



Change, response and adaptation in a lakeshore village in Mukono District, Uganda

Insights from community discussions, complementing a quantitative household economy study

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Introduction

The aim of this field study was to inform our understanding of the current drivers of social and economic change in a lakeside community within the Lake Victoria basin. The work was carried out in Bulebi Sango¹ village, Mukono district, as part of the HyCRISTAL rural livelihoods pilot study in Uganda (<http://www.walker.ac.uk/research/projects/hycristal-integrating-hydro-climate-science-into-policy-decisions-for-climate-resilient-infrastructure-and-livelihoods/>). In 2016, a household economy assessment was carried out providing a quantitative analysis of assets, demography, income sources and disposable income across this community (Petty et al., 2016). In this follow up work, we were able to look at social and institutional factors, as well as economic, environmental and climate related issues, that had influenced changes in livelihood activities over the past three decades. This work was designed to contribute to the HyCRISTAL knowledge exchanges led by Climate Action Network Uganda ([CAN-U](#)) which are informing resilience and climate adaptation policies.

Bulebi Sango village is situated around 35 km from Uganda's capital city, Kampala. This report is based on group discussions held over two days, led by Eunice Achiro, a social scientist at Gulu University, and James Acidri, a Ugandan livelihoods expert. Both researchers had been involved in the 2016 HyCRISTAL household economy assessments (Petty, op. cit., p. 3).

Methodology and overview

A pre-fieldwork visit was made to explain the purpose of this exercise to the Local Council Chairman of Bulebi Village. Additional feedback was provided on the previous year's exercise, highlighting gaps in knowledge around the changes that had taken place in the community over recent decades. The Chairman was asked to identify men, women and young people who had lived in Bulebi for more than 10 years (younger residents) and more than 20 years (older residents) and who were considered to have good knowledge of livelihoods. He was asked to include better off and less well-off residents, engaged in a range of livelihoods activities, including farming, fishing, livestock rearing, vegetable production, business and petty trade.

Focus groups with older residents allowed us to explore trends and change dynamics in an historical perspective. Focus groups with younger people discussed current issues affecting their livelihood choices and their views on future prospects. Topics included finance, investment and new enterprise opportunities, migration and environmental issues, and the role of local government and local community associations. The focus groups included men and women involved in farming, fishing, small enterprise and livestock rearing.

¹ Referred to locally as 'Bulebi'

Women and men were interviewed separately in the discussions of changes that had occurred over the past 20-30 years. Interviews were repeated with different groups on subsequent days.

All quantitative data cited in this report relates to Bulebi Sango and is taken from the IHM study undertaken in Mityana and Mukono districts in 2016 (Petty, op. cit., pp 7-16).

The translators were local primary school teachers. They were given clear instructions on the role of the translator and only asked for clarification of answers where local knowledge was relevant.

Results

Changes over time: focus groups with older residents

Older male residents

The groups were initially asked a series of open questions: How did people live in this community 20-30 years ago? Did people in this community live in much the same way now? If there had been changes, in what ways had things changed? In their view, what were the most important reasons for this change?

The men's groups highlighted population growth and its impact on land and lake resources. They said that 20-30 years ago *"we had very few people in the area, compared to now"*. They felt that steady population growth had limited and depleted land for agriculture and there had been *"over exploitation"* of fish stocks in Lake Victoria. For this reason, incomes had remained low, while expenditure and the cost of living had continued to increase over the years.

Migration from other parts of the country (mainly Teso, Busoga, Ankole, Bugwere, West Nile and Acholi districts) as well as natural growth of the local population, were seen as the reason for this increase in population.

Pressure on land from new arrivals, combined with problems in the agricultural economy at the turn of the millennium had led to extensive sale of land by the original Buganda residents. The timing of many of these land transactions (2000-2005) coincides with a period when rural land values around Kampala were appreciating rapidly, and coffee (the main cash crop) had been hit by global price collapse making farming far less profitable².

"People sold most of their land and relocated to live in urban areas such as Mukono, Jinja and Kampala city".

Whilst many of the original residents were moving into the urban economy, new migrants took up fishing, or combined fishing with agriculture if they were able to buy or rent land³. Most migrants into Bulebi were from fishing communities in other parts of the country⁴ and deliberately moved to Lake Victoria to fish. However, as fishing became more difficult due to depleted stocks and

² Farmers were also suffering major losses from vanilla, which had been introduced as a substitute cash crop.

