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Journal of  
**African Studies and Development**

January 2019  
ISSN: 2141-2189  
DOI: 10.5897/JASD  
[www.academicjournals.org](http://www.academicjournals.org)



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**Social protection mechanisms for children living on the streets:  
Perspectives from Uganda**

Robert Kakuru, Archangel Byaruhanga Rukooko and Gervase Tusabe

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Social protection mechanisms for children living on the streets: Perspectives from Uganda**

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Received 14 November, 2018; Accepted 11 December, 2018

**Social protection continues to gain increased attention in Uganda's national development discourse and beyond, because of its ability to mitigate risk and vulnerability perpetuated by poverty. Despite this impetus, less research has been undertaken to expanding social protection to children living on the streets. Yet, Uganda's increase in urbanization has been associated with the high influx of children living on the streets in some major towns, especially Kampala. Therefore, this study sought to examine social protection mechanisms for children living on the streets of Uganda, a case study of Kampala. This qualitative study was conducted using content analysis and in-depth interviews with both key informants and children living on the streets. The study found that in-kind social protection services existed but hardly accessed. In some cases, these services were accessed through third parties. The government outlawed provision of services to the children while on the streets as a deterrent, but counterproductive measure, to minimize their influx into Kampala city. However, there was in-kind social protection support for children withdrawn from the streets, under rehabilitation, characterized by severe government underfunding, donor driven, and charity, not human rights based. The study contends that a change in national investment priorities, to include social protection of children living on the streets, can transform the lives of children living on the streets and their communities.**

**Key words: Social Protection, children living on the streets, poverty, cash grants, in-kind support.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Social protection, also known as social security, is an important component of poverty reduction strategy and effort to reduce vulnerability to economic, social, natural shocks and stresses (Dercon, 2011). It is also a foundation for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development and an important element of the policy responses required for combating poverty, inequality and economic downturns (Schildberg, 2015). Social protection helps to ensure that the benefits of economic

growth reach the poorest and most marginalized; hence, fulfilling internationally accepted right to a decent standard of living (DFID et al., 2009). Social protection is necessary for promoting social justice and equity; providing protection against risk, ensuring and guaranteeing basic acceptable livelihood standards, (Norton et al., 2001). It is also essential in facilitating investment in human capital, promoting social cohesion and social solidarity (social stability), and compensating

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for declining effectiveness of traditional and informal systems for enhancing livelihood security (ibid). However, the global social security gap entailed 50 percent of children living in poverty (Cichon, 2013), albeit, children constituted the largest vulnerable group in most countries, and their social protection remained far less developed than for the elderly everywhere (Kammerman and Gatenio, 2006).

Social protection services can be presented into categories, namely: *Cash Transfers*: direct, regular and predictable money or cash transfers that raise and smooth incomes to reduce poverty and vulnerability (Arnold et al., 2011). Cash transfers are further classified into: Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCTs), where the beneficiaries decide how to spend; and Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs), where the beneficiaries are given certain requirements and conditions, such as enrolling children in school. *In-kind Social Protection*: economic and livelihood asset transfers to households and individuals, facilitating income generation such as food transfers, (Holmes and Nicola, 2013). *Public Works Programmes*: these provide jobs on infrastructure projects for cash or food (Norton et al., 2001), are politically popular albeit arguably inefficient (ibid).

Social protection mechanisms can exist in a variety of forms, namely; *Protective* providing relief from deprivation, like social assistance programmes for the chronically poor, *Preventive*, averting deprivation and alleviate poverty. They include social insurance for economically vulnerable groups. First, *Promotive*: enhancing real incomes and capabilities and provide springboards and opportunity ladders for children living on the streets to get out of poverty. Next, *Transformative*: addressing concerns of social equity and exclusion through social empowerment. Lastly, *Generative*: emphasising that social protection measures contribute to more livelihood security (Lwanga-Ntale et al., 2008; Kabeer, 2008; Ganju et al., 2009).

Therefore, social protection should be more focused mostly on vulnerable children, especially those living on the streets.<sup>1</sup> This is because, children constitute the largest vulnerable group in most countries yet social protection for these children remains far less developed than for the elderly everywhere (Kammerman and Gatenio, 2006). Similarly, investing in children is relevant in economic terms, given that the return on investment is usually high considering the well-being of both individuals and society as a whole (Roetten and Sabates-Wheeler, 2011, in, Sanfilippo et al., 2012).

Though the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC), Situation Analysis Report by Kalibara and Lynne (2010),

(2010), does not particularly capture the plight of street children in Uganda, it estimates the level of vulnerability among children in Uganda at 96 percent. The African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN, 2013), established that in the 1993, Uganda had an estimated 4117 children living on the streets. By 2013, this number was estimated to be 10,000 children a 70% increase, with 16 new children coming to the Kampala streets every day (Kiyaga, 2013; Nangozi, 2013). With the increasing urbanization rate of Uganda standing at 12.7%, street children have been on an increase in all major towns of Uganda including Kampala city (Adikini, 2010).

