

The role of Non-State Actors in the Implementation of Social Protection Policies and Programme in Uganda

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Abstract:

Drawing from the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the two districts of Uganda, the paper examines the extent to which social protection initiatives in particular the formal and informal policies, regulations and accountability mechanisms of selected social protection interventions influences the demand, design and implementation of programs and consequently the degree of effectiveness it has in addressing gendered vulnerability to poverty. The findings indicate that social protection has become an important strategy for reducing household vulnerability to poverty. Social protection is not only provided by the state but also non-state actors of various categories are increasingly playing a significant role in addressing the different aspects of vulnerability employing different strategies or approaches. The study has shown that governance of non-state actors (NSAs), in particular formal and informal policies and regulations as well as the accountability mechanisms have significant implications for effective delivery of social protection services in particular ensuring that vulnerable poor needs, interest, concerns and priorities are addressed. Therefore, this study explores key ideas needed in the current debate on the development and implementation of social protection policies and programmes against household gendered vulnerability to poverty in Uganda and proposes the development of innovative development policies and programmes that strengthens the pro-poor implementation of social protection along with more comprehensive schemes on poverty reduction.

Keywords: Social Protection, Poverty, Household Vulnerability to Poverty, State, Non-State Actors

Introduction

Addressing vulnerabilities among low income sections of the community is one of the overarching goals of most nations. One of the notions that drive this agenda is the widely held view that all citizens deserve a decent life, one in which they are able to afford basic necessities of life. Besides, high levels of vulnerability and inequality are a setback to economic and social development. It is partly due to these arguments that nations and development partners are now increasingly designing clear and effective strategies for promoting the implementation of social protection policies and programmes. Several definitions and conceptualisation of social protection abound. The World Bank in its 2001 paper on developing a social protection strategy for Africa defines social protection as ‘interventions that assist poor individuals, households and communities to reduce their vulnerability by managing risks better’ (p 4). In the first National Development Plan (NDP, 2010/11 - 2014/15), similar conceptualisation of social protection is adopted where social protection is presented as “a collective system for managing risks faced by vulnerable individual household members” (Government of Uganda (GoU), 2012) (GoU, 2012). DfID takes a broader perspective. Social protection is defined as ‘public actions carried out by the state or privately – that: a) enable people to deal more effectively with risk and their vulnerability to crises and changes in circumstances (such as unemployment or old age); and b) help tackle extreme and chronic poverty’ (Dfid, 2006:1). Other African countries take a similar broad perspective. Benin for instance, in its poverty reduction strategy paper of 2003, states “social protection comprises all systems and measures that provide social assistance and various social services to the different social and professional groups” (Republic of Benin, 2002).

Background

The Ugandan government through the Public Private Partnership policy recognises the important role of non-state social protection actors in accelerating the country’s development process. The Constitution guarantees the right to engage in peaceful activities to influence the policies of government through civic organisations and guarantees the independence of nongovernmental organisations which protect and promote human rights (Objective V (ii)) (Republic of Uganda, 1995). The NGO Statute 1989 and 2006 NGO Amendment Act illustrates government legal commitment to the development of the non state actors’ role in development (Republic of Uganda, 1989). The National Development Plan (NDP) recognizes and stresses non-state social protection actor’s involvement in its implementation and ensuring its success (The Republic of Uganda, 2010). The government has also developed a National NGO policy (2010), which recognizes the role of non-state social protection actor’s in improving the quality of life of Ugandans especially in the sectors of education, health, water and sanitation, environmental management, infrastructure development, humanitarian and relief support that greatly supplements government efforts. The policy also recognizes the role of non-state actor’s in policy development and championing participatory development (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2010). The Integration of

gender in all these initiatives is a central objective for the Ugandan government, as guided by the National Gender policy (see the, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development [MoGLSD], 2007). Reducing vulnerability and poverty are key concerns of the gender policy. Non State Actors (NSAs) implement Social protection interventions either in partnership with government or get financial support from development partners (donors).

Social protection is a major intervention area for non state actors (NGOs and Community- Based Organisations) especially in empowering and meeting the needs of marginalised people (MoGLSD, 2007). Available literature on civil society in Uganda indicates that a number of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been involved in supporting the poor focusing on building local skills and knowledge, economic empowerment, promotion of human rights to deal with social exclusion; establishing minority group-specific social services, relief and humanitarian service; Adult literacy education; education support; confidence building and peace building to reduce conflicts with neighbouring communities among others (Lwanga-Ntale et al, 2008). The CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS) study group notes that CSOs are significantly more effective than the state in meeting the needs of the marginalised. The community members indicated that voluntary organisations provide better services to vulnerable groups than the state (CPRC et al., 2009).

