

Conceptualisation of Poverty and Poverty Eradication Policy Performance in Uganda

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to determine the official and other definitions of poverty that have been used by government and other important actors in Uganda so as to contextualize the official government concept of poverty. This emanated from the research problem that poverty policies in Uganda have not scored expected successes. To reach the bottom of the inquiry, it was hypothesised that “the way poverty is conceptualized in a given society significantly affects the way it is tackled through policy enactments”. Emphasis was therefore placed on answering the following research questions: how do the different entities in Uganda define poverty; who participates in defining poverty in Uganda; by which criteria is poverty defined and why; and does the way in which poverty is defined in Uganda affect the way the government designs poverty eradication policies? A quantitative and qualitative research methodology was employed by use of questionnaire, interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs) in selected districts of Uganda. This research paper presents and discusses the data in response to these research questions.

1.0 Introduction

The poverty eradication effort in Uganda, as is the case elsewhere, needs concerted efforts of all stakeholders in order to receive the utmost attention and to produce the desired results. Such stakeholders normally include government as the lead agency, working in conjunction with other stakeholders that may include citizens, civic organizations, interest groups, opposition parties, private sector organizations, NGOs and the international organisations usually referred to as donors. In this research, we wanted to know the general view of all policy stakeholders on the poverty concept in Uganda during the two decades under consideration (1986 – 2006).

The study was conducted in Uganda in the districts of Bushenyi, Kamuli and Arua as representative of the whole country. To get data from central government agencies, non-government organizations and international bodies, the study was also conducted in Kampala City since the headquarters of these organizations are housed therein. A case study method was chosen in order to overcome the obstacles of getting data from the whole country. As such the country was divided into three categories according to district performance in poverty reduction. The first category was of the districts that had performed fairly well in poverty reduction over time; the second category was of districts that had performed moderately while the third category was for districts that had performed poorly.

The researcher obtained information on district performance from Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), which was in form of poverty maps for 1992, 1999, 2002 and 2005¹.

According to UBOS, the biggest poverty reductions between 1992 and 2005 were registered in the districts of Bushenyi, Kibaale, Luwero, Rakai, Mpigi and Kisoro while poverty increased in Arua, Apac, Moyo and Kasese districts. Between the two extremes lay the districts of Kamuli, Mukono, Pallisa, Mubende, Hoima and Tororo. In choosing the districts to represent the three categories, I used stratified random sampling techniques based on two types of strata: the performance in poverty reduction already referred to and the four regions of the country. As such Bushenyi district represented the first poverty reduction category as well as Western region, Kamuli represented the second category in addition to representing Eastern and Central regions and Arua represented both the third category and Northern region respectively. Kampala City was chosen because it is the seat of the national government and national NGOs and international organisations that were part of the study population.

1.1 Conceptualisation of Poverty in Uganda

This probe into the conceptualisation of poverty was occasioned by the earlier researches which concluded that poverty manifests itself in different ways, a situation that has led to a proliferation of poverty definitions that in turn made it difficult to tackle poverty meaningfully (Orshansky, 1969, Chambers, 2002, Lister, 2004 and Øyen, 2005). In most poverty discourses, there is consensus that poverty needs to be well defined by alluding to all its multidimensional constructs in order to be tackled adequately through policy enactments (Kanbur & Squire, 2000, World Bank, 2000, Dewilde, 2004). This suggests that the conceptualization of poverty in any given territory needs to be done both directly and indirectly by taking into consideration both the monetary and non-monetary indicators. As such the following definition by Vranken (2002) stands out as the best way of conceptualizing and defining poverty.

Poverty is a complex set of instances of social exclusion that stretches over numerous areas of individual and collective existence, and which results in the poor being separated from the generally accepted living patterns in society and being unable to bridge this gap on their own.

¹ The poverty maps for 1992 and 1999 are contained in a book titled “Where are the Poor? Mapping Patterns of Well-Being in Uganda”. This book culminated out of a two-year research project conducted by Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) in collaboration with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), with technical and financial assistance from the World Bank and with financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The publication provides a wealth of facts and figures on poverty and inequality for 1992 and 1999 for regions, districts and counties. The estimates presented in the book were a result of state of the art statistical modelling techniques also called poverty mapping, which combined data on household consumption obtained from a 1992/93 Integrated Household Survey and a 1999/2000 Uganda National Household Survey with complete geographical coverage provided by a 1991 Population and Housing Census. The poverty maps for 2002 and 2005 are contained in a draft report of the work in progress by UBOS, ILRI and DFID, October 2008, based on the 2002 Population and Housing Census data.

The above definition infers that a proper definition of poverty needs to include social, economic and political deprivation of individuals, families and groups within a given population. This is because poverty is a complex and multifaceted problem, and as such, it is as much an economic, political and environmental problem as it is a social one. The four dimensions of poverty identified by Vranken (2001) are thus appropriate in understanding the multidimensional concept of poverty. These dimensions are “height, width, depth and time”. The height dimension looks at the number of poor people in a given society, the width dimension takes care of the different domains or characteristics of poverty, the depth dimension looks at the gap between the poor and none poor in society (poverty gap) and the time dimension looks at the longitudinal aspects of poverty such as the intra-generational and inter-generational persistence of poverty. Such a wider interpretation of poverty can help in tackling it as nothing would be left out in any anti-poverty policy design.