In Uganda, social protection is both formal and informal. *Informal Social Protection*, also known as traditional social protection systems depend on collectivism within the society. In collectivism, an individual is obliged to contribute to the community, not only because it is expected of him or her, but also because the 'community is him or her' (Ikuenobe, 2006; Bukuluki and Mubiru, 2014). Traditional social protection include; kinship, extended family and mutual support groups (Bukuluki and Mubiru, 2014). However, traditional systems are declining and weakening, due to factors like rural-urban migration, diseases, and the interface and adoption of the western lifestyle (Ouma, 1995; Kyaddondo and Mugisha, 2014; Lwanga-Ntale et al., 2008).

*Formal Social Protection* is defined as actions taken by the public and private sectors to have legal and policy backing for poor and vulnerable against risk and vulnerability by the state. The formal social protection system in Uganda comprised two pillars namely; social security and social care and support services, (Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (MoGLSD), 2015a). The Uganda Social Protection Platform (USPP) (2011), categorized social security as direct income support,<sup>2</sup> social insurance,<sup>3</sup> and social care and support services.<sup>4</sup> It was noted that, none of the above pillars was targeting children living on the streets. In a further stratification. DFID (2015), and MoGLSD (2015b), classified formal social protection programmes in Uganda to include; Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) with two facets; (i) The Senior Citizens Grant (SCG),<sup>5</sup> and (ii) The Vulnerable Families Grant (VFG). The VFG closed at the end of 2015, due to targeting and significant inclusion errors. The researchers were not aware of, and did not find any studies that assessed social protection mechanisms for children living on the streets in Uganda, hence a justification for this study.

<sup>1</sup> This is any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street has become her or his habitual abode and/or sources of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by adults, (Inter-NGO Programme on Children living and Working in the Street and Youth, (1985, in Ennew, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> A non-contributory transfer to extremely vulnerable individuals and households without any form of income security.

<sup>3</sup> A contributory system to mitigate livelihood risks and shocks such as retirement, loss of employment, work related disability and ill health.

<sup>4</sup> Concerned with provision of care, support, empowerment and protection to vulnerable persons who are unable to fully care for themselves.

<sup>5</sup> A cash transfer delivery component of Expanding Social Protection in Districts targeting older persons with 60 years and above

## ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The researchers were motivated and guided by the Human Rights Based Approach to programming (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2006), and (OHCHR, 2012), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) National Social Protection Floor, as explained below.

### The human rights based approach

There is no one or correct definition of a human rights-based approach (HRBA) (Australian Council for International Development (ACID), (2010). It was noted that the HRBA concept has been patchily and variedly defined by different scholars and organizations. Fundamentally, a human rights-based approach is that development activities aim to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights codified in the international human rights legal framework<sup>6</sup> (ACID, 2010). The Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2006), defined a HRBA as a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. The rights-based approach is an empowering approach that stems from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and suggests that citizens have justifiable entitlement. This is with human dignity and worth, to basic services—for example, food, education, health, and employment, and justifiable duties to the community—and nation-states have an obligation to meet those entitlements, and citizens have obligation to meet duties (Ife, 2001 in Pawar, 2012).

### The social protection floor initiative

In 2012, at its 101<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted Recommendation 202 (R202) on national Social Protection Floors (SPF) (European Commission, 2015). The ILO (2012) described the SPF as a nationally defined set of basic social security guarantees which secure protection aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion' throughout the life cycle. The SPF is explicitly linked to Articles 22 and 25 of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Articles 9, 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), in order to exclude any contradiction between the Recommendation and the older human rights texts (Schildberg, 2015). The SPF recasts the Social Security

Convention of 1952<sup>7</sup> to address the needs of the highly informal economies of the developing world (European Commission, 2015).

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

### Case study design

A research design is a grand plan of approach to a research topic (Greener, 2008), a plan, structure, and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problems (Kerlinger 1986 in, Ranjit, 2011). A single case study research design was used. A case study is 'a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aim at describing and explaining the phenomenon of interest' (Bromley, 1990). Yin (1984), in Schel (1992), defined a case study as 'an empirical inquiry which: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context: when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident and where multiple sources of evidence are used. A single case study research design was used, because it blended well with an inductive research approach, used in this study. The use of inductive process in a single case study has the advantage of generating new hypotheses, either particular to that individual case or potentially generalisable to a broader population (Bennett and Elman, 2010).

### Area of study

The study was conducted in Kampala city, specifically, Central Division. Kampala was purposively selected, based on the postulate by Adikini (2010), and ANPPCAN Uganda Chapter (2013) in Human Rights Watch (2014), that half of the total children living on the streets in Uganda were staying in Kampala. ANPPCAN further argued that 16 new children were joining the streets of Kampala streets every day. The Central Division, specifically Kisenyi was also purposively selected because of the high population of children living on the streets compared to other Divisions, as Adikini said: "*some areas have high numbers of street children than other areas and differences also evident across gender for instance Kisenyi 2 had the highest number of street children*" (Adikini, 2010.205).