While the NSA sector has expanded in Uganda, majority of these organizations have a narrow social base and thin in national geographical coverage (Makubuya et al, 2002). Most of the leading NSAs are urban-based concentrated Kampala (the Capital city of Uganda) with a token presence in the rural countryside (Ibid). The middle class plays a prominent role in these organizations or at least those most visible in the public arena. Thus several CSOs in the country are characterized as elitist establishments with majority of the NSAs dependent on external donor funding where the interests of donors often determine their objectives and priorities and as such they may be described as nomadic in their pursuits (Ibid)¹. Thus they are open to change of government and others of being donor ‘puppets’ which also affects their accountability. There are reported tensions between staff and senior managers due to limited staff involvement in decision making processes isolation of staff; weaknesses in governance associated with lack of capacity among governing body to take on responsibilities (board members); limited organizational and professional skills among members; low pay (Mukasa, 2006); weak staff career development (Ahmad, 2002; Vilain, 2006); limited financial and management expertise, limited institutional capacity, low levels of self-sustainability, isolation/lack of inter-organizational communication and/or coordination, lack of understanding of the broader social or economic context (Malena, 1995).

The study design and methodological approach

The paper reviewed the secondary and primary data collected from the two districts of Uganda (Katakwi and Kyegegwa), purposively selected to represent the two broad tribal and ethnic cultural groupings – the Nilo-Hamites (Katakwi) and Bantu (Kyegegwa). Katakwi and Kyegegwa districts represent the North Eastern and Western Uganda respectively. The two districts offered this study the best options for comparison between various aspects such as rural-urban and cultural differences. Other criteria for selection of the districts included poverty and vulnerability status and presence of both state and non state social protection actors. The study adopted a cross sectional design employing both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection for the primary data. The secondary data was obtained through an in-depth desk review and content analysis of relevant published and gray material (unpublished studies), policy and programme documents, regulations and laws of the selected non state actors. The review of global and national studies on social protection and governance of non state actor’s provision of social protection provided conceptual and theoretical discourses on gender and social protection initiatives with respect to issues of governance, vulnerability and poverty in Africa and Uganda.

Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

In seeking to understand how NSAs providing SP services have contributed towards resolution of problems related to adequacy, effectiveness and targeting of specific aspects with regard to gender and vulnerability to poverty, the study dwelt on the following parameters: laws, policies and regulations; and accountability. Policies, laws and regulations are key governance mechanisms that facilitate the operation of organisation. It is envisaged that policies, laws and regulations influence the design and implementation of programs and consequently the level/degree of effectiveness in addressing gender and vulnerability to poverty. In the absence of clear policies and enabling laws and regulations, NSAs can fail to full incorporate the unique but vital features of a given society in the design and implementation of initiatives. Similarly, the need for effective accountability to various stakeholders tends to rise to bar for any NSA to deliver services effectively, transparently with tangible results. The channel of accountability works through involvement of all relevant stakeholders that leads to better

¹ The DIFD Report (page 23)

understanding of what needs to be done, how to do it and feedback messages that recursive refinement of the delivery system. It is argued that good accountability mechanisms are better equipped to address gender differences and other specific concerns of the communities. They do so by way of reporting and gathering new ideas to tailor the initiatives to specific local conditions for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Governing Laws, Policies and Guidelines of NSAs

The findings provide support to the argument that formal and informal policies, laws and regulations of entities involved in SP initiatives influence the effectiveness in terms of reducing gender specific difference and vulnerability to poverty. A review of information within the NSAs and the environment around them revealed that policies were both formal and informal. An in-depth analysis revealed that all the NSAs whether informal or formal had some governing policies and regulations written and unwritten. An important explanation for presence of policies and regulations was embedded within the broader government requirement for registration of NSAs. The NGO Board demands that all NSAs should have a constitution which articulates the governing laws, policies or guidelines before it can be registered and licensed (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2010). The rules and regulations provide a framework for internal governance, budgeting and financial reporting, and annual work plans indicating the services and activities carried out (progress) and what is planned.

In the case of Kyegegwa district, further explanation for the widespread presence of laws, policies and regulations is found in the fact that a local NGOs (PAPRO) facilitated the process of developing a constitution by training members and developing a common design that each NSA could easily adopt and adapt. Nevertheless, it was observed that most policies and regulations (about 70%) were informal (not written) though members were familiar with their implementation. Though 30% of the NSAs indicated that they had written policies, only 11% were able to present copies to the research team. In Katakwi district, 95% of the NSAs had a constitution and the remaining 5% had by-laws. Claims of having written constitutions could not be verified except for 26% of the entities who were able to present a copy to the research team. Review of the available constitutions, indicated several similarities in terms of provisions and procedures relating to various aspects of belonging and benefiting for the SP initiatives. For example, there were similarities in conditions for membership, initial and regular contributions, fines and penalties imposed for certain breaches, sharing out of benefits, and guidelines for seeking assistance from the Social Fund in case of bereavement or major illness. Others include administration and governance procedures, frequency of meetings, to review progress and making of operation decisions, guidelines for general meeting and election of leaders.

The constitutions provide the vision, mission, and reason for establishment of the NSA; name and location; geographical coverage of the organization; aims and objectives and activities to be implemented to achieve the objectives. The constitutions further articulate the organizational structure, membership recruitment, composition and termination; elections of committees; duties of the different office bearers in the management of the organization as well as implementation of programmes/activities. They also provide for accountability mechanisms such as reporting and feedback mechanisms; financial accountability; standing orders and by-laws, language of communication as well as procedures for dissolution of the organization when need arises. The community based organisations which did not have written constitutions had rules or by-laws that are agreed upon in the meetings to guide their operations such as payment of fines, irregular attendance, and failure to pay loans among others. Respect for each other cut across most NSAs at the community level. Other rules and regulations provided for extending benefits such as loans to non-members who had to be guaranteed by members.

