

## Chapter Five

# Youth Citizenship and Mobilisation in Uganda

*Aki Stavrou*

Uganda's post-colonial history shows a nation in conflict with itself. To understand what is implied by this, it is useful to refer to Idowu's discussion of citizenship, alienation and conflict in Nigeria, and his claim that political conflict in Africa is about identity and citizenship:

To use the term loosely, the root cause of political conflict in Africa... is your identity, which side of the country you are identified with and what you are ready to do to protect that identity. The idea of struggle for established places in the structure of power, which is only a physical manifestation of a more fundamental cause of national conflict. This idea is that the identity of who controls power is the most crucial issue at stake.<sup>1</sup>

The central concern of this chapter is youth mobilisation in Uganda. It is based on a small-scale exploratory research study conducted in Uganda in June 2002, and is not intended to be representative of youth across Uganda, but rather to focus on youth living currently in Kampala and Entebbe. The main theme explored here will be how urban youth mobilise and participate in Ugandan civil society, and how they negotiate their identities (as youth and as citizens) under conditions of political conflict within the broader society.

## Defining Youth Citizenship

Citizenship as a concept has been variously defined and debated. Every country has its own laws regarding citizenship. There are two main categories into which these laws fall. *Jus soli* is based on the territorial principle, classing citizens as those born within the country, regardless of the citizenship of the parents. *Jus sanguinis*, the principle of blood, defines citizens as those with the right mixture of national blood. The definition of citizenship

used here recognises that citizenship is “common membership of a shared and imminent community”,<sup>2</sup> and is “a set of normative expectations specifying the relationship between the nation-state and its individual members which procedurally establish the rights and obligations of members and set of practices by which these expectations are realised”.<sup>3</sup>

Citizenship is also very much a gender- and age-related concept. Aristotle’s citizen, as described in his work, *Politics*, was a man. In much of the 20th century, citizenship discourse did not include women in many countries. However, this masculine approach to citizenship also became the preserve of older men, with youth (male in this case) being explicitly prevented from staking their claim as well. Citizenship was generally defined by democratically elected politicians as being both a status and a practice, a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. In other words, all who possess the status are equal.

Politics has been reshaped to fit women and youth, and not women and youth to fit politics. During times of conflict, when the need for women and youth to take up arms becomes paramount, the gender prerequisite and the age of entry to citizenship is stripped to the minimum possible requirements. Many states (democratic and repressive) continue to have Women and Youth Leagues separately defined as citizen sub-categories, which, by implication, focus on fringe rights. Youth may be defined to cover all age cohorts between puberty and middle age, which in most developing countries contains well over half of the populace and two-thirds of the voting constituency.

It is necessary to recognise multiple forms of citizenship, including youth and nation state, and youth and civil society, in Uganda. It is therefore useful to refer to Foweraker and Landman’s (1997) distinction between civil, political and social rights, and to weave this into the broader picture of the political status quo in contemporary Uganda.<sup>4</sup> Civil and political rights are a form of power which can be used to create movements of every kind, such as the cases where citizens organise to defend their own interests and identities, premised on the defence of freedom of thought, speech, assembly and association. Social rights are claims to benefits guaranteed by the state and provided by the administrative apparatus of the state. Foweraker and Landman argue that social rights can be manipulated in particular political systems.

The age of entry into citizenship is in constant flux and is dictated by the power politics of the day. West considers efforts to restructure citizenship for young people as discrimination on the basis of age, which is more easily possible because the rights of all youth, including very young children, are

ignored.<sup>5</sup> During the early 1980s Ugandan children and youth, called *Kadogos*, were mobilised into Museveni's army at a very young age, sometimes as young as eight years old. They were granted citizenship rights as fighting men and women. However, soon after Museveni took over the reins of government, the age of youth increased, young people again being denied the status afforded to adults. Youth in all societies are regarded as a bridge between adult and child. In a discussion on youth and conflict in Africa, McIntyre suggests one reason why African youth are perhaps more vulnerable to political and military co-optation:

A generation gulf will always exist between youth and the state and this rings familiar because intergenerational discord, albeit in many forms, is universal. But the difference between youthful protest in Africa and youthful protest in the developed world is that the latter permits safe expression within the family, community or school. These are the structures in a peaceful society that guide youth and protect them from adult moral and political consequences of less-than-mature actions.<sup>6</sup>

