

Progress towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies

SDG 16+ in Uganda



Executive summary

By committing itself to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the government of Uganda has embraced the aim of ensuring a peaceful, just and inclusive Uganda. It has developed a national framework and roadmap to guide their implementation and has undertaken its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2020. To complement this VNR and accelerate meaningful SDG implementation, Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) in Uganda, together with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), conducted an independent civil society led study on the progress of SDG 16+ in six selected districts and at the national level. The study highlighted two key findings.

First, Uganda has a number of enabling legal and policy frameworks, as well as a comprehensive SDG coordination framework that can drive the implementation and realisation of SDG 16+. Second, although the government has made notable progress on a number of SDGs, progress on SDG16+ has stagnated. This is worrying because SDG16+ and achieving a peaceful Uganda is a key pre-requisite and central pillar for the realisation of all the SDGs. The prevalence of violent conflicts, inequalities and injustices curtails the country's development aspirations and the achievement of the SDGs. Other challenges include low awareness on the SDGs, lack of meaningful participation, and low prioritisation of peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

To accelerate SDG 16+, progress, peacebuilding and conflict prevention must be prioritised. This includes: finalising and passing a National Peace Policy; awareness-raising of SDG 16+; greater participation of stakeholders to enhance accountability of duty-bearers at the local and national levels; adequately capacitating the national platform on peacebuilding and conflict resolution; and promoting the contextual SDG 16+ localisation. Particular attention should be paid to human security as well as achieving gender equality, women's rights and engaging youth and other vulnerable groups as partners.

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Introduction to SDG16+ and the study

As stated by the UN, the SDGs – also known as “Agenda 2030” – are “a universal call for action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity”¹. The SDGs comprise 17 goals and were adopted by UN member states in September 2015. While SDG 16 is specifically related to peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, many targets under other SDGs – for instance those on inequality and gender responsiveness are also crucial for realising SDG 16. Therefore, the term ‘SDG 16+’ has been coined to encompass SDG 16 and all peace-related goals and targets across Agenda 2030. SDG 16+ provides a framework to strengthen and link up actions on a range of peace-related issues. This study therefore sought to enhance implementation of SDG16+ in Uganda by complementing Uganda’s official Voluntary National Review (VNR) report on the progress of SDG16 + and offer specific recommendations to accelerate progress.

¹ www.md.undp.org

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SDG16+ and Peace and Conflict in Uganda

The Ugandan government aspires to attain high-income, stable, peaceful, and prosperous country status. Its Vision 2040 is aimed at realising “a transformed Ugandan society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years”. Its National Development Plan III (2020/21 until 2024/25) also strives to achieve this same vision. These long-term aspirations are aligned to the government’s commitment and desire to realise the SDGs by 2030.

At the same time, violent conflicts constitute a major cost and threat to the country’s development aspirations and commitment towards achieving the SDGs. Generally speaking, Uganda is a conflict-prone country within a conflict-prone region. It continues to grapple with cycles of serious, multiple, and complex conflict situations – emanating from negative past experiences and emerging issues. These violent conflicts have a serious negative impact on the realisation of SDG16+.

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Progress on SDG16+ has stagnated

In its 2016 VNR report, the government stated that “Uganda still has significant room for improvement in pursuit of its Sustainable Development Goals²”. Although the government has made notable progress in a number of SDGs, progress on SDG16+ has stagnated or has remained very low. This has very serious implications as SDG 16+ is a key pre-requisite and central pillar for the implementation of the entire SDG agenda. Lack of progress on SDG 16+ and high prevalence of violent

² sustainabledevelopment.un.org

conflicts have a negative impact on the realisation of SDG 16+, undermining the country’s peace and development aspirations.

They are detrimental to livelihood, production, investment and financial flows, as well as human security, human rights, and gender equality, among others.

This demands greater sustained focus on SDG 16+ and clear steps on how the government will achieve the realisation of this goal.