³ At the time of the assessment in 2017 land was sold at around 7 million UGX per acre and generally purchases were made in cash.

⁴ Teso, Busoga, Bugwere and parts of West Nile all have fishing communities in Lake Kyoga, Lake Victoria and River Nile. The push factor from these districts was mainly poverty. In the case of Acholi district, the conflict in northern Uganda, which was only resolved in 2006, was the main push factor.

privatisation of fishing areas, some migrants shifted to crop farming if they were able to rent or purchase land.

Many of these migrants had been hit by a more recent wave of land sales: *“Most people have lost their land, since they were mainly migrants settled as tenants on other people’s land. There is a new wave of outright purchase of land from original owners causing land evictions and landless people who become unemployed in the agricultural sector.”*

Other changes highlighted by the groups of older men included a perceived drop in living standards which they described as household income *“not keeping pace with expenditure”*. They attributed this to liberalisation of agricultural commodity markets, which affected what they described as *“the well organised production and marketing of produce through co-operatives”*. For example, under the previous system, coffee was produced and the market price determined through co-operative unions. This gave farmers a guaranteed selling price and a predictable income. Now, they said *“you don’t know the sale price of coffee. It’s normally determined by exploitative middle-men.”*

Local farmers had also been hit by the loss of a significant banana trade with Kenya. Production of the preferred species (Bogoya) had been badly affected by pests and diseases (possibly associated with changes in climate), and production was now so low that farmers were unable to meet the demands of the Kikuyu traders.

In addition to the liberalisation of commodity markets, the lack of price guarantees and problems of plant diseases and pests, older residents also mentioned *“climate change and reduced soil fertility”* as factors that had impacted on lives and livelihoods in Bulebi’s agricultural sector in recent decades. For those who had stayed in Bulebi, the most profitable (non retail) cash generating activities ranked in order of importance were described as:

- Fishing
- Crop farming, i.e. maize, beans, coffee and ground nuts among others
- Livestock rearing, i.e. particularly cattle

This ranking corresponds with data collected in the 2016 household economy study (Petty, op.cit., p.13), which indicated that four out of the five wealthiest households in the village were boat owners, deriving their income almost exclusively from fishing. However, boat owners are in the minority; most households survive on a combination of farm related activity, day labour and petty trade which is mainly undertaken mainly by female members of the household.

Older female residents

Focus groups of older women were asked the same initial question as the men’s group: How did people live in this community 20-30 years ago? Did people in this community live in much the same way now? If there had been changes, in what ways had things changed? In their view, what were the most important reasons for this change?

They did not think there had been any fundamental change in the way people lived. They did, however, highlight factors that were driving changes in women's lives, including their financial contributions to the household, which in turn was altering some aspects of social relationships.

Like the men, they described the way in which climate had affected production and impacted on their lives:

"Weather variation with high temperature and unreliable rainfall has led to poor crop yields resulting to food shortage".

This had also forced them to use different sources of water. They described the decrease in lake water *"making it dirty and therefore unfit for human consumption hence the government constructed community boreholes for domestic use... 20-30 years ago... the community relied on the lake for domestic use."*

This raises many issues relating changes in domestic routines, social interaction, time management and gender inequalities (e.g. study time available for girls) that would merit further study.

The women, like their male counterparts, referred to the increase in population and its implications for land access. However, women described how this had been a driver of female entrepreneurship and economic activity outside the home (translated as 'empowerment').

"Because of increased population and limited land, many don't practice farming but resorted to business for subsistence as opposed to 20-30 years ago".

When they were asked about specific changes in the way people earned their income, the women explained:

".. people used to depend on farming and fishing mainly for food and income but because of unreliable weather and over fishing, crop yield and fish has decreased respectively therefore, many people opt to start business ventures that make them sure of getting daily income to support their family other than relying on rain-fed agriculture that is very unpredictable."

Whereas men had been responsible for producing most of the food that fed the household, lower yields meant that now women were generating much of the cash used to buy staple food in the market.

Alongside these changes, the women mentioned a significant increase in access to education, a subject not raised in the men's focus groups.