There are also structures that prepare the youth to take their rightful role as fully fledged citizens when they reach an age of maturity. This is not true of youth in many African countries, and Uganda is no exception. African youth are vulnerable to a host of negative forces, which stem from a fundamental inability on the part of families, communities and states to guarantee their rights.<sup>7</sup>

To understand how the state exercises power, it is necessary to begin by acknowledging that Uganda, beneath the veneer of democracy, remains a one-party state under the direct rule of President Yoweri Museveni. Opposition is tolerated only as long as it serves the reigning power brokers and, when it transcends these confines, it is rudely reminded of its role. Political opposition and civil society groups have been violently confronted and forced into acquiescence with the state. The same would hold true of youth movements whose agendas might differ from those of the state.

Civil society conscientisation, articulation and mobilisation in Uganda is also controlled by the state. According to Human Rights Watch, "the National resistance Movement (NRM) has consolidated its monopoly on political power through exclusive access to state funding and machinery, widespread and sometimes compulsory political education programs".<sup>8</sup> Much is made of the apparent freedom of the press in Uganda, relative tolerance of religion and the presence of non-governmental organisations focusing on human rights and development issues. These are examples of

what Fowerake and Landman refer to as social rights.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the presence of the latter ensures the delivery of continued essential services, and therefore serves the state well. But at the level of civil and political rights, Uganda is an authoritarian state, which exhibits in various ways a lack of respect for the full spectrum of human rights, for civil society and for civil participation.

Uganda is depicted as an African “success story”. The United Nation’s Development Programme (UNDP) 1998 report describes Uganda as follows:

By and large, contemporary Uganda continues to be acclaimed a ‘success story’ in Africa. This success derives not only from the much-heralded macroeconomic stabilisation and the sustained economic growth that the country has registered over the past decade but also it is a product of relative socio-political stability, modest gains in social provision and progress in fostering democratic governance. On the positive side of the balance sheet of human development, one factor which stands out, is that the fundamentals of the macro-economy remain quite strong. Recent evidence also points to a modest decline in absolute poverty. As regards social provision, access to safe water, sanitation and health services have improved markedly in recent years. Average life expectancy has risen modestly since the early 1990s, and following extensive awareness campaign, some 60 percent of the population are now fully aware of the AIDS/HIV pandemic. Furthermore, infant mortality rates have declined sharply over the last decade and the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) is providing opportunities for enhanced educational attainment.<sup>10</sup>

Education is an important terrain upon which citizenship is built. The UNDP Human Development Report of 2002 indicates that for 1999, 45% of Uganda’s total population within the relevant age cohorts was enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Interestingly, for the same age groups, South Africa had, for the same time period, a 93% enrolment ratio. Uganda continues to be a country with low development. This is captured in its human development index (0.444) across a population of which 49.2% are below the age of 15, and where 26% of children under the age of five are underweight.<sup>11</sup>

The construct of youth and the organisation of youth mobilisation in Uganda is, however, ‘invisible’ in many of the official indicators of and documents on development. Thus, accounts of youth marginalisation can only be gleaned from programmatic reports dealing with internally displaced communities, or former child and youth soldiers. This programmatic literature shares in common a description of Northern Uganda as characterised by underdevelopment, armed conflict, poor infrastructure,

hunger and mass displacement of civilian populations, most of whom are women and children. This, nevertheless, means that youth marginalisation has to be positioned within the context of international programmatic work centred on young people in Uganda, much of which is concerned with the high-profile issue of child soldiers in the North.

An important insight into youth and citizenship can be gained from feminist literature on equality, difference and citizenship. Feminist scholarship is frequently seen as divided between advocates of equality on the one side, and the advocates of sexual difference on the other.<sup>12</sup> While some feminists demand that women and men be treated identically, others demand that the distinctive characteristics and activities of women be given special consideration. Underlying this is a paired dichotomy of equality and difference; i.e. if one opts for equality, differences are antithetical to it, but if one opts for difference, equality is unattainable.<sup>13</sup> It is useful to refer to Pateman's argument here because it suggests much about the social construction and regulation of citizenship and about subordination. It demands that one ask what the duties of youth are in relation to the nation state. It suggests that what is at stake is not youth's difference from or equality with children and/or adults, but the regulation of citizenship and the subordination of youth. And it could be the case that youth exclusion and subordination is the way the state perpetuates itself. In Uganda, the evidence from secondary sources would suggest that the duty of youth is not merely to vote (as is described in the Constitution) but to behave in ways that perpetuate the state.

