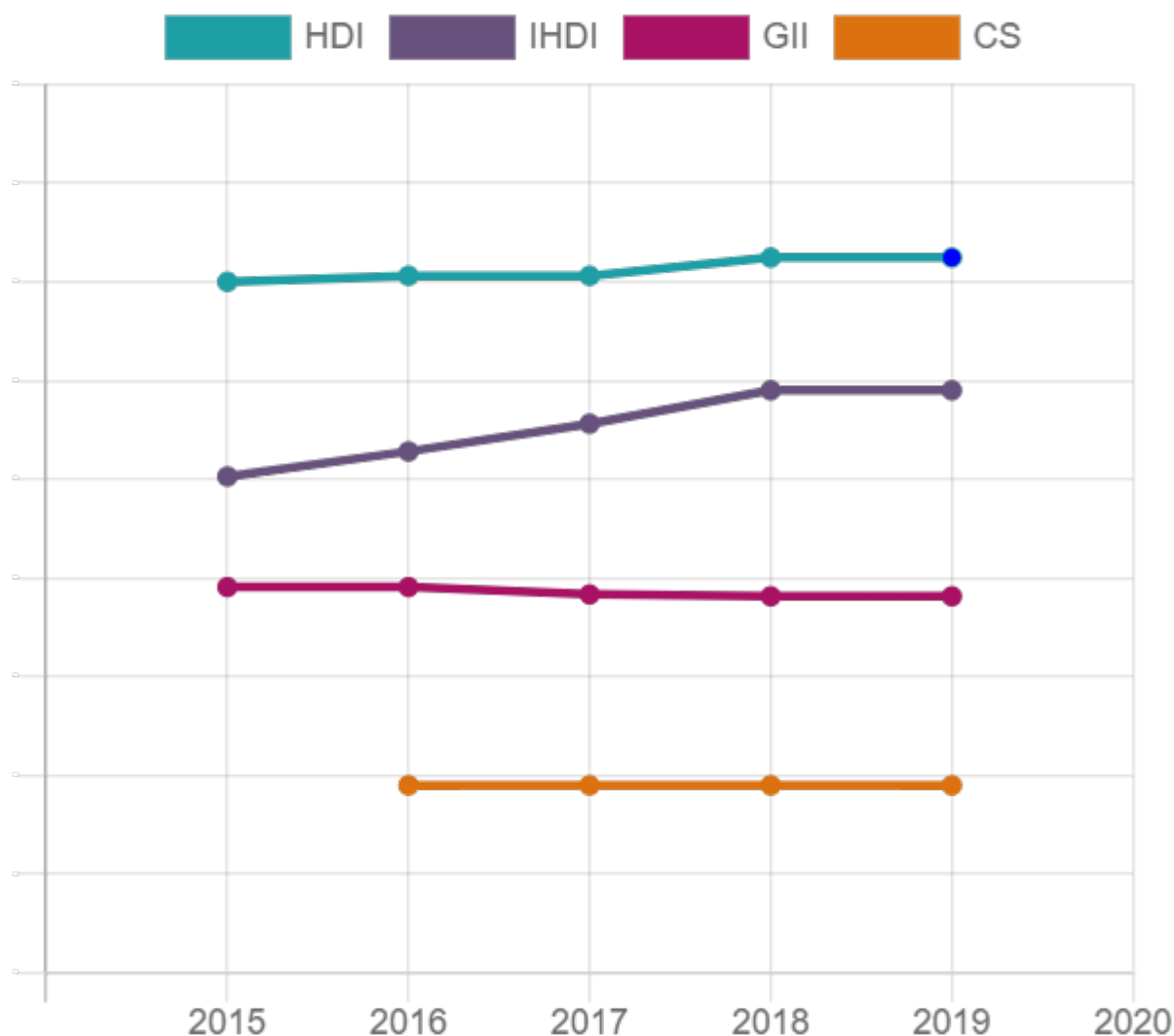


# UGANDA

Uganda is geographically divided into four regions including North, East, West and Central. These regions are made up of 134 districts that each have urban, peri-urban and rural areas. We live in a rapidly changing world – some changes may be for the better – others not so much. In order to continue to ground Voice in local lived realities, a country context analysis is organised every other year, engaging many stakeholders, grantees and rightsholders. The analysis is used to frame Calls for Proposals, to support the applications of grant-seekers and to advance the overall learnings. Below follows a summary of the exercise conducted in 2020, capturing the many views and perspectives of Ugandans. The summary is structured by presenting the big picture and slowly but surely to zoom in on the voices and aspirations of the rightsholders and to zoom out again by sharing the way forward for Voice. This page can also be downloaded at the bottom of the page. A full report and previous versions can be availed to you upon request. Please contact [Uganda@voice.global](mailto:Uganda@voice.global)

## Zooming Out

### The big picture



### Human Development Index (HDI)

The Human Development Index is an index that combines data on life expectancy, education, and per capita

income to rank countries. The HDI ranking has moved up a few spaces from 163 in 2014 to 159 in 2019.

