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Inequality in Uganda: Issues for discussion and further research*

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ABSTRACT *For the past two decades the degree of inequality in Uganda has been variable, mostly on the increase. By 2009, the country's richest 10 percent earned 2.3 times more than the poorest 40 percent. While some progress may have been made in reducing income poverty during this same period, existing figures mask a lot of poverty dynamics and characteristics. With a very low poverty line an erroneous picture is given on the extent of deprivation. Second, the distribution of consumption in Uganda is very flat, implying that many households that are presumed to have 'escaped' poverty have a very high level of vulnerability.*

KEYWORDS *Uganda; income poverty; inequality; vulnerability; expenditure; consumption*

Introduction

Issues of inequality and poverty in Uganda today are topical, and the subject of renewed interest. The reasons for this renewed concern in part arise from what appears to be contradictory evidence suggesting, on one hand, that the country has witnessed consistent growth and made significant reductions in its income poverty rate while on the other hand inequality and multidimensional poverty persist. A comparative analysis of inequality for the five East African Community countries has recently been undertaken (Society for International Development, 2013). This and other reports reveal that Uganda's degree of inequality has been variable for the past two decades. By 2009, the country's richest 10 percent earned 2.3 times more than the poorest 40 percent. These variations notwithstanding, the level of Uganda's income inequality in 2009 was almost identical to that of two decades earlier. While recognizing that inequalities are multi-dimensional (e.g., reflecting in asset holding, education, health and other factors), and cut across multiple domains, this article uses income inequalities as a proxy for investigating the different persistent disparities that are found between the Ugandan people.

In the last two decades, Uganda has made impressive progress in reducing income poverty. According to Ssewanyana and Kasirye (2012), the country's real GDP growth averaged 6.9 percent during 2002/3–2010/13, a slight decline from the more than 8 percent growth during the 1990s (Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development, 2014). Despite the progress, growing income and other forms of inequality stand in the way of realization of further poverty-reducing growth (Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development, 2014).

An overview of Uganda's poverty and income inequality

Uganda's most recent Poverty Status Report (Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development, 2014) estimates that absolute poverty declined from 56.4 in 1992/93 to 19.7 percent in 2012/13. Further analysis suggests an annual poverty reduction rate of nearly 2 percent per annum, and a reduction of 4.8 percentage points over the three-year period (2009/10 to 2012/13). Thus despite the population nearly doubling (from 17.4 million in 1992/93 to 34.1 million in 2012/13), there were significantly fewer people recorded as living in absolute poverty in 2012/13 (6.7 million) than was the case in 2002/03 (i.e., 9.8 million). These figures, however, mask a lot of poverty dynamics and characteristics. First, the country has a very low poverty line, which results in an erroneous picture on the extent of deprivation. Second, the distribution of consumption in Uganda is very flat, implying that there are many households living close to the poverty line. Hence, there is a very high level of vulnerability with the result that even 'minor shocks' can plunge large numbers of people back into poverty (e.g., 43 percent of the households live in an income range between the poverty line and its double and are therefore highly vulnerable to falling into poverty). The 'flatness' in the distribution of income and the large number of people living just above the poverty line is even more striking when the level of the country's poverty line is considered in the international context.[1] To put this differently, if consumption levels fell by 20 percent across the board, for example, in the event of a bad harvest, then poverty would increase by almost three times the current rate to well over 50 percent. A 20 percent fall in consumption levels is quite plausible, and the notion that this can potentially lead to such a dramatic descent of so many people into poverty speaks volumes about the extreme vulnerability of even those who are perceived to have exited from poverty. Another key feature of Uganda's poverty profile is that of regional variation, with the North accounting for 38 percent of the poor but only 20 percent of the country's total population, and lower poverty levels in urban rather than rural areas (Figure 1a).

Uganda's poverty dynamics also reveal a complex picture of patterns of entry into and exit from poverty, and vulnerability, both of which have implications on the state of inequality. In 2012/13, for example, more than half of the non-poor population was classified as insecure, living below twice the poverty line, and in total 21.4 million Ugandans (63 percent of the population) were either poor or vulnerable to poverty. By 2011/2012, 29 percent of those who were insecure non-poor in 2005/06 had actually fallen back into poverty. These figures indicate considerable fluctuations in household well-being over time, reaffirming that the sometimes observed exit of poor households from poverty is not necessarily sustained. In turn, poverty and vulnerability are also linked to the inequality of opportunity. For example, about 30 percent of inequality in outcomes (measured by consumption levels) is determined by (poverty-related) factors that tend to be outside of the control of individuals, including the education levels of parents, fathers' occupations and birth location. These negatively impact on, for example, health outcomes, completion of primary education and overall livelihood.

Uganda's inequality profile

To derive an inequality profile for Uganda, relative mean of expenditure, the Gini coefficient and generalized entropy (GE) inequality measures have been used. These measures provide an indication of the degree of inequality in per capita consumption across the country's population. The Gini coefficient provides an indication of how equitable the distribution is across the population.[2] On the other hand, the decomposable nature of the GE index allows us to examine the nature and extent of inequality within or between sub-groups in Uganda. By extension, we go a step further to gain a better understanding of the relative contribution of each factor influencing income inequality using the regression approach.