The Ugandan government, however, would contest this claim, as did several youth and some civil society organisational representatives interviewed in the course of this study. They would point out hastily that Uganda is one of the few countries in the world where youth representatives are classified as one of the special interest groups represented in the Ugandan Parliament. Five youth representatives sit in parliament and the Constitution requires that one of those members be a woman. Uganda does not, however, recognise political parties, and elections are essentially on personal merit. The electoral management system places prohibitions on candidates holding a meeting of more than ten individuals, or on addressing the public without official chairing by a member of the Electoral Commission.

Civil society organisations, such as non-governmental organisations and community-based associations, do exist, but the state appears to have captured their autonomous space and, in some instances, actively suppresses those organisations and associations, which it deems 'political'. In this

instance, the term 'political' might be understood as anything that appears to challenge, or is antithetical to, the ruling elite. It could be coincidental that youth civil society-based organisations operating in Kampala are overwhelmingly outnumbered by those (including international organisations' programmatic initiatives) focusing on children. This issue, however, will be highlighted later in this chapter.

## Youth Mobilisation

Mobilisation, like citizenship, is a contested concept. In discussions on youth mobilisation, 'mobilisation' often refers to political mobilisation only. Here, mobilisation is used in a broader sense to describe active processes of organising and responding to a particular set of social, economic and/or political phenomena.

With regard to youth mobilisation, Lemarchand, in his occasional paper on exclusion (political, economic and social), marginalisation and political mobilisation in the Great Lakes region writes that there is a plethora of competing explanatory models for describing phenomena in the region. Of relevance here is a brief section on the link between warlordism and youth exclusion:

A dominant theme in the burgeoning literature on warlordism draws attention to its underlying logic, rooted in the crippled economies of the continent. Paul Richards' commentary on the genesis of Sierra Leone's agonies hits the nail on the head: 'The new political violence in Africa has some straightforward practical rationalities that transcend its original context... Africa faces a growing problem of youth unemployment, and war is a surprisingly viable employment option for youth with weak social support and poor educational backgrounds in regions where... clandestine trading opportunities support war-lord activity.' (Richards 1998, quoted in Vlassenroot 2000, p 281). As Koen Vlassenroot has shown in considerable detail (Vlassenroot, 1999, 2000), the social marginalization of youth is the single most important underlying factor behind the proliferation of armed militias, collectively referred to as Mai-Mai.<sup>14</sup>

Warlord groups, suggests Lemarchand, are the political expression of a diffuse sense of hopelessness in the face of economic and political circumstances that are totally beyond their control. Warlords have emerged as crucial pivots in crisis zones around the world where civil war and humanitarian disasters accompany the struggles of societies in transition.

They confront national governments, plunder their resources, exterminate uncooperative communities, interdict international relief and development and derail peace processes. With only a few exceptions, modern warlords live successfully beyond the reach and jurisdiction of civil society. The Great Lakes Region and Uganda are no exception to this, particularly where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is concerned.

Warlordism is derived from a culture that predates its manifestations in the 20th century. It is a negative phenomenon in which power rests on the possession of military forces, occupation of territory in a predatory manner and socio-economic activities that seldom enrich the lives of communities within their influence. Warlordism involves the use of military force in a protectionist manner without any mitigating cultural or religious commitments, and is not a concept that is intellectually developed in any culture. In the chaotic circumstances of civil wars or unrest or resistance to the state, volunteering for the military offers a chance for the marginalised youth to escape from the ravages of poverty and alienation. For them, the military offers, however illusively, the possibility of wealth and unaccustomed power.