"Many schools have emerged leading to increased enrolment in primary schools as opposed to 20-30 years ago."

Following on from this, they noted:

"More women have been empowered⁵ and are involved in various business ventures that facilitate the family welfare not like 20 years ago when women relied only on the man as a bread winner."

⁵ We followed up with the local translator on the precise language used by members of the group. She confirmed that the words used by members of the group implied an acceptance of women's independent economic agency.

In the absence of cash from the sale of crops to underwrite household food security, the group observed that it was now easier for them to start their own business than it had been 20 or 30 years ago. The reason, they felt was:

“...because women have become very hard working. This is self-driven because the men have forgotten their responsibilities so women start their own enterprises other than waiting for everything from the man. The benefit of hard work is worth other than sitting.”

To put this in perspective, one of the drivers of male migration is low household income, and some fishermen we spoke to did send home regular remittances during the 2016 IHM study (Petty et al., 2016). We also came across a new family retail enterprise financed partly by savings accumulated over several years from the husband’s day labour, fishing on the lake.

However, the women’s focus groups were clear that roles and responsibilities within the household had changed, due to the loss of revenue from traditional income sources and the cash many were now able to provide from their own businesses:

“The women can now finance family activities including paying school fees. This is because they now are able to operate their own enterprises”⁶

One of the consequences of women’s increased economic independence appeared to be an increase in polygamy:

“There is increase in polygamy now because, since the women support themselves, and so men are not afraid of having as many women as possible since they will take care of themselves. They have also said that this is because the numbers of women are more than the men.”

Domestic violence was mentioned as a growing problem, some of which was attributed to women’s greater economic independence:

“There were many reasons for this including infidelity, failure by men to provide for the family and lack of control over the spouse’s income, especially men failing to control their spouse’s income.”

We asked if this shift in women’s economic role had changed the way in which decisions were made at household level - including decisions on investment and income diversification. Women felt that the main difference was in their increased independence, resulting from their involvement in small business:

“Women have been empowered to some extent because they can now start their own businesses and use the money, unlike 20-30 years ago when they use to over-work in the garden and never see or touch the money they have worked for, when the produce like coffee have been sold off. For example, women are now involved in enterprises such as local hotels, bars, retail shops and saloon business among others.”

⁶ The researcher cross-checked the translation of the terms used with the local translator who confirmed that attitudes to women working outside the home had changed: ‘ basically there is social permission since the women are free to carry out any economic activity and the men are okay with it since this contributes immensely to family welfare’

Men also referred to these changes: One group said *“Generally there is consensus in decision making at household level between men and women. Most food production is now for consumption. Unlike previous years when excess food production could be sold, households now prioritize own consumption, which enforces consensus between the man and woman.”*

When women were asked about household level decision making one of the groups stated

“Culturally and religiously, a man is the head of the family, so they make decision in all areas.”

Another stated:

“Mainly, men make discussion on areas of household finance generation and utilization whereas women on food consumption.”

However, this group qualified their response explaining:

“In the area of household welfare especially provision of food, this has been the case, but things have changed. The women can now finance family activities including paying school fees. This is because they have been empowered and so they operate their own enterprises.”

There was a consensus in both male and female groups that the fall in farm income was due, at least in part to *“Unpredictable weather which has made farming to be less important now.”*

However, when men were asked: ‘What changes have taken place in the way people earned their income?’ they answered that:

“Cash income is still derived from the same activities namely coffee and banana production. However, there are attempts for diversification into intensive vegetable and other crop farming such as tomatoes, cabbages, beans, maize and potatoes and cassava, but all this is on small scale due to limited capital for investment.”

Alignment with quantitative IHM study

Analysis of the data from the 2016 IHM study (Petty et al., 2016) shows just how low cash income from the traditional crops has become. In 2014-15, the period covered by the assessment, only 17 of the 105 households interviewed were selling these crops.