## **Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IDHI)**

The IHDI measures the human development cost of inequality, or the overall loss to human development due to inequality. The closer to 1 the more equal a society is. The IHDI can inform policies towards inequality reduction. Inequality has reduced marginally in recent years despite economic growth.

## **Gender Inequality Index (GII)**

The GII is an inequality index, measuring the human development costs of gender inequality economically, health- and education-wise. The closer to 0 the better. Gender inequality has only marginally reduced in the country between 2014 and 2019.

## **Civic Space (CS)**

According to the independent Civicus Monitor which started in 2016, civic space continues to be repressed in Uganda. There was no change in the status, although certain groups experience increased insecurity and political exclusion, physical attacks and imprisonment. These were among others LGBTIQ+ people and human rights defenders. They are not freely operating.

## **Behind the numbers**

Uganda is rated as an emerging democracy country with legal, policy and institutional frameworks underpinning governance and human rights protection and promotion. However, policy implementation has remained low at an average of 40% across sectors. We continue to witness both rightsholders and some duty bearers facing human rights violations despite the existing frameworks. These include violations of freedom of association, speech, assembly, and expression as government authorities introduced new regulations restricting online activities, such as the introduction of social media tax. That is the split reality and backdrop for empowerment and influencing work in Uganda.

## **And what will the elections scheduled for March 2021 bring?**

The upcoming presidential, parliamentary and local government elections will usher in a new government and the 12th parliament. New members of parliament will be elected replacing some of the incumbents. Experience has shown that over 40% of members of parliament do not return, creating new opportunities to engage and lobby for rightsholder groups Voice serves to be better represented. At the same time there is a need to strengthen aspirants' capacity to understand and perform their legislative work.

## **Political shifts**

The parliamentary and local government elections have been planned to take place in the first quarter of 2021 according to the Electoral Commission road map. This road map which calls upon candidates to conduct campaigns online using Televisions, Radios and Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. The party primary elections took place in September and October 2020, creating excitement and anxiety in equal measures among the population in the context of Covid 19. One of the key concerns is whether the adoption of virtual campaigns will enable citizens to make informed decisions because access to media especially for and by opposition politicians, is restrictive. Allegedly, most of the public media houses have a bias and are controlled by the state machinery in favour of the incumbent president. In addition, the majority of private media houses are owned by people in government who might not want to offer space to competitors. Mainstream and social media freedoms are curtailed. This is evidenced through registered suppression of

freedom of expression over the years; highlight being the introduction of OTT tax to access internet/social media platforms where the majority of Ugandans feel free to express themselves that now minimises accessibility to the platforms. Human Rights Reports reveal that suppression of freedoms of expression, association and assembly persisted in 2019 as authorities continued to implement new regulations restricting online activities and stifling independent media. However, the Uganda Communication Commission (UCC) hopes to make publishers and individuals with large online followings mindful of the need to uphold public morality and peace. CSOs promoting human rights & electoral democracy/ reforms are harassed. The enactment of the 2016 NGO law and creation of the National Bureau for NGOs has further curtailed CSOs operation in Uganda. Some of the new guidelines such as renewal of NGO permits, declaration of source of funding and other punishable acts deemed prejudicial to Uganda's security have crippled free CSO operations. Conversely, the Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional Section 36 of the Police Act that allowed police to use unlimited force when dispersing crowds and gatherings with no liability for deaths or injuries.

### **Economic shifts**

The economy registered a slow economic growth (4.5%) in FY 2019/2020 and this impacted on many social and economic aspects of the economy. The percentage of people living below the poverty line increased from 19.7 in 2018 to 21.4 in 2019/2020. This is as a result of recent emergencies that the country has gone through including the outbreak of COVID-19, locust invasion, raising water levels that caused property distraction and people displacement, and mud & landslides. This then means that more households will continue living in poverty. There is also less tax revenue collection due to corruption tendencies exhibited by government officials from the tax body. This in turn increased government borrowing to service the different sectors, putting unnecessary and avoidable tax pressure on the rightsholders and citizenry at large.