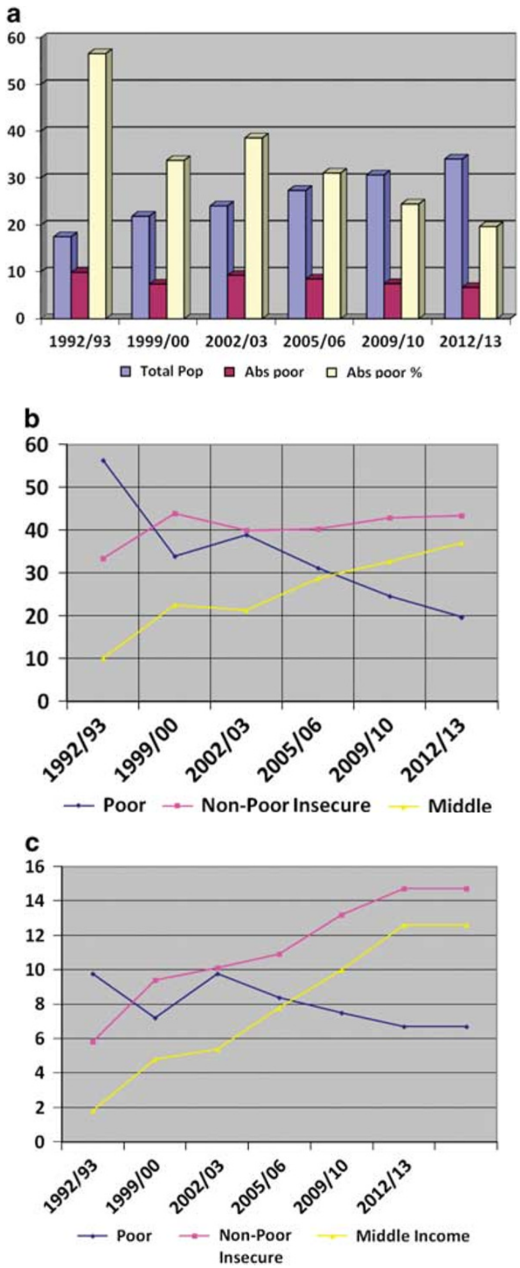

Figure 1: *Uganda – Population, Poverty & Income Trends. (a) Uganda – Population and absolute poverty trends; (b) Income trends for different population categories – percentages; (c) Income trends for different population categories – absolute figures*

According to the 2014 Poverty Status Report, Uganda registered a decline in the Gini coefficient, from 0.426 in 2009/10 to 0.395 in 2012/13 (Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development, 2014). The indices of inequality in Consumption per Adult Equivalent (CPAE) as measured by the Gini coefficient and relative mean of expenditure are presented in Table 1 based on the Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) data.[3] Since 1999/2000, the Gini coefficient for Uganda has averaged 0.40, with significant increases in inequality registered in 2002/3 and 2009/10. The table indicates that in the recent past, the level of inequality has improved, reducing from 0.43 in 2009/10 to 0.39 by 2012/13. The registered change, it is believed, was driven by changes in household consumption in both rural and urban areas. These observations notwithstanding, inequality remains substantially higher in urban than rural areas. Also, based on the relative mean measure of inequality, the welfare of an average rural household has remained the same at about 83 percent of the national average. On the other hand, although the average urban household was better off than the average rural Ugandan household by about 1.9 times in 2009/10, the scale factor had reduced to about 1.6 by 2012/13. This probably means that recent indications that poverty has reduced from 24.5 percent in 2009/10 to 20.3 percent in 2012/13 and the accompanying narrowing of inequality imply that the observed income growth was pro-poor, with people in the bottom ranks of the income distribution registering larger decreases in poverty compared to their well-to-do counterparts.

A mixed picture of spatial inequality

At a spatial level, Table 1 shows that central and western regions were the major drivers for the reduction in inequality registered during 2009/10 and 2012/13. Specifically, the Gini coefficient for central Uganda reduced from 0.45 in 2009/10 to 0.39 by 2012/13. Yet despite this very significant improvement, central Uganda remains the most unequal region in the country.[4] According to the 2012/13 UNHS, at least 43 percent of households in central Uganda live in urban areas compared to 21 percent in western Uganda and 17 percent in both eastern and northern Uganda. In rural Uganda, Table 1 shows that northern Uganda is

Table 1. *Inequality by spatial groups, 1992/93–2012/13*

	Relative mean of expenditure						Gini coefficient					
	1992/93	1999/00	2002/03	2005/06	2009/10	2012/13	1992/93	1999/00	2002/03	2005/06	2009/10	2012/13
Uganda	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.36	0.40	0.43	0.41	0.43	0.39
Rural	0.88	0.83	0.82	0.85	0.84	0.83	0.33	0.33	0.36	0.36	0.37	0.35
Urban	1.83	2.10	2.14	1.81	1.91	1.59	0.40	0.43	0.48	0.43	0.45	0.41
Central	1.28	1.41	1.45	1.45	1.60	1.53	0.40	0.42	0.46	0.42	0.45	0.39
Eastern	0.89	0.89	0.78	0.81	0.79	0.74	0.33	0.35	0.36	0.35	0.32	0.32
Northern	0.77	0.58	0.58	0.57	0.62	0.65	0.34	0.34	0.36	0.33	0.37	0.38
Western	0.93	0.96	0.95	1.01	0.90	1.07	0.32	0.32	0.34	0.34	0.37	0.33
Central rural	0.99	1.02	1.06	1.14	1.23	1.13	0.33	0.33	0.37	0.38	0.41	0.32
Central urban	2.11	2.36	2.50	2.19	2.31	2.16	0.39	0.41	0.48	0.39	0.43	0.37
Eastern rural	0.85	0.83	0.72	0.75	0.76	0.68	0.32	0.32	0.34	0.33	0.30	0.30
Eastern urban	1.25	1.57	1.51	1.49	1.19	1.03	0.32	0.43	0.40	0.44	0.39	0.36
Northern rural	0.75	0.55	0.55	0.51	0.57	0.59	0.33	0.32	0.32	0.30	0.35	0.35
Northern urban	1.11	1.13	1.12	0.88	1.07	0.94	0.39	0.39	0.41	0.38	0.37	0.43
Western rural	0.90	0.90	0.88	0.94	0.84	0.99	0.31	0.29	0.33	0.32	0.35	0.31
Western urban	1.64	2.07	1.64	1.76	1.66	1.39	0.35	0.39	0.44	0.42	0.44	0.35