Analysis of Gender responsiveness of NSA Policies and Programs

Of particular interest to the study was the extent to which gender has been integrated in the policies and regulations. Gender insensitive policies have implications on the programming in terms of targeting as well as the organizations ability to address women's/girls and men's/boys interests, concerns and priorities. While majority of the NSA officials (66.7%) indicated considering gender in their policies, the analysis of the constitutions and other policy documents indicated that they did not reflect gender aspects. The documents did not depict awareness of gender concepts and their implications on life experiences and outcomes for girls and boys, men and women in the community. Beyond the documents, officials could not explain how gender was integrated in the programming and implementation of activities implying that written provisions were not practically applied.

A few organizations provided for addressing specific gender aspects such as socio discrimination against women and children. For example, organizations such as OTUKO People living with HIV/AIDS pledged to create awareness on cross cutting issues such as gender; consideration of both male and female members; gender equity in elections interpreted as 'both men and women inclusive'. Other constitutions² indicate provision

² Omodoi Parents Association (OPA)

for equal rights to all members and that all community members are eligible to become members provided they are committed to the objectives of the association. The constitutions for Omodoi Parents Association (OPA) and family life survival (FALISU) for addressing sexual and gender based violence with emphasis on addressing gender discrimination and gender mainstreaming as well as penalties for sexual harassment. Katakwi District Development Actors Network (KaDDAN), the umbrella organization for all CSOs in the district emphasizes values such as gender sensitivity, mutual respect, transparency and accountability in its operations and calls for gender parity and non-discriminatory practices, justice and equity in the member organizations.

In terms of contextualizing gender issues, the analysis shows that a number of NSAs had simply reflected broader gender issues without considering the local situation in their areas of operation. Only one of the organizations recognizes the role of gender in development in the preamble of the constitution but also very broadly with no specific identification of the gender issues affecting the beneficiaries of their programmes. The findings reveal that most NSAs in the study areas (66.7%) provided services that are gender neutral with only 27.8% with gender specific activities. 33.3% focus on access to savings and credit facilities for community members. A gender institutional analysis of the selected NSAs reveals lack of gender capacities in most organisations characterised by limited capacity and skills to conduct gender analysis and use the gender analysis to inform design and delivery of SP interventions. A few organisations³ mainly the international, national and district ones had either conducted a gender training for their staff or their staff had attended gender training as well as had gender policies to guide their operations. The lack or limited human resource technical capacities for gender planning is a major challenge in ensuring that NSAs adequately integrate gender in their operations to be able to meet the needs and interests of men and men in their communities of operation.

Accountability Mechanisms of NSAs

Good governance is measured by the level of accountability in the organization or institution. Accountability strengthens governance structures, enhances organizations credibility and legitimacy as well as ensuring that stakeholder needs and concerns are addressed at all levels. The key dimensions of accountability as defined by Blagescu et al (2005) which were considered in the study include transparency; participation, evaluation and complaint and response mechanisms, responsiveness to people needs and concerns among others. These dimensions offer opportunities for addressing gender concerns, interests and priorities.

Transparency

Transparency is an important mechanism for accountability that ensures beneficiaries receive adequate information on the organization's policies, procedures, structures and activities. In-depth analysis showed that majority of the NSAs provided opportunities for sharing information with the members and beneficiaries through various kinds of meetings. This offered opportunities for members to participate in planning, reviewing progress on implementation of activities and budgeting. In the Credit and Savings NSAs, during the meetings, members review progress reports on contributions by each person, what to do with savings, decisions on defaulters within the group, and attendance of training programmes. In this way, there was joint monitoring of activities and accountability processes. As noted, all members also participate in the selection of leaders during the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The beneficiaries confirmed that meetings were the major avenue of sharing information about the operations of NSAs. The major channel for communication was through meetings whose frequency ranged from weekly to annually across the different NSAs. In both districts large proportion of the NSAs - in Katakwi district (66%) met weekly while 20% met annually at the general assembly. In Kyegegwa district majority of the NSAs met weekly (78%) and annually (10%) (Figure1). It was observed that 10% of NSAs did not hold any kind of meeting for members and beneficiaries.

The weekly meetings were common among the informal NSAs especially those dealing with savings and credit while annual meeting were organised by the national and the formal NSAs. The international NSAs do not hold meetings for local people but rather staff members who do the monitoring and evaluation. The meetings provided a forum for information sharing on programme design, implementation progress as well as feedback on beneficiaries' views and grievances about the service or initiative. In addition, community consultative meetings, sensitization and training workshops and monitoring and evaluation visits are commonly organised by field staff of international, national and formal community based NSAs. With the informal groups at community level, information was largely shared through regular group meetings that are held either on a weekly or monthly basis. The multiple channels through which beneficiaries were able to voice their views and grievances on the initiatives and obtain a response included hand over notes; telephones; radios; home visits and church.

