

THE EFFECTS OF A VERY YOUNG AGE STRUCTURE IN UGANDA COUNTRY CASE STUDY

BEATRICE DAUMERIE AND ELIZABETH LEAHY MADSEN

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME SERIES

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Introduction

Uganda's demographic profile is one of the country's most salient development challenges. Driven by a very high fertility rate of nearly seven children per woman, Uganda's population nearly doubled in the past 20 years to 29 million in 2005. The high rate of population growth creates strains on the country's natural resources, including arable land, which in turn drives up the poverty rate and threatens future gains in agricultural production and food security. Plots of land are divided among children, and due to large family sizes, per capita access to arable land is shrinking with each successive generation. In 2003, 38 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line, and the number of people living in poverty grew by 28 percent in five years.^{1,2} Together with a growing poverty headcount, unemployment and underemployment are serious concerns in Uganda, despite relatively high access to education.

Uganda has faced significant political upheaval in the second half of the twentieth century. After gaining independence from Britain in 1962, the country experienced two decades of dictatorship accompanied by extreme civil violence. Since 1986, the presidency of Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has brought relative stability and economic growth to the country, but Uganda has also remained involved in internal and regional conflicts. In this decade, conflict has spilled over the country's borders with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Sudan. Despite recent United States-supported military operations, the civil war between Museveni's government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda continues and is among the longest in Africa.

In 2007, Population Action International (PAI) published *The Shape of Things to Come: Why Age Structure Matters to a Safer, More Equitable World*. In a 30-year historical analysis, the report found that countries with very young and youthful age structures—those in which 60 percent or more of the population

is younger than age 30—are the most likely to face outbreaks of civil conflict and autocratic governance.³ While the relationship between age structure and instability is not one of simple cause and effect, demographics play an important role in mitigating or exacerbating a country's prospects for development and the well-being of its people. *The Shape of Things to Come* makes the case that because of this interplay of factors, demographic issues and the policies and programs that influence them—namely, family planning and reproductive health, education and economic outlets for women, and opportunities for growing cohorts of young people—must be fully integrated into development strategies by country governments and international partners.

Following the publication of *The Shape of Things to Come*, PAI is publishing three detailed case studies of Haiti, Uganda and Yemen, to further examine the relationship between demographics and development in countries and regions with very young and youthful age structures. These countries were selected because they have the youngest age structures in their respective regions (Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa and Middle East). In addition, they clearly illustrate the challenges of individual welfare and national development faced by nations at the beginning of the demographic transition,⁴ as well as the opportunities that lie ahead if governments and their partners implement comprehensive and forward-looking policies to shape demographic trends. The political and programmatic responses of Uganda and the other countries profiled in this series provide a diverse array of examples of policies that directly and indirectly affect age structure.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are extended to all of the country study contacts in Appendix 2 for their contributions to the report. At Population Action International, Karen Hardee was involved at every step of the process and provided numerous and very helpful guidance. Kristine Berzins provided thorough editing and research assistance. Michael Khoo, Jeffrey Locke and Tod Preston greatly helped to communicate research findings to a wider audience. Thanks to Roberto Hinojosa for managing the design and production of this case study and associated materials. Rosemarie Muganda-Onyando and Meher Rehman contributed to country research in Uganda. Caroline Behringer, Suzanne Ehlers and Morgan Grimes also provided valuable insight and assistance.

Table 1
Demographic and Socioeconomic Indicators for Uganda

Population*	1980	12.7 million
	2005	28.7 million
	2025 (<i>medium fertility scenario</i>)	53.4 million
	2025 (<i>constant fertility scenario</i>)	58.1 million
	2050 (<i>medium fertility scenario</i>)	91.3 million
	2050 (<i>constant fertility scenario</i>)	152.2 million
Median population age*	2005	15 years
Population under age 15*	2005	49.3 percent
Life expectancy at birth*	2000-2005	
	<i>Female</i>	48.5 years
	<i>Male</i>	47.6 years
Net migration rate*	2000-2005	-0.0 per 1,000 population
Total fertility rate†	2006	
	<i>National</i>	6.7 children
	<i>Urban</i>	4.4 children
	<i>Rural</i>	7.1 children
Contraceptive prevalence rate (modern methods, married women ages 15-49)†	2006	
	<i>National</i>	17.9 percent
	<i>Urban</i>	36.5 percent
	<i>Rural</i>	15.1 percent
Unmet need for family planning (married women ages 15-49)†	2006	40.6 percent
HIV prevalence rate (ages 15-49)‡	2007	5.4 percent
Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births)§	2005	550
Gross national income (GNI) per capita (Atlas method, current US\$)**	2007	\$370
Population living on less than \$2/day**	2005	76.0 percent
Unemployment rate ††	1996-2005	3.2 percent
Adult literacy rate (population ages 15 and over)‡‡	1997-2007	
	<i>Male</i>	76.8 percent
	<i>Female</i>	57.7 percent
Arable land per capita (hectares)§§	2007	0.2

Sources:

- * *United Nations Population Division 2009*
- † *Uganda Bureau of Statistics and Macro International 2007*
- ‡ *Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS 2008*
- § *World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNFPA and World Bank 2007*
- ** *World Bank, World Development Indicators*
- †† *United Nations Development Programme, 2007/2008 Human Development Report*
- ‡‡ *United Nations Development Programme, 2009 Human Development Report*
- §§ *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO Statistical Yearbook 2009*

Methodology

The study addresses the following key questions:

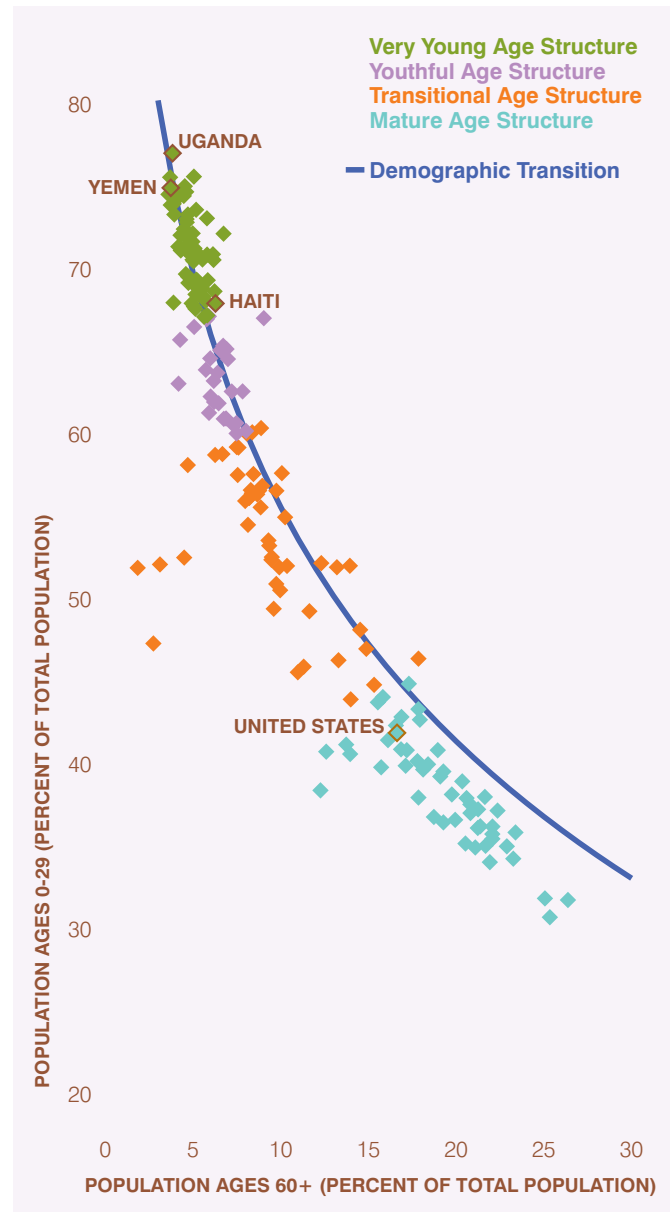
- How has population age structure affected development in Uganda?
- What are the demographic forces shaping Uganda's current and projected age structures?
- In what ways are the government and other stakeholders implementing policies and programs that address the country's demography? What are stakeholders' assessments of the future direction of this policy agenda?
- Considering Uganda's opportunities and challenges related to age structure issues, what policy recommendations can be offered?

In a context of very high fertility, as exists in these three countries, demographic trends are relatively easy to forecast, but the effects of rapid population growth on other sectors are less often considered. The objective of these reports is to promote the inclusion of population in broader development policies, including those related to security, good governance, economics, gender equity and the country's ability to adapt to future stresses, such as climate change. Demographic momentum is a powerful driver of future trends, but age structure is far from static. Government policies and development practices can have a major impact on the forces contributing to a more balanced age structure.

Data for the country study were collected in 2009 through a review of available statistics, policy and programmatic documents and published articles and assessments. The information compiled in this desk review was supplemented by a research trip to Uganda in March 2009, during which the authors conducted interviews with key stakeholders, including government officials, civil society organizations and bilateral and multilateral donors (see Appendix 2 for a complete list of interview contacts).

This report begins by briefly describing Uganda's current and projected population age structure before surveying security, governance, economic development, climate change, and gender, and assesses how these focus issues might be affected by demography. The report then outlines key demographic trends, such as age at marriage, desired family size, contraceptive use and maternal mortality. To evaluate the response of Uganda's government and other actors to demographic issues, national policies on population and reproductive health as well as political rhetoric are analyzed, and the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international donors in the population sector are summarized. The report concludes with a review of the opportunities and challenges facing Uganda related to age structure and offers related policy recommendations.

Figure 1
Age Structures along the Demographic Transition, 2005

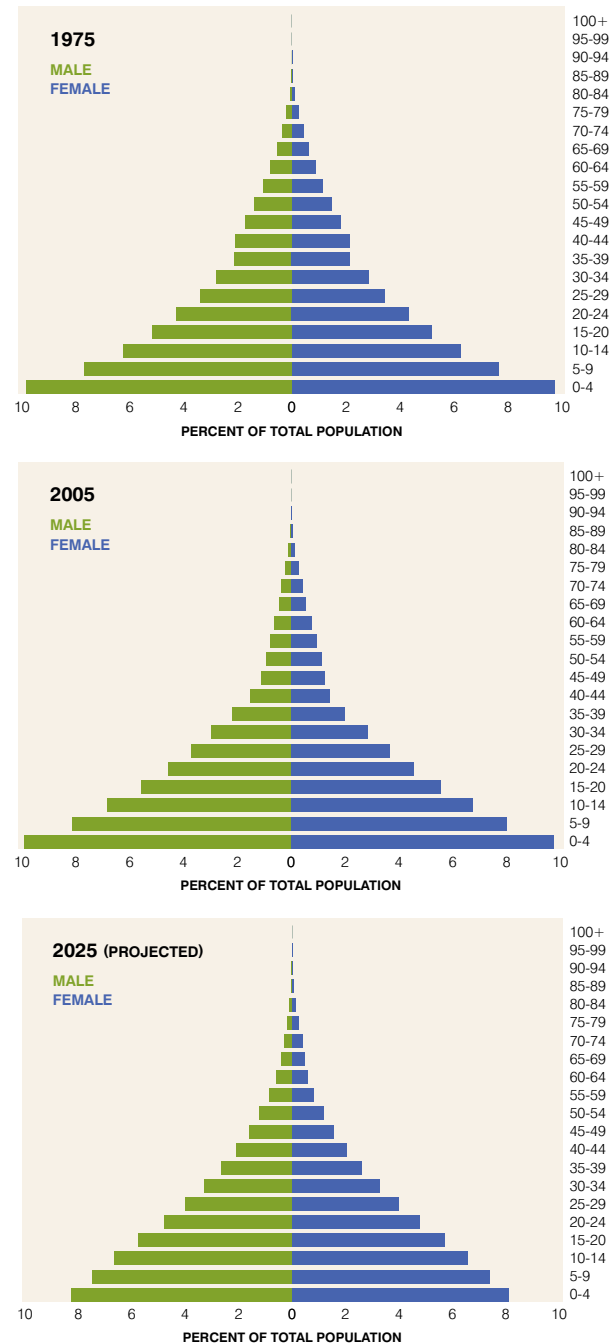


Age Structure

With 77 percent of its population under the age of 30 in 2005 and an annual population growth rate of 3.2 percent, the impact of ongoing high population growth is reflected in Uganda's age structure, which has stayed virtually the same since 1975 (Figure 2). Consistently high fertility rates in Uganda for decades have produced the youngest age structure in the world.⁵ Uganda's population is currently growing by about one million people per year, and the continually larger size of youth cohorts reaching reproductive age ensures that given the force of demographic momentum, Uganda will see high rates of population growth for decades to come.

If fertility stays constant at the current rate of 6.7 children per woman, Uganda's population would quadruple by 2045; even if it falls below five children per woman, Uganda's population will nearly double again by 2025, to 53 million.⁶ After that, depending on the source of the forecasts, Uganda might have between 92 and 130 million inhabitants.⁷ In terms of land density, this would mean an increase of 350 percent, from 122 inhabitants per square kilometer to a possible 551 inhabitants per square kilometer.