Youth in Uganda, especially in Northern Uganda, the main site of the civil war, are often caught in power struggles between state and civil society (and the various mobilised forms it assumes). This exacerbates further political and economic exclusion of different ethnic groups, women, children and youth. It is worth citing the following discussion of re-integration of abducted child soldiers in the Gulu District, Northern Uganda:

During the later years of the 20th century adolescents have become 'principal' participants in most of Africa's wars. Whether their participation was through armed conflict, as in most civil wars in West, Central and East Africa, or through sustained civil unrest as in Southern Africa, over the years these combatants have become increasingly youthful. Pre-adolescents, as combatants, are no longer the exception, but have joined their older comrades in becoming the norm. Moreover, the introduction of girls alongside boys as soldiers has become more prevalent. In the past, however, children were usually enrolled in the armed forces when the reserve of adult soldiers ran short, whereas nowadays the youngest are often the first to be recruited. Today in Africa's remaining wars, many 'rebel' militias or movements comprise almost entirely adolescents and pre-adolescents - sometimes as young as eight years old. Although when one considers that over half of Africa's population is under the age of 18 years, it is not surprising that there has been a proliferation of

children in the various armies. Rebel or anti-government forces, however, are not alone in their use of child soldiers. Government forces are also prone to recruiting young adolescents into their ranks. There is more to this than purely the need for conscription: life in the army often offers the only alternative to a subsistence survival way of life. The promise of training and a sustained livelihood is a powerful lure in regions where poverty and population pressures overwhelm education and jobs.<sup>15</sup>

In discussing youth mobilisation, it is worth noting that in the mainstream literature on youth, unchallenged assumptions about children and youth abound. Young men in developing countries are regarded as predisposed towards militarist mobilisation, and are assumed to be psychologically and physically 'volatile'. Significantly, children's involvement in violence, conflict and war is often represented as coerced, and their situation as that of unwitting victims.<sup>16</sup> This is not to deny that children are victims of conflict, but to highlight that in contrast to children, youth are often depicted as 'active agents' in conflict. The story of conflict and the use of child soldiers in Uganda adopt mostly a narrative structure, positioning one agent as the aggressor and the other as the victim. The truth is much further away than such categorical absolutism would suggest, and of relevance to this chapter's argument is the recognition that the current government's inaction sustains this; indeed, its past actions make it a co-creator of the phenomenon in the region. Looking closely at events and processes underway within the country, and exploring notions of (children and) youth, civil and political participation is crucial because it requires one to question whether Uganda is, indeed, the "success story" it is often made out to be.

Youth, it has been suggested, have resorted to several channels by which to counteract exclusion. Warlordism has already been mentioned. Mobilisation around populist leaders and groups is another channel. Populism is an appeal to 'the people' against both the established structure of power and its dominant ideas and values.<sup>17</sup> Populist politics has a characteristic mood, and associated with this mood is the tendency for heightened emotions to be focused on a charismatic leader.

Other channels include organised religion, which will be highlighted later, and militarist and para-militarist groups. It is worth looking at this latter idea in light of Machel's writing on the proliferation of small arms and child and youth soldiers. Citing the Graduate Institute of International Studies' estimate that 500 million small arms and light weapons are in global circulation, she claims that these inexpensive and easy-to-use technologies are behind the

bloodshed and mayhem: they increase the numbers of civilian casualties and the transformation of children and adolescents into “professional killers”. Machel draws several links between small arms and light weapons, militarisation and culture that are worth quoting and then commenting on:

Small arms and light weapons take many different forms... Although designed for use by armed forces, the portability, size and price make small arms and light weapons advantageous for private armies and mercenaries... The militarisation of daily life adds to general levels of instability, blurring the boundaries between warfare, crime and local disputes. In these environments, non-state actors are often better armed than the police. Fuelled by fear and oppression, individual citizens may acquire arms to defend themselves, their families and property. The possession of weapons can also be a source of pride, a status symbol and, in some cases, a symbol of ethnic and cultural identity. By itself, this does not necessarily lead to a culture of violence. However, a culture of weapons may be transformed into a culture of violence when a State cannot guarantee the security of its citizens or control illicit activities that depend on small arms. The breakdown of social codes and of traditional mechanisms for conflict further undermines stability.<sup>18</sup>

Machel's claim is based on what is known as the ‘cognitive neo-associationist model of aggression’. This states that outward expressions of aggression as coping modes are more likely under certain conditions than others, and that the probability that aggression will occur is increased when the means to express it are available. Weapons, such as guns, according to the model, have a ‘weapons effect’ and tend to elicit violent behaviour, particularly from individuals who are angry, or fearful, or in a state of negative arousal.<sup>19</sup>

Experimental evidence has shown that the presence of weapons is not sufficient to elicit such effects; rather, the context and meaning surrounding the weapon has to be recognised. A Lebanese study conducted in 1992, which compared the effect that weapons have on children living in war and peace zones (i.e. Palestinian and Belgian children of five to six years of age), found that Palestinian children were neither more aggressive nor more ready to use toy guns to engage in inter-individual conflict than Belgian children.<sup>20</sup> However, as is self-evident in these sorts of experiments, the laboratory setting and the missing variable of ‘the other’ (i.e. the perceptions of the enemy group) mean that additional evidence is required.