Sources: Ssewanyana *et al.*, 2004 and Ssewanyana and Kasirye, 2014 the region that has consistently exhibited conditions of worsening inequality in the recent past, with the Gini coefficient for the region having increased from 0.33 in 2005/6 to 0.37 in 2009/10 and more recently to 0.38 in 2012/13. A more detailed examination of Table 1 (see bottom part of the table) reveals that households in the urban areas of northern Uganda seem to be fuelling the rising inequality in the region. This suggests that the 'recovery' that the region has been purported to have attained is skewed to urban residents and, since only a small proportion of the population lives in urban areas, it is logical to conclude that there have only been a few beneficiaries of growth in northern Uganda.

Inequality trends are more stable for poorer households than better-off ones. Table Two shows similar inequality indices as Table 1, but categorized on the basis of per capita expenditure quintiles – from the poorest to the richest. In 2012/13, the bottom quintile roughly corresponds to the households classified as very poor. Using the relative mean criterion for the analysis, the table reveals that the bottom quintile fared relatively better during 1992/93–2012/13 as it maintained its relative share of mean incomes at about 33 percent. Given that the bottom quintile has only about 6 percent of the urban population, this trend reflects relatively robust income growth in rural areas. The table also shows that it is mainly households in the top quintile that registered significant changes in their relative income – increasing from a scale factor of 2.2 in 1992/93 and peaking at a factor of 2.87 in 2009/10 before reducing to a factor of 2.36 in 2012/13. Given that the top quintile accounts for 51 percent of urban households, these observed changes reflect changes in inequality in urban areas.

Further, the table also shows that inequality levels are very low (with Gini coefficients of less than 0.1) within each of the three middle subgroups of the population. Overall, the Gini coefficients for quintiles one, two, three and four have remained virtually the same over the past 20 years. But among the richest 20 percent of Ugandans, there was a significant increase in inequality from 0.23 in 1992/93 to 0.33 by 2002/3. Notwithstanding the fact that the level of inequality reduced for the richest 20 percent during the period 2005/6–2012/13, it nonetheless remains volatile.

Figure 1b shows income trends for different population categories for the period 1992/93–2012/13. It is evident that income poverty declined dramatically from 56.4 percent in 1992/93 to 31.1 percent in 2005/06 and subsequently to 19.7 percent in 2012/13. Over the same period, there was an increase in the proportion of the non-poor (but insecure) and those in middle income. A comparison with the analysis in Tables 1 and 2 shows that aggregation masks a lot of details (Figure 2).

There are disparities in household incomes between the richest and the poorest, with the former earning 71 percent of total income, against the meagre two percent of the latter. Meanwhile, across all income quintiles, 42 percent of households earn their income mainly from subsistence farming, whereas only 25 percent of these have an income derived from paid employment (Figure 3).

Contributions of within- and between- group inequalities

Table 3 presents the percentage contribution of the inequality components to the national Theil index for the different survey periods. For all the spatial and household-specific subgroups, the contribution to national inequality of within-group inequality is several-fold higher than that of between-group inequality. Nevertheless, the between-group contribution is distinctly higher for quintiles. It may thus be concluded that inequality in Uganda is primarily driven by within-group disparities. The lowest contribution of between-group inequality, which is almost at zero percent, is observed when household head's age groups decomposition is applied. The largest between-group contribution to national inequality comes from quintile subgroups, but this contribution has increased during the past 10 years, from 64 percent in 2002/3 to 88 percent by 2012/13. Conversely, the within-quintile contribution to inequality has reduced from 36 percent in 2002/3 to 12 percent by 2012/13. Regional differences

Table 2. *Inequality by spatial groups, 1992/93–2012/13*

	Relative mean of expenditure						Gini coefficient					
	1992/93	1999/00	2002/03	2005/06	2009/10	2012/13	1992/93	1999/00	2002/03	2005/06	2009/10	2012/13
Quintile 1	0.34	34	31	0.34	0.31	33	0.14	0.15	0.14	0.13	0.14	0.14
Quintile 2	0.57	56	51	0.56	0.52	54	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
Quintile 3	0.79	76	69	0.79	74	74	0.05	0.07	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.05
Quintile 4	1.11	1.04	98	1.18	112	106	0.06	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.07
Quintile 5	2.18	2.37	2.5	2.68	2.68	236	0.23	0.03	0.33	0.27	0.29	0.25