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Approach to the study

This study analysed the extent to which progress on SDG 16+ indicators has been implemented. Given the intersectionality of the agenda, the study found it necessary to incorporate SDG 2 (zero hunger), 5 (gender equality), and 17 (partnerships), as each of them critically contributes to peaceful, just, and prosperous societies in the Ugandan context. In terms of geographical scope, the study targeted participants (youth, women and men from local communities, traditional leaders, local and national authorities and civil society) from six districts in Uganda, selected from six regions. These were *Kaabong* in North Eastern Uganda (*Karamoja* region), *Yumbe* in the West Nile region, *Lira* in Northern Uganda, *Tororo* in the Eastern region,

Kasese in the Western region, and *Mityana* in the Central region. The study also involved national-level stakeholders that are key to implementing SDG 16+. This selection provided a good sense of the national outlook, both in terms of diverse geographical coverage and representation.

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods, with more emphasis on qualitative. It was conducted ahead of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in which Uganda was to present its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) report. The report therefore fed into both the official government VNR report 2020 and the CSO rejoinder report (under the NGO Forum).

Key Findings

key issues from the study

- At strategic level, Uganda has a number of enabling legal and policy frameworks, as well as a comprehensive SDG coordination framework that can drive the implementation and realisation of SDG 16+. However, Uganda still lacks a specific policy framework on peacebuilding that provides systematic guidance, coordination, and implementation of peace efforts throughout the country.
- The implementation of SDG16+ related policies is generally weak, especially at local level.
- General awareness of the SDGs and 16+ in particular is low and, related to this, participation of stakeholders at the community level in SDG 16+ efforts is minimal despite the critical roles that communities need to play.
- Despite the explicit commitment of the government to “strengthen policies and institutions and to mobilise multi-stakeholders support and partnerships for the accelerated implementation of the SDGs”, meaningful participation and inclusion of relevant partners, such as civil society, local authorities and the private sector remain largely confined to strategic levels and are less visible in practice and at the community level.
- Uganda has managed to significantly contain insurgencies, disarm communities, and create macro-level stability. However, at the local levels, different forms of violence are still significantly hindering SDG progress.
- Land and domestic violence were cited as the most prevalent conflicts across all the sample districts. An increase in domestic violence was partly attributed to COVID-19 – mostly triggered by tensions created when individuals who used to be “bread winners” were no longer able to provide, as a result of the lockdown. Although the government ordered the suspension of all land transactions, evictions, etc. as a way to manage violence during the COVID-19 lockdown, violent land-related conflicts continued to escalate.

- **Traditional practices that undermine the participation of marginalised groups such as youth and women persist as major obstacles to the realisation of SDG 16+.**

- **Peace and conflict prevention issues are not prioritised by the government. Its official VNR key message³ to the UN does not refer to peace or conflict prevention and pays little attention to SDG16. Peace and conflict prevention are also not prioritised in budgeting at the national and local government levels. Furthermore, Uganda indicated in its VNR message that it would prioritise “key accelerators based on their relative return on investment”. This does not bode well for investment in peace and conflict prevention, which is likely to continue receiving little attention. Investment in peacebuilding demands a long-term perspective and is not easily quantified. Even when the importance of peace as a bedrock for other sectors to thrive is recognized on paper financial commitments are often low. Paralleling the central promise of the SDGs to “Leave No One Behind”, review participants strongly called on all actors: “Don’t leave SDG 16 behind”.**

- **The COVID-19 pandemic has directly disrupted peacebuilding interventions and fuelled human rights abuse and violations. Its multiplier effects can be seen in cases such as domestic violence that increased to outlier levels. Groups like women, due to gender socialized roles; youth in the informal sector; those abled differently (disabled); pregnant women and those suffering from chronic illnesses, were the worst affected by the lockdown. The findings also indicated that COVID-19 will have a longer lasting impact on peace, as the livelihoods of people such as women and youth who depend on petty businesses have been severely disrupted.**

- **Localisation of SDG 16+ is fundamental and needs more attention. This localisation must enhance human security of people and communities, particularly the most vulnerable. The study offers some key localisation principles that all actors should follow:**
 1. **Localisation needs to build on what is there;**
 2. **SDG 16+ needs to affect change at the community level;**
 3. **Ownership is key – build outwards starting from local communities and councils;**
 4. **SDG 16+ strategies and implementation must be moved forward in a holistic way;**
 5. **Building broad local support structures for SDG 16+ is essential;**
 6. **Invest in the process of local ownership of the goals and solutions;**
 7. **Ensure development, availability of, and access to localised SDG 16+ indicators and data at the local level.**