The same views were later echoed by Lister (2004) in the following statement:

It's important to think about poverty at the conceptual level and also to make a clear distinction between concepts, definitions and measurements. We need to listen to what people with experience of poverty themselves have to say. Why? Because it helps us understand better the meaning of poverty, in particular how it is experienced as a shameful and corrosive social relation as well as a material condition. This then has implications for politics and policy, which I sum up under the rubric of a politics of social justice that combines redistribution and 'recognition and respect'.

Perhaps the works of Amartya Sen (1981, 1985a, 1985b, 1992 and 2000) are crucial here in reinforcing the need for a multidimensional approach to poverty conceptualization. He has argued that the philosophical basis of the idea of human welfare as perceived in economic and political discourses is best provided by the concept of capability – the ability of people to live the kinds of life they value as compared with other concepts, such as utility or material possessions. The application of this concept to poverty has led to the recognition that poverty is intrinsically multidimensional in nature; it consists of the failure of several kinds of basic capabilities. According to him, the concept of capability refers to a person's freedom or opportunities to achieve well-being in the above sense (1985a).

As per the study objective, the research overwhelmingly established that poverty is still perceived as a big problem in Uganda and as such concerted efforts of all stakeholders are required in the fight against it. The quantitative result about the conceptualization of poverty stood as presented in the tables below. Table 1.1 contains a general country picture while Table 1.2 is specific on the basis of the representative study areas.

Table 1.1: Respondents' perceptions of conceptualization poverty in Uganda

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the concept of poverty in Uganda?	Percentage Response					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Agreement
Poverty is still a big problem in Uganda that needs to be stamped out through appropriate public policies	80	18	2	0	0	98
Poverty eradication in Uganda needs concerted efforts of all stakeholders: government, citizens, civic organizations, interest groups, opposition parties, private sector organizations, NGOs and the international community	88	10	2	0	0	98
Among all concerned stakeholders, the onus to eradicate poverty in Uganda rests primarily on the government (as a policy coordinator)	32	35	8	20	5	67
The government of Uganda has in the past 20 years involved and worked well with all concerned stakeholders in its poverty eradication drive	5	40	21	29	5	45
Poverty needs to be well defined and understood by all those involved in policy making in order to be able to design and implement effective poverty eradication policies	61	35	2	2	0	96
There has been only one definition/understanding/conceptualisation of poverty in Uganda that has been used by all government sectors and non-government sectors (all stakeholders) while designing poverty eradication interventions (policies and programmes) in the past	12	26	26	30	6	38
The conceptualisation (definition) of poverty in Uganda has been based only on the economic wellbeing of an individual or groups i.e. one's level of income required to satisfy basic needs	18	51	10	19	2	69
The conceptualisation of poverty in Uganda has been based only on the social well-being of an individual or a group in society in terms of housing, clothing, education, health and feeding affordability	12	43	13	27	5	55
The conceptualisation of poverty in Uganda has been based only on one's/group's political capacity/influence in the government (public affairs) at either village, parish, sub-county or national level	6	15	18	51	10	21
The conceptualisation of poverty in Uganda has been based only on the capacity of a person or a group of persons to tame/exploit the environment (environmental resources) around him/her/them	4	18	20	46	12	22
The conceptualisation of poverty in Uganda has been multidimensional/ holistic in nature to the extent possible in terms of embracing a person's/group's economic, social and political status in society as well as his/her/their capacity to exploit the surrounding natural environment	12	36	20	20	12	48

Table 1.2: Data per district on respondents' perceptions of conceptualization poverty in Uganda

To what extent do you agree that poverty is still a big problem in Uganda that needs to be stamped out through appropriate public policies?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	42	11	2	0	0	55
	76.36	20.00	3.64	0.00	0.00	100.00
	35.00	40.00	66.67	0.00	0.00	36.67
Kamuli	32	3	0	0	0	35
	91.43	8.57	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
	26.67	11.11	0.00	0.00	0.00	23.33
Arua	18	8	1	0	0	27
	66.67	29.63	3.70	0.00	0.00	100.00
	15.00	29.63	33.33	0.00	0.00	18.00
Kampala	28	5	0	0	0	33
	84.85	15.15	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
	23.33	18.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	22.00
Total	120	27	3	0	0	150
	80.00	18.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
To what extent do you agree that poverty eradication in Uganda needs concerted efforts of all stakeholders: government, citizens, civic organizations, interest groups, opposition parties, private sector organizations, NGOs and the international community?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	46	8	1	0	0	55
	83.64	14.55	1.82	0.00	0.00	100.00
	34.85	50.00	50.00	0.00	0.00	36.67
Kamuli	32	2	1	0	0	35
	91.43	5.71	2.86	0.00	0.00	100.00
	24.24	12.50	50.00	0.00	0.00	23.33
Arua	24	3	0	0	0	27
	88.89	11.11	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
	18.18	18.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	18.00
Kampala	30	3	0	0	0	33
	90.91	9.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
	22.73	18.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	22.00
Total	132	16	2	0	0	150
	88.00	10.67	1.33	0.00	0.00	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00

