

# UGANDA'S NATIONAL URBAN POLICY: THE EMERGING RESPONSE TO POVERTY, FOOD SECURITY AND GENDER IN URBAN UGANDA

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## KEY POINTS

- Urban food security and gender are critical factors needing full integration in the National Urban Policy (NUP) if it is to address the needs of the poorest residents of Uganda's cities.
- Without attention to the inequalities of power and the subsequent gradations of poverty within communities, Uganda's NUP will be ineffective in reaching marginalized groups within the poor.
- A focus on economic opportunities, better administration and slum upgrades will not meet the larger challenges of urban food security, which differ substantially from food insecurity in rural areas.

## INTRODUCTION

Uganda will release its first NUP in late 2013. As an explicitly pro-poor policy, the NUP has the potential to fill in gaps in existing national policy, which fail to adequately identify and respond to urban poverty, particularly in the overlapping areas of gender and food security. The NUP is being developed with input and support from a variety of international, national and local partners and stakeholders, who hold different priorities and levels of influence in producing, implementing and monitoring the final document. This policy brief points to the gaps and silences in Uganda's urban strategy, specifically those linked to food security and gender. An examination of the policy process underway indicates that the NUP is unlikely

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## ACRONYMS

CBO	community-based organization
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	non-governmental organization
NUF	National Urban Forum
NUP	National Urban Policy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RoU	Republic of Uganda
SDI	Shack/Slum Dwellers International
SUDP	Strategic Urban Development Plan
TSUPU	Transforming the Settlements for the Urban Poor in Uganda
USPS	Urban Sector Profiling Study
WID	Women in Development

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to either respond directly to urban food insecurity or substantively reflect the multidimensional poverty needs of Uganda’s urban poor, particularly women. It may indirectly respond, however, by improving living conditions for some urban residents and creating greater efficiency in the administration of urban areas, particularly in cities at early stages of growth.

Urban food security and gender are critical factors needing full integration in the NUP if it is to address the needs of the poorest residents of Uganda’s cities. Across Africa, the urban poor spend a large portion of their income on food; urban poverty is a problem of food security and vice-versa. Inadequate nutrition directly contributes to multiple health problems and lower brain and physical development, severely impacting an individual’s ability to move out of poverty. Further, poverty is gendered: men and women experience poverty differently, and much of women’s poverty is invisible when attention is not targeted on how gendered power relations distribute wealth and resources inside households and communities. Women’s roles are also central to producing, securing, preparing and distributing food and other resources critical to nutritional well-being. While challenges of creating a meaningful policy response to urban food security exist throughout Africa, Uganda presents a useful case study for several reasons. First, it has a comparatively strong policy capacity. Second, its rapid urbanization is still in the beginning stages, which allows significant opportunities for an innovative early response to this growth. Finally, the development of an NUP has the potential to provide a location and framework to meet the growing challenges associated with urbanization.

If the components of the process intended to support widespread stakeholder participation were more robust, the NUP could be more responsive to the

needs of the urban poor, given the significant knowledge and experience base of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) working on urban poverty. There are also serious questions regarding the impact that this policy is likely to have, due to its low priority within the context of other national policies and the direction that Uganda's National Development Plan (NDP) is taking, treating poverty reduction as an end product of economic growth. The NUP can be expected to remain dependent on external donor support and have limited influence on existing food security and poverty reduction policies.

## **CONTEXT: POVERTY, FOOD INSECURITY AND GENDER IN UGANDA'S URBAN CENTRES**

The rate of urbanization in Uganda, 4.8 percent, is among the highest in the world. While Uganda's urbanization level is still low, at 12 percent, by 2030 it is projected to reach 30 percent, with an urban population exceeding 20 million people (Cities Alliance, 2010: 1). In slum areas, the informality of housing overlaps with informal employment, service provision and legal status. Understanding and planning for accelerating urbanization in Uganda requires attention to rural urban linkages, population growth, legislation around land tenure, urban agriculture, employment opportunities, international migration patterns, and appropriate mechanisms to provide services and opportunities to the growing numbers of urban poor.