Figure 2
Uganda's Age Structures⁸



Age Structure's Impact on Development in Uganda

By some measures of development, such as education and agricultural production, Uganda is making significant progress. Its production of cereals has more than doubled in the past 25 years, a rate higher than five other East African countries, and Uganda now has the same global share of cereal production as Kenya, which has a land area nearly three times greater.⁹ Uganda is much more food secure than its neighbors: Only 15 percent of the country's population is undernourished, the lowest rate in East Africa.¹⁰ President Museveni instituted a universal primary education program in 1997, and the country's literacy rate of 67 percent is in the middle range of countries in sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹ The removal of primary school fees has been effective in raising the enrollment rate of girls, and a universal secondary education policy is currently being implemented.¹²

However, closer examination reveals a number of trends that are less favorable for Uganda's development. Throughout them, age structure provides a common thread that, in the case of Uganda, is likely to exacerbate the challenges that lie ahead. *The Shape of Things to Come* found that the influence of age structure on a state's security, democracy and development is significant and quantifiable. Countries with a very young age structure, like Uganda, are much more likely to have experienced outbreaks of civil conflict from the 1970s through the current decade. Between 1970 and 2007, 80 percent of all new civil conflicts occurred in countries in which 60 percent or more of the population was younger than age 30. Countries at the beginning of the demographic transition have also historically had a nearly 90 percent probability of autocratic or only partially democratic governance. The likelihood of democratic governance increases markedly as countries progress through the four age structure types marking the demographic transition. Although demographic factors alone are unlikely to directly cause conflict or autocracy, countries with very young age structures face greater difficulties in improving the welfare of their people and solving political and economic problems.

Security

Considering that President Museveni came to power following two decades of dictatorships and a civil war that left 300,000 dead, his government "has made tremendous strides in mitigating and transforming the preconditions for violence."¹³ From the perspective of politicians in Kampala, threats from civil conflict have ebbed in recent years. The Ugandan army has worn down the long-standing uprising of the LRA in the north. However, the LRA conflict has spilled over into the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, and pastoral violence is rampant along the eastern border with Kenya. Nearly one million Ugandans remain displaced within the country.¹⁴

A very young age structure combined with limited opportunities for youth can enable a sense of hopelessness and disenfranchisement toward political leaders, increasing vulnerability to violent conflict. A number of other factors could contribute to this vulnerability. Diminishing per capita resources¹⁵ and poverty drive conflicts to areas rich in natural resources, especially when neighboring countries also have unresolved security issues. Because of the country's colonial regional development strategy, the northern regions of Uganda have long been under-prioritized¹⁶ and lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to offer much beyond subsistence agriculture as a means of living. In addition, Uganda is among the most ethnically heterogeneous countries in the world, and stakeholders report that ethnic identity has become more salient in Uganda under President Museveni, with cultural leaders sometimes promoting population growth for their tribe's wealth and security.¹⁷

On the Ugandan policy front, opinions diverge about the importance given to the connection between demographic factors and security issues. While a number of stakeholders report no discussion at all about the association between large youth cohorts and security-related problems, some see a direct link and blame the fast-growing population for many of the security issues, using terms such as "social unrest" and "tipping point."¹⁸ One expert on Uganda's population explained, "If the youth are not taken care of from the point of view of education, health [and] jobs, you have a time bomb in your hand. You get civil war issues of course and land issues."¹⁹ Another stakeholder said that with insufficient resources for the needs of a growing population, political instability inevitably follows.²⁰

Governance

The state of democracy in Uganda offers a blurred picture. Museveni seized power in 1986 through military means, yet his decades in office have seen improvement in democratic indicators such as human rights and freedom of press compared to his predecessors Idi Amin and Milton Obote. Following his initial decade of rule, which was marked by economic successes, political stability and closer ties with donors, the president's hold on power has notably strengthened in recent years. In 2004, he proposed the introduction of a multi-party political system, a move that won praise as an important step toward democracy. However, in the same reform process, Museveni also rescinded presidential term limits, granted himself authority to dissolve Parliament, and implemented policy changes that restrict the oversight authority of Parliament over Cabinet members.

From a demographic perspective, there is concern about the extent to which the lack of democracy prevents economic development from serving the interests of the Ugandan people in a context of increasing needs and dependency ratios. In order to keep pace with exponential population growth, economic efficiency and productivity are even more essential to avoid a situation of resource scarcity. In Uganda, the process of economic reforms has meant more opportunities for patronage and for patrimonial practices, both in the economic and political spheres, which prevents resources from being used efficiently.²¹

Uganda's democracy and economic growth are largely personalized in its president. Donors, "having long hailed Uganda as a great success story... have made their claims to run effective aid programs depend on the country's perceived fortunes," including the stability of a leader well-ensconced in power.²² The presidential elections of 2011, in which Museveni will seek his fourth official term, will indicate whether any change is likely in Uganda's political realm. Meanwhile, some foreign stakeholders working in Uganda compare the country's current state to Kenya, which experienced outbreaks of civil violence that left more than one thousand people dead following the disputed national election in late 2007. "Kenya also has a very young population," one foreign representative who has worked in both countries explained. "It was a contributing factor to the violence after the election. Young men sitting unemployed in villages... were easy prey to village elders to egg them on. There is no reason why Museveni couldn't tap into that here."²³

Figure 3
Risk of Civil Conflict by Age Structure Type, 1970-2007²⁴

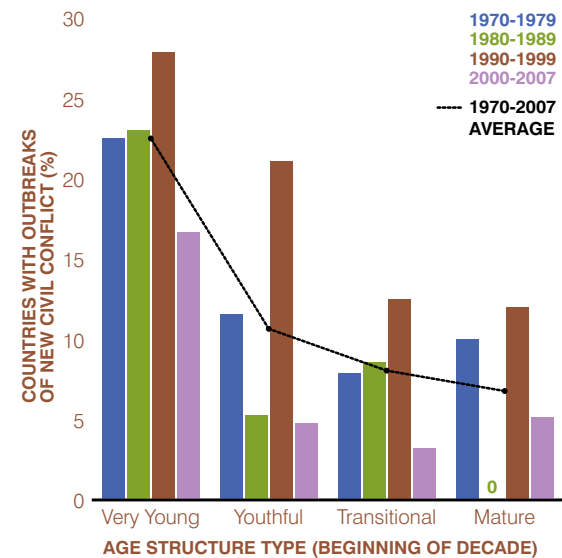
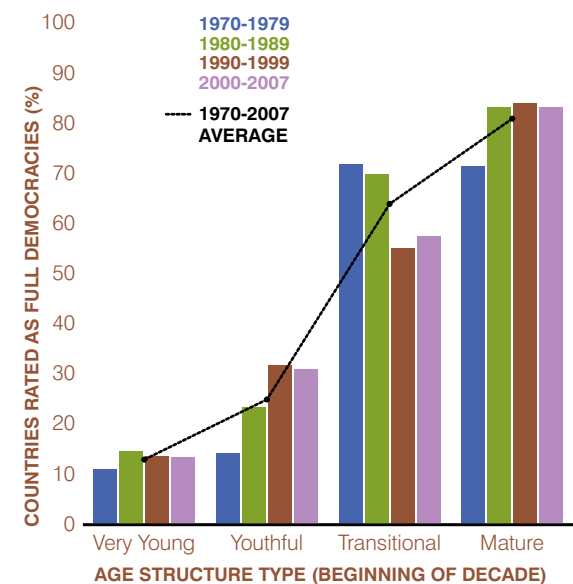