Overall the most common channel for communication and feedback channels were through the meetings. This fact was confirmed by 64.6% of males and (58.9%) females. The second most common form of communication was mobile telephones: 23.1% (for males) and 22.1% (for females). Monitoring and evaluation

³ Action Aid Uganda, KaDDAN, Child Fund, SOCADIDO, Lutheran World Federation

activities as well as radios were least used as channels of communication and feedback mechanism. In both districts, while meetings of formal NSAs involve representatives of the communities especially the local leaders, with the informal community based organisations, all the members attend meetings and in some associations penalties are given for non-attendance. This arrangement was noted to create a sense of ownership, responsibility and accountability among the membership. Although women were highly involved during focus group discussions they had challenges of regular attendance due to restrictions on their mobility and lack of time created by heavy household workload involving farming and domestic chores that take the largest share of their time.

Participation in decision making, planning and implementation of SP activities

Accountability was largely judged by the nature in which the NSA involved the stakeholders either in the making of key decisions that influenced realization of the objectives and/or shared information about what had been delegated to a smaller group and the results obtained. Information on involvement in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation indicated that, at the design level, majority of the NSAs (67%) involve the beneficiaries while 28% engage the selected executive members. A few staff members (6%) are involved in the planning (6%), which is mainly done through meetings (78.4%) in majority of the community based organisations and national organisations. A similar trend is observed at implementation level, where a large proportion of the NSAs (especially community based) involve beneficiaries (61%), followed by involvement of staff and executive members 18%. The international organisations, on the other hand, use specialists (consultants) to do much of the planning (see figure 2).

In monitoring, NSAs largely involve executive members (41%); and project staff and beneficiaries (both 26%). Evaluation is dominated by beneficiaries (36%) followed by the executive members and staff. About 33.3% of the organisations do not conduct monitoring and evaluation. While interview with NSA Officials indicated high involvement of beneficiaries across the different stages of the project/programme cycle, interviews with selected beneficiaries revealed that there was limited involvement in decision making process in the formal NSAs. The above reveal the non-participatory approach of formal NSAs and the implications of such approach which they referred to as – ‘*buying what the community does not need*’. Consequently, people are increasingly setting up self-help associations/groups to support each other deal with poverty in their households. With the community based associations and groups planning is done by all members, women and men as one of the opinion leader reveals; “*If you look at the way the village SACCOs are operating, they are composed of both men and women and also in some cases the youth are given a special consideration. In such a case you find that the group members are working together as a team and getting results. The same approach has been applied to revolving fund schemes (‘aipoono’) in the villages... (Key Informant, Male, Katakwi)*”

Despite the challenges related to workload and limitations on mobility, the women testified that they are involved in the planning of their group/associations activities and equal sharing of benefits. For instance one of the female beneficiaries noted: “*Our men are longer behaving they way they used to be in 80’s, at least some men allow their wives to engage us in income generating activities although some are still strict. Women are involved in associations especially savings and credit associations which has helped them to improve on household welfare for example paying school fees, buying household materials...(key informant in , female, kyegegwa)*”

The formal NSAs have their field staff members who implement the activities; the beneficiaries are mainly called to attend consultative community meetings, often organized at sub county level, and hence not accessible to all especially the women. With the informal NSAs, implementation is a collective responsibility of the members.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an important mechanism of accountability through which organizations monitor and review progress to ascertain whether the objectives are being met. This process allows the organization to capture progress and derive any lessons to feed back into the system. While majority of the NSAs officials (61.1%) indicated having a monitoring and evaluation system in place, there was no physical evidence to back up the claim. Only 11.1% of the NSAs presented their M&E mechanisms to the research team. About 28% of the NSAs did not have any system in place for monitoring and reviewing progress and impact of their initiatives. Reviews and feedback are conducted through meetings and monitoring visits on weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual basis depending on the organizations policy and procedures. According to most respondents’ field staff in international, national and formal NSAs conduct the reviews and provide feedback to the beneficiaries. Evaluation in informal NSAs is a collective responsibility, conducted during the meetings.

Reporting and feedback mechanisms

Reporting and feedback mechanisms varied across the different types of NSAs but largely depend on type of

NSA and source of funding. The sharing of these reports among various stakeholders varied across the different NSAs with the formal CBOs and NSAs sharing monthly and quarterly reports with a few stakeholders – mostly funders, district government officials and executive board members. Only a few of the NSAs (4.9% of international and 4.5% of national) reported to the beneficiaries. For community based organisations, only those registered at district level report to the district and to their funders but all report to the beneficiaries. The types of reports produced include financial and activity reports as well as annual reports which are shared on monthly, quarterly and annual basis as per the NSA reporting procedures and regulations which vary across different NSAs. Reporting appeared more transparent at CBO level where all members are expected to participate in joint monitoring and evaluation of their activities in the meetings. Annual reporting was reportedly common among the formal NSAs, while the CBOs receive reports on a weekly basis. International and national NSAs seem to be more accountable to the donors and government than the beneficiaries of their projects/programmes. This finding concurs with Jordan's⁴ argument that NGOs are often oriented towards external stakeholders that have considerable leverage over and NGO like a donor or government regulator (p.20).