To what extent do you agree that among all concerned stakeholders, the onus to eradicate poverty in Uganda rests primarily on the government (as a policy coordinator)?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	9	28	5	12	1	55
	16.36	50.91	9.09	21.82	1.82	100.00
	19.15	52.83	38.46	40.00	14.29	36.67
Kamuli	16	8	4	5	2	35
	45.71	22.86	11.43	14.29	5.71	100.00
	34.04	15.09	30.77	16.67	28.57	23.33
Arua	13	6	1	5	2	27
	48.15	22.22	3.70	18.52	7.41	100.00
	27.66	11.32	7.69	16.67	28.57	18.00
Kampala	9	11	3	8	2	33
	27.27	33.33	9.09	24.24	6.06	100.00
	19.15	20.75	23.08	26.67	28.57	22.00
Total	47	53	13	30	7	150
	31.33	35.33	8.67	20.00	4.67	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
To what extent do you agree that the government of Uganda has in the past 20 years involved and worked well with all concerned stakeholders in its poverty eradication drive?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	4	19	10	21	1	55
	7.27	34.55	18.18	38.18	1.82	100.00
	50.00	31.67	32.26	48.84	12.50	36.67
Kamuli	3	11	9	12	0	35
	8.57	31.43	25.71	34.29	0.00	100.00
	37.50	18.33	29.03	27.91	0.00	23.33
Arua	1	13	6	3	4	27
	3.70	48.15	22.22	11.11	14.81	100.00
	12.50	21.67	19.35	6.98	50.00	18.00
Kampala	0	17	6	7	3	33
	0.00	51.52	18.18	21.21	9.09	100.00
	0.00	28.33	19.35	16.28	37.50	22.00
Total	8	60	31	43	8	150
	5.33	40.00	20.67	28.67	5.33	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

To what extent do you agree that poverty needs to be well defined and understood by all those involved in policy making in order to be able to design and implement effective poverty eradication policies?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	33	18	2	2	0	55
	60.00	32.73	3.64	3.64	0.00	100.00
	36.26	34.62	66.67	50.00	0.00	36.67
Kamuli	21	12	1	1	0	35
	60.00	34.29	2.86	2.86	0.00	100.00
	23.08	23.08	33.33	25.00	0.00	23.33
Arua	17	9	0	1	0	27
	62.96	33.33	0.00	3.70	0.00	100.00
	18.68	17.31	0.00	25.00	0.00	18.00
Kampala	20	13	0	0	0	33
	60.61	39.39	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
	21.98	25.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	22.00
Total	91	52	3	4	0	150
	60.67	34.67	2.00	2.67	0.00	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	0.00	100.00
To what extent do you agree that there has been only one definition/understanding/conceptualisation of poverty in Uganda that has been used by all government sectors and non-government sectors (all stakeholders) while designing poverty eradication interventions (policies and programmes) in the past?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	4	13	11	25	2	55
	7.27	23.64	20.00	45.45	3.64	100.00
	23.53	33.33	28.95	54.35	20.00	36.67
Kamuli	6	15	9	5	0	35
	17.14	42.86	25.71	14.29	0.00	100.00
	35.29	38.46	23.68	10.87	0.00	23.33
Arua	3	6	3	10	5	27
	11.11	22.22	11.11	37.04	18.52	100.00
	17.65	15.38	7.89	21.74	50.00	18.00
Kampala	4	5	15	6	3	33
	12.12	15.15	45.45	18.18	9.09	100.00
	23.53	12.82	39.47	13.04	30.00	22.00
Total	17	39	38	46	10	150
	11.33	26.00	25.33	30.67	6.67	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

To what extent do you agree that the conceptualisation (definition) of poverty in Uganda has been based only on the economic wellbeing of an individual or groups i.e. one's level of income required to satisfy basic needs?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	6 10.91 22.22	31 56.36 40.79	2 3.64 12.50	16 29.09 57.14	0 0.00 0.00	55 100.00 36.67
Kamuli	5 14.29 18.52	16 45.71 21.05	8 22.86 50.00	5 14.29 17.86	1 2.86 33.33	35 100.00 23.33
Arua	6 22.22 22.22	17 62.96 22.37	2 7.41 12.50	2 7.41 7.14	0 0.00 0.00	27 100.00 18.00
Kampala	10 30.30 37.04	12 36.36 15.79	4 12.12 25.00	5 15.15 17.86	2 6.06 66.67	33 100.00 22.00
Total	27 18.00 100.00	76 50.67 100.00	16 10.67 100.00	28 18.67 100.00	3 2.00 100.00	150 100.00 100.00
To what extent do you agree that the conceptualisation of poverty in Uganda has been based only on the social well-being of an individual or a group in society in terms of housing, clothing, education, health and feeding affordability?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	5 9.09 27.78	26 47.27 40.00	4 7.27 21.05	19 34.55 46.34	1 1.82 14.29	55 100.00 36.67
Kamuli	5 14.29 27.78	9 25.71 13.85	10 28.57 52.63	9 25.71 21.95	2 5.71 28.57	35 100.00 23.33
Arua	4 14.81 22.22	15 55.56 23.08	3 11.11 15.79	3 11.11 7.32	2 7.41 28.57	27 100.00 18.00
Kampala	4 12.12 22.22	15 45.45 23.08	2 6.06 10.53	10 30.30 24.39	2 6.06 28.57	33 100.00 22.00
Total	18 12.00 100.00	65 43.33 100.00	19 12.67 100.00	41 27.33 100.00	7 4.67 100.00	150 100.00 100.00