³sustainabledevelopment.un.org

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Recommendations

5.1

To the government

- Through the Office of the Prime Minister, the government **should finalise and operationalise the national peace policy** draft through a purposeful multi-stakeholder approach. Such a human security-based peace policy is key to ensuring a coordinated and coherent method to prevent, manage, and resolve violent conflicts, as well as to securing sustainable, positive peace in the country.
- National and local governments should **prioritise peacebuilding and conflict prevention** by:
 - Enhancing specific programmes and approaches, such as promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms in community structures;
 - Increasing allocations for SDG 16+, in particular to peace and prevention themes and sectors for national and local budgets;
 - Ensuring an open civic space and the protection of all fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and the media.
- Strengthen SDG 16+ collaboration and information sharing by **revitalising** and adequately capacitating the **National Platform on Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution** under the Office of the Prime Minister.
- **Increase the human and resource capacity of existing institutions working on conflict prevention**, such as the Conflict Early Warning and Early Response Unit (CEWERU), for it to operate nationally and on its 5 recently scaled-up themes⁴, and the National Focal Point on Small Arms and Light Weapons (NFP-SALW), for it to increase activities in the Karamoja region, as ways of enhancing SDG 16+ implementation at the local level. Capacity building could include enhancing skills of key officers involved in SDG 16+ implementation with expertise in peacebuilding, human security, and participatory programming.
- **Scale up the community policing programmes** as a way of promoting preventive responses to violence at the community level.
- **Ensure gender equality and the protection of women's rights** (including to land). To achieve this, the Ministry of Gender should identify key issues to tackle and work with relevant ministries, local authorities, traditional leaders, and other key "gatekeepers" in communities to address them.
- Government should **engage youth as partners** to identify youth-specific needs and respond to key issues that affect youth, such as unemployment and low and/or tokenistic participation in decision-making processes. This can be done by ensuring their active participation and strengthening existing capacities for youth to help establish youth-led development initiatives.
- Work through local governments, and collaborate with CSOs to build on and **strengthen district peace committees**, local councils and community peace

⁴ Environment, Social, Economic, Governance and Security

committees to coordinate SDG16+ implementation at local levels.

- Work through local governments and collaborate with civil society, UN agencies, and the private sector to **enhance SDG awareness** and enable the localisation of the agenda. This collaborative approach should activate community participation in SDG implementation, SDG advocacy, and in holding the various duty-bearers to account. Active participation should include involving local communities as key actors in spearheading community dialogues, ensuring inclusion of youth, women, and other vulnerable groups, in addition to tracking SDG 16+ progress and participatory budgeting.
- **Localisation of SDG 16+** needs to be clearly stipulated as a responsibility of the Chief Administrative Officers, sub-county, and local council leaders, so that they integrate localisation into their day-to-day work. This should include facilitating local ownership of the goals, data collection, developing inclusive SDG 16+ strategies, and their inclusive implementation.
- Collaborate with neighbouring countries to **enhance cross-border approaches** and minimize spill-over effects of violence. This will reduce challenges faced in border regions including cross border raiding, arms proliferation, violent extremism, and boundary-related tensions about natural resource. Ensuring the implementation of the UN commitment to support the Uganda-Kenya cross-border initiative (2020-2025) for sustainable peace and development in the Turkana, West-Pokot and Karamoja regions is a key opportunity to seize⁵.
- **Enhance SDG data collection** by, for example, identifying a government office at the district level and assigning it a role to coordinate data collection and act as a one-stop centre for information on SDGs. The office could work closely with the SDG secretariat⁶.

⁵ ug.one.un.org

⁶ The Secretariat was established in 2019 to support SDG coordination architecture in Uganda.

5.2 To civil society organisations

- Jointly **advocate** for and cooperate with the government in **finalising and operationalising the national peace policy draft** for it to be passed and approved by parliament. This could be done through the National Platform on Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution.
- Jointly **advocate** and **cooperate** with local and national authorities to **increase their budget allocations towards SDG 16+**, in particular peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This should include specific attention to working with youth and women to identify and address their specific rights, capacities, and needs.
- **Work with communities** for them to participate in developing and **tracking relevant SDG 16+** plans, budgets, and expenditures and progress.
- **Collaborate** with government, the UN, and the private sector in a participatory and inclusive manner to **enhance SDG awareness and SDG 16+ in particular** – especially at the community level.

