

PRIORITISING CHILD PROTECTION IN GOVERNMENT PLANNING AND BUDGET ALLOCATION IN UGANDA

INTRODUCTION

Uganda has one of the world's youngest populations with more than half (56%) of the total population under the age of 18 years and about 49% under the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2019). This population structure highlights an urgent need for deliberate and increased investment in child protection if these children are to fulfil their potential and contribute sustainably to the development of the country. Child protection is well articulated in the country's overarching policy and planning frameworks including the National Development Plan, the Social Development Sector Plans and Sector Budget Framework Papers. Promotion and protection of the rights of children from abuse, neglect and exploitation is specifically articulated as one of the six (6) interventions, under Thematic Area 3 – "Social Protection" in the Social Development Sector Plan.

Children in Uganda, however, continue to face several protection challenges including orphanhood, teenage pregnancy, child labour, an influx of street-connected children, and violence (MGLSD, 2020). The first-ever Uganda National Violence against Children Survey revealed that more than 76 per cent of children experienced at least one form of violence (MGLSD, 2018). The Uganda Police Annual Crime Report (2021) reveals that 14134 children were reported to have been defiled in 2020, accounting for 7.2 per cent of all crimes committed during the year. The consequences of these child protection challenges are dire and undermine the gains made by the government's commitment to protecting children from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Children who are subjected to various forms of violence are more likely to have poor mental health, suicidal ideation, sexually transmitted diseases, become pregnant, become sexually exploited, harm themselves, and have poor school attendance, among other consequences (MGLSD, 2018).

It is worth noting that, the Government of Uganda has made commendable progress in putting in place a robust legal, policy and institutional framework for the protection of children. However, the implementation and enforcement of these frameworks has been adversely affected by several systemic and functional bottlenecks attributed to limited funding among other drivers.

The Budget Analysis

ChildFund and the AfriChild Centre conducted a budget analysis to ascertain the level of funding to the child protection sector, with the aim of providing budget allocation trends over the last five financial years (2017/18 to 2020/21) and establishing funding gaps for the sector vis-à-vis government commitment as provided in key national and international documents. A quantitative analysis of budgetary allocation, release, and expenditure on child protection at both the national and local government levels for the five years 2017/18, 18/19, 19/20, 20/21 was conducted. Additionally, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with key central and local government officials, child protection stakeholders and children were conducted in the five Districts of Wakiso, Gulu, Katakwi, Busia, and Mbarara.

“14134”

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KEY FINDINGS

Current budget allocation to child protection

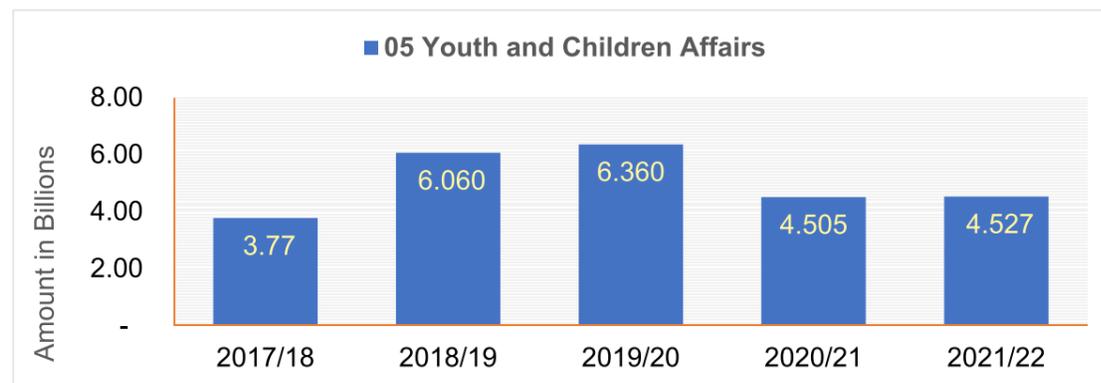
Child Protection is well articulated in the National policy and planning frameworks and receives allocations from the government of Uganda resource envelope under the "Youth and Children Affairs sub-Programme" of the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MGLSD). The

budget allocation and public spending on child protection, for the past five (5) Financial Years is characterized by a threefold undesirable trait namely low, fluctuations and decreasing allocations.

Low budget allocation

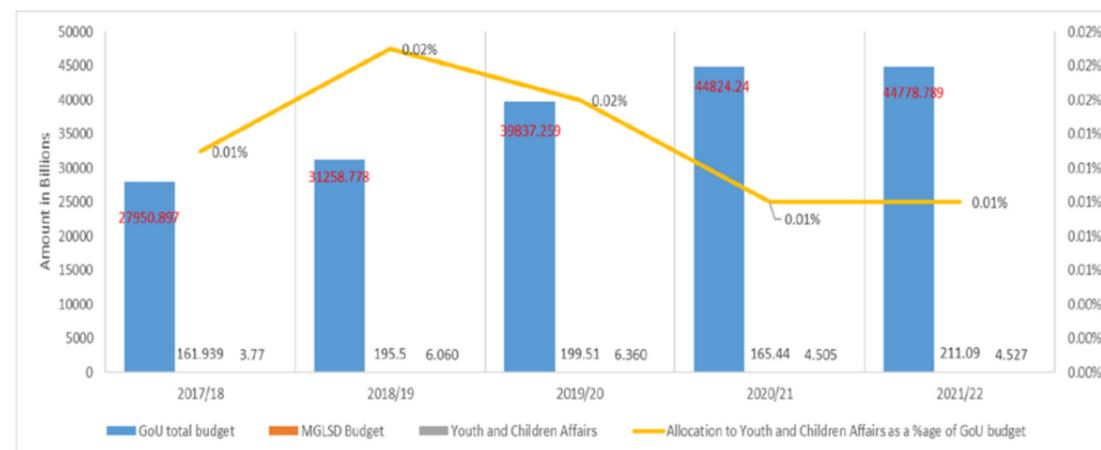
A review of government budgets for FY2017/18 – 2021/22 shows that although the "Youth and Children Affairs" sub-Programme budget nearly doubled from UGX 3.77b in FY2017/18 to UGX

