

# Youth Participation in Community Development in Eastern Uganda

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**Abstract:** The study investigated youth participation in community development in Eastern Uganda. Specifically, the study assessed youth awareness of their need to participate in annual planning, budgeting processes and decision making in the development of their communities, and the obstacles that hinder their participation in the development of their communities. The study employed descriptive survey design, and 305 respondents. Questionnaires and focus group discussions were the main instruments used for data collection. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and linear regression. The study revealed that the youth were not aware of their need to participate in the annual planning, budgeting processes and decision making. Furthermore, the factors that hindered their participation in community development included among others lack of information, bureaucracy, low level of education, political affiliation, corruption, gender inequality, and poverty. The study further revealed that there is a positive and significant effect of youth participation on community development (adjusted  $R^2 = .363$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The study recommended that leaders must purposefully engage young people to participate in matters that directly affect them during the planning and budgeting process, and a variety of strategies, including capacity building and education, can help increase youth participation.

**Index words** - Youth Participation, Community Development, Youth, Eastern Uganda

## I. INTRODUCTION

A basic right is the right to participate, one of the tenets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it has been reaffirmed in numerous subsequent conventions and declarations (Nations, Youth Participation, 2019). Through active engagement, young people are given the power to play a crucial part in both their own and their communities' development, empowering them to gain essential life skills, acquire awareness of human rights and citizenship, and encourage constructive civic action. Young people need the correct tools, such as knowledge, education, and access to their civil rights, in order to engage effectively. Young people are a significant human resource for development and important agents of social change, economic growth, and technical innovation, as acknowledged by the UN for a long time. The UN's agenda for youth has participation in decision-making as one of its top priorities (Nations, Society and Decision Making Factsheet, 2020).

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), an international strategy to better address young people's issues and expand opportunities for participation in society, was adopted by the United Nations in 1995, marking the tenth

anniversary of International Youth Year, strengthening its commitment to young people. Through UN General Assembly resolution 58/133, which emphasises the "importance of the full and effective participation of youth and youth organisations at the local, national, regional, and international levels in promoting and implementing the World Programme of Action and in evaluating the progress achieved and the obstacles encountered in its implementation," the international community has reaffirmed its commitment to youth participation (Report, 2020). Later resolutions have also addressed youth-related policies and programmes, as well as encouraging young peoples' involvement in social and economic development (Nations, Dialogue and Mutual Understanding. Fact Sheet: Youth Participation, 2011).

Youth involvement in community development is, in fact, a key strategy for empowering communities to help themselves and maintain development initiatives. Young people are now recognised as key stakeholders and relevant participants in the implementation and management of community development projects, rather than simply the recipients of development programmes as they once were (Usman, Waziri, & Manga, 2018). All facets of the local community are involved in the dynamic process of community development, particularly the youth population. Getting young people involved in community development is difficult but rewarding, and it takes a lot of time and effort (Usman, Waziri, & Manga, 2018).

Due to a variety of challenges, including limited competence and understanding regarding governance, a lack of facilitation, and inadequate platforms for interaction, young people in Uganda have frequently had limited opportunities to engage in governance concerns (Facility, 2020). For instance, Restless Development Uganda (RDU) established, oversaw, and facilitated the District Youth Working Group in Jinja District in Eastern Uganda. This group meets on a regular basis to discuss issues pertaining to youth, such as their inability to participate in budgeting, planning, and decision-making processes (Facility, 2020). This study looked into how youth participated in annual planning and budgeting processes at the local government level in order to increase their involvement in community development. The study primarily looked into how young individuals engaged in this process for two reasons: The general public, especially young people, have a role to play in the budget planning cycle in Uganda. If they are involved, young people can have a significant impact on how resources are distributed according to their priorities.

*Statement of the Problem*

Youth in Eastern Uganda do not take part in projects that support community development in terms of planning, budgeting, or decision-making (Nganzi, 2021). In Eastern Uganda, a number of factors, including but not limited to a lack of appropriate skills, low levels of education, high levels of poverty, corruption, unfavorable mindsets, and a lack of government support for youth development in response to community development, prevent youth from participating in community development. This has led to a high percentage of unemployment and associated poverty, which has driven young people to engage in drug usage, high rates of crime including rape, murder, and gambling out of frustration (Odeke, 2020). When youth do not participate in their budgeting and planning processes, they become the enemy of development by opposing and sabotaging it. However, with youth participation, community projects that specifically address youth needs and challenges can be of great benefit to the youth. Thus scope of youth involvement in community development in Eastern Uganda was examined in this study.