Effectiveness of governance mechanism and accountability

For governance and accountability to be affective, responsiveness to the vulnerable groups' needs and concerns should be an integral part of the organizations focus through promotion of social justice and gender equality to further the realisation of the rights of all citizens (Institute for Development Studies [IDS], 2009). Such responsiveness is reflected in the objectives of the NSAs articulated in the policies and strategies as well as the services and activities being implemented. Considering the gender situation identified (Box 1) and the beneficiary needs (Table 1), analysis of NSAs objectives and focus reveals that NSA objectives appeared to be in line with beneficiaries' needs.

According to most NSAs whose policies and regulations were reviewed, the major objectives of their activities included the following:

- Eradicating poverty through promoting credit and savings schemes; provision of skills in income generation;
- promote education of both boys and girls and community sensitisation
- promote modern farming practices to ensure improved livelihoods and food security
- Address the health problems experienced in the communities such as HIV/AIDS; and improve access to health facilities
- Promote gender and human rights
- Promote dialogue, peace building and advocate for peace, reconciliation and a conducive working environment for CSO's
- Advocate for youth employment among Others⁵

Challenges notwithstanding, beneficiaries spoke of having gained from the services provided by the NSAs. The benefits ranged from education of their children; building their houses; access to free medicine, treatment; access to justice; counselling; economic empowerment; obtaining skills to having a sense of belonging. In both districts, having a sense of belonging was mentioned by a large proportion of the men (27.7%) and women (31.6%); followed by education of children reported by 27.7% of the men and 28.4% of the women, acquiring skills (24.6% of the men and 28.4% of the women). Men were happy about being able to provide shelter for their families. These benefits reflect the needs identified by the beneficiaries and the objectives of the NSAs, implying that somehow the NSAs have responded to the needs of their target population. Most women noted that although the local NSAs are small, they have helped in addressing their immediate needs to improve on their household welfare; *"Like in our group, people have benefitted in getting mattresses, we agreed that every Sunday a member contributes 2000/= (USD\$0.8) towards purchase of a mattress for another member. The group contributes for a member who is in need e.g. to buy beddings, household utensils, some borrow money when they have problems and pays back with no interest. When we save we also buy cows, goats and anything that one desires.... (FGD Women, Katakwi)"*.

Other benefits highlighted include knowledge, paying school fees and social networking. Most women appeared to have benefitted from the local NSAs that the international and national NSAs which they said were more accessible to the local leaders and their relative. However, the beneficiaries noted that not all their needs have been addressed and vulnerability to poverty remains a major concern for women and men in the two districts. Although the beneficiaries needs appear to be largely practical, and hence the services largely focus on promotive and protective support, the need for increasing focus on transformative measures as some scholars have argued (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; Holmes and Jones, 2010; Thakur et al, 2009) would go a long way to reduce gendered vulnerabilities to poverty, which are reflected in the gender situation of the beneficiaries

⁴ Lisa Jordan Mechanisms for NGO Accountability. Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) Research Paper series No. 3.

⁵ Advocacy for the rights of vulnerable people, networking and coordination of CSOs efforts, research on causes of insecurities, help the needy; support disabled children; address disasters that affect the clan.

as highlighted in Box 1.

Findings reveal that the services are generally inadequate as reported by majority of the men in Katakwi (71.4%) and in Kyegegwa (64.7%) as well as women in Katakwi (83.3%) and in Kyegegwa (66.7%). In both districts, more women than men were dissatisfied with the services provided by the NSAs especially the international and National actors. The respondents were concerned about corruption in these NSAs which impacts on the delivery of services. In Omodoi Sub County, women in the focus group discussion cited a case where most beneficiaries of the initiatives are not the poor but rather benefiting the leaders in the community and their relatives. Women were especially concerned about the services being hazy. Respondents especially those in Katakwi Sub County complained of the limited number of formal NSAs in their sub county – they are largely served by the local groups, which have limited resources.

The respondents identified a number of challenges related to the services provided considering the different levels of service provision. The most common challenges associated with design of programmes of initiatives were; poor community involvement; inadequate services provided/services do not meet the expectations of the beneficiaries; limited participation of the local population in decision making; high levels of illiteracy and ignorance. Others include exclusion of some vulnerable groups (the non-active poor, youth, elderly); services given are not one's choice; loans difficult to pay back; limited services provided for health care; poor organization and poor policy implementation as some the men noted; *"Some of us have not benefited [from the formal NSAs]. They should bring those activities to the groups...The groups should determine what they want, not them deciding for the groups and people... (FGD, men, Katakwi)"*.

At implementation level, in both districts challenges including: non-involvement, absenteeism; internal wrangles over leadership; conflicts & disagreements; corruption by leaders; division of funds was a problem; lack of clean water; unpredictable weather conditions; hectic or too much work; programs take long to be implemented. Others include lack of technical skills; exclusion of some groups of people; things given have strings attached and are not adequate and non-involvement in planning and implementation.