Although Uganda's urban population is considerably better off (measured by income) than the rural population and more than 90 percent of Uganda's poor live in rural areas, urban poverty is widespread, increasing and severe (Mukwaya et al., 2011: 13). Urban income distribution is highly unequal, and the majority of urban residents are impoverished, with an estimated 60 percent of Kampala's

population living in slums. Poverty in an urban setting is a markedly different experience from that in rural areas. While there may be greater proximity to health, education and legal services, access is challenging due to the existence of a variety of formal and informal barriers. Unemployment levels are high; the youth unemployment rate is estimated at a shocking 83 percent (World Bank, 2007). Most of the urban poor rely on the informal economy, where income is irregular and security risks are widespread. Residents of high-density urban slums face further struggles connected to security, health and stigmatization.

Existing food security policy relates only to the rural agricultural sector. Although some urban farming exists in Uganda, much of this is geared toward an export market in flowers. Urban food agriculture is vulnerable to theft and may be grown on lands with uncertain use rights — which may also be toxic. Urban food prices are high and access to regular income is necessary to secure it. Further, nutritional well-being relies on an array of inputs, such as clean water, access to medical services and a diverse diet, all of which are difficult with insecure incomes and residency in informal housing settlements. Poverty is multidimensional and Uganda's urban poor are not homogenous — there are many gradations of poverty and nutritional insecurity among them, structured by factors of gender, age, disability, health and place of origin.

Poverty, gender and food security are interrelated. Effective policy targeting poverty must address “the inequalities in power, incomes and asset bases that generally underpin malnutrition and lack of basic services,” which are inherently gendered (Satterthwaite, 2003: 182). Women experience food insecurity in ways that highlight their marginalization and vulnerability: limited power in their households and communities translates into lower nutritional levels for girls and women (DeRose, Das and Millman, 2000: 520). Thus, urban women — particularly widows and other unmarried

female heads of households who have less income — have less access to food and other resources that are critical to nutritional well-being. Female-headed households in urban centres in Uganda have lower incomes than male-headed ones, in contrast to rural regions where women heads of households are more likely to have urban remittances to draw on, as well as land to cultivate (Appleton, 1996: 1811). Women are also key providers of food, household income and other resources linked to nutrition, playing an essential and often dominant role in the provision of the “three pillars” of food security: food availability, food access and availability of the non-food resources critical for nutritional security (child care, health care, clean water and sanitation) (Quisumbing et al., 1995). Policies targeted to enhance these roles — and that address the social, cultural and economic constraints women face — are needed to respond to the high numbers of malnourished and food-insecure individuals. The participation of women at all stages of the policy process is absolutely necessary to avoid the kind of policies typical of gender mainstreaming and Women in Development (WID) approaches, which place increased burdens on women’s time and resources without addressing existing cultural, social, political and economic barriers to empowerment.

## THE POLICY PROCESS: EXISTING ENVIRONMENT AND THE URBAN CAMPAIGN

There are several existing policies in Uganda that address poverty, food security and gender nationally, and there has been a series of policy attempts to address concerns of urban poverty and housing. Despite ongoing awareness of these concerns and important improvements in some areas — for example, in access to safe drinking water — gaps in the policy environment exist.

There is a prioritization of rural poverty concerns in national poverty reduction strategies, including the most

current NDP, which obscures the importance of long-term implications of Uganda’s urbanization trends (Republic of Uganda [RoU], 2010a). Since all other policies need to align themselves with the priorities set out in this NDP, and as it has the most secure financing revenues for poverty alleviation, this is a serious gap. While the NDP does have more of an urban focus than previous Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), this attention is geared more toward harnessing the economic potential of urban areas than responding to rising poverty and economic inequality. Economic growth is necessary for poverty reduction, but the process is not automatic and revenue from economic growth needs to be invested strategically into public services. Uganda has been running a pilot project of conditional cash transfers, but again this project has been centred in rural areas where poverty is severe and particularly unresponsive to the pro-poor growth tools in the PRSPs. In Latin America, conditional cash transfers have been shown to be most effective in urban areas, but this has not yet been piloted in Uganda.