### Respondents

This study, involved 33 respondents, 18 were children living on the streets, cited as CLS1-18, while 15 were key informants. The children were aged between 10 to 17 years.<sup>8</sup> The Key Informants included: government officials from the Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development, the Expanding Social Protection Secretariat, and the Equal Opportunities Commission cited as KIGov1-4, Kampala Capital City Authority, cited as KIKcc1, Civil Society Organizations, cited as KICso1-7, UNICEF, cited as (KIUni1) and the community cited as KICom1-2 (Table 1).

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of results, the research tools were translated from English to Luganda. The tools were peer reviewed and appraised by the academic supervisor(s).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Uganda was yet to ratify this convention

<sup>8</sup> Empowered minors

<sup>9</sup> The entire study and particularly the research tools were also reviewed and approved by Gulu University Research Ethics Committee and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology respectively; to minimize harm to the research participants.

<sup>6</sup>The international human rights legal framework refers to the binding United Nations human rights treaties.



**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents.

<b>Nature of Respondents/Institution</b>	<b>Number</b>
Central Government (Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development (MoGLSD), Expanding Social Protection Secretariat (ESP), Equal Opportunities Commission)	4
Kampala Capital City Authority	1
United Nations Children Fund	1
Civil Society Organizations	7
Community	2
Children living on the streets	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

Source: Self constructed by the researcher (2018).

A Gate Keeper was identified in the field to support the identification and sampling of children due to their mobility.

### Sampling

It was systematically conducted using non-random methods that included: (i) *Critical Case Sampling* was used to sample respondents from MoGLSD and ESP programme. (ii) *Deviant Case Sampling*, method was used to study organizations (the outliers), that were perceived to deviate from the standards of social protection for CLS and the application of the human rights based approach. (iii) *Criterion Sampling*, was used to select respondents (children) with gender characteristic. In criterion sampling, the researcher selects participants on the basis of identified characteristics or traits that will provide needed information (McMillan, 2016). (iv) *Maximum Variation/Heterogeneous*, was used to select respondents that provided a diverse range of social protection services for CLS. (v) *Snowball Sampling*, was used to select CLS, since they were homeless and it was hard to locate them.

### Ethics

The study was also guided by the National Guidelines for Research involving Humans as Research Participants (July 2014), by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). For example, informed and written consent and assent was obtained from all the respondents (children living on the streets) before interviews.

A central concern for rigor in qualitative research is evidentiary the adequacy, sufficient time in the field and extensiveness of data (Erickson, 1986 in Morrow and Smith, 1995). The data consisted of 33 interviews and secondary data. Each interview took an average of 40 minutes, a total of about 1320 minutes. Some of these interviews were audio and video recorded, and later transcribed. The findings were presented and discussed in the sections below.

### Social protection mechanisms

This section drew responses from the children living on the streets. These respondents said that there were in-kind social protection services like universal primary education, basic medical care, from government institutions. However, these services were inaccessible, due to structural constraints. For example, children reported that; *“there are free medical services provided by KCCA, but after cleaning ourselves and borrowing good clothes from our colleagues who have”* (CLS6). Another child said that; *“basic health services*

*are available and free of charge for the public, but for us street children, we are chased away because we are dirty. We find solutions by ourselves. For example, we have ‘Uncles’ and ‘Aunties’ who take care of us. They get these drugs free of charge from the Health Centre, and sell them to us in-kind, for example, we work for them for a week free of charge”* (CLS12). A further probe revealed the *Uncles* and *Aunties* are Masters, hosts and hostesses for these children. Some of these Masters aid the transporting and trafficking of these children to the city for commercial purposes like begging on the streets, and cheap labor, above all, these Masters control the proceeds from begging and cheap labor.

Another child reechoed this view, saying that; *“we only access medical services through third parties (uncles and aunties) in fear of being arrested. The third parties pick the drugs free of charge from the health facilities. But they give them to us at a cost, for example, in-kind labor for about a week or even more depending on the nature of treatment; but majorly, many times, we do not report our illnesses”* (CLS6). Another child said that; *“when we fall sick, some community members (good samaritans) help us to get health services and sometimes food.”* (CLS12). However, this respondent was also lucid enough to add that the good Samaritans also expected *something* like cheap labor, etcetera. Another respondent said that; *“last week I went to Naguru Hospital for treatment of a wound on my leg, which you can even see right now. The services were free of charge, but when they realized I am a street child, they wanted to forcefully take me to Naguru Teenage Home, immediately, I escaped and ran away.”* (CLS4).

From the above annotations, it was evident that children living on the streets did not have social protection in the form of cash grants. These children also faced challenges like discrimination and stigmatization-from public institutions and communities-in accessing the existing, yet insufficient government’s in-kind social protection services. Similarly, the study revealed that there was hardly any formal social protection of children who were still on the streets as a deterrent measure to reduce the influx of many new children joining the streets. In this study, it was suggested that the government of Uganda should strike a delicate balance between a total ban of services for children who were still on the streets, and the soaring numbers of children joining the streets, through carefully defined social protection mechanisms, to avert vulnerability and restore the dignity of the children living on the streets. Through such interventions, the government shall be building the required confidence and trust for the children to willingly accept living the streets. The practice of obstructing social protection and other services to children who were still on the streets, fell short of international human rights standards, like non-discrimination. The researchers did not come across any scientific study that had been conducted to examine the relationship between discontinuation of services and the influx of children living on the streets, and subsequently a drop in the total number of children living on the

streets. Stated differently, the number of children living on the streets was increasing, albeit government intervention like, forceful eviction, and stopping any form of help to these children.