Sources: Ssewanyana *et al*., 2004 and Ssewanyana and Kasirye, 2014

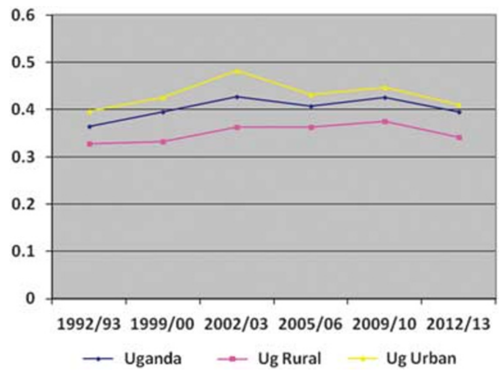

Figure 2: *Inequality trends 1992/93–2012/13 by rural and urban location*

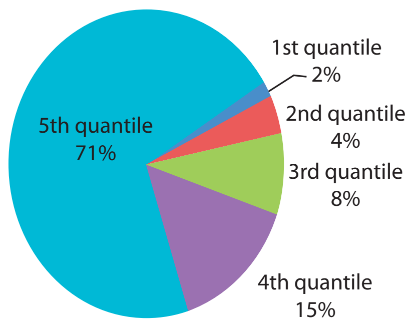

Figure 3: *Share of total income by quintile, Uganda, 2009/10*
Source: Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2010)

exhibit the second highest between-group inequality with a rise in the corresponding percentage contribution from seven percent in 1992/93 to 22 percent by 2012/13. This suggests a widening gap in consumption between regions – specifically, central Uganda has consistently progressed as other regions – notably northern and eastern Uganda have registered upswings and down swings in welfare status.

Income inequality contributing factors

The factors behind the above trends and dynamics are many and complicated. Following earlier studies that examine determinants of inequality in Uganda, for example, Ssewanyana *et al.* (2004), we adopt the decomposition approach by Fields (2003) to estimate the overall contribution of each factor to total income

Table 3. *Percentage contribution of within and between-group inequality*

	1992/93	1999/00	2002/03	2005/06	2009/10	2012/13
Rural/Urban						
Within-group	83.9	77.1	80.5	84.4	82.9	84.2
Between-group	16.1	22.9	19.5	15.6	17.1	15.8
Regional						
Within-group	92.5	87.4	87.4	80.4	79.3	77.8
Between-group	7.5	12.6	12.6	19.6	20.7	22.2
Quintiles						
Within-group	24.5	30.7	35.8	11.1	11.3	12.1
Between-group	75.5	69.3	64.2	88.9	88.7	87.9
Head's educational level						
Within-group	83.8	79.7	75.2			84.4
Between-group	16.2	20.3	24.8			15.6
Head's economic sector						
Within group	85	84.4	84.8			83.3
Between group	15	15.6	15.2			16.7
Head's age group						
Within-group	97.7	99.5	99.3			99.9
Between-group	2.3	0.5	0.7			0.1
Household size group						
Within-group	93.9	95.3	91.7			86.8
Between-group	6.1	4.7	8.3			13.2

Sources: Ssewanyana *et al.*, 2004 and author's calculations from UNHS 2005/6, 2009/10 and 2012/13

inequality. In terms of model specification, we include various indicators such as gender, age category, education attainment and sector of employment of the household head. We also include categorical variables relating to households size as well as spatial location of the households. The results are presented in Table 4.

A significant proportion of the variability in log expenditure per adult equivalent (of nearly 51 percent) remains unexplained. Individuals that have attained formal education relative to no formal education are significantly more likely to have a higher income. The returns are highest for post-secondary education attainment. Education attainment is a key factor influencing the degree of income inequality. It explains nine percent of the variance in log expenditure, a percentage lower than that reported for Uganda (15 percent) as whole in 2002 (Ssewanyana *et al.*, 2004). The pattern of relative contribution for each education level is similar to that reported in Ssewanyana *et al.* (2004). More notably, the relative contribution is highest for post-secondary education and beyond. Having education attainment beyond primary is an important source of increasing inequality of income, if compared to

Table 4. *Log expenditure per adult equivalent OLS regression estimates, 2012/13*

Variable	Coefficient	*t*-value	Contribution	
			Relative	Overall
Household head is male	0.028	1.44	0.000	
Age category of household head (cf: under 25 years)				
25–34 years	0.072	2.33	0.003	−0.006
35–44 years	0.061	1.90	−0.001	
45–54 years	0.113	3.21	−0.002	
55–64 years	0.178	4.53	−0.001	
65+ years	0.139	3.47	−0.004	
Education (cf: No education)				
Some primary	0.121	5.51	−0.007	0.094
Completed primary	0.233	6.80	0.002	
Secondary	0.304	9.89	0.027	
Post-secondary	0.622	14.30	0.072	
Household size (cf: 1-person)				
2-person	−0.208	−4.50	−0.015	0.127
3-person	−0.431	−10.62	−0.020	
4-person	−0.543	−14.65	−0.005	
5-person	−0.687	−16.29	0.026	
6 or more persons	−0.768	−20.83	0.142	
Industry (cf: Agriculture)				
Manufacturing	0.007	0.25	0.000	0.037
Construction	0.002	0.05	0.000	
Trade	0.239	8.03	0.015	
Transportation	0.19	4.38	0.004	
Services other than transportation	0.151	3.94	0.018	
Household is located in an urban area	0.239	7.83	0.057	
Geographical location (cf: central rural)				
Central urban	0.347	8.22	0.070	0.247
Eastern rural	−0.407	−10.62	0.029	
Eastern urban	−0.235	−3.71	−0.002	
Northern rural	−0.600	−16.7	0.149	
Northern urban	−0.370	−4.77	0.001	
Western rural	−0.079	−2.41	−0.002	
Western urban	0.075	1.36	0.002	
Constant	11.390	228.07		
Residual			0.509	
R^2				

Source: Author's calculations from 2012/13 UNHS having no formal education. However, there is very little difference between having no primary education at all and having some primary education, which implies that only a few years of education (at Primary level) will not set people apart in terms of income.

