

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 16:
Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
in Uganda**

By

Sister Josephine Kamau

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AIM: To promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Goal 16 Targets

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime

16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance

16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

16.A Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime

16.B Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

Uganda's Report progress towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies SDG 16+ in Uganda



While SDG 16 is specifically related to peaceful, just and inclusive societies, many targets under other SDGs for instance; those on inequality and gender responsiveness are also crucial for realising SDG 16. Therefore, the term ‘**SDG 16+**’ has been coined to encompass SDG 16 and all peace-related goals and targets across Agenda 2030. The innovating element of the SDGs as compared to the Millennium Development Goals, is its attention to new areas, such as climate change, economic inequality, sustainable consumption, and peace and justice as key pillars for sustainable development. With the recognition that the goals are interconnected, Agenda 2030 is a call on governments and all other partners to secure societies that are peaceful, just, and inclusive.

SDG 16+ provides a framework to strengthen and link up actions on a range of peace-related issues. Still, as recognised by practitioners, ‘it will not drive change on its own. It depends on change-makers and reformers, both within and outside the government, to identify and take action

on key obstacles to peace, justice and inclusion in their own contexts as well as integrating the global agenda into national plans and processes.

By committing itself to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the government of Uganda has embraced the aim of ensuring a peaceful, just and inclusive Uganda. It has developed a national framework and roadmap to guide their implementation and has undertaken its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2020. To complement this VNR and accelerate meaningful SDG (CECORE-GPPAC SDG 16+Policy report - Uganda 2020).

SDG 16+ in Uganda: Progress towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies

With its specific focus on good and inclusive governance, peace and security policies, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 addresses the core of sustainable development issues. Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) in cooperation with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) carried out an independent civil society lead Voluntary National Review (VNR) of Goal 16 and related peace targets – called SDG 16+. This review provides a civil society perspective of Uganda’s progress towards creating a peaceful, just and inclusive society.

In 2016, the government stated that Uganda still has significant room for improvement in pursuit of its Sustainable Development Goals and this still holds true for most of the SDG 16 indicators. Key issues that the government indicated that it would be addressed under SDG 16 in 2016 had not significantly progressed which included; enhancement of accountability and observance of human rights, improvement of democracy and governance processes, eliminating corruption and increasing community participation in the development process from 50% to 70%.

Violent conflicts were rampant in communities. Common cases of violence including land disputes, domestic violence and child abuse whereby in some localities, these were being reported to be happening on a daily basis. Other common expressions of violence identified in the interviews included rape, forced marriages, excessive force by security forces and alcohol abuse. Religious, tribal, and political/electoral violent conflicts were also reported to be common. Also,

poverty, illiteracy and corruption were named as the drivers of violent conflict in their communities. Some conflicts were more pronounced in certain districts than in others. For example; *Kaabong* suffered more from cattle rustling; *Yumbe* experienced rising tensions from the influx of refugees; *Tororo* was more prone to tribal conflicts; trauma and other post-conflict issues were more rampant in *Lira*; *Kasese* largely experienced ethnic-related tensions; and *Mityana* predominantly faced landlord-tenant land tensions.

In the last half a century, the insecurity resulting from cattle rustling between pastoral communities has erupted. This is also true for the *Ik* ethnic minority in the centre of these communities — *Turkana* of Kenya in the East, *Topo* and the *Didinga* of South Sudan in the North, the *Dodoth* and the *Jie* in the South and West as the four groups targeted them to loot, rape, and even kill. Although some *Ik* have managed to get oxen and ox ploughs, they cannot keep them on their land due to these cattle rustling communities, they are stolen in no time. A few children go to school but face huge uncertainties as their families are unable to meet requirements such as tuition fees and scholastic materials.

“We are the most marginalised in the region. We live in the most remote locations. So, when issues related to SDGs are discussed, that discussion does not reach us because of remoteness, insecurity, and poor roads or no road network whatsoever. So, do not continue to leave us behind” – said one of the leaders of the *Ik*, ethnic minority in *Kaabong* district. This parallel similar issue highlighted in a video documentary, made in *Kaabong* in 2019, ‘Left behind by SDGs’, where communities expressed low SDG awareness and involvement.