There is a similar lack of attention to the urban sector in the “Uganda Food and Nutrition Policy” (RoU, 2003). This policy was developed by, and is under the administration of, the ministries for agriculture and health. It aligns its goals and strategies to support existing policies, in particular the PRSP, and contributes a “Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture” targeted at rural Ugandans. Uganda’s agricultural sector is central for national food security — for rural and urban populations alike — but this is a very limited focus and misses much of the relevance for urban food-insecure populations, a rapidly increasing demographic.

Access to growing and acquiring locally produced food is an important component to urban food security, and urban agriculture is a significant contributor to the welfare of poor urban residents (Maxwell, 1995). In Kampala’s urban zones it is estimated that the proportion of households

engaged in urban agriculture is 26 percent (Lee-Smith, 2010: 483). Kampala's city council has a Department of Agriculture, which is unusual in African cities, and is in support of regulating and even expanding this sector — for example, by reclassifying some zones to allow for agricultural production. It is poorly funded, however, and has been unable to reach its preliminary objectives of conducting a city-wide census on agriculture (ibid.: 485). New agricultural ordinances were introduced in 2006 to allow for regulation, but limitations on wetlands may have a negative impact for poorer agriculturalists (David et al., 2010: 98). Recent research on Uganda's urban agriculture policy environment points to the urgent need for policy and program support related to marketing and food security safety net planning (ibid.).

Previously implemented policies addressing urban poverty and housing (for example, the 1986 National Human Settlement Policy, the 1992 National Shelter Strategy and the 2005 National Housing Policy) have suffered from low priority after development and subsequently weak implementation, a slow approval process and dependency on external support, and have only benefitted a small proportion of urban slum dwellers, typically, the most affluent among them (RoU, 2008: 26–32). Poverty, while frequently described in policy documents as multidimensional, is most often measured by income and populations within the poor who are not affected by existing “pro-poor” strategies, often women, are rendered invisible. In urban areas, the poorest 20 percent are constituted by large numbers of elderly women (Okidi and Muagambe, 2002: 14). There is also a lack of targeted attention to the fact that, while there has been a steady decrease in poverty as measured by income in Uganda, levels of malnutrition and caloric intake have not responded to the same degree, particularly in urban areas. The recommended daily caloric intake is 2,300 per adult per day, but more than 60 percent of Uganda's households do not meet this target. Calorie-

deficient households are more prevalent in urban areas, with 72.7 percent calorie deficient, compared to 60 percent of rural households. Food insecurity is “higher in urban areas though the incidence of income” (RoU, 2010c: 29).

Attention to gender has been mainstreamed throughout Uganda's policy environment, resulting in the kinds of problems experienced widely with gender mainstreaming practices, which are parallel to problems associated with poverty mainstreaming (Woodford-Berger, 2004). Policy suffers from a superficial attention to gender, consisting primarily of platitudes lacking substance or meaningful strategies to help women gain greater access to the services, resources and power they need in their homes and communities. Gender is typically included through a WID approach, emphasizing ways to involve more women in economic production, such as microcredit or new income-generating opportunities, without sufficient attention to unintended consequences. The dominance of women in subsistence urban agriculture limits their opportunities to participate in higher paying occupations, so “urban agriculture can become a low-income trap that imprisons unskilled women” (Bryld, 2002: 81). In addition, women who have new economic opportunities may not be able to breastfeed their children, prepare nutritious food or ensure their children are getting to school. Further, there is weak empirical evidence supporting microcredit as a strategy to lift women out of poverty and a lack of research in the Ugandan context to show what kinds of microcredit might be most effective (Duvendack, 2010).