To what extent do you agree that the conceptualisation of poverty in Uganda has been based only on one's/group's political capacity/influence in the government (public affairs) at either village, parish, sub-county or national level?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	6 10.91 66.67	5 9.09 22.73	5 9.09 17.86	34 61.82 44.74	5 9.09 33.33	55 100.00 36.67
Kamuli	1 2.86 11.11	6 17.14 27.27	9 25.71 32.14	14 40.00 18.42	5 14.29 33.33	35 100.00 23.33
Arua	2 7.41 22.22	4 14.81 18.18	2 7.41 7.14	17 62.96 22.37	2 7.41 13.33	27 100.00 18.00
Kampala	0 0.00 0.00	7 21.21 31.82	12 36.36 42.86	11 33.33 14.47	3 9.09 20.00	33 100.00 22.00
Total	9 6.00 100.00	22 14.67 100.00	28 18.67 100.00	76 50.67 100.00	15 10.00 100.00	150 100.00 100.00
To what extent do you agree that the conceptualisation of poverty in Uganda has been based only on the capacity of a person or a group of persons to tame/exploit the environment (environmental resources) around him/her/them?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	3 5.45 50.00	9 16.36 33.33	4 7.27 12.90	34 61.82 49.28	5 9.09 29.41	55 100.00 36.67
Kamuli	2 5.71 33.33	8 22.86 29.63	10 28.57 32.26	12 34.29 17.39	3 8.57 17.65	35 100.00 23.33
Arua	1 3.70 16.67	3 11.11 11.11	8 29.68 25.81	12 44.44 17.39	3 11.11 17.65	27 100.00 18.00
Kampala	0 0.00 0.00	7 21.21 25.93	9 27.27 29.03	11 33.33 15.94	6 18.88 35.29	33 100.00 22.00
Total	6 4.00 100.00	27 18.00 100.00	31 20.00 100.00	69 46.00 100.00	17 11.33 100.00	150 100.00 100.00

To what extent do you agree that the conceptualisation of poverty in Uganda has been multidimensional/ holistic in nature to the extent possible in terms of embracing a person's/group's economic, social and political status in society as well as his/her/their capacity to exploit the surrounding natural environment?						
District	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Bushenyi	8	27	9	10	1	55
	14.55	49.09	16.36	18.18	1.82	100.00
	47.06	50.00	29.03	32.26	5.88	36.67
Kamuli	4	5	13	7	6	35
	11.43	14.29	37.14	20.00	17.14	100.00
	23.53	9.26	41.94	22.58	35.29	23.33
Arua	2	7	3	9	6	27
	7.41	25.93	11.11	33.33	22.22	100.00
	11.76	12.96	9.68	29.03	35.29	18.00
Kampala	3	15	6	5	4	33
	9.09	45.45	18.18	15.15	12.12	100.00
	17.65	27.78	19.35	16.13	23.53	22.00
Total	17	54	31	31	17	150
	11.33	36.00	20.67	20.67	11.33	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

1.2 The Definition of Poverty in Uganda

The research aimed inter alia at determining the official and other definitions of poverty used by government and other actors. Although, almost everyone agrees that poverty is still a big problem in Uganda, there are many differing voices from the government, population, academic circles and civil society organizations when it comes to assessing the reduction of poverty in the last decades. This is to a large extent due to the differences in conceptualization of poverty. In Tables 1.1 and 1.2 above, it is clear that policy actors do not agree on any single multidimensional definition of poverty.

Even though the government, NGOs and the donor community in Uganda have broadly used the \$1 and \$2 per day thresholds as measures of extreme and relative poverty respectively, the validity of these measures is contestable. Generally, the official list of poor people consists of six categories: landless peasants, female-headed households, older people and their dependants, orphaned, displaced, and neglected children, people living with disabilities, and people living in areas prone to natural calamities such as those in north-eastern Uganda (UPPAP, 1999, 2002). However, civil society organizations identify additional categories of poor people that are not mentioned in government reports. Among these are refugees, pastoralists, and people living in small and often isolated communities. According to Lwanga-Ntale and McClean (2003), the last category of poor people is virtually absent in the literature on poverty in Uganda.

In Uganda, an attempt has been made to distinguish absolute poverty from relative poverty. Officially, absolute poverty is considered to be a situation where individuals or households are unable to meet their basic needs - food, shelter or clothing. In addition, they are unable to meet survival needs such as education, health care and self-determination leading to feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability. Relative poverty on the other hand, concerns individual deprivation measured relative to others in society. When individuals cannot access goods and services enjoyed by fellow citizens it is unacceptable according to government, but it is not deemed to be a life-threatening condition as absolute poverty. Accordingly, in Uganda, absolute poverty applies to the condition of people who live on less than \$ 1 a day and relative poverty applies to the condition of those who live on less than \$ 2 a day (MFPED & UBOS)².

However, other stakeholders like the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC)³, go further to distinguish some categories of absolute poverty as chronic poverty. They define chronic poverty as “that poverty where individuals, households or regions are trapped in severe and multi-dimensional poverty for an extended period of time (several years or a lifetime), and

² The official government poverty statistics and policy in Uganda such as PEAP (1997 & 2004 and UPPAP (1999 & 2002) are authored by Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in association with Uganda National Bureau of Statistics, Kampala.

³ The Chronic Poverty Research Centre in Uganda is part of a global network which brings together academic institutes, research organizations, consultants and NGOs (from Bangladesh, India, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Uganda and the UK) into a virtual centre, coordinated by the institute of Development Policy and Management at the University of Manchester in England. In Uganda, CPRC's work is coordinated by Development Research and Training (DRT), a Ugandan development organization, and guided by a committee drawing members from the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC), Government (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development), NGOs, Makerere University and other institutions. CPRC aims to draw attention to chronically poor people - those people in the south who are least likely to have benefited or have suffered most from contemporary development efforts; and for whom emergence from poverty is most difficult [<http://www.chronicpoverty.org>, www.drt-ug.org].

where poverty is linked with inter-generational transmission”. Such people normally live on one meal a day and have no chance of overcoming this condition on their own. The research conducted by the CPRC from 2002 to 2005 revealed that 20% of the country’s households, more than 7 million Ugandans or 26% of the total population lived in chronic poverty. The research concluded that there was a growing realization in Uganda that inequality rose amongst the population, both during and after the periods of poverty-reducing growth of the 1990s, and that a significant proportion of the national population did not benefit from opportunities to ‘escape’ from poverty during that period, and that many of these were people in chronic poverty. This assertion illustrates the divergences in conceptualizing poverty in Uganda by different actors.