In terms of household size as a measure of dependency burden, a household is more likely to be worse off (in economic terms) if it has a large number of members. Nearly 13 percent of the inequality of income is attributable to household size, marking the second highest contribution to overall national inequality following regional location. Also, household size contributes more to inequality than education. While household size of four members and below is income inequality reducing, beyond four persons it is inequality increasing. The contribution of sector of employment to overall inequality is about four percent and largely driven by services other than transport, for example, communication (1.8 percent) followed by trade (1.5 percent). Relative to not working, working in sectors other than services increases income inequality.

Geographical location contributes 24 percent to the total income inequality, with rural areas inequality increasing, whereas the urban areas are inequality reducing. Relative contribution is highest in rural North (14 percent) followed by urban central, relative to rural central.

In sum, there are disparities in the level of income inequality both spatially and across social groupings. The results have revealed that higher incidence of poverty may also be associated with more unequal income levels. For example, rural North, with a very high incidence of poverty, also contributes the most to geographical inequality. Consistent with the trends in poverty reduction, inequality of income has declined in the recent past – both in urban and rural areas. The contribution of between-social-groups inequality (education levels, sector of employment and geographical location) to overall inequality continues to widen overtime. The econometric results reveal that education, sector of employment, household structure and geographical location do influence the level of income inequality in Uganda.

Underlying factors affecting income inequality outcomes in Uganda

Inequality and the life-cycle

The factors that affect income inequality in Uganda are complex and fall into two broad categories – structural and non-structural. If we adopted a life-cycle approach to our analysis, the situation that each individual is born into, that is, the 'starting point', would perhaps be one of the most important critical determining factors with regard to inequality. Individuals are born into families, communities and circumstances with differing opportunities (and challenges) – wealth and assets; networks of links and connections; livelihood opportunities; and so on. Children who are born in the country's south-western districts of Kisoro would, for example, face more challenging initial conditions that perpetuate inequality than those who are born in Ntungamo or Mbarara districts, with the latter having a head-start over the former. Similarly, being born male and to an educated livestock-keeping family in western Uganda would imply an advantageous starting point over being born female in an uneducated crop-farming family in eastern Uganda.

In childhood, the initial inequalities that people are born into are exacerbated. Wealthier households are not only better able to provide improved nutrition and early childhood education to their children (thereby building human assets); they also experience less downward social mobility. On the contrary, those who are born into disadvantaged households are likely to remain disadvantaged and to experience limited human asset building (which itself further drives inequality).

At adolescence, inequality is further deepened by a combination of varying educational as well as income opportunities and outcomes. The universal primary and secondary education programme is illustrative: While the programme has led to an increase in enrolment, especially of poor students, simultaneously, the poor quality of education has led to declining education standards and deteriorating academic performance standards. Essentially, the country finds itself with a two-tier school system, with the majority in underperforming, mostly rural universal primary and secondary education schools, and a minority in better, private schools – an obvious driver of further inequality. Second, the implicit poor development of skills for the less advantaged young people results in further marginalization and limited future access to quality employment opportunities thereby exacerbating inequality and poverty.

For the elderly, there is credible evidence that the number of people experiencing older age, disability and/or mental illness is growing. Given the weakening extended family relations and support, this involves a substantial negative impact on poverty, vulnerability and inequality. Second, ageing is associated with several disadvantages. Studies that informed the design and implementation of the country's cash transfer programme, including those of the Expanding Social Protection Programme (ESPP), revealed that households with older people tended to be poorer than other households did. In part, this is due to their limited ability to work, as only a very small proportion of the elderly have access to pension schemes. This is in spite of older people taking care of a large number of the country's children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. This scenario accentuates inequality.

Inequality and the structure of the economy

The make-up of Uganda's economy affects equality patterns in the country. Non-formal employment, mostly casual labour in agriculture, is associated with both poverty and inequality. One in two households reports subsistence agriculture as their main source of income, although a slight drop has been observed from 49 percent in 2009/10 to 44 percent by 2010/11. Similarly, subsistence agriculture remains the most important source of income for the poor, with approximately 55 percent of them citing it as their main source of income. This reliance on subsistence agriculture is an indicator of vulnerability to inequality and poverty. Subsistence farmers lack suitable farm technologies and have limited access to agricultural advisory services. Poor farmers also tend to lack commercial incentives, and rarely have access to adequate quality land, water for irrigation, farm equipment, finance or effective farm extension services.

There are other issues of policy-relevance linking the state of agriculture and inequality in the country. Over the past two decades, liberalization and privatization policies have had mixed impacts on the agricultural sector. The adoption of free market approaches, premised on the beliefs that farmers would get a higher share of the farm gate price and that liberalization was the best way of maximizing incentives, have generated flawed outcomes. Furthermore, it was believed that liberalization would increase competition in the inputs market, thus driving prices downwards in favour of farmers. However, the actual experience, particularly for very poor people, was again different. Not only did population growth continue to outstrip the agriculture growth rate, the poor were also constrained in terms of access to land, further deepening inequality.

Another area of relevance is that of employment, particularly wage employment, and the link between this and inequality patterns in the country. There are two mechanisms through which employment mediates inequality. The first is the employment and remuneration behaviour of the labour market. The second mechanism is the inflow of fiscal revenue that growth makes available for active social policy and poverty alleviation. It is notable that Uganda's minimum wage, set at Shs 0.6000 (just under US$2) per month has stagnated for many years, and remains extremely low. A proposed new minimum wage was negotiated between the government and the private sector in 2003 and set at 54,000 Shillings (under US$27), but was not legislated. Yet, according to the ILO, in 2010 the number of persons employed in the informal sector comprised of 2,344,000 and as a proportion of people in non-agricultural employment this translated to 59.8 percent, a substantial proportion.