Figure 4
Likelihood of Democratic Governance by Age Structure Type, 1970-2007²⁵



Economic Development

Although the overall growth rate has remained solid, the impact of Uganda's very young age structure is in many ways most evident in economic terms. Employment is still heavily dependent on agriculture, which employs 80 percent of the labor force, even as the value of the sector within Uganda's economy has been in decline.²⁶ While solid unemployment estimates are rare, the country's deputy prime minister has reported that the unemployment rate among Ugandan youth is more than 22 percent, and even higher among young people with university degrees and young people living in urban areas.²⁷

Uganda's high fertility rate directly contributes to poverty due to shortages of land compounded through each successive generation.²⁸ According to a local council chair in the country's Mityana district, the average family farms on three acres, which are divided among their children, so plot sizes are decreasing as the population grows.²⁹ Unemployment is more prevalent among young people who have been educated, in part driven by a mismatch between the desired credential of a university degree and the vocational skills that are in relatively more demand in the labor market. Without steady, high rates of job creation, economic prospects only worsen over time as the size of the youth cohorts entering the job market steadily grows.

From an economic and human perspective, the large number of young people in Uganda's population has the potential to be a tremendous asset, as these individuals will shape the country's future. However, with fertility rates at their current high levels, the economy will have to sustain continuous expansion in order to keep pace with and provide sufficient jobs for the rapidly growing population. If fertility rates begin to decline and Uganda moves through the demographic transition, the country will have an opportunity to reap the benefits of the "demographic dividend," when an age structure dominated by a large segment of working-age adults provides a window of opportunity for increased economic well-being at the national and household levels.

However, the potential benefits of the demographic dividend are not automatic. In addition to the changes in age structure that must be preceded by a significant decline in fertility rates—which so far is not happening in Uganda—the economy must also be supported by an educated workforce and secure financial institutions.³⁰ Uganda's current age structure, where youth represent three-quarters of the population, means that the demographic transition provides enormous potential, but there must be a strong focus on human capital, with intensive investments in education and health. Ugandan policymakers often describe this as a need to focus on the quality of the population rather than the quantity; as a Population Secretariat official said, "Our main aim is to ensure a quality population."³¹ With poor education, young people will not contribute to their country's economic development in a way that will enable it to compete with other economies.

In Uganda, universal primary education was initiated in 1997—though not made compulsory—and the government committed to provide textbooks and other materials as well as to pay school fees. In practice, parents are asked to contribute money not only for books and school uniforms, but also for new classroom construction materials.³² The very young age structure of Uganda poses tremendous challenges for the financing of education, both for the government and for families, who must sometimes choose which of their children will remain in school. Research shows that children who drop out of school in Uganda are more likely to have an earlier age of sexual debut, lower use of modern contraceptives and higher fertility.³³

With education already allocating up to one-fifth of the national budget, a significant increase in educational financing from the government may be unlikely, even though the issue is emphasized in the country's new population policy. The enormous challenge posed by the issue of education financing in Uganda is not a question of priority on the part of the government but simply of keeping pace with a rapidly growing school-age population. The currently overcrowded classrooms, where the target teacher-student ratio of 1:50 is reportedly often exceeded, have led many parents who can afford it to send their children to privately funded schools.³⁴ Despite the government's efforts to achieve universal primary education, which is in line with the Millennium Development Goals, estimates indicate that only one-quarter of students who enroll in school reach the final grade of primary level.³⁵

University studies are prestigious but do not seem to match the demand on the labor market and the needs of the Ugandan economy.³⁶ While young people are a critical resource for Uganda's future, few opportunities await them when they graduate. Numerous stakeholders consider vocational training to be a key missing link in the economy. As one member of civil society explained, "The problem is less about education itself than about the type of education. Academic excellence is preferred over vocational skills. The degree fails to translate into practical skills. There is a mismatch."³⁷ When cohorts of young people are not only increasing substantially over time but also at an increasingly faster annual rate, the chances of young people finding jobs are limited, only reinforcing the economic challenges of Uganda's age structure.³⁸

Reports by the United Nations (UN) and donors qualify the economic achievements of Uganda, which include annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates of five to 11 percent annually over the past decade, as "impressive" and "extraordinary," and indicate that the structure of the economy is following the development path.³⁹ The logic behind Uganda's economic strategy is that the combination of natural resources and a large labor force will produce manufactured goods and services at a low cost both for the domestic market and for export.⁴⁰ From this perspective, President Museveni takes a pronatalist stance aimed at providing both abundant labor and a large market to absorb production.⁴¹ With relatively high levels of economic growth,⁴² a doubling of GDP per capita between 1989 and 2007, lower poverty rates and inflation under control, many refer to Uganda's economic strategy as a success.

However, low social spending, particularly in health, has resulted in a set of indicators that tell a very different story from a brilliant economic performance. The portion of government spending devoted to health in Uganda, like many of its neighboring countries, remains well below the target of 15 percent agreed to by African health ministers in 2001.⁴³ Trends also show a progression toward a more unequal spread of wealth that undermines the benefits from development, and the share of the population living below the national poverty line increased from 34 percent in 2000 to 38 percent in 2003.⁴⁴ One stakeholder reports that with the country adding one million people to its population each year, "inflationary pressures wipe out any gains that are made."⁴⁵

Climate Change

Countries with a youthful and growing population are overwhelmingly likely to be among those considered most vulnerable to climate change, and Uganda is no exception. On average, 59 percent of countries with a very young age structure are also among those least resilient to the impacts of global climate change, both in terms of their sensitivity and their adaptability.⁴⁶

In Uganda, 80 percent of the population is rural and depends on rainfed agriculture, while inherent fluctuations in the climate leave the country vulnerable to floods and droughts.⁴⁷ In a setting where most people rely on agriculture, even relatively minor changes, like a delay in the rainy season, can wreak widespread effects on the environment and threaten the livelihood of much of the population.⁴⁸

Uganda's very high population growth rate of more than three percent for the last 30 years (during which time the population has more than doubled) and its very young age structure are increasing demands for food and energy and straining the country's current and future natural resources. This is recognized by the government in its National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) for climate change, which links high population growth and density to species loss, deforestation, land pressures, vulnerability to disease and overall ecosystem weakening.⁴⁹ Uganda's NAPA also highlights the contribution of food insecurity to early marriage in cases where girls are married off to secure their families' survival. The growing resource needs implied by the country's age structure are likely to lead to a dynamic of environmental stress more intense in the future than it is today.