Western models of psychology and psychological development are individualistic and assume that childhood experiences have a great deal of

influence on youth and adult behaviour.<sup>21</sup> Much of what is written about child soldiers, youth and political violence is written from the perspective of Western psychology. While this chapter cannot adequately engage with these issues, an attempt has been made to explore youth mobilisation in Uganda from a perspective that tries to take into account resilience as much as it does the risk that youth exclusion and marginalisation present to the country's development.

## **Under-prioritising Youth in Uganda**

Youth development is not, it would seem, a priority in Uganda. However, official responses from governmental representatives and state-approved youth leaders suggest that it definitely is. While youth participation in Ugandan parliament and governmental structures does occur, several civil society representatives pointed out that there is a range of reasons why youth development is under-prioritised in Uganda. Some of the reasons identified are set out in the paragraphs that follow.

The focus on child development in Uganda, particularly by international development agencies, is very high. Priority is given to child development and, in particular, child soldiers and children living in internally displaced camps in Northern Uganda. According to one of the journalists interviewed in this study, youth issues "were not sexy issues attracting a lot of attention like child soldiers can attract". The mobilisation of intellectual and financial resources directed towards youth development is insufficient to address the real social and economic marginalisation experienced by youth. It should be hastily added that this tendency to ignore youth cannot be entirely blamed upon the government, for the international NGO sector in Uganda has also conveniently sidestepped the issue. It was argued that should INGOs get involved in youth affairs, they would either, at best, be restricted in their ability to operate, and therefore hamper existing interventions, or, at worst, be expelled. With the exception of health programmes targeting youth, there was little evidence of INGOs having tried getting involved with youth mobilisation.

Mobilisation around social and economic issues among the youth appears to have been either abdicated to the state as its responsibility, or annexed by the state as its area of operation. Representatives from youth organisations stated that their organisations were concerned with assisting youth in developing skills and receiving training, but they acknowledged that they were unable to assist youth with securing employment. Without exception,

the responsibility for creating jobs was identified as that of the state. Sadly, this remains the case for most of Africa, where the state, much maligned by the citizenry for its inadequate and inept delivery of social services and utilities, is simultaneously being thought of as the vehicle that should provide economic opportunities.

Youth representation in the Ugandan parliament was identified by youth leaders formally included within the official system as sufficient infrastructure for addressing youth issues in Uganda. The definition of youth issues was, unsurprisingly, not well articulated. HIV / AIDS was identified as an important challenge facing youth living in Kampala and Entebbe, as was unemployment, but there were no clear indications of what proportion of youth were HIV-positive or unemployed. In general, the description of challenges facing youth living in urban Uganda was poorly differentiated from those faced by children and by adults. The risk with this is that insufficient information is being collected about youth issues in urban Uganda, and therefore decisions about youth development are being made on the basis of 'best guesses' and 'experiences' of the elites within the official system of youth representation. However, because youth representation is found in parliament, it is felt that their cause is being addressed and, as such, the Ugandan government takes the issue seriously.

Official international indicators show clearly that among the Ugandan population, unemployment is high and educational attainment is low. Unemployed youth and students participating in this study reported that dropout rates were very high in some schools within Kampala and Entebbe. Poverty was one of the main contributors to this. An important point made by several students participating in the study was that Ugandans living in the South and in Kampala and Entebbe, particularly, might be poor, but they do not starve. The fertility of the soil and the possibility of growing fruit and vegetables meant, they suggested, that even poor families did not go hungry. According to one of the students, the fact that people could eat "took off the need for the poor to mobilise". Combined with prohibitions against political mobilisation, several of the students pointed out that youth living in impoverished areas of Kampala were "invisible".

## **Youth and the Economy**

Important points were made about youth and the economy of Uganda. There are, however, three issues that are highlighted here.