Similarly, urban poverty and inequality is increasingly becoming critical, especially with the country's population growing at 3.2 percent per annum, and the urban population constituting over 15 percent of the population. Kampala the country's capital city has a population of close to 2 million constituting approximately 40 percent of the urban population, yet considerable number of people still live in poverty and on average

60 percent of the urban population live in slums and informal settlements (Werikhe, n.d.).

Inequality, difference, geography and conflict in Uganda

Idiosyncratic factors, spatial differences and related socio-cultural and economic diversities are key underlying factors for inequality in Uganda. Gender, ethnicity and religious difference are especially important.

Gender and inequality

Gender inequality, which is the product of historical discrimination against girls and women, is widespread in Uganda. A patriarchal system, coupled with payment of bride price, means that girls are often treated as a financial burden, whereas boys are viewed as the preferred gender for the continuation of a family. A range of factors, including poorer nutrition for girls, unacceptably high maternal death rates, less emphasis of education for girls and general exclusion from political decision making, all combine to accentuate gender inequality. The degree to which poverty and inequality have been addressed also varies between one geographical region and another. In the southern districts where early education and health systems were developed and where small-holder agriculture and commercial activity took root much earlier, less poverty and inequality can be witnessed. In contrast, the North and North-East still lag far behind, partly a legacy of colonial and post-colonial neglect and the perpetuation exclusive policies.

As a result of all these determinants, women in Uganda experience higher poverty incidence than men do, a concept which is often described as the 'feminization of poverty' (Chant, 2008). The country's 2009/10 National Panel Survey revealed that women head 30 percent of households. Thus, female headed households are generally poorer and more vulnerable to hunger and disease than male-headed households (CPAN and DRT, 2013). Between 2005/06 and 2009/10, also, the proportion of female-headed households increased in both rural and urban settings, from 26 percent to 29 percent and from 29 percent to 35 percent, respectively. There is also a regional dimension, with the western region witnessing the biggest increase (from 24 percent in 2005/06 to 31 percent in 2009/10). However, northern Uganda still has the largest number of female-headed households (33 percent in 2009/10), a feature attributable to the effects of the 20-year conflict, which had far-reaching effects on women and girls.

Ethnic and spatial inequality

Uganda's natural resource endowment, disease burden, transport costs and other related factors are all critical to shaping development and hence spatial and ethnic patterns of inequality. In particular, differences in opportunities between ethnic groups from central and western Uganda on one hand and northern and eastern Uganda on the other have in effect formalized discrimination against 'northerners', a problem that was (and still is, to some extent) felt in all walks of life – education, health, employment and so on. Much of the basis for this discrimination is connected to the 'southern view' that northerners are best suited to doing menial jobs and cannot be part of the mainstream, so they have to be isolated from society. Not surprisingly, people from ethnic groups in northern and eastern Uganda were for long subjected to severe limitations. Even in instances where considerable rural-urban migrations were happening, most were excluded from certain geographical areas of Kampala.

There is also a historical angle to be considered. During the colonial period northern Uganda was used as a labour reservoir and later, for supplying soldiers. This economic zoning of the country perpetuated the neglect and underdevelopment of the region and fomented subsequent regional tensions. It also engrained feelings of superiority in the South and inferiority (at least in terms of production) in the North. Colonial-era ethnic rivalries and the effect of colonialism on different groups and regions of the country, coupled with the uneven distribution of social and economic amenities in both the colonial and post-independence Uganda all contributed to inequalities and to some extent some of the present day ethnic tensions within and among the different ethnic groups. An overriding feature of the county's ethnic polarization is the North–South divide and the dominance of the southern half of Uganda in general, and in particular the Baganda and Banyankole. These groups have enjoyed relative economic and political dominance in both the colonial and post-colonial times.

In the last few years a different issue – that of the dominance of particular ethnicities in the senior echelons of the Uganda Government and whether this leads to policy outcomes that advance the interests of the region(s) from which such officials come – has come to the fore of popular debates. Not surprisingly, debates of this nature attract sensitivities and are, therefore, often held either informally or strictly in private. Imbued with the discussions are debates on whether, by capturing state power, certain elites from what have come to be recognized as politically (and ethnically) dominant groups have simultaneously redirected public resources obtained through taxation and other means to funding state-led investments in basic socio-economic infrastructure (such as roads and electricity) in localities where the political leaders originate from. More research is therefore needed to ascertain whether the spatial disparities in both income and non-income indicators across the country's regions are informed by underlying political drivers.