The Ugandan case shows evidence of the interaction between age structure and climate on several levels. The role of population growth on climate change adaptation strategies is increasingly acknowledged by the research community, while the consequences of climate change are likely to be borne unequally, with the poor and those living in sub-Saharan African countries like Uganda suffering the most severe impacts.⁵⁰ The future impacts of climate change are not yet fully known, but those who will feel them most directly—the poor and other vulnerable groups—are already the most affected by high fertility rates, low education and limited access to social services that will in turn diminish Uganda's capacity to adapt to climate change.

While the environmental challenges posed by a very young age structure and a fast-growing population require drastic action for adaptation strategies on the part of the government, such steps are dependent on a strong institutional structure. Uganda's NAPA sets out plans to increase awareness of climate change in local communities and does to some extent relate issues of climate change to population. One project described in the plan includes family planning programs along with community sanitation and water projects. However, one NGO observer has said that there are insufficient policies, awareness and funding, and "inadequate determination of adaptation and mitigation options."⁵¹

Gender and Social Context

Legal rights to gender equality are protected in Uganda's 1995 constitution, and more than one-quarter of parliamentarians are women.⁵² Accordingly, Uganda is ranked higher than nearly all other African countries and just below Italy in a global survey of gender equity, based on its share of women in high-level professional positions, conducting economic activity and attaining education relative to men.⁵³ Uganda, as measured by these indicators, contradicts the trend in which countries with a very young age structure have a Gender Equity Index score 27 percent lower, on average, than those with a mature age structure.

Still, there seems to be a consensus that the government has concentrated on increasing women's political participation while neglecting issues of gender equality within households and families. One scholar suggests that the high levels of political participation by women reflects both a push among women who were active in Museveni's rebel movement to maintain a prominent role in the new government as well as an understanding by the political elite that Uganda's relationships with donors would be well-served by appearing to promote women's status.⁵⁴ Other indicators reveal a more pervasive gender inequity: differences in education levels between men and women, early marriage and the custom of bride price, widespread domestic violence, very high maternal mortality rates and very low levels of participation in paid employment.⁵⁵

In Uganda, women represent 80 percent of the unpaid agricultural labor force and are responsible for the majority of food production despite being highly limited in land ownership.⁵⁶ Cultural norms limit women's rights to inherit land even though the constitution formally protects widows' rights to property. In the case of divorce, customary law denies women rights to land, while formal law denies legal rights for their contributions to the home during the marriage. One major issue is women's lack of knowledge about their rights; this as well as the costs implied by going to court make the judicial system inaccessible for many women even in cases when the law formally protects their right to own land.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, surveys show that 70 percent of women have experienced physical or sexual violence, most often from their current husbands or partners, and about the same share of women say there are at least some situations in which a husband is justified in beating his wife.⁵⁸

Even though research demonstrates that women in Uganda often enter business for themselves and are likely to repay debt, limits on their time and on their access to credit restrict their involvement in the formal economy.⁵⁹ At both the household and macroeconomic levels, gender inequality inhibits economic growth; The World Bank calculates that the loss from inequities in education and employment could amount to as much as two percent of growth annually.⁶⁰ Very high levels of fertility, coupled with maternal mortality, prevent women from having productive lives outside of childbearing activities and deprive Uganda of a group of potentially innovative economic actors.

Fertility in Uganda is characterized by early⁶¹ and late pregnancies, and has been among the highest in the world for 40 years.⁶² The total fertility rate of 6.7 children per woman obscures major geographic differentials between the areas surrounding the capital relative to regions in the country's periphery. In the east and north, fertility is greater than 7.5 children per woman, and is estimated to be closer to nine in the camps for internally displaced persons.⁶³

The rate of unmet need for family planning⁶⁴ among married women—41 percent—is the second highest in the world, and studies demonstrate that nearly half of births are unwanted or mistimed.⁶⁵ A parliamentarian notes that large families convey prestige for men and self-worth for women, who may feel that their value to their husbands is linked to how many children they provide.⁶⁶ Because of gender roles, women often have to seek out family planning in secrecy from their husbands. Only 22 percent of married women report making decisions about their own health care, while nearly half of men report that husbands should have the primary role in decisions on how many children to have.⁶⁷ In contexts where men are often the decision makers on the timing of sexual relations and childbearing as well as on the use of health care services, reproductive health programs might better serve women if men are more actively involved.⁶⁸

Age structure will help drive the future trajectory of gender issues in Uganda. In the short run, better access to family planning will help women have the number of children they want, which is fewer than they currently have. In turn, giving women control over their own fertility will increase

their ability to contribute to the country's economic sphere. Both lowered fertility and women's contributions to the economy will improve Uganda's potential for realizing the demographic dividend. However, the increased economic participation of women that could derive from lower fertility rates would have to occur in paid employment in order for women, families and the larger economy to see benefits. In addition, a more balanced age structure would free up resources to finance education, particularly among families, thus allowing more girls to attend school and eliminating the large disparity in literacy among adult women and men. Women, who already comprise the bulk of the labor force in the country's largest industry, can play an active role in creating a more positive demographic dynamic, but are greatly limited by insufficient access to education and health care.

Fertility in Uganda

In order to understand the determinants of high fertility in Uganda, a comparison with its neighboring country, Kenya, is necessary. In 1965, both countries had very high fertility levels, at seven and eight children per women on average, respectively. Although Kenya's total fertility rate was higher than Uganda's at the time, it subsequently declined to its current rate of five. Uganda's fertility levels, on the contrary, remained static, and the average number of children per woman today differs very little from the census estimates of 1968-1969.⁶⁹

According to research, the main observable factor to account for the difference in fertility trends in the two countries is the use of modern methods of contraception.⁷⁰ The use of modern contraceptive methods is nearly twice as high in Kenya as in Uganda, based on recent surveys. Findings suggest that the differences in contraceptive use are partly explained by a much greater access to contraception for Kenyan women but are also due to differences in fertility preferences, the ideal family size being much higher in Uganda than in Kenya. The pronatalist policies of President Museveni may contribute to the preference for larger families in Uganda.

Fertility rates are interrelated with education and early marriage on several levels. The median age at first marriage for women ages 20 to 49 is 18 years in Uganda, while the median age at first birth is 19 years.⁷¹ Among the younger cohorts, women with secondary education marry three to four years later than women with no education. Since age at first birth affects a woman's final family size, delaying the age of marriage can have a significant effect on total fertility rates. If implemented and financially supported by the government, the recent reform of universal secondary education might have some positive side effects in lowering national fertility rates, presuming that families value the education of their daughters.