On a scale of 0-10, the average level of satisfaction that there is peace in Uganda was 6.2. Presence of peace was mainly attributed to the relative national peace Uganda is enjoying as it is not in direct inter-state conflict or fighting internal wars. Those reporting a lower level of satisfaction were mainly concerned with the rampant community-level conflicts in the country and the context-specific conflicts mentioned above.

The 2018 Uganda Human Rights Commission report (UHRC 2019) showed that the number of people in detention awaiting legal proceedings is higher than those who have been convicted and sentenced to imprisonment, raising the issue of prolonged detention on remand. Long pre-trial detention is a violation of the right to a fair hearing (UHRC 2019). Formerly detained interviewees

also reported that prisons are over-crowded. This was mostly attributed to the police arresting suspects before investigations, the unavailability of judicial officers, and general ignorance about procedural issues that need to be undertaken. On a positive note, initiatives by the Ugandan government such as plea bargaining; quick wins' sessions (through arbitration); and diversion of children in conflict with the law from formal justice systems (for example, where the children do not have to be taken to court but instead settle the issue from remand homes), are among other interventions that reduce the prolonged pretrial detention.

A study conducted by UBOS (2018) confirmed that corruption is a central challenge, with 88% of the population considering it a major concern. According to this same study, two out of 11 Ugandans (18%) paid a bribe in the 12 months prior to the survey, with urban areas recording 21%.

As reported by the UN Human Rights Council in 2019, violence against journalists remains a very serious threat, especially for those reporting on political issues and demonstrations, or voicing criticisms against powerful people, government, corruption, human rights violations, and social problems. The report presents cases and decries the plight of human rights defenders – including restrictive legislative environments; alleged cases of torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment and the absence of effective remedies and office break-ins by security operatives.

Although the level of access to information and media freedom has relatively improved, there is still commonplace torture and humiliation of journalists and human rights defenders. One of the national level participants shared that, *'Many cases are showed on TV...but this does not mean that those are the only ones that have been committed, there are many cases we do not get to know'*.

Assessment of legal and legislative frameworks and policies relevant to SDG 16+

Uganda has various legal and legislative frameworks and policies that generally support the implementation of SDG 16+. Uganda's legal framework is largely based on the 1995 constitution, which strongly indicates the need for peace, unity, stability, gender equality, and respect for human rights and freedoms. It includes the popular phrase of 'all power belongs to the people' in chapter I of the constitution.

Other instruments aimed at protecting (or preventing) people from physical violence include the Equal Opportunities Act (2007), which established the equal opportunities commission. This commission aims to promote inclusive development that includes all vulnerable groups. The Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) framework is also aimed at ensuring access to justice. The national gender policy (2007) and the refugee policy also contribute towards protecting people from violence. The police, especially the family and child protection unit and its community policing programme, seek to protect people from violence. Furthermore, Uganda has its National Development Plan III that recognizes peace and security as key pillars for development in the country. SDG interventions are expected to be aligned to this development plan. An ad-hoc platform on peacebuilding and conflict resolution under the Office of the Prime Minister often brings together government and non-government peace actors to address topical issues. These, and a number of other frameworks, policies, and instruments, contribute in one way or another to the realisation of SDG 16+, providing a basis for government and non-government actors to work from.

While there are government organs that would advocate and promote justice for persons, especially the vulnerable and minority groups, the centres for such services are not within close proximity to the people who deserve free services to justice... the arm that would mediate family issues hardly has outreach services to the people who deserve them.

However, the establishment of institutional infrastructures has steadily improved in Uganda. This is evidenced by local government structures, health centres, schools, security services, and justice centres, among others. Bringing services closer to the people is a positive and fundamental step towards effective service delivery.