In response to the dramatic and accelerating increase in Uganda's urban population, the Ministry of Local Government initiated a policy response with support from the NDP. A draft policy was created in 2010 (RoU, 2010b), and then the Ministry for Lands, Housing and Urban Development began the process of developing a revised and expanded policy document, which has become the NUP.

They are doing so with the financial support of the World Bank and the Gates Foundation, with some subcomponents supported by additional donors.

This policy is being prepared in tandem with, and as a part of, a wider Uganda urban campaign, launched in 2010, to raise the profile of the government’s attention to urban planning. The urban campaign is also under direction of the Ministry for Lands, Housing and Urban Development, but in addition to the development of the NUP this campaign has also advanced four additional components:

- The National Urban Forum (NUF) was created as a permanent body to represent and draw on the voices of a variety of stakeholders such as NGOs, CBOs, the academic community, the private sector and different levels of government.
- Transforming the Settlements for the Urban Poor in Uganda (TSUPU) is a program targeting Uganda’s secondary cities “to align urban development efforts at the national government, local government and community levels and include the urban poor into the planning and decision-making processes” (RoU, 2010d).
- The Strategic Urban Development Plan (SUDP) will outline the specific courses of action to be taken over a 15-year period.
- The Urban Sector Profiling Study (USPS) will function as a housing sector assessment tool. This is being carried out in tandem with TSUPU, initially in five secondary cities, which are to be expanded to 13.

These components are intended to support and complement one another, use participatory frameworks, and align with Uganda’s NDP and commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Funding is disbursed and donor oversight is managed by Cities Alliance, a global partnership based in Washington,

DC, whose mandate is to meet the challenges of pro-poor policies and prosperous cities without slums. Cities Alliance has a particular interest in participatory upgrade programs, and while it has no permanent presence in Uganda, it works through a South African-based NGO federation, Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI), who in turn works closely with a Ugandan NGO, ACTogether. SDI and ACTogether are both part of the NUF and are the lead partners in TSUPU, focussing primarily on urban communities in five pilot cities (Aruja, Jinja, Mbale, Mbarara and Kabale).

The focal points of the NUP as it emerges are twofold. First, it seeks to reform the overlapping bureaucracies at different levels of government currently involved in urban administration in order to make governance more efficient and effective, both in terms of cost and performance. In light of growing concerns with urban sprawl — in particular of slum settlements and the difficulties in managing land rights, service provision and security concerns — this was the initial impetus for developing the NUP. Second, in line with the priorities of the MDGs, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, this policy is also pro-poor in its focus. While these two areas are not necessarily incompatible, it is important to note that the first administrative focus is best understood as one of control and management, reflecting challenges from the perspective of local and national governments, while the second focus is part of the wider global attention to poverty and the needs of marginalized citizens.

## **ASSESSMENT OF EMERGENT POLICY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Ugandan government’s attention to urban planning is promising in a number of areas, particularly many of those that can be viewed as improving the administrative management of urban areas. However, an assessment of its

likely impacts for the most marginalized and food-insecure urban populations raises concerns related to the process of developing policy, the focus of the emerging policy and the potential for the effective implementation of the policy.

## THE POLICY PROCESS

Ensuring active participation of stakeholders in the policy process is always challenging, particularly around social policy. Despite the stated intention of widespread and meaningful participation in the process, this is not occurring.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- *More NGOs need to be brought into the policy process, particularly groups with established roots in urban communities and those with established skills with gender and development.* ACTogether is an inadequate representative of Uganda's urban poor. Its membership is small (six staff members); its wider membership through the National Slum Dwellers Federation of Uganda is shallow and framed around those in urban slums who can use microcredit. Its assessment of gendered urban needs and grassroots strategies is not adequately open to new perspectives or the full multidimensionality of experiences of the poor. In particular, whereas other NGOs with greater experience working with the urban poor in Uganda immediately identify both gender and food security as central areas in need of policy attention, ACTogether, even when asked specifically about concerns in these areas, largely dismissed their relevance.
- *The NUF needs to be better organized and have mechanisms introduced to grant it greater influence.* Its meetings are sporadic and several key members do not attend regularly. Its importance to the process needs to be more

carefully thought out, with specific mechanisms that go beyond consultation to ensure relevancy to participants. Otherwise, the already established priorities of the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development are unlikely to be modified in light of other stakeholders' and partners' concerns.