The qualitative data also showed that Uganda lacks a common yardstick for defining and measuring poverty that covers all of its multidimensional facets. The majority were of the view that the definition of poverty is highly tilted towards economic wellbeing of citizens thus disfavours the population categories in social, political and environmental exclusion. The following views from the respondents demonstrated the extent of the differences in the conceptualization of poverty in Uganda:

A respondent from a rural community based organization in Bushenyi district had this to say:

The government usually tells us that the economy is growing and that poverty is reducing and will soon be in the past, but I have not seen any indications that this is and will be so. In this village, peoples’ standard of living has not improved over the years. Our children are chased from school now and again due to failure of parents to pay school dues. People are dying of malaria and other preventable diseases due to lack of drugs in public health facilities and also due to their inability to pay for services in private health facilities. We have not benefited from the government’s claim of economic growth. We do not see poverty the same way as government does.

FDGs from Kamuli concurred:

We shall know that poverty has reduced in our district when everybody can afford to go to school, pay for better medical care, use smooth roads throughout the year, eat adequate and healthy meals, live in iron-roofed and cemented house, live a longer life-span and participate equally in societal affairs without fear or favour.

An official from the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development responded:

We have tried to involve everyone in the poverty-eradication policy-making process to the extent possible and government has prioritized poverty eradication in the national budgeting frameworks. In spite of this, however, not everybody agrees that much has been achieved in poverty reduction. May be, our view of poverty is different from that of people outside government administration.

An NGO official in Arua claimed:

Despite government claims of impressive economic growth with poverty reduction effects in the 1990s and thereafter, people here are still poor. The people see poverty as lack of means to be at the same social standing as their peers, lack of finances to purchase essential necessities and lack means to influence political events in their surroundings and nationally. By these measures, nothing much has changed in the lives of people in the rural areas. This means that there is a fundamental difference between the way government bureaucrats and ordinary people perceive poverty.

A top official of an advocacy NGO in Kampala summed up the conceptualization of poverty in Uganda in the following statement:

Government people are fond of promising much to their constituents and delivering little during their time in power. However, instead of using their voting right to enforce accountability from their leaders, the citizens often succumb to simple material gifts as a result of their poverty. Poverty in Uganda is not lack of what to eat, as people normally work for their living, but rather it is lack of power to influence the sharing of the national cake. If this political marginalization and manipulation of the poor had been eradicated alongside improvements in the national economy, poverty would have disappeared from our country long time ago. In Uganda, poverty is more politically related than it is economically.

The results about the conceptualization and definition of poverty in Uganda were further analyzed using the Chi-square test of association. The Chi-square assumption significance was less than 0.05 translating into a 5% level of significance. I therefore rejected the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the respondents' views on the conceptualization and definition of poverty in Uganda. This infers that poverty is conceptualized quite differently in Uganda by different stakeholders.

What accounts for the different perceptions of poverty in Uganda emanates from the difficulty of measuring some causes of poverty, such as vulnerability and powerlessness. For example Lwanga-Ntale and McClean (2003) in their study of poverty across six districts of Uganda found that the communities defined poverty in different ways that transcended basic material paucity. They argued, for example, that whereas both men and women tend to define poverty in terms of some "lack or deficiency", men's definitions place more emphasis on

material possessions whereas those of women tend to focus on non-material aspects of well-being. The difference in the definition of poverty between men and women is attributed to their social status in society and their relationship. For instance, women lack ownership of and access to productive assets such as land, they have limited participation in decision-making and they have heavy workload in family life. This is one of ways by which poverty is viewed by the poor but such views are not captured in the official definition of poverty.

Furthermore, different perceptions of poverty may also arise from age differences, differences in one's physical and mental or psychological handicaps. For example, the study by Witter and Bukokhe (2004) on children's perception of poverty in Uganda established as follows:

Children under the age of 18 years represent 62 percent of the poor in Uganda. To date, their perspective has not been incorporated in the many poverty analyses that have been conducted. The survey asked children between the ages of 10 and 14 years about their perceptions of poverty, and also about the effectiveness of local governments in addressing issues of concern to them. The survey found that children have a different perspective on poverty from that of the adult key informants consulted in the sample; they have a positive view of their own potential role in mitigating poverty, and are highly critical of the current performance of local governments.

The broad differences in the definition of poverty suggest that poverty is a dynamic process, which constitutes an amalgam of socio-economic, cultural, political and other deprivations affecting individuals, households, and communities, often resulting in conditions like lack of access to basic necessities, a feeling of powerlessness, disenfranchisement and accentuated gender imbalance, isolation and social exclusion and erosion of traditional cultures, values, and social welfare systems. Therefore, the failure to integrate all these feelings in the official definition of poverty in Uganda leads to contestable poverty assessments.