Religion, poverty and inequality in Uganda

Religion is the other factor in poverty and inequality that, again due to sensitivities, is rarely brought into open discussions in the country even though it is (at least informally) identified as important in influencing inequality trends.[5] A historical illumination may be a useful start. According to historical reports, Islam was the first foreign religion to be introduced in Uganda – in the 1840s, but religious tensions began after the arrival of Anglican missionaries in 1876 and Roman Catholic Missionaries in 1879 – all this during the rule of King Mutesa 1. Following the death of Mutesa, Mwanga, who succeeded him as King of Buganda in 1884, attempted to purge all foreign religions, mostly focusing on the Christians. However, the Roman Catholic, Anglican Protestant and Muslim political parties collaborated and overthrew him. Subsequently, the Muslims expelled the Christian groups from government and Buganda was briefly turned into an Islamic state. Excluded from power, the Catholic and Protestant factions conspired to divide power and resources equally between themselves if in the future they would have acquired the instruments of power, a fact that took place in around 1890. Since that point, Muslims were generally left out of political (and therefore economic) influence. Later in 1892, however, Catholics and Protestants fought to control Buganda and the ensuing Protestant victory, bolstered by Captain Frederick Lugard's supplies of guns and ammunitions, relegated Catholics to a secondary role and further marginalized the Muslims.[6] From that time on, Anglican Protestantism became the prominent religion and the basis for favoured access to resources. Herein lie the foundations for land allocation based on the 1900 Buganda agreement, and the ensuing historical inequality in control of this important resource.

In contemporary times, religious interests in Uganda still seem to be playing a political role, but from a different stand point. First, there are no definite figures on poverty and inequality within and among the country's religious sects. This shortcoming notwithstanding it is estimated that 25–30 percent of those who identify as Christian (some 85 percent of Ugandans) now belong to the evangelical movement. With approximately 67 percent of Ugandans vulnerable to poverty and 24.5 percent of that group living on less than $1.25 a day, it is notable that the primary teaching among evangelicals is that prayer is the most important intervention in bringing an end to people's daily struggles for food, school fees and access to quality health care. Interestingly, when evangelical missionaries arrived in Uganda in the early 1980s, their first efforts were to build health clinics, schools and orphanages. Their operations expanded rapidly during the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1990s, and, with the support of the local born-again elite, they are now running huge social development programmes in the country.[7] With these developments, an evangelical subculture has emerged over the years – one that is simultaneously viewed as a solution for the 'missing services' and an inspiration towards achieving free-will individualism. According to Arinaitwe (2014), this approach is now being blamed by some for undermining the sense of 'community'; indeed, the evangelical 'prosperity gospel', which links faith in God to financial success, is a powerful attraction for poor Ugandans.[8] Also, the closer ties that these groups have established with Ugandan government leaders have cemented their influence on the country's development policy.

Recent policy interventions focusing on inequalities

A wide range of programmes have been implemented in the recent past to address inequality. Most of them are geared at advancing social protection objectives. They have been implemented with varying levels of success, consistency and coordination. Nearly ten years ago, the country's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) was hailed as a 'social protection-friendly' and 'equality-promoting' framework. It suggested interventions in health, education, water and sanitation as priority actions for reducing poverty and vulnerability. Later, different forms of transfers were either introduced or strengthened. They include the Pensions Scheme and National Social Security Fund; the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF); the Post-Recovery Development Programme; and the Community HIV/AIDS Initiative.

A number of planning documents articulate priority actions for reducing poverty and vulnerability. Addressing inequality may reasonably be construed to be part of this agenda. This objective is engrained in the country's Constitution under the National Objective and Directive Principles of State Policy that charges the state to endeavour to fulfil the fundamental rights of all Ugandans to social justice and economic development. At the policy level, the social development sector has accordingly developed policies on equal opportunity, gender, elimination of child labour, orphans and vulnerable children, etc. However, most of these policies and programmes are poorly implemented.

Of the efforts targeted to directly deal with inequality, three merit special mention: the ESPP, the Post-Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP) and the Universal Primary Education Programme (UPE). The ESPP is a five-year programme seeking to reduce chronic poverty. Taking it to scale has, however, faced a number of challenges. First, a dominant macro-economic narrative continues to prioritize growth over equity issues. The predominance of this view among the country's planners tends to lead to a 'residualist' view of social protection rather than approach it as key investment in human and social capital assets. This challenge needs to be addressed by strengthening the link of social protection investment to the country's growth and poverty eradication agenda. Second, while social protection is currently housed in the ministry that is responsible for social development (which is a generally marginalized ministry), key related issues are currently handled by other government ministries with weak institutional coordination. It is therefore essential to build the credibility of the ministry responsible for social protection and explore innovative ways in which inter-ministerial collaboration on these matters can be strengthened. Third, there is the added challenge of managing expectations for public service delivery and the problem of politicization of social provision.

The other significant intervention is the PRDP, whose precursor programme was the NUSAF.[9] The PRDP's overall goal is consolidating peace and security and laying the ground for recovery and development in northern Uganda. During the six years of implementation of NUSAF, significant progress was made in enhancing the capacities of communities in northern Uganda, making local governments more accountable to community demands and improving service delivery. In spite of these contributions, poverty, vulnerability and inequality remain. A key reason for this is that the region has only recently emerged from more than two decades of insecurity and political instability. As such, the structure of society has not yet normalized so as to allow the economic and social returns of anti-poverty programmes to be equitably realized. Similarly, social protection interventions have not had much positive impacts as the cash grants given are too small to yield the impacts (Blattman *et al.*, 2013).