*Objectives of the Study*

- i. To assess youth awareness of their need to participate in annual planning, budgeting processes and decision making in the development of their communities.
- ii. To establish the obstacles that hinder youth participation in the development of their communities.
- iii. To determine the effect of youth participation on community development.

**II. THEORETICAL REVIEW**

This study adopted Arnstein's (1969) Theory of Community Participation, which contends that there are several levels of participation, ranging from control of the community members to manipulation of the community members (Arnstein, 1969). If the youths do not participate in the programmes meant to promote community development, their valuable contribution is missed and therefore programmes are not aligned to meet their needs. This has promoted poverty among the young people in Eastern Uganda especially in Busoga sub-region which was ranked as the region with the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest poverty level in the country by UBOS house hold survey report 2020. According to Arnstein's view, there is a progression of community involvement. According to him, engagement in the community is influenced by a number of variables, including power structures, procedural problems, participant attitudes, and capacity and leadership challenges. He asserted that there has been a change toward viewing youth participation through the lens of community and youth empowerment (Arnstein, 1969). This results from the rising popularity of the notion of a community member as the consumer in situations where there are options available, which are viewed as a way to obtain power. According to this view, young people should participate fully in the decision-making processes, especially when it comes to the implementation of community development initiatives, as they are supposed to be responsible for them

(Choguill, 1996). This theory is appropriate for this study since there are a number of variables that connect to the elements outlined in Arnstein's theory of community involvement and that affects youth participation in the implementation of community development initiatives.

*Youth Participation in Community Development*

Participation is a tactic for changing society from the distribution of scarce resources, authority, and knowledge to the outcomes that the majority of the population deems acceptable (Mutyal, 2019). Additionally, community development refers to a working that is guided by a set of principles. It consists of a collection of techniques that might boost the potential for social change, including advocacy, consulting, and partnerships with regional organisations (Roberts, 2019). Participation by youth promotes democratic processes in which beneficiaries within the community make their own decisions and have a say development projects that directly affects them.

As a result, very few community-based projects might succeed without the use of participatory principles (Ochieng, Onyango, & Kinaro, 2020). It is not unexpected that all government initiatives and development initiatives use participatory techniques to engage more people in their work while also advancing community development plans and policies at both small and large scales (Otieno, 2021). The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other major development organisations have all agreed that the only way to achieve sustainable development is through citizen participation in the development process (Coughlin, Smith, & Fernandez, 2017).

In other words, the participatory planning paradigm promotes making community development programmes centred on the needs of the community. By allowing young people to take part in budgeting and decision-making processes at the government level, youth engagement in decision-making supports democracy. According to (Thomas & Thomas, 2007), community development initiatives are unlikely to be successful without youth involvement in their planning and planning procedures. The authors contend that this approach enables the youth to engage in participatory development effectively; it is a crucial means of empowering youth to oversee community development initiatives in order to appreciate community development efforts (Thomas & Thomas, 2007).

Indicators of youth involvement in community development project implementation and management were summed up by (Ledwith, 2020) as including participation in decision-making, contribution to the community, responsibility, representation, authority, and well-informed decisions that result in economic development for the community. Therefore, it is crucial that all aspects of project planning and execution are based on youth preferences. In order to aid youth in making logical and socially advantageous decisions, they must have access to the knowledge they need to comprehend possibilities, as well as available alternatives and related costs (Ledwith, 2020).

Furthermore, the youth should not be coerced into taking part in the creation and administration of community development programmes. In order to prevent others from feeling marginalised, the youth who are in charge of carrying out community development programmes should show the diversity within the community (Ledwith, 2020).

*Empirical Studies*

In Kenya's Turkana South Sub-County, (Ochieng, Onyango, & Kinaro, 2020) evaluated the involvement of rural youth in community development initiatives. According to the study, youth involvement in project planning and community development projects are inversely connected with formal education standards. The study also discovered that technical, political, institutional, financial, and training constraints prevented young people from taking part in project planning (Ochieng, Onyango, & Kinaro, 2020).

In Kashari Sub-county, Mbarara District, Uganda, (Ochieng, Onyango, & Kinaro, 2020) did a study to ascertain the impact of youth involvement on the social and economic development of the community. The study found that young people took on a variety of tasks in community development, including resource mobilisation, community policing, raising community members' understanding and sensibilities, and participating in decision-making (Kambesigye, 2016).