Another factor that contributes to differences in perceptions of poverty in Uganda concerns the location of poverty. Indeed, an important distinction is often made between rural and urban poverty. On the one hand, rural poverty is characterized by failure to educate children, limited access to infrastructure facilities and services, poor yields, alcoholism, impoverishment at old age, and the disintegration of families. On the other hand, urban poverty is associated with unemployment and/or low pay compared to the cost of living, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS infestation, frequent family misunderstandings, idleness, early marriages and pregnancies, as well as poor living conditions that lack drainage and sanitation facilities. Though difficult to formulate an all-encompassing definition of poverty, it is important that the rural-urban poverty differentiation is taken seriously as it impacts on policy formulation and implementation. Rural dwellers in Uganda view life differently from their urban counterparts and as such they need specific policy attention rather than generalized ones, which are a result of generalized poverty definition that has been in force in Uganda from 1986 onwards.

The ambiguity surrounding poverty in Uganda – its definition and its manifestations illustrate important conceptual and methodological differences. This suggests that the difference in the definition of poverty reflects the fundamental dislocation between the intended benefits and actual benefits of the poverty alleviation measures that have been enacted to fight against the effects of poverty. In Uganda's poverty eradication policy, social relations, political influence and networks which are the strongest resources possessed by the poor, are neglected in many

ways and this further widens the differences in the definition and measurement of poverty and consequently weakens the policy framework for poverty alleviation.

Despite the broad range of conditions associated with poverty in Uganda, a common denominator for most perceptions of poverty remains the notion of "lack or deficiency", a criterion that present measurement problems. To circumnavigate out of this dilemma and achieve a more robust understanding of wholesome perception of poverty, it is hereby suggested that statistical measurements of poverty have to be supplemented by disaggregated qualitative data on the non-income dimensions of poverty such as social relations, political influence and networks of all sorts.

Alcock (1993: 3) provides that one of the few points of agreement in the international academic debate on poverty is that poverty is a contested concept. He states that arguments over how poverty should be conceptualized and defined go beyond "semantics and academic hair-splitting". According to him, "poverty is inherently a political concept and thus inherently a contested one" because "poverty is not just a state of affairs, it is an unacceptable state of affairs. It implicitly contains the question, what are we going to do about it?" He further states that the concept and definition of poverty in a society is like a mirror-image of the ideals of that society in that by conceptualizing and defining what is unacceptable in a society we are also saying a great deal about the way we would like things to be. In conclusion, he argues therefore, that a concept and definition of poverty as well as being theoretically robust, is also appropriate to the society in which it is to be applied. He further surmises that having agreed on a definition or definitions, the method of measurement must appropriately operationalize the definition. This role cannot be left hanging and it is only government that is suited to play it due to its central role in public policy making mechanisms.

Thus, to design appropriate poverty eradication policies in Uganda, efforts need to be made by the government to harmonize the understanding of poverty by all stakeholders and this calls for an understanding of the different perspectives of poverty and their underlying assumptions. What needs to be done is to facilitate the participation of people with experience of poverty in the poverty eradication policy making mechanisms. The government as the policy coordinator is required to build real partnerships between people living in poverty and governance structures at all levels in order to improve anti-poverty policy formulation and implementation. This is so because such partnerships help to strengthen social capital in form of inclusion and citizenship, which in turn provides a fertile platform for managing the poverty eradication campaign.

1.3 Participation in Defining Poverty in Uganda

A consensus was established that government plays a primary role in coordinating other stakeholders in all anti-poverty policy endeavours (Tables 1.1 and 1.2) as supported by further qualitative data analysis. The government's role is to ensure that the poverty debate is informed by clear theoretical considerations and that any poverty lines or definitions adopted as 'official' should be conceptually clear and appropriate for the country by capturing all views of policy players. As everyone agrees that there is a problem of poverty in Uganda, we need to worry about how the problem is conceptualized, defined and measured because this may have implications for policy design and performance.

A respondent from a national NGO summarized the question of participation in poverty policy in Uganda in the following words:

Despite government policies to promote citizen participation in decision making, especially through decentralization policy, big challenges remained such as lack of information on key issues and lack of transparency and accountability of elected leaders, which acted as barriers to full participation of all citizens in the governance of Uganda and this ultimately affected poverty policy-making.

As to whether the Government of Uganda had up to 2006 involved and worked well with all stakeholders in poverty eradication, a mixed picture emerged. The respondents were almost divided equally on this question. Those who stated that government did not involve other actors in poverty policy sighted the period between 1986 and 1997, where most anti-poverty policies were imposed on the government by donor agencies most especially, the IMF and the World Bank, without adequate involvement of other stakeholders and more evidently the poor themselves. As such, the conceptualization of poverty in Uganda was not multidimensional enough to embrace all domains of poverty from 1986 to 1997. Poverty was defined in terms of economic well-being of citizens with little regard to other domains such as political and social exclusion as well as the environment-related poverty issues.

Muwanga (2001) contends that government's continued reliance on quantifiable measurements of poverty (income, expenditure, and consumption) at the expense of qualitative evidence of poverty that provide insights about the nature of impoverishment, or poverty processes led to different interpretations of the data available on growth rates and the poor as a percentage of the growth. Lockwood and Whitehead (1998) noted that this discrepancy was a fundamental methodological choice, since it locked the poverty assessment into reliance on expenditure data from household surveys which in addition to being narrow, were also often unreliable because they masked important differences in the impact of poverty on different households.