From an emic perspective, the children living on the streets were asked about the kind of social protection services they received from the state and non-state actors. All the children replied that they never received any form of social protection from government and other service providers, while on the streets; they lived and survived on their own. One child stated that:

*“while on the streets, we do not receive any social protection services, not even any other single service. If one is lucky to be taken off the streets by some organizations that is when such a person is provided with; education, accommodation, clothing, food, and other services. The only ‘protection’ we get from government institutions like Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) is harassment to live the streets without alternative support,”* (CLS14). Another child added that; *“there is nothing like social protection for children on the streets, whether cash or material, because, I tried to go to Nakivubo Blue Primary School, when I joined the streets. This is a government school, but they refused to admit me, because I did not go with a parent. They asked me to go back with a parent, whereas I do not have any, therefore, I never went back”* (CLS6).

It was established that the children frequently feared accessing all social services, especially health services, because they were afraid of being arrested by both KCCA Enforcement team, and Uganda Police, to be taken to Kampiringisa,<sup>10</sup> and other rehabilitation centres. On a further probe, why they feared being taken to rehabilitation centres, where they could access social protection services, one child said; *“some of our colleagues were arrested and taken to Kampiringisa, but we have never seen them since their time of arrest. We do not know whether they are still alive,”* (CLS4). Another child said: *“we are regarded as thieves, even when we are not, because not every street child is a thief. We are regarded as vagabonds and drug addicts but not all street children are vagabonds and drug addicts, although some of them are. We are not sure if we can be provided with any social protection service, since we are already condemned by the public,”* (CLS5). Another child added that; *“in our local urban communities, there are bad people/criminals and good people. When the police comes to arrest, they only arrest criminals living out the good ones. However, for us, we are all called street children, (which has become a taboo), and branded as criminals, even when some of us are not. When police comes, they want to arrest all of us,”* (CLS13).

The NGOs, donors and all other philanthropists were also prohibited from providing service to children living on the streets, but only to those withdrawn from the streets. The absence of social protection services from the NGOs and donors was confirmed by a key informant from UNICEF who argued that:

*“UNICEF is funding and supporting programmes like; (i) advocacy, (ii) capacity building to strengthen national institutional capacity (iii) Coordination framework of all donors (iv) Support to an Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for social protection, but not focusing on rural areas. Our programmes in Uganda do not target children living on the streets in urban areas, (KUni1). Such programmes could not address the social protection rights of children living on the streets.*

<sup>10</sup> Overtime, Kampiringisa Rehabilitation Centre in Mpigi District was the only known rehabilitation centre to these children. Therefore, for these children, any child withdrawn from the streets was taken to Kampiringisa. Hence, Kampiringisa was synonymous with Rehabilitation Centres. The centre has traditionally been used to rehabilitate all children in conflict with the law, and the children withdrawn from the streets. However, due to demand by CSOs to separate children in conflict with the law, and children withdrawn from the streets, the MoGLSD in partnership with Uganda Women Efforts to Save Orphans (UWESO) established a rehabilitation centre for children living on the streets in Masulita, Wakiso District.

Therefore, the intervention also fell short of the set out international human rights principles like, non-discrimination, and progressive realization of social and economic rights.

No specific social protection programme targeting these children as a preventive measure was not found, despite their unique vulnerability. However, it was established that some organizations like Save Street Children Uganda (SASCU) and Dwelling Places were withdrawing and rehabilitating these children from the streets. During rehabilitation, the children were provided with services like, education, psychosocial support, health services, food, shelter and skilling services for children above 14 years.

In support of the above, a key informant said that; *“despite the limited resources, we pick these children from the streets and provide them with basic children’s needs like food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education, and rehabilitation services”* (KICso2). Other organisations were rescuing, children from the streets, rehabilitating and reintegrating them in their respective communities. In support of this, a child said; *“some organizations forcefully pick children from the streets, take them to Masulita Children’s Centre, from Masulita, they are taken to Kobulin Centre in Napak District, where they are reintegrated into their communities, re-enrolled into schools and supported various basic needs like clothes and beddings. For some children, houses are constructed for parents,”* (CLS1).

To understand the preference for cash or in-kind social protection, the children living on the streets were asked to list the social protection services that they would like to be provided for by government or NGOs, to improve their living conditions and live the streets. The commonly mentioned services were ranked as; (i) food, (ii) housing/ Shelter/accommodation, (iii) clothes, (iv) education-going back to school, (v) health services/medication (vi) financial grants to facilitate their welfare and start some small business, (vii) security, (viii) training in practical skills for access to employment, and (ix) legal support and access to justice for lost property. Legal support was particularly mentioned by one child who wanted to regain property that he inherited from the parents, who had passed on, but the property was squandered by relatives mainly uncles. Although cash grants were mentioned by the children, they were not emphatic on them. It was argued that Conditional Social Protection Support was ideal for children living on the streets, not forceful eviction of these children from the streets.