In Konoin sub-county, Kenya, (Mwei, 2016) did a study to determine the impact of youth engagement on their community development projects and how their active participation in decision-making might support community development. The study found that youth participation in community development projects was influenced by factors such as education, experience, and gender. Youth participation in monitoring, evaluation, and decision-making throughout the execution of community development programmes was also mentioned (Mwei, 2016).

In Tetu Sub-County in Nyeri Kenya, (Nderitu, 2014) conducted a research to evaluate youth involvement in socioeconomic activities. According to the report, youth participated in a variety of socioeconomic activities, including animal husbandry and informal microfinance organisations. Gender, age, and educational attainment were found to be the personal characteristics that significantly influenced social economic contribution. The family background factors that were significantly correlated with youth's socioeconomic contribution were parental education level and occupation. According to the study's findings, older male teenagers with higher levels of education and training made a greater contribution to the socioeconomic growth of their communities than those with little to no formal education. Additionally, the degree of education and occupation of parents had a big impact on how much youth participated in socioeconomic activities for community development (Nderitu, 2014).

In addition, (Umar & Mohammed, 2014) evaluated the involvement of youth in community development in the Yobe

State, Nigerian local government area of Damaturu. To generate the data for the investigation, standard random sampling techniques were used. Simple percentage calculations and tabulation were used in data analysis to examine field data. According to the findings, the majority of young people work together to maintain walkways, provide security, and contribute to community development. The study came to the conclusion that youth involvement in community development is one of the guiding principles for creating programmes and should be at the heart of local community development initiatives (Umar & Mohammed, 2014).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey design, which includes gathering data through the use of a questionnaire, and focus groups with a sample of people. The study's design was found appropriate since it allowed for the description, recording, analysis, and reporting of existing circumstances (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The study area included the districts of Jinja, Iganga, Kamuli, Mayuge, Bugweri, and Luuka in Eastern Uganda. A total of 1,285 respondents participated in the study. Utilizing Slovin's formula, the sample size was determined:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(\alpha)^2}$$

Where N= study population; n= sample size;  $\alpha$  =level of significance at 0.05.

Thus sample size of this study was: 305 respondents.

This study included focus groups and questionnaires to better understand young people's perspectives, and semi-structured interviews with local leaders helped the researcher to understand how young people are involved in community development. The mean and standard deviation were used in the descriptive analysis of quantitative data. Furthermore, the study used linear regression analysis to determine the effect of youth participation on community development. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), which deals with the descriptive presentation of qualitative focus group and interview discussions from the transcripts produced by the respondents, was used for the qualitative analysis.

IV. FINDINGS

Table 1: Youth Awareness of need to participate

Youth awareness of participation	Mean	Std. Deviation
I know about the annual budgeting and planning process in my community	2.90	1.549
I participate in the monitoring of development projects planned and budgeted for during annual budgeting in my community.	2.50	1.333
I know my leaders and they allow me to access their offices whenever I need to ask them questions about the budgeting and planning outcomes.	2.46	1.132

I know the role I should play in the annual budgeting and planning process in my community	2.32	1.270
I am often invited to participate in the annual budgeting and planning process in my community	2.19	1.138
Valid N (listwise)		

The results in Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents disagreed that they know about the annual budgeting and planning process in their communities (mean = 2.90, Std = 1.549). Furthermore, respondents disagreed that they participate in the monitoring of development projects planned and budgeted for during annual budgeting in their communities (mean = 2.50, Std = 1.333). Similarly, respondents disagreed that they know their leaders and they allow them to access their offices whenever they need to ask them questions about the budgeting and planning outcomes (mean = 2.46, Std = 1.132). Additionally, respondents disagreed that they know the role they should play in the annual budgeting and planning process in their communities (mean = 2.32, Std = 1.270). Likewise, respondents disagreed that they are often invited to participate in the annual budgeting and planning process in their communities (mean = 2.19, Std = 1.138).