The research results suggested that differences in the definitions of poverty in Uganda could be attributed to the way in which poverty is perceived and who is defining it. The official conceptualization of poverty raises several questions: Who are the poor in Uganda? What are their basic characteristics? Are the poor a homogeneous group? If they differ, why, where, and how do they differ? From the voices of citizens, civil society members and donors, it was claimed that despite government policies to promote citizen participation in decision making, especially through decentralization policy from 1993, and the adoption of PEAP from 1997 and UPPAP from 1998, big challenges remained. For example, it was claimed that there is inadequate information to all citizens on key economic, political and social issues and lack of transparency and accountability of elected leaders, which have acted as barriers to full participation of all citizens in the governance of Uganda. Thus the cause of the difference in the definition of poverty in Uganda stems inter alia from lack of effective citizen participation in policy especially the poor. Their poverty situation causes them to be excluded from the social, economic and political infrastructures of the country.

After the trials and tribulations of the poverty eradication policy arena from 1986 to 1997, the government launched the Poverty Action Plan (PEAP) in 1997 after a wide consultative process with local governments, donors and civil society organizations. Since then, the PEAP became the central plan for government institutions at all levels in their efforts to eradicate poverty in the country. The purpose of the PEAP was to provide an overarching strategic

framework and to guide public action to reduce poverty. In order to deepen the consultation process and impact of poverty eradication policy interventions, the Government under the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) initiated the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project (UPPAP) with the first phase covering 9 districts in 1998/1999 and the second phase covering 12 districts in 2001/2002⁴. The main aim of UPPAP was to engage the voices of the poor in policy planning and implementation for poverty eradication.

The PEAP was first revised in 2000 and subsequently in 2004. Revisions were intended to keep the PEAP current in the light of changing circumstances and emerging issues from the two UPPAPs. In each revision of the PEAP, each government sector prepared a sector PEAP revision paper to be used in the preparation of the current document. For the PEAP to provide an overarching framework to guide public action to eradicate poverty, each revision was prepared through a consultative process involving central and local government, parliament, donors and civil society members.

Despite the PEAP and UPPAP strategies, the conceptualization of poverty by different entities remained largely different due to the fact that government official definition of poverty continued to rely on quantitative analyses which could not capture the qualitative dimensions of poverty afflicting different sections of the Ugandan society. The Uganda society is highly differentiated on the basis of gender, rural-urban divide, educational levels, powerlessness and vulnerability levels. Due to these glaring societal differences, the perceptions of poverty between government and other stakeholders remained obscure. This was compounded by government's methodological quantitative statistical analyses that did not take into consideration the qualitative views of the poor and other stakeholders.

Additionally, the "quasi" nature of stakeholder participation in anti-poverty policy making contributed to this situation. Wood (2004a) contributed that the exercise of stakeholders participation in Uganda, just like in other Sub-Saharan African countries, is merely for public relations and the contributions of non-government actors is, in most cases, not taken into consideration. This means that government did not play its role effectively in coordinating poverty eradication discourses. By participation, this thesis adopted the WB model described in Chapter 2, which stresses equal participation and treatment of all actors. But the following criterion used by ODA⁵ is quite relevant as well.

Participation is a process whereby stakeholders (those with rights and therefore responsibilities or interests) play an active role in decision-making and in the consequent activities which affect them.

Participation is often used to mean a number of different kinds of activity and confusion may arise when the term is used without specifying which is meant. For

⁴ MFPED, UPPAP District Reports, 2002. The nine Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) districts in the first phase were; Moyo, Kotido, Kapchorwa, Kumi, Kalangala, Kisoro, Kabarole, Bushenyi and Kampala. The twelve PPA 2 districts included; Mubende, Bugiri, Arua, Kitgum, Moroto, Masindi, Ntungamo, Bundibigyo, Rakai, Soroti, Wakiso, Jinja and Soroti.

⁵ Note on Enhancing Stakeholder Participation in Aid Activities, Overseas Development Administration (ODA), British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Social Development Department, April 1995. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office is responsible for assigning development aid to other countries and contributes to the European Development Fund and other aid agencies including charities.

example: a person can be said to participate by the very fact of agreeing to interact, such as coming to meetings but remaining silent; people may participate in management or implementation of a project, through active involvement (such as in the operation and maintenance of infrastructure); people may participate in the governance of a programme or project. This could include consultation about sector objectives and setting the criteria by which project success might be measured.

Meaningful participation therefore encapsulates the second and third aspects listed above.

In Uganda, the nature and extent of participation on the criteria of the World Bank (2003) model, is not fully encouraged. The World Bank (2003: 3) defines participation as the ability of all those who have a stake in the governance process, and want to participate in it, to do so on an equal basis, whether by voting, by being consulted, or by overseeing local public service agencies. Participation also implies that governments under the good governance model need to treat everyone equally by protecting the rights of everyone with equal vigour, ensuring that exclusion and discrimination are absent in the provision of public services by governments, and according everyone equal access to resources and remedy if there is discrimination by public officials. This criterion is in line with the argument of this article which avers that for good governance to prevail, governments must endeavour to include all stakeholders in decision-making at all policy levels.

Other than the haphazard stakeholder participation and other governance problems at the central and local governance levels (Wood, 2004a, Witter & Bukokhe, 2004), the problem of poor participatory policy-making mechanism is compounded by the poor standard of education which makes it hard for the poor to interact and voice their views about their living conditions and general economic, social and political aspirations.

1.4 The Criteria for Defining Poverty in Uganda

One of the problems in Uganda, and indeed in many other countries with poverty problems is the absence of clear distinctions between conceptualization, definition and measurement of poverty. This thesis argues that it is essential for the debate on poverty definition and measurement to be informed by clear theoretical considerations and that any poverty lines or definitions adopted as 'official' should be conceptually clear and appropriate for that country and should be clear to every concerned stakeholder in the poverty eradication crusade. If everyone agrees that there is a problem of poverty in Uganda, do we need to worry about how the problem is conceptualized, defined and measured? Yes indeed, we need to worry simply because as suggested by most literature (Kanbur & Squire, 2000, World Bank, 2000, Dewilde, 2004), the way poverty is conceptualized in a given society significantly affects the way it is tackled through policy enactments.