To triangulate the above responses, the children were further asked whether they would accept to live the streets, if the above services were sustainably provided. All the children’s responses were affirmative, except one child who unequivocally said; *“Even if you give me one million Uganda shillings Cash, I cannot live streets. The street is my source of livelihood now”* (CLS3). Literary, this child did not see himself getting off the streets for any reason, even if social protection services were conditioned.

All key informants supported social protection through in-kind support, though no mention of conditionality. A key informant said; *“the children living on the streets need food, clothing, shelter, education, and access to health and other services. Their problem(s) will be solved, if these services are well-coordinated, to minimize resource leakage and return to the streets”* (KICso2). Another key informant said; *“the children living on the streets do not need cash based social protection, but access to quality social services,”* (KIKcc1). Correspondingly, another key informant said; *“the major problem of street children is not lack of money, but rather lack of services, system failure or breakdown, that undermine access to basic needs or human rights”* (KICso7).

Thus, given the above responses, it was inductively established that there was a strong preference for in-kind social protection support to children living on the streets. This was mainly due to the high fiduciary risk associated with cash based social protection interventions. However, it was recommended that in-kind social protection services should at all times espouse human rights principles and standards like participation and nondiscrimination.

### Institutional mechanisms

In-depth interviews with key informants revealed that UNICEF and the MoGLSD played critical roles regarding protection of children, though with no focus on social protection for children living on the streets. For example, in March 2016, the Children's Act Cap 59 was amended to create a National Children's Authority (NCA), and in effect, disbanded the National Children's Council, all led by MoGLSD and UNICEF and other likeminded organizations. However, the effectiveness of government institutions supporting children living on the streets continued to be severely undermined by limited funding and sector budget cuts (MoGLSD, 2011).

Childcare institutions also had challenges chief among them being lack of capacity to meet the rights of children, (Williamson and Greenberg, 2010, Walakira et al., 2015, and Walakira, et al., 2016). Some Civil Society Organizations had performance gaps as mentioned by a key informant: *"There is inadequate institution capacity to manage the social protection for children, though there is institutional coordination framework for policy and research like the establishment of Africhild Centre to coordinate research and influence policy,"* (KICso6). Another key informant added that; *"Social work capacity building is missing in child protection interventions and must be strengthened, for sustainable social protection for children living on the streets,"* (KICso4). Whereas another key informant argued that; *"There are CSOs which are creating employment opportunities for themselves, but not providing the required social protection and other forms of protection or social support to these children on the streets, although some organizations are really good and doing a commendable job,"* (KICso5).

From the above, it was evident that national professionalization and certification of social workers was critical. There was an already existing Association of Social Work and Social Administration Professionals. However, as part of professionalizing social protection, the Government of Uganda should establish an Institute of Certified Public Social Work and Protection Professionals in Uganda, and its mandate should be to; (i) regulate and maintain the standard of social protection in Uganda, (ii) regulate the conduct of Social Protection Professionals in Uganda.

During interviews, the key informants especially, KIGov1, KICso7, and KICso3, recognized the critical role played by the Uganda Social Protection Platform (USPP).<sup>11</sup> The platform was instrumental in advancing the Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) programme, but with less focus on advocacy for social protection of children living on the streets. The USPP advocacy was however undermined by a weak social protection legal regime in Uganda. This argument was armor-plated by Proudlock (2011), that the judicially enforceable constitutional right to social assistance ... in a national law provides the necessary legal foundation for the growth in take-up and expansion reform.

### Social protection financing mechanisms

National social protection funding remained staggeringly low, for all categories of vulnerable people (Cammack and Twinamatsiko, 2013), and nonexistent at all for children living on the streets. Though Uganda's economy was projected to grow, this growth was not reflected in expanding social protection (ibid). A key informant said that; *"Uganda's economy has been growing with a widening tax base. I hope that the discovery of oil will lead to substantial gains in growth. All these developments should lead to proportionate social protection interventions for the very poor like*

*children living on the streets. Then donors can where necessary complement government interventions,"* (KICso7). It was argued that as Uganda's economic growth should lead to increase national social protection funding.

The researchers further established that the Government of Uganda had capacity to establish a robust social protection for children living on the streets (Cammack and Twinamatsiko, 2013), as also argued by a key informant; *"No government can fail to care of its people, at least with basic services or needs. Expanding social protection to children living on the streets requires resources that can really be found by the government of Uganda. It's a question of priority,"* (KICso5). However, Uganda faced a challenge of low funding, in all the sectors of the economy. The MoGLSD, the lead agency for social protection, was the most affected in terms of national budget cuts. Additionally, within the Expanding Social Protection Programme (ESP), the Government of Uganda was yet to fully honour her financing obligation and commitment.<sup>12</sup> In an interview with a key informant, it was evident that;

*"the biggest challenge is getting adequate internal funding for social protection for children living on the streets. The MoGLSD, remains severely underfunded. The Community Development Officers in Kampala Capital City Authority and District Local Governments do not have equipment, and are underfunded to run child centred programmes,"* (KIUni1).