Demographic Issues and the Government's Policy Agenda

A Ugandan government official notes that the country's high rate of population raises "catastrophic" issues in terms of access to an already deficient health care system, and that the most vulnerable in the society, children and women, are subject to the highest toll.⁷² A member of Parliament describes her perceptions of the best approaches to the debate around population:

*The president...sees population as a market force. We are growing at a very fast pace, and looking at the projections, it can't be sustained. We have a bank of young people who are dependent, unemployed or can't make a living. We should have an aggressive family planning program. People should consciously know how many children they can manage, and think about their quality of life. It's mainly women who have suffered.*⁷³

The parliamentarian's advocacy of family planning is not shared by all government officials, however. In March 2009, the newly appointed state minister for planning, Professor Ephraim Kamuntu, announced that Uganda's high rate of population growth is attributable to limited access to electricity, and the appropriate response from the government is infrastructure improvements, with family planning programs seen as unnecessary.⁷⁴

Population Policies

Uganda has a very solid policy framework for demographic issues, but stakeholders are nearly unanimous in their criticism of how such policies are implemented. The current Ugandan National Population Policy, published in 2008 by the Population Secretariat within the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, states that "the high rate of population growth can undermine the economic gains the country has made so far... [it] puts pressure and enormous burden on the provision of social services and infrastructure...as well as on the environment."⁷⁵ Stakeholders express consensus that the National Population Policy and its associated strategies are well elaborated and suit the country's needs. The country's previous Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) detailed plans for the government to lead "an extensive public discussion" of the high fertility rate, and included indicators for reducing the maternal mortality ratio and increasing the percentage of demand met for family planning services.^{76,77} However, such policies are often heavily influenced by donors, and have much less import for most Ugandans than the proclamations of their political leaders.

Demographic and political trends are intertwined in Uganda, where President Museveni's regular pronouncements on the benefits of population growth are longstanding and well-documented. In a 2008 statement, he said, "Uganda has got [many] more natural resources than [developed countries]. How can we fail to cope with a population of 30 million or the subsequent increases?"⁷⁸ The president advocates for a large population on the rationale that it will translate into a potentially large economic market capable of supporting and sustaining a high demand for Ugandan products; stakeholders report that he frequently compares the country to China and other economic powerhouses. Despite the presidential rhetoric, most officials working on health and population take a more nuanced approach to population issues. The potential benefits of a large population can't compare to the negatives, a health sector official said, because with one-third of Uganda's people living in poverty, the population lacks purchasing power.⁷⁹ Another official highlights that there is a missing step in the logic positing a large population as an economic force: "Our country can certainly have more people if they have been educated, have skills, [are] healthy and have opportunities for economic engagement."⁸⁰

If they do not directly counter the president's rhetoric, ministries are generally unimpeded in the policy development process, and political interference is not generally described as a major problem. Still, one government official says that when President Museveni is discussing the benefits of a large population, "those who come up with dissenting voices fear for their jobs."⁸¹ Meanwhile, there is no real agreement about the actual influence of the views of the president—and his wife, who is both a member of Parliament and a Minister of State—on the fertility behaviors of the population. While some stakeholders minimize this influence, others stress the popularity of the presidential couple, imputing the sustained desire for large families to the Musevenis' pronatalist attitudes.⁸²

Considering the combination of large desired family size and high unmet need for family planning, the conflicting messages and ambivalence from political leaders have likely been detrimental to concerted efforts to improve access to reproductive health in Uganda. Still, pinning fault for Uganda's demographic challenges entirely on the country's political leadership is simplistic, and does not account for the myriad other financial, logistical and cultural issues at play.

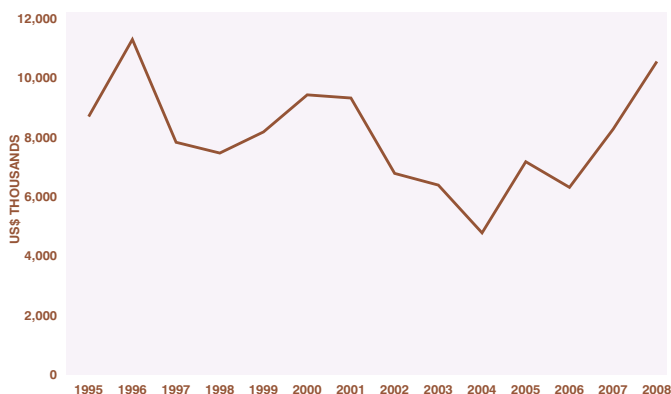
Population Programs in Uganda

Family planning and reproductive health programs represent only a small share of the national health budget, and only 14 percent of such program funding is derived from the government (including un-earmarked health and budget support).⁸³ Although there is a line item in the government budget for contraceptives, it is vastly under-spent in practice. Meanwhile, the government emphasizes that health outcomes are not the sole responsibility of the health sector,⁸⁴ and in fact the majority of the health budget is funded by donors.

The largest donors for family planning and reproductive health in Uganda have been the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Many other bilateral and multilateral donors provide funding through un-earmarked sector or budget channels. After declining for much of this decade, population assistance from USAID has steadily risen in each of the past two fiscal years, but has still not reached the 1996 level even as the population grew by 46 percent over those dozen years. A group of eight donors (African Development Bank, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and The World Bank) work together through the Joint Assistance Strategy, which targets implementation of the PEAP and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.⁸⁵ The Joint Assistance Strategy prioritizes reproductive health programs, including “increasing parents’ ability to plan the size of their families, and initiating a public discussion on the implications of high fertility rates for households and for national economic development.”⁸⁶ A new joint assistance framework was being devised in 2009, but according to one person involved in the process, it will include only a very moderate target for increasing the contraceptive prevalence rate.

Even as maternal, infant and child mortality remain at very high levels and the unmet need for family planning has increased, much donor attention to health in Uganda has been focused on HIV/AIDS, to the detriment of other issues. More broadly, numerous stakeholders repeatedly refer to the problems managing the ineffective use of resources. USAID underlines the “real challenges in addressing low marks for corruption and ruling justly” in Uganda.⁸⁷ One donor recommends partnering with NGOs, which are more likely to be independent from political power struggles but which also, crucially, lack resources.⁸⁸

Figure 5
USAID Family Planning Funding in Uganda, 1995-2008⁸⁹



A series of misconceptions about the effects of contraceptives and cultural barriers related to gender also account for the relatively slow progress of family planning and call for more and higher-quality information, especially in the form of better trained staff. The family planning programs that have been in place for decades in Uganda also suffer from serious logistical challenges. Stockouts are frequent, often driven by a breakdown in the supply chain between the central level warehouse and health facilities. The number of health workers is inadequate to meet demand, and those available are often poorly trained. These challenges are most severely felt in rural and less accessible areas; in the camps for displaced persons, for example, unmet need for family planning can rise as high as 58 percent.⁹⁰ The major donors handle procurement of reproductive health supplies separately from the government, and donors do not always effectively coordinate their planning with each other or the government.⁹¹

Demographic Opportunities and Challenges

Uganda's fast-growing population and young age structure represent enormous challenges to the country. The country's demographic situation impacts economic development, the quality of education and health care provisions. Governance, political stability and security are also deeply influenced by demographic mechanisms such as high unemployment. From a security perspective, Uganda's troubled history offers numerous examples of the interaction between demography and conflicts. Population growth and a youthful age structure are tied to conflict through both recruitment and resource depletion. Demographic pressures also affect the environment and compound the impacts of climate change, especially in the northern, more arid and less developed regions, where fertility is the highest in the country.