The poverty eradication period between 1986 and 1997 lacked participative policy-making approach as it was majorly a top-down phenomenon due to World Bank and IMF conditionalities. It was for this realization that the Uganda government embarked on the exercise of participatory poverty assessment in 1998 and later in 2001 (UPPAP, 1999, 2002). The first UPPAP study (1998 – 1999) established likewise that “the way poverty is understood affects the way it is a tackled-design of interventions, targeting expected and actual impact. It should be remembered here that UPPAP emerged due to stakeholder disagreements on poverty definition and measurement during the adoption of PEAP in 1997 and it was hoped that such disagreements would be made history by adopting UPPAP.

However, it has remained a thorny issue as to whether UPPAP engendered effective participation especially of the poor. In Uganda, the poor are usually people of less education and little self-esteem and who are in a state of powerlessness due to prolonged life in poverty. As such, they are incapable of participating effectively in poverty eradication policy discourses. Therefore, in spite of appearing on paper to have engendered participatory anti-poverty policy-making (bottom-up approach) from 1998, the reality was different due to governance and societal problems of poor education and lack of self-esteem on the part of the majority peasant population in Uganda. The definition of poverty thus remained marred by quantitative analyses.

For example the Uganda National NGO Forum (2001) established that there are fundamental differences in perceptions of poverty arising from the quantitative statistical analyses of economic growth by government on the one hand and the qualitative view of civil society on the other hand that despite the good economic indicators, the poverty situation was worsening. The key findings of the NGO Forum study indicated existence of growing gender imbalances, lack of access to services, poor infrastructure, feeling of powerlessness, social exclusion and lack of "voice" (political power) in decision-making as facets of poverty among the poor, which were in some instances on the increase. This information was corroborated by Okidi and Mugambe (2002) and UBOS (2005), whose research established that income inequality widened despite government official figures showing a declining poverty status in Uganda from 1992. This scenario can be explained by the fact that economic growth alone without deliberate government effort to redistribute the benefits of growth through appropriate policy instruments cannot eradicate poverty. Thus, according to Martineussen (1997: 299), genuine economic development implies not only growth, but also persistent and measurable progress and social improvements for the poor and the resource-weak groups in a society. This progress and improvement concerns not only incomes, but also all aspects of the poverty complex.

1.5 The Relationship between the Conceptualization of Poverty and the Design of Poverty Eradication Policies in Uganda

The results of the quantitative analysis shown on Tables 1.1 and 1.2 were in total agreement with the qualitative data collected by interviews and FGDs, by indicating an overwhelming agreement of the respondents' perception that poverty needs to be well defined and understood by policy makers, policy implementers as well as intended policy beneficiaries if it is to be tackled more effectively and efficiently. They further agreed overwhelmingly that the achievement of a consensus on poverty definition needs concerted efforts of all stakeholders while government's primary role is to make it possible for stakeholder participation. Thus, I reiterate that the multidimensional concept of poverty is shared when the policy framework encourages equal participation of all stakeholders but most especially the poor themselves. In turn, these approaches; multi-dimensional definition and participatory policy-making, have significant contribution to policy performance as the following responses from the respondents infer.

A respondent from an academic institution stated:

The economic growth figures that government based its poverty computations did not transcend to the poor in form of improved economic infrastructure, equal gender access to productive activities, access to vital services like health, education, sanitation, credit and extension facilities. It is not adequate to say that poverty has

been significantly reduced because many Ugandans are still too poor as evidenced by high school dropouts, high infant mortality and high number of deaths due to preventable diseases.

Another respondent from a research institution expressed:

Up to 2006, the country's economy boasted of a dominant percentage of the population solely engaged in a hand-to-mouth production. This implied that there was poverty amidst that highly acclaimed economic progress. It should be noted that macro-economic growth does not benefit the ordinary people more so in Uganda, where most of the economy is largely agrarian and dominated by subsistence producers (hand-to-mouth production). This means that these people were mere spectators in the market system since they had nothing to put on the market.

The above responses illustrate that people in Uganda perceive poverty in many other social and political ways other than the economic considerations used by government to determine the level poverty. According to them, this discrepancy in conceptualizing and defining poverty has had negative effects on the design and performance of the anti-poverty policies so enacted from 1986 to 2006.

1.6 Conclusion

The conceptualization of poverty in Uganda as elsewhere presents a problem for social scientists and researchers alike. In most cases, measurements of poverty depend on the purpose for which poverty is measured as well as the availability of data. For Uganda's case, measurements of poverty have remained biased toward traditional economic indicators despite an emerging literature on the multidimensional nature of poverty and the need to expand conventional sets of poverty indicators. This practice has had big implications pertaining to poverty eradication policy-making in Uganda. For example, many poverty eradication policies in Uganda have been mere stop-gap measures that have failed to tackle problems of poverty entirely. This explains why all policy actors do not agree with the official poverty calculations.

Does the way poverty is defined in Uganda affect the way the government designs poverty eradication policies? The research revealed that the way in which poverty is defined and measured could lead to different outcomes. Policies designed to tackle poverty cannot effectively address the problem of poverty unless planners and the beneficiaries of policy revisit structural relations, distributional relationships and the empowerment of people to participate in self determined change and access to resources.

1.7 References

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