Challenges associated with review and reporting include: limited involvement; ignorance of reporting writing and delays; illiteracy; little time given to project members for handing in reports; poor mobilization; lack of transport; no follow ups on the reports; and reports are hard to interpret by some members. While most women and men were comfortable with the local NSAs especially the savings and credit associations, they noted that the groups depend on member's contributions and yet the members do not have money.

Discussion of key findings and resonance with other studies

It is clear from the findings that governance mechanisms of NSAs including policies, laws and regulations as well as accountability mechanisms influence the design and implementation of programs and consequently the extent of effectiveness in addressing gender and vulnerability to poverty. In the absence of clear gender sensitive policies and enabling laws and regulations, NSAs fail to fully incorporate the unique and vital features of a given society in the design and implementation of initiatives. The reviewed policies in majority of NSA are gender blind; they do not reflect clear and participatory identification of gendered economic and social vulnerabilities, needs, interest and priorities. They are based on broad national and district assumed vulnerabilities and fail to utilise community's contributions in the design of initiatives. Consequently such approaches were noted to offer inappropriate interventions – interventions that do not address community needs. The gender blindness of policies is reflected in the design and implementation of activities with services that are largely gender neutral constituting majority of the NSA activities and services (72.9% - including the savings and credit schemes). Accordingly Holmes and Jones (2010b) argue that policy and programme design; implementation, monitoring and evaluation should have a gender perspective, in which gender equality and women's rights are central to the goals.

Only those organisations whose policies had gender considerations implemented gender specific activities and offered gender specific services. NSAs that considered gender in their policies largely provided for participation of women and men in meetings, male and female representation on membership (both general and executive committee), advocacy for human rights in particular gender based violence, non discriminatory recruitment procedures and working environment and providing equal access to savings and credit facilities for interested women and men in the given community. The savings and credit initiatives are predominantly women because of its focus on improving household welfare/care – an activity or role that is traditionally known as female domain. This is contrary to what is reported by Norton et al, (2001) where most beneficial societies were largely composed of men (90%). Norton et al, (2001) however note that argue that forms of local organisation which take on the function of pooling resources against risk are likely develop a higher level of capacity in order to meet the demanding functions. This has implications in terms not only of direct benefits, but also the development of social and organisational capabilities which assist poor people (and specific groups, such as women) to effectively negotiate rights and entitlements from private sector service providers and public authority (Ibid).

On accountability as measured by transparency, participation in decision making and evaluation, the findings reveal a more transparent system of governance in community based NSA that offers opportunities for information sharing by members and beneficiaries than with the formal international, national and district based NSAs. Such lack of transparent and involvement of communities has been reported by other scholars (Norton et al, 2001). Norton et al, (2001) argue that informal NSAs in particular ‘micro-insurance’⁶ offer efficiencies to both provider and patient (smoothing revenue for the former, smoothing expenditure for the latter because local micro-insurance structures enjoy ‘cohesion, direct participation and low administrative costs’. Regular meetings often held weekly and annual meetings for majority of community based NSAs in Kyegegwa and Katakwi districts respectively offer opportunities for members and beneficiaries to participate in planning, share information on progress and financial accountability of their organisations. The findings reveal that women and men are encouraged and required to participate in the meetings although women expressed the challenge of irregular attendance which they attributed to time poverty created by heavy workload that involve farming and domestic chores which take the largest proportion of their time.

While interviews with selected NSA officials (from National, international and district formal NSAs) revealed involvement of beneficiaries at all stages of project/programme cycle, the beneficiaries reported limited involvement especially in decision making. Although there are no formal Monitoring and Evaluation systems for majority of NSAs, reviews and feedback are done in meetings where progress and financial reports are shared. With formal NSAs reports are largely shared with the donors, executive board members and government agencies district local government. The community based NSAs share reports with all members. Agyemang et al (2009) argues participation as an accountability mechanism reflects the process of involving beneficiaries in projects decisions. This includes sharing information and consultation and dialogues with beneficiaries and other stakeholders (Ebrahim, 2003; Agyemang et al, 2009). However, in practice the decision making remains with the implementation organizations and donors. Agyemang et al (2009) study found that beneficiaries are often involved through communal meetings usually held at the start of the projects. They note that review meetings offer an important forum where the beneficiaries reflect and comment on the performance of the NSA work. International and national NSAs seem to be more accountable to the donors and government than the beneficiaries of their projects/programmes. This finding concurs with Jordan’s⁷ argument that NGOs are often oriented towards external stakeholders that have considerable leverage over and NGO like a donor or government regulator.

An assessment of the effectiveness of NSAs in responding to the needs and interests of the poor women and men and other vulnerable groups reveals a clear linkage between governance mechanisms in particular policies, laws/regulations and accountability mechanisms and design and implementation of appropriate SP interventions. It is clear that recognition and appreciation of the different vulnerabilities to poverty in the policy and legal framework of NSAs translates to objectives, interventions and services that respond to the identified vulnerabilities. For instance the few NSAs which have gender sensitive policies with gender specific objectives (and are informed by gender analysis, implement and offer gender specific activities and services in their SP interventions. Hence policy focus informs design and implementation of appropriate SP interventions. NSAs with accountability mechanisms that ensure sharing of information and participatory involvement of members and beneficiaries as was the case with most community based organisations were noted to be effective in responding to poor women’s and men’s needs and interests. The poor women and men are given an opportunity to participate in decision making on issues that affect them especially identifying their needs, concerns and priorities.