### **Social shifts**

Uganda's population growth rate continues to be one of the highest globally estimated at an annual rate of 3%, compromising social service delivery efforts due to increased demand. The social sector, on the other hand, is one of the underfunded ones in Uganda. Budgetary allocations have been diverted to focus on infrastructure development. The Government increased the age bracket for receiving Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) from 70 to 80 years which has negatively affected vulnerable people concerned. Other special programmes such as the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) and Uganda Women Empowerment Programme (UWEP) have similar challenges in terms of meeting targets and poor governance. The regulatory framework for NGOs such as Public Management Act 2013 and NGO Act 2016 has affected the work of some civil society organisations and contributed to shrinking the operating environment of CSOs working on governance issues, rule of law and democracy. NGOs are often misquoted, misunderstood and usually labelled as "opposition".

### **(Invisible) Power shifts**

Good governance is registered when the three arms of Government; the Executive, Legislature, and the Judiciary perform their roles. However, in Uganda, there is a noted diminishing role of legislature and judiciary in government decision-making. Several bills/ amendments requests presented before the parliament have come with pressure from the executive/president to be passed ultimately using the big numbers of the ruling party to endorse these documents. The shrinking mandate of the parliament reflects a shrinking voice of the rightsholders they represent.

### **Covid-19**

The government of Uganda took several measures to minimise the spread of the outbreak of COVID-19. These

included partial lockdown and restrictions on movements. There was the development of Standard Operating Procedures that have posed challenges in terms of adherence. The infection rate has been increasing and as of October 20th, the number of infections had surpassed 10,000 people. The government distribution of relief items to the poor urban dwellers was characterised by corruption and mismanagement often leaving vulnerable households of elderly, people with disabilities, youth, people living with HIV missing out. However, Covid-19 has been a wake-up call for policy-makers and citizenry at large. The situation has brought to the fore, inequalities in the implementation of existing social policies. Therefore, there is a need/or desire to make reviews on the existing social protection policies to align with the vulnerabilities among rightsholders. This offers a window of opportunity for Voice grantees and citizenry at large to engage and lobby policy-makers to ensure that rightsholders issues are incorporated in the review processes.

## ***Zooming in***

### **Voices behind the picture**

Uganda's population is at 44 million with more than 78% of Ugandans being **young people** aged 30 and below. The rapid growth of youth presents an opportunity for Uganda to tap into a potential demographic dividend. However, the slow economic growth does not match the increasing need for youth employment. The 2016-2021 National Youth Manifesto calls for holistic interventions to improve the employment environment in Uganda through an enabling legal and policy environment to facilitate job creation, skills development and enterprise opportunities for youth. Whereas this is in place, progress on implementing the commitments has been slow.

***“The commercialisation of politics has left no space for youth political participation since they are economically weak and cannot provide the incentives to their electorate. The youth view political positions as job opportunities rather than a platform to influence political decisions and policies in the best interest of the youth.”***

A majority of the **elderly persons** are equally excluded from job opportunities, including from existing government programmes such as operation wealth creation. A large section of the elderly are still energetic and can engage in gainful work if supported to access affordable factors of production such as loans. Existing financial institutions are hesitant to extend financial facilities to the elderly claiming that the risk of default is high. Additionally, the elderly suffer neglect, abuse and violence at the hands of society around them. Their basic rights e.g. freedom from discrimination and work, are often violated. The abuses they endure range from theft and burglary of property, especially on elderly women rape, dispossession of property (*land and money*) by individuals, families or the community close to them. They are sometimes tortured and assaulted for among other things, accusations of witchcraft. The discrimination and marginalisation experienced by **ethnic minorities and indigenous people** from neighbouring communities are deeply entrenched and take the form of land rights violations, poor education and provision of social services. Negative stereotyping, for example on the Batwa community legitimises official subjugation, exclusion and dispossession of indigenous peoples by government institutions and dominant groups.

***“Indigenous women are often doubly vulnerable, as their access to land and resources is frequently mediated through customary law, which depends on their communities retaining control over traditional territories”*** Minority Rights Group International.