Yet another intervention that should have had a significant impact on inequality in the country is that of UPE and subsequently Universal Secondary Education.[10] In 1997, the government of Uganda abolished school fees for primary education, which immediately led to a sky-rocketing of enrolment rates. Gross enrolment rates rose from 77 percent in 1996 to 137 percent in 1997, while net enrolment rose from 57 percent to 85 percent (Essama-Nssah, 2010). Enrolment rates are reported to have remained high over the following decade, with poor children, girls and rural residents benefiting disproportionately from the increase in access.[11] The 2010–2015 national development plan also recognizes the importance of education for sustained economic growth and social transformation. Yet, inequality in education persists. Three key challenges are notable. First, heavy reliance on foreign aid to fund education, raising questions about the ownership and sustainability. Second, there has continued to be a perceived lack of results from the 'investments' in education, which has led to tensions between educational officials and the Ministry of Finance and donors. Third, the Ministry of Education faces capacity problems, both at the central and local levels. The failure to effectively combat problems of pupil and teacher absenteeism and the abuse of funds only aggravates the problem.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article argues that high levels of income inequality have the potential to simultaneously result in poor livelihood outcomes, while at the same time contributing to a reduction in further and more sustained growth. The argument here is twofold. First, inequality is incompatible with sustained economic growth, since it prevents a considerable proportion of the population from effectively participating in the economy. Second, high levels of inequality work against societal and institutional stability, in so doing exacerbating crisis and other negative tendencies.

This article also argues that the income and related inequalities that Uganda exhibits today are a complex mix of structural factors or 'drivers' and economic 'maintainers' – part of an enduring legacy of the unequal power relations that exist in such diverse categories of the population as gender, ethnicity, language, religion, age, cultural groups and disability status. On the other hand, the 'maintainers' and 'aggravating' factors of the inequality are contemporary and dynamic in nature. Indeed, inequalities in Uganda appear to be structural and deeply rooted in the basic set-up of Ugandan society, which includes the way in which assets have historically been distributed and how social relations are mediated. This leads to further exclusion, marginalization and even more pronounced inequality.

Lastly, it is important to note that the persistence of poverty in the country is not a simple reflection of lack of 'sufficient' economic growth. In fact, unequal growth is itself a cause of growing inequality. Responses to inequality are to be found in policy choices that define a more inclusive growth path – choices that are prepared to challenge the notion that growth alone would deal a blow to poverty and inequality.

However, it is also important to highlight the fact that inequality, just like poverty, is a lot more than an income disparities' feature. Because it is the product of structural, institutional, policy and political dimensions many of which are rooted in culture, systems, and socio-political processes, and so on, implying that strategies which combine economic development objectives with active social policies are needed to address the issues that are involved. On one hand, patterns of growth and structural change need to ensure that development outcomes are accessible to all, regardless of income or class status, gender, ethnicity or location. On the other hand, it is vital that social policies are grounded in universal rights and are supportive of structural change, social cohesion and democratic politics, as well as the protection of human and civil rights.

Notes

1 The official poverty line is comparable to 'extreme' or 'food' poverty as defined in most other countries, that is, it is set at the level required to just meet daily caloric requirements and no more, meaning that in reality households at or below the poverty line must sacrifice the minimum level of food intake in order to purchase other items necessary for survival.
2 A Gini coefficient of zero implies that all households have the same level of consumption. A coefficient of one results from a situation where all except one member of the population have no consumption expenditure. Meanwhile, the GE index is a family of income inequality measures which incorporates a sensitivity parameter (α) that varies in the weight given to inequalities in differing parts of the income spectrum.
3 Relative mean of expenditure refers to mean expenditure by social grouping relative to the Uganda average.
4 This high level of inequality in central Uganda may be explained by the fact it is the most urbanized region in Uganda.
5 In some ways the religious factor is closely inter-twined with ethnicity due to the history of spatial geographical location.
6 Captain Frederick Lugard was a representative for the Imperial British East Africa Company. He arrived in Buganda in 1890, eventually controlling over 250,000 sq. miles along the coast of East Africa with the sole objective of advancing Britain's colonial interests. Lugard also helped free thousands of slaves from Arabs in Zanzibar.
7 Evangelical NGOs in Uganda are now bigger and better funded than most secular aid organizations. They account for more than one-fifth of all NGOs in the country. As of 2002, evangelical groups' humanitarian operations in the country were already worth more than $2bn annually – a number which has doubtless grown – and they compete aggressively with secular NGOs to secure US government grants.
8 James Kassaga Arinaitwe is a 2014 New Voices Fellow at the Aspen Institute and is the school partnerships manager at Educate – Uganda. For a more detailed discussion see http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/07/us-evangelicals-uganda-2014724135920268137.html.
9 The Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) was implemented between 2003 and 2009 as a community driven Project aimed at creating a harmonized platform within which communities become active players in decentralized service delivery. It strengthened transparency while at the same time promoting community reconciliation in the region. In spite of the contributions of NUSAF and other development programs, the region still faces widespread poverty, vulnerability and inequality.
10 In 2007, Uganda government also started the first free universal secondary education (USE) policy in Sub-Saharan Africa. The USE policy has increased student enrolment in public secondary schools with girls benefitting more from the intervention. Girls from poor households have been noted to have benefited significantly from USE policy, suggesting a more positive impact of the policy on this category of the population.
11 It is notable however that the quantitative success of the government's UPE initiative put significant stress on the country's educational infrastructure with a consequent toll on the quality of primary schooling.

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Appendix

Table A1. *Number and percent of Ugandans that are poor, insecure non-poor and middle class*

	1992/3	1999/00	2002/03	2005/06	2009/10	2012/13
Millions						
Poor	9.8	7.2	9.8	8.4	7.5	6.7
Non-poor insecure	5.8	9.4	10.1	10.9	13.2	14.7
Middle class	1.8	4.8	5.4	7.8	10.0	12.6
Percent population						
Poor	56.4%	33.8%	38.8%	31.1%	24.5%	19.7%
Non-poor insecure	33.4%	43.9%	39.9%	40.2%	42.9%	43.3%
Middle class	10.2%	22.4%	21.2%	28.7%	32.6%	37.0%

Source: UNHS various years, IHS 1992/3