In both districts while the international and national level NSAs were considered effective in meeting their objectives according to assessments by political and opinion leaders, the beneficiaries rated them less effective largely on grounds of expectations of coverage of their individual and group needs. The vulnerability of households was related to multiple factors and yet many NSAs addressed one or two aspects. Communities were not informed of the specific coverage of each NSA and neither did the NSAs work in partnership so as to jointly and holistically address most needs of a given community.

Community Based Organization (CBOs) had a more focus to local conditions and tended to incorporate the gender needs as well as ensuring representation of women and men both in their informal administrative structure and programs. For example, many of the SILC groups allowed individual persons to use their savings for activities of their choice and the amount of weekly contributions had been set to accommodate the abilities of most of the individual members. The amount of savings contributed per member had increased over the years and households had used their repayments to purchase household items, farm implements and cattle or goats. It was possible to conclude that the level of vulnerability to low and/or unstable incomes was being reduced gradually for all participating households. Participation in governance and design of programs was

⁶ small, local, independently-managed schemes (because people are unwilling to trust larger and more anonymous schemes)

⁷ Lisa Jordan Mechanisms for NGO Accountability: Global Public Policy Institute (GPI) Research Paper series No. 3

more pronounced at the CBO level compared to international and national level NSAs. The later NSAs tended to treat the communities as beneficiaries who should simply receive hand-outs of say food, land, medical care, and educational support without making any input in the operational design of the programs. The CBOs on the other hand had more involvement of communities since most of them were member-based. It is worthwhile to conclude that the level of community involvement enabled CBOs to be more focused and effective in resolving specific community vulnerabilities.

Conclusion and Policy implications

Evidence from the study, shows that social protection has a potential to reduce poverty and vulnerability among poor household's in the country. Although social protection in Uganda has been known to be a public responsibility largely in the hands of the state through social security schemes and other poverty reduction programmes, non state actors both formal and informal community support systems have increasingly become popular in meeting the needs of the poor and vulnerable population, albeit not adequate given the chronic poverty situation in the country. The study has shown that governance of NSAs, in particular the formal and informal policies and regulations as well as the accountability mechanisms have significant implications for effective delivery of services especially ensuring that men/boys and women/girls needs, interest, concerns and priorities are addressed.

The emerging findings have a number of policy implications for addressing gender and vulnerability to poverty in Uganda. Firstly, the roles of NSAs are critical not only in complementing the State in the provision of SP but also addressing concerns that the latter has not targeted at all. Common household level vulnerabilities such as shock due to critical illness, bereavement and loss of a critical asset (land, bicycle, cattle etc.) are not in the domain of the state interventions and yet they are significant one-off events that tend to set a given household on a trajectory to continued poverty. Besides, their impacts have significant gender dimensions especially with widows, girl-children and orphans who become even more vulnerable to communities including own relatives. Protecting the rights to life and property for such groups was exclusively targeted by a number of NSAs and no other actor.

Secondly, governance in terms of simplified policies and accountability to direct beneficiaries and entire communities was more visible with lower level NSAs. Every member seemed to be aware of all the key parameters such as membership criteria, administrative structures and roles of leaders, objectives of the organization, and mode of operation to realize the set objectives. Members were also more involved in monitoring progress and results. Higher level NSAs especially those formed at international and national levels were more inclined to upward accountability to supervisors and/or financiers. This category of NSAs also seemed to be more focused on implementing rollout programs designed with little or no regard to local conditions. Communities did not know about selection of beneficiaries and nature of interventions or how the involvement of the NSA was supposed to address given vulnerabilities over time. Common and unique gender aspects such as those related to culture were not considered beyond generalities of numbers in terms of men, women and children. Accordingly, the impact, though appreciated by the local communities as critical, could have been more beneficial and possibly cost-effective if the NSA had involved communities more into identification of how best to design strategies for meeting the needs.

Thirdly a policy framework requiring NSAs coming to work in a given area to effectively engage local communities in identification of needs and strategies should be encouraged. Even the international level NSAs with global designs should be encouraged to share with communities how and what they intend to do so as to accommodate local conditions and vulnerabilities. For example, they could use local governance committees involving selected members of communities to monitor progress and utilization of resources towards set objectives. Apart from knowing that the interventions eased their plight on a given specific vulnerability of cause of poverty, most beneficiaries lacked knowledge of the anticipated long-term strategies and impacts. Most NSAs address a given aspect, which is a small part of the entire livelihood strategies for a given household or community. Accordingly, if the intervention is to give more impact in terms of empowering households to shift to more beneficial strategies, knowledge of how the individual parts (given intervention) fits into the whole (both short- and long-term) would increase impacts on the communities.