Table 1. Total cash income from former most important cash crops in 2014-15 (sampled households)

Matoke/banana	Coffee	Maize
Value of sales 8.58m UGX	Value of sales 7.12m UGX	Value of sales 1.6m UGX
20 households produce Matoke, 10 households produce & sell	13 households produce and sell Coffee	24 household produce Maize, 4 households produce and sell Maize

Income from traditional cash crops has to some extent been replaced by vegetable production and petty trade, generally carried out by women, and by cassava production carried out by both men and women⁷. Cassava is not a new crop in this community but, according to a local key informant who has been a resident for over 30 years there have been changes in its use and economic importance in recent years:

“Cassava is a traditional crop in this area; however, it has become more prominent in the past 20-30 years. Earlier it was grown only as a food crop just to supplement the staple food, Matoke, but due to banana wilt disease, coffee wilt disease and unreliable weather, it has become both a food and cash crop since it is more resistant to weather variation and disease.”

Table 2 shows the total value of income from tomatoes and cassava, two increasingly important sources of crop income.

Table 2. Total cash income from Tomatoes and Cassava, 2014-15 (105 sampled households)

Tomatoes	Cassava
Value of sales 18.5 m UGX	Value of sales 43 m UGX
10 household produce and sell 6 consume some of their production	34 household produce; 17 sell some of their production

Other crops such as beans and sweet potatoes (Table 3) are produced in Bulebi, but these are mainly for household consumption.

Table 3. Total cash income from beans and sweet potatoes 2014-15 (105 sampled households)

Beans	Sweet potatoes
Value of sales 2.4 m UGX	Value of sales 15 m UGX
42 households produce; 13 sell some of their production	30 households produce; 10 sell some of their production

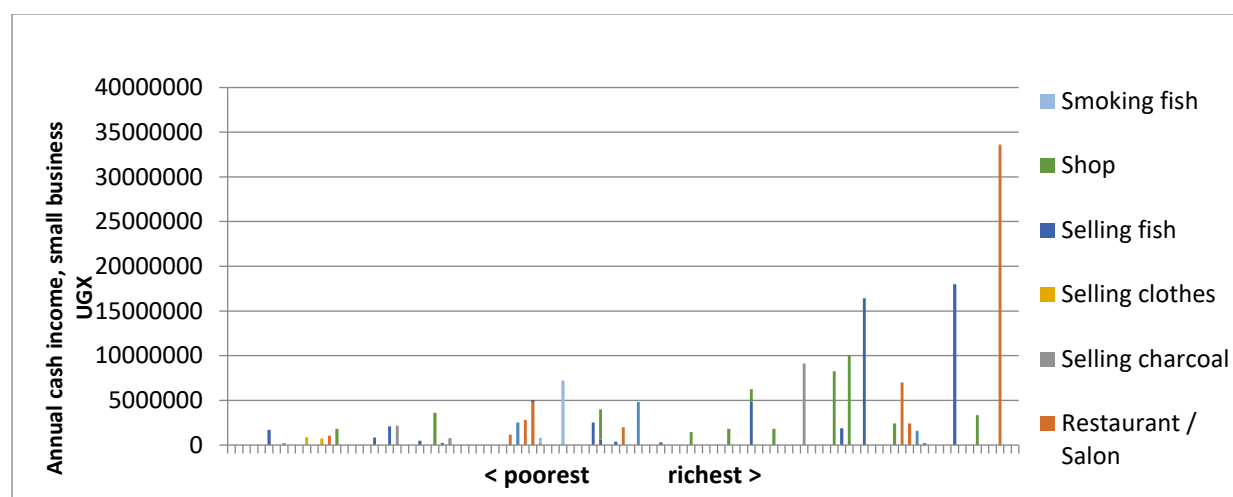
Economic impact of adaptation: The contribution of small enterprise to food security and welfare

The 2016 IHM study recorded cash income disaggregated by income sources. We have therefore been able to calculate the value of women’s enterprises and their contribution to household income.

⁷ Cash from the sale of cassava is controlled by whichever spouse was responsible for its production and sale.

Just under half the households in the sample gained income from business enterprises mainly or exclusively conducted by women. The types of enterprise and amount of income earned (after input costs have been deducted) are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Annual cash income, enterprises frequently owned by women (Source: 2016 IHM study Bulebi Sago)



The range of income from business enterprise per household is extremely wide (from 240,000 UGX to over 33m UGX). Whilst the amount earned in the richest quartile is relatively high, income from enterprise lower down the income distribution would not be sufficient to support significant investment or loan repayments needed to launch higher value enterprises, such as shops, kiosks, bars, restaurants, and salons, which all required an initial cash investment of between 2m UGX and 5mUGX. Approximate start-up costs are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Enterprise investment costs