Public health suffers from a relatively low priority on the national budget agenda and reproductive health services in particular are neglected. Meanwhile, the pronatalist outlook articulated by President Museveni and Uganda's embedded gender inequities exacerbate cultural and structural factors, further undermining the success of family planning programs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve Uganda's long-term development goals, PAI recommends that the United States government, working in coordination with the Ugandan government, other donors and in-country civil society partners:

1 Increase investments in family planning and reproductive health, including meeting the needs of youth.

Given the very real pressures that Uganda faces in providing for its rapidly growing population, meeting the extremely high national unmet need for family planning will not only benefit women who lack access to basic health services, but will also pay larger societal dividends. Meeting this need will require true political commitment, increased funding for commodities to meet a growing demand, and sustained investment in health system strengthening. Regional disparities within the level of unmet need for family planning reveal important weaknesses in the channeling of family planning services. Human resource training, systematic monitoring and infrastructure improvements would all increase women's and men's access to reproductive health supplies.

2 Support programs that respond to the needs of a large number of youth and focus on education, vocational training and jobs.

Responses to challenges, such as a growing youth bulge, should incorporate economic and educational empowerment programs. Funds should also be devoted to ensuring education for girls.⁹² The number of students seeking admission already far outnumbers the available university places. The government of Uganda recognizes that vocational training is essential to give young people the practical skills that can effectively translate into an engine for economic growth, and education has to fit the needs of the market. This should include assessing the needs of the economy, expanding existing vocational training schools as well as creating new ones, and promoting vocational education and the job opportunities it provides to potential students. This strategy could also incorporate a gender component by promoting the economic independence of women through skills training programs.

3 Include age structure and broader demographic factors in efforts to foster political stability and security.

Work with civil society to raise demographic issues on the policy agenda. Stakeholders suggest that the connections between demographic trends and resource pressures, ranging from land and education to jobs, may be the most successful argument to ensure that population is more fully integrated into the policy agenda. It will be important to ensure that Uganda's civil society and political leadership are fully briefed on the impact demographic trends have on other development opportunities and challenges. For example, a network of women parliamentarians has been formed to raise awareness of maternal health issues, and this group also has the power to pressure the government on its budgetary allocations.

4 Support policies and programs that promote gender equity and advance the legal rights of and economic opportunities for women.

Formal changes in the Ugandan Constitution and governmental documents underlying the rights of women have not translated into significant improvements for women's everyday lives. Changing gender and social norms need to be set in motion at the community level, and should incorporate critical interventions such as engaging men and meeting their reproductive health needs. For example, programs bringing together local leaders and community members to discuss issues of reproductive health and gender inequality have already increased knowledge and generated solutions to reduce adolescent pregnancies and violence against women, and should be expanded. Funding should address the gender gap in education by assisting innovative programs to reach adult illiterate women.⁹³

5 Develop and fund integrated approaches to climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability that include family planning and reproductive health.

The government of Uganda will have to take an active role in addressing climate change. Population is taken into account in Uganda's NAPA, which has identified family planning and reproductive health as priority adaptation needs. However, this project remains unfunded by the international community while fertility rates are highest in the regions of the country that are most likely to be severely affected by climate change. Human vulnerability to the effects of climate change is exacerbated by the reliance of 80 percent of the country's growing population on rainfed agriculture for their survival. Considering the ways in which population growth and age structure affect the availability and renewability of natural resources, any adaptation strategy needs to help families reduce their vulnerability and cope with climate change impacts by addressing the country's unmet need for family planning.

6 Strengthen efforts to integrate family planning within broader health policies, strategies and programs, such as maternal health and HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

Uganda's high maternal mortality figures have rightfully garnered attention among national and international policymakers. While maternal mortality is closely linked to pregnancies that are too early, too frequent or too closely spaced, greater efforts are needed to integrate and expand family planning and reproductive services and supplies with maternal health services. Furthermore, integrated initiatives remain critically important across the health spectrum, as demonstrated by the role of family planning and reproductive health services and supplies in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV among vulnerable populations (including youth). Integrated policy approaches to HIV/AIDS should be financed and strengthened, and evidence-based prevention strategies should be instituted.

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Appendix 2. Country Study Contacts

Positions listed are those held at the time of interview.

Dr. Angela Akol, Project Director, Family Health International

Anne Alan Sizomu, Training Manager, DSW Uganda

Dr. Dorothy Balaba, Country Manager RH, Population Services International (PSI Uganda)

Hannington Burunde, Head, Information and Communication Department, Population Secretariat, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development

Mona Herbert, Advocacy and Communications Officer, DSW Uganda

Ulrika Hertel, First Secretary, Health and HIV/AIDS Advisor (SIDA), Embassy of Sweden

Dr. Henry Kakande, Engender Health

James Kotzsch, Country Director, DSW Uganda

Dr. Anthony K. Mbonye, Assistant Commissioner, Reproductive Health Division, Uganda Ministry of Health

Thomas Mega, Country Director, Marie Stopes Uganda

Dr. Florence Mirembe, Associate Professor, Makerere University

Hassan Mohtashami, Deputy Representative, United Nations Population Fund

Elly Mugumya, Executive Director, Reproductive Health Uganda

Andrew Mukulu, Director Population Social Statistics, Uganda Bureau of Statistics

Jotham Musinguzi, Regional Director, Partners in Population and Development

Moses Muwonge, National RH Commodity Security Coordinator, Ministry of Health

Grace Nagendi, FP-HIV Integration Co-ordinator, Engender Health

Hon. Nansubuga Sarah Nyombi, Member of Parliament, Ntenjeru North

Peter Ogwang Ogwal, Program Officer, Royal Danish Embassy

Gerald Owachi, Conflict and Humanitarian Adviser, Department for International Development

Henry Semwanga Lule, Deputy Country Director, Population Services International (PSI Uganda)

Dr. Olive Sentumbwe-Mugisa, National Professional Officer, Family Health and Population, World Health Organization

Hon. Sylvia Ssinabulya, Member of Parliament, Mityana District

Dr. Krista Stewart, Social Science Analyst, U.S. Agency for International Development