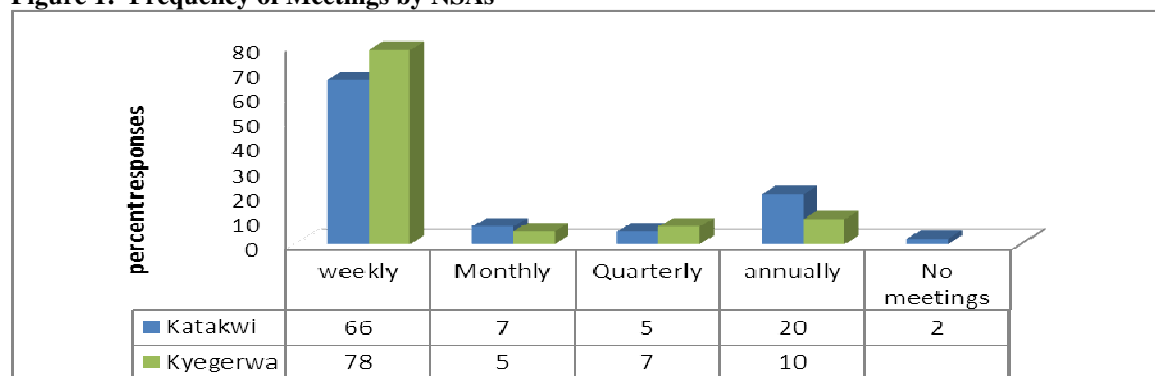
It is recommended that broader discussions be held initially with communities to expound on aspects beyond the individual NSA's area of focus or specialty. Such an approach involving more transparency in policy, design of intervention and accountability on results by the NSAs would result into more impacts and benefits to communities who would tailor their general efforts to a more integrated approach of uplifting their entire livelihood strategies. Gender should be integral in the policy and programme design as well as in accountability mechanisms of NSA SP interventions. NSAs should be encourage to undertake gender focused assessment to inform their interventions and well as conduct gender training for their staff to strengthen their human resource capacity to enable them act more effectively and efficiently.

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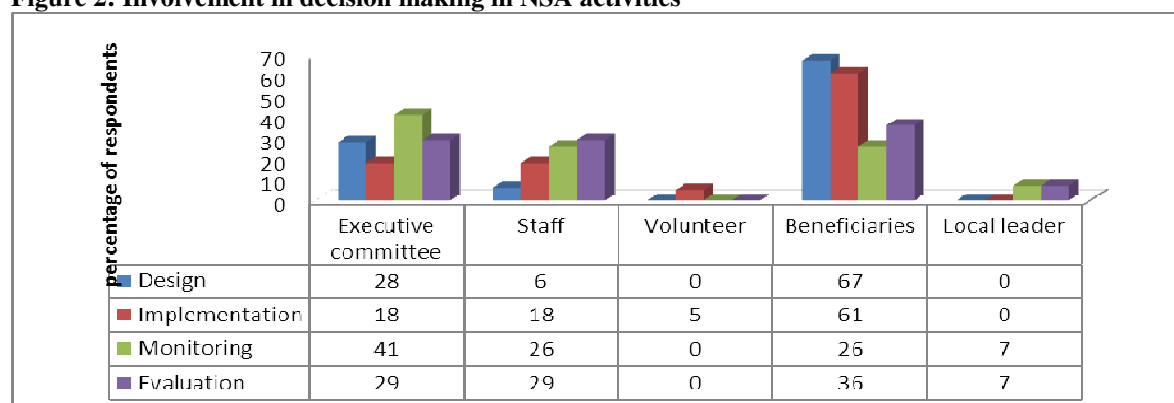
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Figure 1: Frequency of Meetings by NSAs



Source: Field data, Katakwi and Kyegegwa district 2013

Figure 2: Involvement in decision making in NSA activities



Source: Field findings – Katakwi and Kyegegwa districts

Table 1: Beneficiaries' needs in the study districts

Beneficiaries needs	Katakwi		Kyegegwa		Total	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
Education, school fees	48.4	75.0	63.6	45.2	56.3	61.1
Food	64.5	77.1	36.4	26.2	50.0	53.3
HH necessities	0.0	2.1	27.3	21.4	14.1	11.1
Clothing	61.3	45.8	42.4	28.6	51.6	37.8
Health care, treatment	71.0	60.4	45.5	47.6	57.8	54.4
Water	35.5	22.9	15.2	11.9	25.0	17.8
Building	3.2	4.2	18.2	14.3	10.9	8.9
Improving agriculture	41.9	29.2	9.1	11.9	25.0	21.1
Life skills trainings e.g. brick laying, tailoring	3.2	2.1	0.0	2.4	1.6	2.2
Animal farming	29.0	27.1	12.1	7.1	20.3	17.8
Shelter and beddings	41.9	39.6	30.3	19.0	35.9	30.0
Buying land	0.0	6.2	21.2	14.3	10.9	10.0
Others	22.6	29.2	21.2	31.0	21.9	30.0

Source: Field findings – Katakwi and Kyegegwa districts

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