*Qualitative finding*

The responses from the key interview informants (KIIs) were summarized as below:

- “I have never participated because I have never heard or been told about the planning and budgeting (KII, 01)”.*
- “I have never participated because I do not know what the planning and budgeting process is all about (KII, 02)”.*
- “I have never participated at any stage because I did not know that I am supposed to get involved (KII, 03)”.*
- “I have never participated in the planning and budgeting because I did not know young people were supposed to get involved (KII, 04)”.*
- “I have never participated in the planning and budgeting process, since I am not informed about when it's held (KII, 05)”.*

Table 2: Youth Participation in Decision Making

Youth Participation in Decision Making	Mean	Std. Deviation
My decision is often taken into considerations and implemented during the annual budgeting and planning process in my community	2.51	1.220
I am involved in all the stages of budgeting and planning processes of youth development projects in my community.	2.50	1.170
The outcome of my decisions in the annual budgeting and planning process is communicated to me by my leaders.	2.48	1.200
I am consulted to give my opinion regarding implementation of youth development projects in my community.	2.21	1.071

I participate in decision making during the annual budgeting and planning process in my community	1.87	1.003
Valid N (listwise)		

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents disagreed that their decision is often taken into considerations and implemented during the annual budgeting and planning process in their communities (mean = 2.51, Std = 1.220). In addition, respondents disagreed that they are involved in all the stages of budgeting and planning processes of youth development projects in their communities (mean = 2.50, Std = 1.170). Furthermore, respondents disagreed that the outcome of their decisions in the annual budgeting and planning process are communicated to them by their leaders (mean = 2.48, Std = 1.200). Similarly, respondents disagreed that they are consulted to give their opinion regarding implementation of youth development projects in their communities (mean = 2.21, Std = 1.071). Equally, respondents disagreed that they participate in decision making during the annual budgeting and planning process in their communities (1.87, Std = 1.003).

Table 3: Barriers to Youth Participation

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The bureaucracy in the governance of my community makes it difficult to participate in the annual planning and budgeting process	4.06	.862
My education level makes me feel that my opinion will not be taken seriously by our educated leaders	4.05	.814
My political affiliation makes it possible for me to participate in the annual planning and budgeting process	3.94	1.106
My leaders request for money from the youth if they must participate in the annual planning and budgeting process	3.73	.990
My gender makes it possible for me to participate in the annual planning and budgeting process	3.69	1.057
I do not have the transport fare to travel to the venue to participate in annual planning and budgeting process	3.56	1.245
I lack the information about my need to participate in the annual planning and budgeting process	3.44	1.221
My leaders support the idea of youth participation in the annual planning and budgeting process	2.54	1.858
Valid N (listwise)		

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents agreed that bureaucracy in the governance of their community makes it difficult to participate in the annual planning and budgeting process (mean = 4.06, Std = 0.862). Furthermore, respondents agreed that their education level makes them feel that their opinion will not be taken seriously by their educated leaders (mean = 4.05, Std = 0.814). Similarly, respondents agreed that their political affiliation makes it possible for them to participate in the annual planning and budgeting process (mean

= 3.94, Std = 1.106). In the same way, respondents agreed that their leaders request for money from them if they must participate in the annual planning and budgeting process (mean = 3.73, Std = 0.990). Additionally, respondents agreed that their gender makes it possible for them to participate in the annual planning and budgeting process (mean = 3.69, Std = 1.057). Moreover, respondents agreed they do not have the transport fare to travel to the venue to participate in annual planning and budgeting process (mean = 3.56, Std = 1.245). Similarly, respondents agreed that they lack the information about their need to participate in the annual planning and budgeting process (mean = 3.44, Std = 1.221). However, respondents disagreed that their leaders support the idea of youth participation in the annual planning and budgeting process (mean = 2.54, Std = 1.858).

**Qualitative finding**

The responses from the key interview informants (KIIs) were summarized as below:

*“There is a lot of bureaucracy in government due to a lot of structures in its policies, and this makes it hard to bear with them. Very many steps are required to meet our leaders in person (KII, 01)”.*

*“Our leaders ask us for money before he or she shares a meeting with us and sometimes we don’t have the money. The leaders are selfish. Every office you go to for a stamp, you need to pay some money (KII, 02)”.*

*“No female members in this area have ever attended any budgeting processes at the sub-county level. The male youth have a tendency of dominating participation in government programs leaving their female youth outside, creating imbalances (KII, 03)”.*

*“I have to attend to my husband at home. Therefore, due to fear of being beaten by my husband, it makes many of us women not to participate in the planning and budgeting processes (KII, 04)”.*

*“We have never participated in the planning and budgeting process, since we are not informed about when it’s held (KII, 05)”.*

*“Young people do not have information or have not been informed not only about planning and budgeting, but also other government programs (KII, Local Leader 01)”.*

*“I do not think young people are aware because they are never educated about their relevance in the planning and budgeting process (KII, Local Leader, 02)”.*

Table 4: The Effect of Youth Participation on Community Development

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.605 <sup>a</sup>	.366	.363	.41689	.366	131.025	1	227	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), youth participation

Table 4 shows that youth participation significantly affects community development by a variance of 36.3% (Adjusted R Square = .363, p = 0.000). This implies that youth participation is very important for a community project to succeed and bring about development.