Dr. Michael Strong, PEPFAR Coordinator, U.S. Embassy

Sereen Thaddeus, Senior Technical Advisor, USAID/Uganda

Bernard Tusiime, Senior Projects Coordinator, DSW Uganda

Catharine Watson, Director, Straight Talk Foundation

Endnotes

- 1 World Bank 2009b.
- 2 Wakabi 2006.
- 3 Leahy, Engelman, Vogel, Haddock and Preston 2007.
- 4 The demographic transition is the gradual shift from a population with high death and birthrates to higher life expectancy and smaller family size. See, for example, Bloom, Canning, Fink and Finley 2007.
- 5 Uganda has the youngest age structure in the world as measured by Population Action International. PAI's measure assesses a country's progress along the demographic transition, determined by the share of its population younger than age 30 and the share older than age 60. For more details, see Leahy, Engelman, Vogel, Haddock and Preston 2007.
- 6 United Nations Population Division 2009.
- 7 In addition to the national projections for Uganda produced by the United Nations Population Division, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics publishes a set of projections for the country. The United Nations medium-fertility variant assumes that Uganda's fertility rate will decline to 2.6 children per woman by 2050, resulting in a total population of 92 million. UBOS assumes that fertility will decline to 6.0 children per woman by 2017. In the low variant, which it designates as more likely, UBOS projects a population of 40.6 million in 2017. The 130 million projection was provided by Hannington Burunde of the Uganda Population Secretariat, as cited in Ssekamatte 2009. This figure is included in the National Population Policy, assuming a sustained annual growth rate of 3.2 percent (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development 2008).
- 8 United Nations Population Division 2009. The age structure for 2025 is based on the medium fertility variant of future population projections.
- 9 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), FAOSTAT.
- 10 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) 2008.
- 11 United Nations Development Programme 2007.
- 12 As shown in World Bank 2009b, the enrollment rate of girls relative to boys in primary and secondary schools has increased from 89 percent in 1998, one year after the universal primary education policy was implemented, to 98 percent in 2005.
- 13 McDonough 2008, p. 367.
- 14 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- 15 In the case of Uganda, the doubling of GDP per capita between 1987 and 2002 as well as the diminishing poverty headcount measures between 1993 and 2002 were hiding an increase in income poverty as well as an increase in the unequal distribution of wealth. See Okuonzi 2004.
- 16 Jackson 2002.
- 17 Interviews, 3 March 2009 and 5 March 2009.
- 18 Interviews, 3 March 2009 and 7 March 2009.
- 19 Interview, 5 March 2009.
- 20 Interview, 2 March 2009.
- 21 Mwenda 2007, p. 30.
- 22 Mwenda 2007, p. 34.
- 23 Interview, 6 March 2009.
- 24 Conflict analysis drawn from: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and Centre for the Study of Civil Wars, International Peace Research Institute (PRIO) 2008 and Gleditsch et al 2002.
- 25 Democracy ratings drawn from: Center for Systemic Peace and George Mason University 2008.
- 26 FAO as reported by World Resources Institute, World Bank 2009b.
- 27 World Bank 2007.
- 28 Wakabi 2006.
- 29 Interview, 9 March 2009.
- 30 Bloom and Canning 2001.
- 31 Interview, 5 March 2009.
- 32 Interviews, 4 March 2009, 5 March 2009 and 10 March 2009.
- 33 Ndyabangi et al. 2004 (research conducted in Karabole district only).
- 34 Interview, 10 March 2009.
- 35 United Nations Statistics Division.
- 36 Interviews, 2 March 2009, 3 March 2009 and 5 March 2009.
- 37 Interview, 3 March 2009.
- 38 World Bank 2009a, p.19; Bloom, Canning, Fink and Finley 2007.
- 39 United Nations Development Programme 2007 p. 3; Joint Assistance Strategy, p. IX.
- 40 Okuonzi 2004; Wakabi 2006; Interview, 10 March 2009.
- 41 Wakabi 2006.
- 42 World Bank 2009b.
- 43 Govender, McIntyre and Loewenson 2008.
- 44 World Bank 2009b.
- 45 Interview, 2 March 2009.
- 46 Malone and Brenkert.
- 47 Hepworth and Goulden 2008.
- 48 Revkin 2009.
- 49 Mutunga and Hardee 2009.
- 50 Jiang and Hardee 2009.
- 51 IRIN News 2009.
- 52 Ellis, Manuel and Blackden 2006; Wyrod 2008, p. 806.
- 53 Social Watch 2008.
- 54 Hughes 2009.
- 55 Bantebya Kyomuhendo 2003; Ellis, Manuel and Blackden 2006; Wolff, Blanc and Gage 2000.
- 56 Although the share of agriculture in Uganda's economy is diminishing, "the sector still contributes to almost 40 percent of GDP, 85 percent of export earnings and 80 percent of total employment." Moncrieffe 2003, as cited in Ellis, Manuel and Blackden 2006, p.27.
- 57 Ellis, Manuel and Blackden 2006, pp. 51-52.
- 58 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. 2007.
- 59 Kibanja and Muene 2009.
- 60 World Bank 2005.
- 61 By the age of 17, 25.5 percent of girls are pregnant or have given birth. Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. 2007.
- 62 Okuonzi 2004.
- 63 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. 2007.
- 64 Unmet need for family planning is calculated by surveying the number of married women of reproductive age who are fecund, sexually active and who say that they do not want to get pregnant in the next two years, or wish to have no future pregnancies, but are not currently using a contraceptive method. For a complete definition, see Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International 2007. PAI's analysis includes only countries with data dating from 1999 or more recently.
- 65 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. 2007.
- 66 Interview, 3 March 2009.
- 67 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. 2007.
- 68 Bateefu 2008.

- 69 Blacker, Collins, Momodou, Sloggett and Ssekamatte-Ssebuliba 2005.
- 70 Blacker, Collins, Momodou, Sloggett and Ssekamatte-Ssebuliba 2005.
The reduction in pathologic infertility in Uganda (mainly due to the high prevalence of gonorrhoea) is likely to explain part of sustained high fertility in Uganda for earlier periods. Without it, the authors suggest that some decline could have occurred.
- 71 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. 2007.
- 72 Interview, 4 March 2009.
- 73 Interview, 3 March 2009.
- 74 Baguma and Ogwang 2009.
- 75 Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development 2008, p. 11.
- 76 Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development 2004, p. 153.
- 77 Leahy and Akitobi 2009.
- 78 Baguma and Ssengendo 2008.
- 79 Interview, 4 March 2009.
- 80 Interview, 5 March 2009.
- 81 Interview, March 2009.
- 82 Interviews, 4 March 2009, 5 March 2009 and 6 March 2009.
- 83 Interview, 4 March 2009; USAID | DELIVER Project 2008.
- 84 Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development 2004, p. 148.
- 85 Joint Assistance Strategy.
- 86 Joint Assistance Strategy, p.12.
- 87 United States Agency for International Development (USAID), *Congressional Budget Justification 2006*.
- 88 Interview, 10 March 2009.
- 89 USAID Office of Population and Reproductive Health data (November 8, 2009), budget allocation; United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Population, Health and Nutrition Information (PHNI) Project 2005; United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Population, Health and Nutrition Information (PHNI) Project 2001; United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and John Snow, Inc (JSI) 1998.
- 90 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. 2007.
- 91 Leahy and Akitobi 2009.
- 92 Population Action International (PAI) 2008.
- 93 Population Action International (PAI) 2008.