There is no homogenous Ugandan woman, but rather **women** created by circumstances that lead to their **exploitation, abuse and violence**. Access to factors of production, financial services, land and employment, come with power dynamics. This is due to different factors like patterns in domestic roles, lack of collateral, long distances, male signatories, male domination, control of resources and decisions. The **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI)** community in Uganda continue to be marginalised and discriminated by society, policymakers, and cultural and religious leaders. This is coupled by the existing restrictive legal and policy frameworks such as the Penal Code Act criminalising consensual same-sex intercourse, the registration of person act 2015 doesn't make provisions for transgender and intersex adults to change their sex details in the register, the Non-Government Organisations Act 2016 provides for NGO Registration but stops organisations whose objectives are "in contravention of the law" from being registered, and the Equal Opportunities Commission Act has a provision which prevents the commission from investigating any matter involving immoral and socially harmful behaviour, which means, cases from LGBTIQ persons are excluded.

***"We continue to witness incidences of punitive attacks and raids on the drop-in centres and other LGBT+ safe spaces. Raids in work spaces for LGBT+ service providers and homes have also not been spared."***

The disability movement on the other hand has registered several gains in profiling **persons with disabilities**, their needs, aspirations and getting key decision-makers to act in addressing them. However, the existing policies and legal frameworks are not fully implemented. One that stands out is the limited accessibility due to failure to adhere to building and infrastructural standards.

### **Their aspirations**

An environment free from violence is an aspiration for **women**. With equal access to productive assets such as land, capital to become productive and empowered members of society. Women need to feel free and safe to express themselves without fear of threat and/or abuse. Education among **indigenous communities and ethnic minorities** is a matter that has not been seriously addressed. Land rights and national identity is also pressing.

***"The acknowledgement of ethnic minorities elevates their status on the international scene for them to benefit from the forms of affirmative action meant for them"*** Hon. Joshua Anywarach

The desire of **elderly persons** is to be loved and catered for by their government and families, combined with social services, such as health care, that is responsive to their needs. The **young people**, on the other hand, seek employment, start-up capital, skills development, access to formal education or training, and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive rights and health services. **People with disabilities** desire to become more self-reliant, societal acceptance both at family and community level. They seek the provision of accessible information and assistive devices to enhance mobility and desire for implementation of disability-friendly laws. Most of **LGBTI** youth are often abused and this creates an urgent need for services that are not readily available, such as, mental health services. Security and safety plans for the LGBTIQ community especially during the elections period are key. Plus continuous psycho-social support to members in the LGBTIQ community especially those that are HIV+, the trans\* women and men

## Zooming out

### Fostering change

- It is important to note that Uganda has made tremendous efforts by putting in place policies/or affirmative action's/or programmes that support the different rightsholder groups like women and girls, persons with a disability, and youth and elderly. However, implementation is still low in all sectors. State recognition does not always result in effective implementation of the laws and policies or programmes.
- According to the analysis, women and girls in all groups are more vulnerable than men and boys. Uganda has a gender-responsive legal and policy framework that recognises the needs to address gender inequities by expanding opportunities for men, women, boys and girls as a means for sustainable inclusive development. Despite this investment, gender biases and inequalities continue to be propagated by society by perpetuating negative social and cultural norms.
- Voice in Uganda intends therefore to focus its attention on the following issues in the coming years:
- It is urgent to take stock of the effects of Covid-19 on the various rightsholders and grantees engaged in Voice and design more tailored interventions to mitigate the effects and seek alternative solutions in response to the unusual situation.
- Related to this, there is an urge to increase access to safe and secure ICT use among Voice rightsholder groups to enhance their connectedness and relations with the external environment.
- Economic development is of crucial importance yet so broad a topic that Voice in Uganda will take time to reflect whether and in what way this could be taken along.
- Experience has shown the need to pay careful attention to the mental health state and well-being of human rights defenders and people who are excluded and discriminated against, often survivors of violence and abuse. Therefore, we will promote and support mental health care in all Voice interventions and grants, especially those initiatives facilitating empowerment processes.
- Recognition of one's rights is a critical issue in cross-border situations. Support to initiatives providing accessible legal services to people with disabilities, women facing violations and abuse, elderly, youth and LGBTIQ persons would be of priority.
- Aiming for more inclusive elections and better representation at decision-making levels, there is an urgency to advocate for electoral reforms ahead of the 2021 elections and subsequent elections. This, with a focus on the advocacy for engendered electoral processes and increased participation of different rights holders in decision making across especially at the local government levels.
- The forthcoming Calls for Proposals will be based on these priorities and issues -although other new ones may come up that require further attention.