Another key informant, who stated that, further emphasized the inadequate funding for social protection programmes: *"The government funding for social protection is exceptionally low. Even government's social protection funding for senior citizens is almost non-existent. Government considers children's social protection at a broad level, using a comprehensive protection approach. For example, Universal Primary Education (UPE) and access to basic health care services are considered as being part of in-kind social protection. Nonetheless, government has to identify the existing service delivery gaps, for example, some children are dropping out of universal primary education schools to end up on the streets. This implies that other human rights have to be dealt with holistically, to transform the lives of these children,"* (KIGov1).

It must also be recalled that the government's broad protection strategy mainly targeted children in defined households. Therefore, it was inferred that, government's consideration of social protection for children living on the streets as part of the broader protection strategy, was a blind strategy, and discriminated children living on the streets. It undermined the extenuation of both salient and underlying vulnerabilities that the children living on the streets particularly faced, like; lack of food, education, health services, decent housing and others, with far reaching impact, which could be addressed through social protection.

Although Uganda needs donor funding, social protection programmes for children, living on the streets should remain government-led. This was because donor funded social protection programmes raised questions of ownership, legitimacy and sustainability both at local, national and international levels, (Cammack and Twinamatsiko, 2013). A key informant who argued that reaffirmed such views; *"the Government and Civil Society Organizations can undertake social protection pilot with donor funding. But for sustainability, there must clear systems and processes for internal funding of social protection programmes,"* (KIUni1). In affirmation of this view, a key informant from the ESP Secretariat said that; *"the Expanding Social Protection programme was facing funding challenge since the GoU was yet to honor all her obligations and financing commitments,"* (KIGov1). Thus, it was argued that the major problem was prioritization not funding since, national resources can by no means be enough.

<sup>11</sup> A loose coalition of about 67 CSOs and Development Partners at the time of the study.

<sup>12</sup> Donors led by Department for International Development (DFID) and IrishAid were threatening to withdraw their support, by the time of this study.

### Corruption in financing social protection

While concluding an interview with a key informant from a government institution, one respondent sternly said; *"I hope that, you will not live out corruption in your analysis of social protection for children living on the streets. Corruption is a serious problem that has greatly undermined many services in this country. If all the resources at the disposal of both NGOs, and Government were used efficiently and effectively to serve these children, I am certain that the impact would be very significant, beyond the current status of these children"* (KIGov1).

These remarks prompted the researchers to probe deeper into the vice of corruption and its potential and real threats to the expansion of social protection to children living on the streets. Indeed, during interviews, some respondents said that corruption was a very big hitch to expanding social protection to children living on the streets like other services. It was noted that that corruption increases the cost of service delivery, diminishes the available resources, and widens income inequalities. It as well, creates a "state of insufficiency" to implement a comprehensive social protection for children living on the streets. A key informant said: *"Corruption continues to undermine the gains being made in the social protection sector and social work in both government and NGOs. There are many programmes, which could potentially create lasting impact on children living on streets through in-kind support, but the impact remains minimal or none at all in some areas,"* (KIGov4). Another key informant said that: *"most of the in-kind support to children living on the streets by CSOs do not present a value for money,"* (KICom2).

Children living on the streets, though generically, not in the context of social protection also cited corruption. For example, one child living on the street said that: *"we bribe the police and Kampala Capital City Authority Enforcement Officers not to arrest us. There, we are sure of our safety as we go to "Kuwenja" (CLS11). A further probe revealed that Kuwenja is a street concept, literally; 'denoting fighting to get a livelihood by all means like; collecting and selling metal and plastic scrap, begging, many forms of casual work like selling various items assigned by shop owners, and even stealing sometimes among others. The prevalence of corruption was also supported by another child who said that; "the government has not helped us at all, and many of the government officers in this area are corrupt. We pay for all our services, including, paying for free health services, paying police officers and private security 'Askaris' (guards) to protect us at night. We may also be required to pay in order to access the social protection support that you are talking about (CLS15).*

Therefore, efforts to expand social protection to children living on the streets should be intertwined with measures to mitigate corruption, enhance economic efficiency and value for investment, through transparency, accountability and participation to create sustainable impact. Available secondary data also supported this view. For example, in a News Blog by Anadolu Agency (2016), the problem of corruption in Uganda was emphasized by Lokodo that: *"Uganda continues to face intolerably high levels of corruption both within the public and private sector",* (Hon. Simon Lokodo, Minister for Ethics and Integrity, in Anadolu Agency, 2016). Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU) (2014), and Musisi (2016), who argued that large proportion of public funds remained unaccounted for in Many Ministries and Agencies, contrary to financial regulations, which required all the expenditure to be accounted for, supported this.