- *Measures of "poverty" need to be standardized and improved.* The comprehensive situation analysis of Uganda's urban sectors needs greater collaboration with national statistical efforts to measure poverty in line with the MDGs and with the UN's Human Development Reports. In particular, the measures in the Multidimensional Poverty Index have useful crossover with several components commonly used to measure nutritional security. Urban statistics on gender are also key to unpacking the areas where policy attention needs targeting.

## THE POLICY FOCUS

Much of the NUP is centred on providing an improved administrative and legal environment for urban planning. This focus is important for supporting goals of economic growth, which is clearly the central priority of the government, as well as a necessary correlate to poverty alleviation. That said, there are several concerns around this focus for the urban poor.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- *In addition to secondary cities, attention needs to be focussed on Kampala.* The current national approach of focussing on secondary cities has the advantage of looking at possibilities for slum upgrading, mobilizing urban populations and urban development early in the process of urbanization when the task is much easier. It also supports links with local governments. However,

it is not clear that Kampala, which will continue to dominate as the urban hub, will benefit from the pro-poor strategies of TSUPU, as SDI and ACTogether are only working within secondary cities.

- *Slum upgrading projects need to engage with a clear recognition of past mistakes around relocating slum dwellers and expand to respond more broadly to the multidimensional needs of the poor.* Improvements in urban water provision provide one example of government capacity in this area. However, the focus on slum upgrading is a partial response to nutritional insecurity. How well the government has recognized past failings where the poorest populations could not afford to take advantage of improvements (such as better but more expensive housing and public latrines with fees) is unclear.

## THE POTENTIAL FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

- *Urban poverty, nutritional security and gender need greater priority in Uganda's policy environment.* The NUP will be fully funded by external donors for an indefinite period of time, which raises questions regarding its long-term sustainability. This policy will exist in an environment where government ministries compete as much as cooperate for scarce resources; this is an uncertain context for expanding the NUP into areas, such as food security, that are the responsibility of other ministries. For the poverty focus to go beyond basic slum upgrading and microcredit, the concerns identified here need to be incorporated into the NDP, which is responsible for identifying the central national priorities for all ministries and policies to support.
- *The competing goals of urban economic growth and improving the lives of the urban poor need to be substantively addressed.* These are parallel objectives, which are not mutually exclusive but require a coordinated

response. Microfinance, information about upgrading substandard houses, developing grassroots leadership and capacity are all worthwhile approaches to improving the living conditions in urban slums. Most marginalized groups are unlikely to be reached, however, where invisible and persistent poverty persists. Growth-mediated strategies, such as ensuring universal access to functioning public health and education services, are necessary. In addition, urban conditional cash transfers and other tools of social protection need to be considered. These policies can be targeted directly at the most marginalized and food-insecure populations. Additionally, revenue directly for poverty alleviation needs to be drawn from the NDP's poverty fund, or similarly "ring-fenced" to ensure this focus gets the full 50 percent of funding it has been allocated by the World Bank.

## CONCLUSIONS

Without attention to inequalities of power and the subsequent gradations of poverty within communities, Uganda's NUP will be ineffective in reaching marginalized groups within the poor. It will not be able to address their needs or ensure that the participatory process is genuinely representative of those it claims to speak for. A focus on economic opportunities, better administration and slum upgrades will not meet the larger challenges of urban food security, which differ substantially from food insecurity in rural areas. An additional focus on nutritional security for all would facilitate a needed response to urban poverty, directing attention to the most marginalized and insecure populations. In particular, more research on the interconnections between urban food security and gender is needed.