Under colonial administration, a poll tax was introduced in Uganda. This tax has a long and controversial history in Uganda, but it remains – even though it has been renamed the Graduated Poll Tax. Several participants in this study reported that this tax placed considerable pressure on young men who were unemployed and who had to rely on family members to pay this annual taxation on their behalf. Many complaints were received about the processes and systems of collection. Anecdotes were relayed about not only ineffective tax collection processes, but exploitative ones in which young boys were instructed by corrupt officials to pay this tax because (according to one participant) “he looks like a man, like someone of 18 years [of age]”. In general, however, participants expressed concern with the processes of tax collection rather than the concept of a poll tax itself. None of the official youth leaders believed that this tax posed a particular challenge to youth living in Uganda.

In a statement made to the General Assembly on Children at the United Nations, President Museveni stated that US\$505 million worth of remittances were sourced from Ugandans living abroad and working in “unskilled jobs”. Several participants pointed out that young, skilled Ugandans had left the country to work overseas, and reported that there are sizeable Ugandan expatriate communities in London, Boston and Tokyo. Several participants also pointed out that the total value of remittances exceeded the value of Uganda’s exports. There was divided opinion on whether this ‘migration labour system’ contributed to Uganda’s development or undermined it. Two journalists participating in this study pointed out that a significant portion of Kampala’s construction industry was supported by remittances from Ugandans living abroad. According to one of the journalists, “they have saved the construction industry in Kampala”. There were hints that youth graduating from tertiary institutions were being encouraged to leave Uganda, often illegally, in order not only to act as conduits in terms of migrant remittances, but also to remove them from the political scene in Uganda. Thus, their emigration serves to limit future opposition from a group of intellectual elite who would ordinarily have become disillusioned owing to limited employment opportunities, and to turn them into a foreign-exchange-earning asset.

Several journalists, students and civil society organisational representatives spoke about a particular incident involving street vendors on the streets of Kampala. In April and May 2002, the Kampala City Council and the Mayor embarked upon a series of street vendor evictions following complaints by shop owners that vendors were “stealing their business” but not paying taxes or the high rentals that formal shop owners had to pay.

Several participants pointed out that a significant portion of the vendors who were chased off the streets were young men working as street-trader entrepreneurs. According to one of the human rights organisation representatives, the youth entrepreneurs were chased away to the outskirts of Kampala and, although some of them returned, “no-one knows where they are”. He added that these vendors had apparently “disappeared”, and were very angered by the action of the City Council. Creating self-employment opportunities is one of the few avenues available to youth wishing to become economically active. The formal sector is far too small, over-subscribed and difficult to break into. The emergence of the mobile telephone market created a short-term employment boom, but since then there have been very few employment opportunities available. Limiting the ability of youth to create self-employment opportunities further marginalises them from the mainstream.

## **Youth, Religious Organisations and Skills Development**

Several participants spoke about youth and religious organisations in Uganda. It was pointed out that there was a rise in popularity of charismatic Christian churches. While Islam and Christianity are two of the main established religions in Uganda, Pentecostal and Fundamentalist churches have increased in popularity, and it was reported that youth especially are being recruited into these churches. According to one of the journalists working on the state-funded newspapers, youth were recruited with the promise of training and employment. However, while training was provided, it did not necessarily prepare young men and women for entrepreneurship or workplace employment.

Several of the young men and women participating in group discussions in this study expressed discomfort with the line of inquiry on youth participation in churches and the possibility that churches (including the charismatic ones) were offering training for any other purpose than for building young Ugandans’ skills. The student participants, however, were slightly more amused by this inquiry, and one student (a political science graduate) claimed that the churches may have a role in inhibiting political mobilisation among youth living in Kampala, but that they had yet to make any significant impact.

## Political Conflict in the Other Uganda

One of the most startling trends in the discussions with youth and with youth representatives and organisations based in Kampala and Entebbe was that the political conflict in Uganda was 'out there', and that the people who were affected by this were 'not us'. The construction of the 'other' was highly pronounced in the discussions about 'political conflict' in Northern Uganda. There are several possible reasons for this.

The victims of the conflict are largely the 'other'. In this construction of 'other', ethnic identity is pre-eminent. Acholi, for example, are as an ethnic group mostly affected in the North of Uganda, but Bugandans are significantly a part of the elite living and working in Kampala. Ethnic identity politics and the 'management' of the war by President Museveni's state has served to keep the conflict 'distant' from the daily experiences of those living in urban areas such as Kampala or Entebbe. It is also worth recalling here Watson's claim that "there's no Acholi elite in the south, and so there's no one to put the north on the agenda or keep it in people's minds. The north just slides off the map."<sup>22</sup> In many of the discussions, the North was treated as another place, almost removed from Uganda.