Table 5: The ANOVA of the Effect of Youth Participation on Community Development

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.772	1	22.772	131.025	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	39.452	227	.174		
	Total	62.223	228			

a. Dependent Variable: community development  
b. Predictors: (Constant), youth participation

Table 5 shows that the regression model is good fit because youth participation can statistically and significantly predict the variance in community development (F=131.025, p = 0.000).

Table 6: The Coefficients of the Effect of Youth Participation on Community Development

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	2.385	.145		16.425	.000	2.099	2.672
	participation	.438	.038	.605	11.447	.000	.363	.514

a. Dependent Variable: community development

Table 6 shows that a single improvement in youth participation will significantly cause a variance of 60% in community development ( $\beta = .605$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This implies that for every involvement of youth in community projects, there will be a guaranteed success in community development by a magnitude of 60%.

## V. DISCUSSIONS

Young people who participated in the study revealed that it is not just that they do not know about the annual planning and budgeting process; they are also unaware of the role that they can play in it. A fundamental part of being able to deliver this role is understanding where and when they can engage. Leaders must intentionally invite young people to participate in key development issues during the planning and budgeting process to ensure that young people understand that their participation is needed and desired. The first step to enhancing the youth's participation in the planning and budgeting process would be to ensure that they are better aware of how the process runs and where there is need for participation in community development. It is also noticeable that a number of factors hinder youths' participation in these processes including, poverty, corruption, low level of education, gender inequality, political affiliation, bureaucracy, lack of timely information etc.,

This study agrees with that of (Ochieng, Onyango, & Kinaro, 2020), (Kambesigye, 2016), (Mwei, 2016), (Nderitu, 2014), and (Umar & Mohammed, 2014) who conducted a study on a similar subject. For example, (Ochieng, Onyango, & Kinaro, 2020), evaluated the involvement of rural youth in community development initiatives and found that technical, political, institutional, financial, and training constraints prevented young people from taking part in project planning. Similarly, the government should provide youth with a conducive-atmosphere to become long term contributors to community development. This will reflect the significance of local network and may require active collaboration with youth than before in order to engage them in ways that can open opportunities for them to contribute.

A fundamental part of being able to participate in development programmes is understanding where and when young people can engage. Leaders must intentionally invite young people to participate in key touchpoints during the planning and budgeting process to ensure that young people understand that their participation is needed and desired

Improve trust between young people and their leaders by creating platforms for dialogue. This study highlights that young people and their leaders misunderstand each other in ways that impact young people's participation in the planning and budgeting process. Both parties misrepresent the intentions of the other in ways that erode the trust they have in each other to each play their role in the process.

Finally, impediments impacting young and married women's participation must be dealt with in order to guarantee that youth

(Kambesigye, 2016) did a study to ascertain the impact of youth involvement on the social and economic development of the community and found that young people took on a variety of tasks in community development, including resource mobilisation, community policing, raising community members' understanding and sensibilities, and participating in decision-making. Likewise, (Mwei, 2016) in his study on determining the impact of youth engagement on their community development projects and how their active participation in decision-making might support community development found that youth participation in community development projects was influenced by factors such as education, experience, and gender.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure that young people realise that their participation is essential and valued, leaders must purposefully engage young people to participate in matters that directly affect them during the planning and budgeting process.

Additionally, a variety of strategies, including capacity building and education, can help increase young participation. Through both conventional and inclusive technology mediums, such as the internet, SMS, radios, and Television shows, youth-friendly information and resources can be used to pass information to the youth regarding the need for their participation in community development processes.

Furthermore, the Community-Based Service Unit at the local government level should take the lead on community outreach initiatives to enlighten young people about the importance of their engagement in annual and budgeting processes in collaboration with youth councilors.

involvement is inclusive, egalitarian, and gender sensitive. Their participation in the annual planning and budgeting processes should be equitable.

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