Uganda is a leader in policy development, with an established record of developing policies that are used

as best practices in Africa.<sup>1</sup> The country is in a unique and advantageous position for developing an innovative NUP capable of meaningfully addressing the challenges ahead. Uganda is in a strong position because while its urbanization is accelerating rapidly, it is just beginning to take off; there is still time to carefully plan its development. The current crisis in food prices has made the issue of urban food access politically relevant in Uganda. In addition, the framework for this policy, as determined with the World Bank, dictates that it needs to comply with the goals and mandates set out in the MDGs and Uganda's NDP (World Bank, 2007). The 2013 NUP needs to incorporate attention to gender, poverty and a participatory framework. There is an opportunity to push for greater attention on these three fronts (poverty, gender and participation) through an inclusion of food security as part of the urban policy agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in 1986, Uganda was the first to have a developed policy response, which was widely copied throughout Africa, as well as a universal education policy that was among the earliest in Africa.

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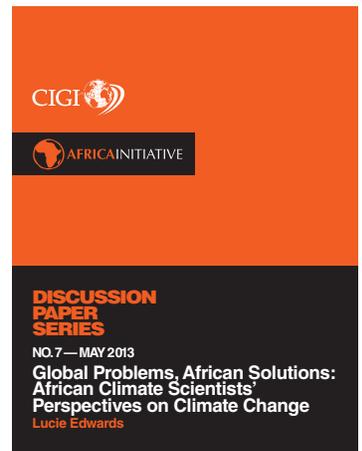
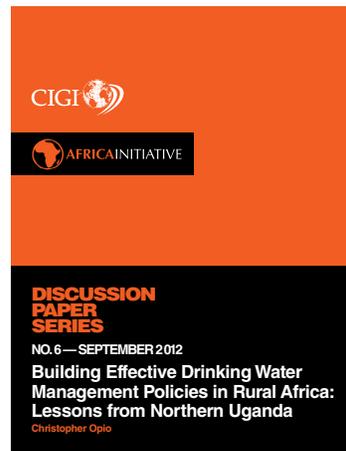
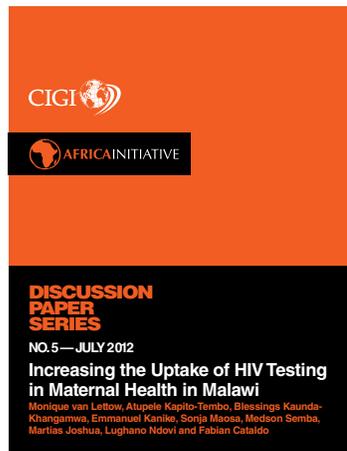
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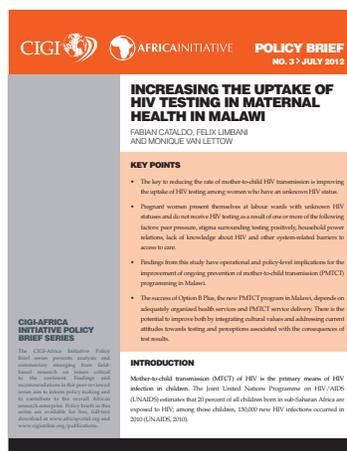
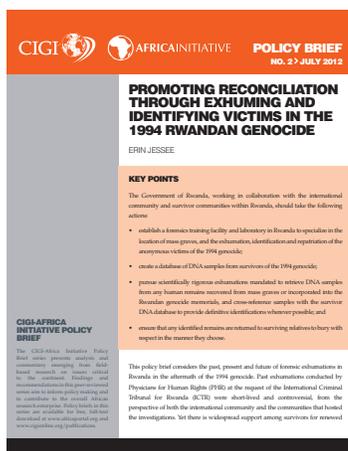
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