### Social protection inadequacy

It was established that the existing social protection interventions fell short of internationally recognized social protection practices for children living on the streets. The existing in-kind social protection

mechanisms for children withdrawn from the streets were majorly charity-based, NGO run, and fell short of the human rights based approach. For example, children were being forcefully<sup>13</sup> rescued from the streets to qualify for such in-kind social protection services, which ignored the free will of children, a core principle of children's rights based programming. It is the researchers' conviction that such a practice of forceful rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration of these children was potentially productive in short run; but counterproductive in a medium and long terms if there was no deliberate effort to consistently target these children through social protection service delivery within their communities of reintegration; since some of the children may opt to return to the streets with more new recruits.

The findings of the study suggested that social protection mechanisms for children living on the streets<sup>14</sup> in Uganda were *preventive* in nature seeking to avert deprivation. However, this social protection was characterized by meagre state funding,<sup>15</sup> incoherent, and less coordinated institutional frameworks. It was argued that such interventions could not empower and transmute the lives of these children, hence, creating, encouraging, and sustaining vulnerabilities. This can potentially force these children back to the streets.

## DISCUSSION

The study findings were in contrast with Rema and Karlan (2016), who established that, most economists favored cash based social protection programs, since the beneficiaries maximized utility. Similarly, the findings of the study were comparatively in contrast with Kakuru and Cyuzuzo (2018), whose study on refugees-established that refugees in Uganda preferred cash grants compared to food vouchers or other forms of in-kind social protection, since cash grants empowered them to undertake various investments, with a multiplier effect. Save the Children UK, (2005), in Kamerman and Gatenio, (2006), was also relevant to our study, having established that cash transfers were generally preferred over commodity transfers because there is considerable skepticism about the ability of in-kind programs to rectify poor living situations.

Ressler and Gillespie (2008) established that cash as an alternative to in-kind assistance, is increasingly being used as a social protection method in situations of acute poverty, hunger and vulnerability. Devereux (2006), in, Ressler, and Gillespie (2008), stated, "there is convincing evidence that cash transfers have significant positive impacts on the lives and livelihoods of the poor." However, Devereux (2006), in Ressler and Gillespie (2008), disclaimed that while cash transfers may contribute to the well-being of the household, the impact of cash on local markets, gender relations and *social*

<sup>13</sup> For details, refer to the letter dated May, 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018, by Hon. John Byabagambi, Minister for Karamoja Affairs directing the Inspector General of Police to resume operations to forcefully repatriate children living on streets in Kampala to Karamoja sub-region.

<sup>14</sup> The children withdrawn from the streets only, since those still on the streets were not entitled to any form of protection.

<sup>15</sup> With no national budget for cash grants.

*networks* (emphasis added) of the household was not fully understood, and therefore the total and long-term well-being of the household could be in question.

However, findings from this study were in agreement with Hoddinott et al. (2014), who compared cash and food transfers in Niger and established that the food transfer program had a larger impact on food consumption and diet variety than cash. Equally, Hidrobo et al., (2014), compared cash, food vouchers and a control group in Ecuador and found that all three types of programs improved per capita food consumption. However, Temin (2008), in European Commission (2015), argued that 'the integration of services and transfers is a key aspect of the social protection policies in Chile, Brazil and South Africa. The experiences of these countries demonstrate the importance of an integrated national plan that use finances, and resources for the poorest and most vulnerable.'

The five principles by Currie and Gahvari (2008), in Rema and Karlan (2016), largely explain why the Government of Uganda should consider in-kind social protection support to children living on the streets. These views include; (i) *Paternalism*: This argument followed that an in-kind subsidy could reduce the children's risk of misuse of the grants like spending on items like drugs and alcohol. However, it was also argued that if the in-kind subsidy were infra marginal—easy to resell—then in-kind subsidies would not alter the child's ability to resell the item. (ii) *Popularity*: As argued by Epple and Romano (2008), in Rema and Karlan (2016), in-kind support was more appealing, and affluent companies were also willing support this mechanism as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). However, the researcher observed that using CSR as a mechanism for social protection to children living on the streets, required a careful approach, since it embodied a charity-based postulate, and contradicted the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA).

From the above views therefore, it was concluded that both cash and in-kind social protection had their strengths and flaws. The choice of the mechanism of social protection to children living on the streets should be determined by the context and existing conditions. The choice must also espouse justice, and human rights principles, such as non-discrimination, rule of law, transparency and accountability, participation and empowerment of children and many more.

### **Social protection financing mechanisms**

The findings from this study were in agreement with Devereux et al (2011), who argued that many donor-led social protection projects rarely are scaled up as national social protection programmes.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the decision

<sup>16</sup> The DFID and IrishAid SAGE programme in Uganda was a live example. The Government of Uganda was yet to honor her commitment, subsequently, donors were threatening to withdraw support.

to introduce a social protection programme for children living on the streets should emerge from domestic policy discourses and must reflect indigenous political agendas and priorities, complemented by donors, (ibid). Basing on Devereux et al (2011), and Cammack and Twinamatsiko (2013), it was established that the failure by the GoU to honor the Expanding Social Protection financing obligation was related to the national ownership, and legitimacy of the programme. However, the suggestion made by Mokbul-Morshed (2013), that Uganda, like other low-income countries needed assistance in terms of financing from international donors for social protection, were very pertinent valid for this study. However, it was argued that this assistance should be limited to the exigencies of transitional period.