Access to information about the political conflict is limited. While there is a level of press freedom in Uganda and the presence of an independent newspaper in Kampala, Internet access is expensive, and television broadcasting is either via state-owned services and infrastructure or via expensive South African cable network television services. In discussions about the political conflict in the north of Uganda, most of the youth participating in the discussion groups were able to speak about Joseph Kony and the LRA, but there was little critical discussion of the historical factors around ethnic identity politics and the systemic underdevelopment of the north of Uganda. In fact, the absence of critical political discussion is quite stark.

A shortcoming of this study was that it was not representative of the broader spectrum of socio-demographic groups living in Uganda and in Kampala and Entebbe. Youth from the most vulnerable income groups (the impoverished), from marginalised ethnic groups, and from Asian and white communities were not included in this study. It is possible that a different perspective on these issues may have been obtained through a more representative sample. But, as was pointed out in the section on methodology, this study was not intended to be representative of young

Ugandans, but merely an exploration of some of the mobilisation issues facing young men and women living in Kampala and Entebbe.

## **Youth, Populism and Mobilisation**

Mobilisation among young people living in urban Kampala and Entebbe seems to be the exception rather than the norm. One of the students from Makerere University described young women and men living in Kampala as different from those in South Africa, who were known and respected as mobilised.

Youth, according to several civil society organisation representatives, were mobilised by the state only at the time of elections or in the event of crises, and generally ignored for the rest of the time. Accounts of the mobilisation of youth during mayoral elections was often cited by participants as an example of how state machinery mobilised youth for their “own ends”, but then, upon successful election, youth were “dropped”. In the recent mayoral elections (in which John Ssebaana Kizito was eventually re-elected), youth were mobilised in significant numbers by the party to secure this election.

Another area of mobilisation referred to by participants is youth mobilisation under the direction of populist leaders. One of Kampala’s most colourful characters, Al Haji Nasser Ntege Sebaggala, had run for Mayor in 1998 and had secured significant popularity among impoverished and marginalised youth living in Kampala. According to one of the journalists, when Sebaggala returned to Uganda from the United States, thousands of Ugandas, especially the youth, “were lining the streets and giving him a hero’s welcome”. Sebaggala was said to be successful because he deliberately positioned himself as “anti-elite” in that he, himself, was poorly educated, but had become a well-known “businessman”, had a criminal record (for money laundering) and did not speak English very well (and loudly proclaimed that he would only speak Bugandan). Sebaggala had apparently actively targeted young men and women, particularly among the most impoverished communities within Kampala, and had presented himself as an accessible leader and a role model for them. With the ousting of a disgraced Sebaggala, youth (according to some of the participants) were left considerably disillusioned with the political system in Kampala.

Student activism and mobilisation in Uganda’s universities was, according to students participating in this study, ineffective. Aspects of universities, such as the residences and the catering services, were said to be poorly

managed, but when students protested, these issues “were never addressed” in spite of promises. One of the participants (who asked not to be identified either by name or by organisational representation) stated that the state had an active network of informants within Makerere University and this made it difficult for any student activism to be undertaken without the state security forces finding out about it before it happened.

## Conclusion

Many of the issues discussed with participants in the course of interviews and discussion groups (such as HIV/AIDS and young people’s hopes for the future) have not been included in this short chapter but were also part of the context within which discussions about mobilisation were held.

From the findings of this small-scale study, there are several concluding remarks that can be offered, the first being that mobilisation in urban Kampala and Entebbe among the youth is, when not orchestrated by state machinery, ad hoc and fragmented. It is unclear whether there is a general passivity, possibly apathy, among youth, or whether there are considerable normative and official restrictions on mobilisation. Student political mobilisation appears to be weak and opportunistically orchestrated by the state.

The second finding from the primary data on children and youth in Northern Uganda is that there are real differences among Ugandan youth that are not adequately addressed or represented within formal youth representation structures. Urban youth have different challenges from those that face youth in rural Uganda – particularly in war-torn areas. Very little attempt appears to be made at the civil society level to create a youth movement in Uganda to accommodate these differences and mobilise youth around the diversity of issues facing young men and women across Uganda.