Key achievements

In reference to Article 33 and 31 of the constitution that emphasize gender equality and affirmative action in favor of marginalized groups, a woman in *Kasese* noted that they *feel that they are being represented and their voices are being heard because of having a strong district woman member of parliament*. Similarly, a woman from the *Ik* community in *Kaabong* expressed her gratitude for the creation of *Ik* County: *'You cannot imagine that we the Ik ethnic minority community are also*

represented in parliament'. Conflict Early Warning and Response Unit (CEWERU), in its work with the NFP–SALW, were also mentioned as key institutions that have played a key role in contributing towards the reduction of cattle rustling in the *Karamoja* region. CEWERU's task is to collect, process and communicate early warning information to appropriate authorities for effective response to emerging or existing pastoral conflicts.

From a champion of violence to a champion of peace: Testimony

Irwata, a former cattle raider who commanded cattle raids, escaped death after witnessing many of his friends being killed. He was both a perpetrator and a victim of violence. He testified that, 'In the whole of Kaabong district, I used to be the number three in command of raiders. I am now the number one commander of peace in my community'. As a result of the government disarmament exercise and peacebuilding skills training by CECORE, Irwata has transformed. He further said 'I realised I was on a path of death. Indeed, most of my friends died during the raids we commanded'. He leads a group of fellow young people in Kalapata sub-county, known as Naporoto peace champions, who preach peace and carry out income-generating activities like goat-rearing and making arts and crafts pieces. Having learnt from his past experience, Irwata's number one mission is to change people's mind-sets as a key strategy to realising peace in the Karamoja region.

Responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels is at the heart of SDG implementation. This is also echoed in programmes and policy frameworks of the Ugandan government. Uganda has fronted its commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind' in all its SDG awareness campaigns. This commitment aimed at ensuring government and other actors would include vulnerable groups (women, youth, elderly, those abled differently, ethnic minorities, geographically disadvantaged, the poverty stricken, and children). Another key commitment has been that of ensuring participation. At strategic levels, including policy frameworks, there is a clear pledge to inclusion and participation. Uganda has also established several specific interventions aimed at ensuring inclusive development. One policy measure is the national gender policy and the establishment of the equal opportunities commission. Specific programmes such as the youth livelihood programme, Uganda women entrepreneurship

programme, and the social protection programme for the elderly attempt to enhance empowerment and inclusive development.

Some of the other key initiatives to promote inclusive development have been affirmative action in education and electoral positions (parliament and local councils), women leadership, and awareness around gender rights. People living with disabilities, the army, women, youth, and workers are also categorized as special interest groups, and are represented in decision-making processes. Significant progress has been realised in this regard, especially in electoral leadership positions (in parliament and local government structures). For example, as a result of affirmative action, there were 124 district women representatives, five youth representatives, and five representatives of people with disabilities in the 10th parliament.

General findings indicate that government and non-government actors undertake efforts to promote responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making. However, many efforts assume that the groups are homogeneous which means that the needs of the most vulnerable often go ignored. The youth and women victims of armed violence in *Kasese*, *Lira*, and *Karamoja* have special needs that are overshadowed within broader youth or women groups.

This points to a central issue when trying to address implicit and explicit power relations: adults can include youth (as passive beneficiaries) and they can mainstream youth issues, but they cannot participate on behalf of the youth. Similarly, men can include and mainstream women issues in their agenda, but they cannot “participate” on behalf of women. The same principle applies across marginalised groups. To ensure ‘responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, those different groups must take an active part in designing policies, frameworks, as well as their implementations; otherwise, Uganda risks the absence of the desired meaningful change on the ground.

Public access to information is a basic necessity for and right of people. Article 41 (1) of the constitution of Uganda on the right of access to information provides for the right of every citizen to access information in possession of the state or any other organ or agency; except where the release of information is likely to prejudice the security or sovereignty of the state. The Access to Information Act (2005) aims to ensure that the government provides the public with timely, accessible, and accurate information.

Conclusion

The realisation of SDG 16+ is key for transforming the lives of people. SDG 16+ is a pre-requisite and central pillar for the realisation of the entire SDG agenda. At the same time progress on SDG 16+ is also an indicator that all other SDGs are being realised. With active and meaningful involvement and participation of stakeholders, as well as coordination and prioritisation of peace and conflict transformation, great strides can be taken towards more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Therefore, the government of Uganda and other actors must enhance their efforts towards peace and conflict transformation in the country.