6.06b and UGX 6.36b in FY2018/19 and FY2019/20 respectively, there was a sharp decrease in FY2020/21 by 29.2% equivalent to UGX 1.855b.



The national budget has substantially grown over the review period, but the proportional allocation to child protection as a percentage of the MGLSD

budget indicates a decreasing trend while its share in the national budget has been oscillating between 0.01% and 0.02%.

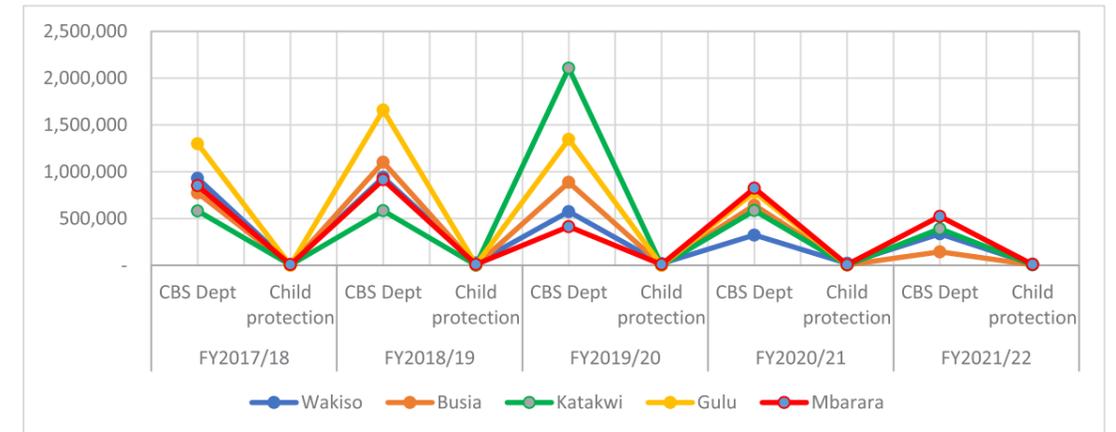


At the sub-national levels, child protection has largely been dependent on the conditional grant (non-wage) received through Central Government transfers to Local Governments. Most Districts have no locally raised revenue and always wait for central government transfers. Without these

transfers, Districts do not function. However, this grant is limited since it ought to be shared by nine other units in the Community Based Service Department. Therefore the Probation and Social Welfare Office which handles child protection receives only 10% of the grant.

Budget fluctuations and dwindling allocation

In the five (5) Districts of Mbarara, Wakiso, Gulu, Katakwi and Busia which are the basis for this analysis, the trend in allocation was found to fluctuate for Wakiso and Mbarara, static in Busia while Katakwi and Gulu recorded a trend of declining allocations.



Critical impediments to adequate budget allocation included limited appreciation of child protection by the various budget development stakeholders as well as the highly restricted budget development process, which hinders significant contribution of partner's ideas due

to a top-down approach and predetermined components that participants have to adapt to. As a result, budget allocation for Child Protection is not based on the need but rather on available funds in the resource envelope.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government of Uganda should embrace a systems approach to child protection across actors and sectors (linking traditional protection actors, civil society, and governments). All the relevant line ministries, departments and agencies should have a clear understanding of their role in child protection and prepare their budgets accordingly.
- The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development supported by other actors should take the lead in sensitizing both political and technical stakeholders at the national and District level on the importance of child protection in socio-economic and political transformation, and institute mechanisms for intensive lobbying to have child protection included among the priorities that need an increase in government budget allocation.
- A substantial investment by child protection stakeholders needs to be made in studies that explore the economics of child protection; cost of inaction studies, cost-benefit analyses, value-for-money evaluations and cost-effectiveness studies. It's imperative to have a strong evidence-driven case for increased investment and what this increase should look like. The real challenge is to undertake high-quality, methodologically sound studies in a sector where reliable data are notoriously difficult and expensive to collect – because of the often-sensitive nature of the subject matter.
- The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development should develop budget/expenditure markers for both budget formats and the chart of accounts. This will enable effective tracking of funds allocated to child protection across the different sectors. This may involve the following:
 - Improving the descriptions of the budget programme structures used by the government so that they explain where budget information for specific implementation programmes is recorded.
 - Ensuring the accurate use of the economic classifications to describe child protection budgets in budget documents, and in the recording of expenditures on child protection.
 - Proposing the inclusion of child protection markers in the chart of accounts used by the government

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