- **Use the SDGs as an advocacy tool** for peace and human security to constructively engage rights-holders and duty-bearers. The SDGs provide an internationally, nationally, and locally recognised tool to work with stakeholders in fulfilling their various mandates and service delivery.
- Collaborate with government institutions to **promote Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** mechanisms, such as mediation, as well as trauma counselling, as an approach to transforming conflicts within communities. This can be done through local councils and community-based organisations.
- The NGO Forum⁷ should facilitate coordination, learning, and information

⁷ An NGO platform organization in Uganda.

sharing meetings for CSOs to engage, reflect, and share experiences on SDG 16+ awareness-building, mobilisation, implementation, learning, monitoring, and advocacy. This should have a particular focus on increasing active participation of communities, including local leaders, in SDG 16+ implementation, as well as promoting accountability and anti-corruption measures.

- In collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister and Ministry of Internal Affairs, the NGO Forum should organise regular, **constructive dialogues** among civil society and government on implementing complementary, joint SDG 16+ efforts, discussing related recommendations from official and CSO-led SDG reviews.

5.3 To the international community

- **Enhance support for peace and conflict prevention** in the country by increasing funding for SDG 16+ interventions. This can be done through specific calls for funding proposals for CBOs and CSOs and earmarked contributions to relevant government agencies. This funding should also specifically address the Covid-19 pandemic and its localized impact on human security.
- **Support** government, CSOs and CBOs in participatory localisation and **awareness-raising of SDG 16+** and its targets in an inclusive manner, in particular at the community level.
- **Encourage** and support a **conducive civic space** and access to information by urging the government to ensure that CSOs (including media) are able to freely play their legitimate roles.
- **Support partnership building** among the state, civil society, and the private sector for effective planning, implementation, and monitoring of SDG 16+. This could be done by funding **Government-CSO-private sector dialogue meetings**.

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Conclusion: Do not let SDG 16+ behind!

The realisation of SDG16+ is key for transforming the lives of people. SDG 16+ is a key prerequisite and central pillar for the realization of the entire SDG agenda. At the same time progress on SDG16+ is also an indicator that all other SDGs are being realised.

With active and meaningful involvement and participation of key stakeholders, as well as greater coordination and prioritisation of peace and conflict transformation, great strides can be taken towards more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. It is unquestionable that SDG 16+, like other SDGs, cannot be achieved under conditions of violent conflict. Therefore, the government of Uganda and other actors must enhance their efforts towards peace and conflict transformation in the country. As participants strongly appealed, ***“As we strive to leave no one behind, let us ensure we do not leave SDG 16 behind”***.

Colophon

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CECORE



CECORE was founded 1995 by a number of Ugandans aspiring to promote alternative and creative means of preventing, managing, and resolving conflict. CECORE's purpose is to empower individual women and men, communities, organizations and institutions to transform conflict effectively by applying alternative and creative means in order to promote a culture of active tolerance and peace.

CECORE commits to work with people, especially – but not only – in areas where conflict is present or peace is threatened, to awaken and develop their awareness that peace is within their grasp; to empower them with the knowledge and skills relevant to their situation; and to facilitate conflict prevention, resolution and transformation.

CECORE focuses on research for capacity development in areas related to: peace building and conflict transformation, governance, human rights, lobby and advocacy, nonviolence, conflict sensitivity and gender and youth inclusive related approaches.

CECORE is one of the founder members of GPPAC. From 2017, CECORE is the regional secretariat for GPPAC-Eastern and Central Africa regional network where it coordinates peace building work of its members in 16 countries in the region.

GPPAC



Global Partnership
for the Prevention of
Armed Conflict

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is a network of civil society organisations active in conflict prevention and peacebuilding practice world-wide, promoting a fundamental shift in how the world deals with violent conflict: moving from reaction to prevention. GPPAC members work together to inform policy, improve practice and facilitate collaboration amongst civil society, intergovernmental organisations and state actors.

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