Thirdly, youth economic and social development appears to be under-prioritised by the state and by civil society. There are few civil society organisations – aside from organised religious organisations – that have dedicated resources and the intellectual and financial means to address the significant developmental challenges faced by Ugandan youth. Although this study did not aim to create a taxonomy of these issues, unemployment, education and skills development, entrepreneurship, HIV/AIDS, taxation and a range of political and civil rights (including the right to freedom of speech) are obviously issues that need to be addressed.

A fourth point is that the outward-migration of skilled young men and

women appears to be encouraged rather than addressed as part of a strategy for retaining talent and skills within Uganda. In several ways, these 'migrants' are deified by some of the youth participating in this study and castigated by others for being "unpatriotic". A fifth point relates to the notion of youth identity among Ugandan youth. It would seem that there is a common identity among students participating in this study, but not between them and unemployed young men and women living in Kampala or Entebbe. Differences appear to be the most common dimension in definitions of youth: between men and women, between Bugandans and other ethnic groups, between students and non-students, and between the employed and the unemployed. As was pointed out earlier in this paper, the construction of these differences serves to maintain the subordination of youth by the state to the interests of the elite.

The final point is that there was consistently an implied classification of youth as 'patriotic' and 'unpatriotic'. The patriotic are young men and women who accept the political status quo and the legitimacy of the state machinery, while the unpatriotic are classified as all of the rest from the outward migrating job-seekers to 'Kony's army' to street vendors. The construction and management of these differences is part of a state strategy for maintaining its own position of power that requires the subordination of youth for this to be possible.

## Endnotes

- 1 W O O Idowu, Citizenship, alienation and conflict in Nigeria. *Africa Development*, XXIV 24, 1 & 2, 1999.
- 2 Roche, 1995, cited in Ndegwa, Citizenship and Ethnicity: An Examination of Two Transition Moments in Kenyan Politics. *American Political Science Review*, 91, 3 (September 1997): 599-616.
- 3 Waters, 186 cited in *ibid*.
- 4 J Foweraker, T Landman, (eds), *Citizens and rights: Social movements: A comparative and statistical analysis*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997.
- 5 A West, Citizenship, children and young people, *Youth and Policy*, 55, pp 69-75, 1997.
- 6 A McIntyre, Rights, root causes and recruitment: The youth factor in African conflicts, *African Security Review*, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 2003.

- 7 McIntyre, op cit.
- 8 Human Rights Watch (HRW), *The scars of death: Children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda*, Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project, September 1997, New York, Washington, London and Brussels.
- 9 Fowerakre et al, op cit.
- 10 United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1998*. <<http://www.imul.com/undp/hdr98.html> >
- 11 United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2002*. <<http://www.undp.org/hdr2002>>  
<<http://www.undp.org/hdr2002/hdi.pdf>>
- 12 C Pateman, Equality, difference, subordination: The politics of motherhood and women's citizenship, in G Bock, S James, (eds), *Beyond equality and difference: Citizenship, feminist politics, and female subjectivity*, Routledge, London, 1992.
- 13 Ibid. Scott in Pateman, 1992.
- 14 Center for Development Research (ZEF Bonn), Facing Ethnic Conflicts (14-16 December 2000), R Lemarchand H Stein, *Exclusion, marginalization and political mobilization: The road to hell in the Great Lakes*, Occasional Paper, Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, March 2000.
- 15 S Stavrou, R Stewart, (eds), The re-integration of child soldiers and abductees: a case study of Palaro and Pabbo, Gulu district, Northern Uganda. Paper presented at the International Conference on War-affected Children, Winnipeg, Canada, 2000.
- 16 G Machel, The impact of war on children: A review of progress since the 1996 United Nations Report on the impact of armed conflict on children. David Philip, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 2001.
- 17 M Canovan, Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy, *Political Studies*, XLVII(47?),1999.
- 18 Machel, op cit, p 120.
- 19 A Dawes, The emotional impact of political violence, in A Dawes, D Donald, (eds), *Childhood and adversity: Psychological perspectives from South African Research*, David Philip, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1994.
- 20 A Mahjoub, J Leyens and V Yzerbyt, The effects of political violence on socio-moral reasoning and conduct, in Dawes et al, *ibid*.
- 21 Levett, in Dawes et al, *ibid*.
- 22 HRW, op cit.