In a study titled *The Concrete Particulars of the everyday Realities of Street Children*, Grundling and Grundling (2005), established that, in Namibia, street children's numbers were increasing because of lack of sufficient resources, such as funding, and trained staff, as well as thorough planning and government policies. Therefore, the findings of our study, provided an aperture, for discussing social protection financing, given that the Government of Uganda grossly underfunded social protection. Russell et al (2005), in a study titled *Uganda's Response to Street Children: Investigating the Validity and Impact of the Kamparingisa National Rehabilitation Centre (KNRC) in Working with Street Children in Uganda*, reaffirmed the lack of political will and funding to expand social protection to children living on the streets. They argued that; "issues related to street children received too little attention and were too low a priority in the Government" (Russell et al., 2005. 20).

Generally, the findings of this study were partly in contrast with the studies conducted in South Africa by Barberton (2006), and Budlender and Proudlock (2011). In these studies, the South African government budget allocations for the social protection services for children living on the streets in the Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005) were insufficient, whereas for Uganda, it was very deficient, but only provided for rescue of children from the streets. Unlike South Africa, Uganda had no law to support such financing. Therefore, our findings supported UNICEF (2004) in Skhosana, et al. (2014), that social protection<sup>17</sup> for children living on the streets required sufficient resources allocation, and enhanced internal capacity.

While advancing the above views, the researchers were aware of the argument by Cammack and Twinamatsiko (2013), that the lower the income of a country, the more it is reliant on donor support for social protection. However, there was equally consternated by an immediate contradiction when Cammack and Twinamatsiko (2013), added that the Government of Uganda had the capacity to implement social protection

<sup>17</sup> Defined as public and private interventions to address risks and vulnerabilities that expose individuals to income

with just slight adjustment and prioritization in national budget—necessitating, just over 2% of government expenditures, or 3.76% of recurrent expenditures. It was noted that most findings from this study were in agreement with, Cammack and Twinamatsiko's views that financing social protection, necessitated a strong government leadership, commitment and effective coordination of initiatives in Uganda's social protection framework, rather than hurried donor funding. Save the Children Sweden's (2011), suggestion that social protection for children living on the streets should be regarded as one element in a broad strategy aimed at ensuring the protection of children, supported the findings of this study.

### **Institutional mechanisms**

The European Commission (2015), raised a very relevant and convincing argument, that; consolidation of social protection delivery mechanisms within a single institution promotes cost-effectiveness, value-for-money, and minimizes the risk of programme fragmentation. According to Walakira, et al. (2015), the MoGLSD continued to grapple with the challenges of: the huge growth in number of poorly functioning CRF, poor quality of care provided including the misuse of Child Care Institutions (CCI) as a commercial enterprise, with children being 'recruited' from poor families. The researchers however also noted that the RCF were also often denoted as orphanages in both public and professional discourse, even though this was a misnomer since a small proportion of the children living on the streets were orphans (ibid).

The findings of this study were in agreement with, the Uganda Social Protection Platform (USPP) (2011), that, most of the direct actions to help street children were being undertaken by NGOs and religious organizations. Similarly, McCord (2013), cited in European Commission (2015), emphasized that International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs) were highly influential in mobilizing resource flows in favour of social policy, both internationally and within donor countries. Loffel (2008), also argued that South Africa's protective service delivery to street children remained largely the responsibility of NGOs, which were funded by volunteers. Likewise, Pitzl (2006), and the Republic of South Africa (2010), established that NGOs played a significant role in programmes for street children, in many cases providing social welfare services that local and national governments could not afford supported our findings.

### **Conclusion**

The major strength of this article was the provision of rich qualitative analysis of the existing mechanisms for social

protection of children living on the streets of Kampala in Uganda; to provide evidential backup to existing theories, and normative human rights frameworks, and provided the impetus for expanding social protection to include these children. The researchers established that in-kind social protection mechanisms, like education and health services existed, albeit hardly accessed by children living on the streets. However, the children that were withdrawn from the streets enjoyed in-kind social protection services like; education, skilling, health care, housing, food, rehabilitation and many others. As a preventive measure, there were no services, including social protection targeting children living on the streets, except rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration. The GoU also had the capacity to establish a National Social Protection Fund for children living on the streets. Therefore, the key question to ponder is how to ensure consistent and sustainable social protection, for children living on the streets in the short, medium and long-term national interventions.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The authors would like to thank the Research Assistants, Ms. Juliana Lotukei, Mr. Alvin Mutebi, Mr. John Vincent Akakisiima, and the research Gate Keeper, Mr. Fred Busulwa, for their support during data collection. Also, to Dr. Resty Naiga, for her comments. The authors also appreciate the respondents, key informants and children living on the streets for their views and responses.

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