Activities	Specific items	Startup Capital requirement
Trade	Kiosk	2 million UGX
	Bar	5 million UGX
	Restaurant	2 million UGX
	Saloon/barber shop	3 million UGX
	Hardware shop	10 million UGX
	Land per acre Rental	3 million UGX per annum 2 million UGX per annum, labour, seeds and purchase of pesticides
	Poultry	5 million UGX

Enterprise, credit and loans: mixed age groups

Participants who had all been involved in some kind of business enterprise, were asked how new and on-going activities were financed in Bulebi. They reported that, although there were no government microfinance services in the area, people could access loans through commercial micro finance organisations. However, interest rates on these loans were high, and the repayment period

short, for example 30% interest over 6 months. There were also local group Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs) in Bulebi, which provided interest free loans, but for smaller amounts.

In principle, women as well as men could access commercial loans, but men generally had easier access and could borrow larger amounts as they owned more assets (e.g. land, houses) so had greater collateral. The low levels of disposable income described in the previous section, together with the generally poor returns from business enterprises among the lower income groups, and the very high interest rates charged (30%) highlight the difficulties faced by households in general, and women in particular in attempting to increase their economic security through entrepreneurship.

The groups also discussed the problems and risks involved in starting new enterprises. Lack of financial information, particularly on terms and conditions of repayment was a particular concern, along with the risk of losing property offered as collateral. Women faced additional obstacles in accessing formal sector finance, arising from traditional property rights and the use of land as collateral. Men and women also had different perspectives on risks and reasons for business failure, which reflect the different types of investment they made.

Men saw climate change as the main problem, *“which has led to various risks such as crop failure, rampant crop pests and diseases.”*

They also referred to the short loan repayment period, which affected profits on businesses, and the fear of *“dealing with corrupt people, who will in turn provide substandard/poor quality agricultural inputs.”*

This underlines problems of governance and regulation highlighted by respondents at many points in the focus group interviews.

One group said the greatest risks they had dealt with was when reduced income from fishing led them to shift their activities from fishing to farming. However, they were now faced with challenges in agriculture, which included *“climate change and unreliable rainfall, lack of land for agricultural crop farming and livestock rearing.”*

They referred to the specific example of tomato farming *“which has not paid off due to lack of rainfall and increased cases of crop pests.”*

Potential to diversify into market gardening for nearby urban areas was further constrained by the absence of government investment in either irrigation or feeder roads. There were also heavy risks and limited opportunities for investment in livestock, despite Bulebi’s proximity to major centres of population. Land availability was limited and even households with the largest herds rent rather than own land, despite the cost (UGX 30, 000 per month). The risk of livestock loss from disease was also high, mainly due to low investment in extension services.

Whilst most investments in land and livestock were undertaken by men, some women were also involved in farm-based enterprises, particularly poultry rearing. They preferred to do this individually, rather than as a family or group venture as this allowed them to *“have a say on who to send to school including daughters since they will be contributing to school fees unlike in the past.”*

Most women preferred not to invest in livestock *“because of fear of forceful sale by their spouse and other relatives in case of any emergency need, in addition to their limited capital and land.”*

Both men and women identified defaulting on loans as the main risk in starting up a business as this resulted in loss of property, a fear that discouraged enterprise.

Although, in general, women had worse access to credit than men, they said they did not form savings groups for *“fear of misuse of their money by the person who is entrusted to keep the money”*, indicating relatively weak social bonds. This is in marked contrast to other locations in the region with a strong tradition of informal savings groups, and merits further research. Lacking access to formal or informal savings and loans, many women relied their own savings, despite length of time needed to accumulate sufficient cash needed to finance or expand an enterprise.

Women spoke of *“fear of suspicion from the community of where about capital is got from for investment.”* In other words, they feared social stigma arising from the assumption that money had been acquired by dishonest or irregular methods.

There was also *“fear of failures such as when you start up a business and fail, your peers can laugh at you and you become the talk of the community”*, and *“a great fear of loan reclaiming after business failure due to high food prices for hotel owners, crop failure, fight breakup in bars and thief in shops among others”*.

These comments underline the need to create opportunities for all sections of the community to have a voice in identifying obstacles to investment and entrepreneurship and in recommending policy changes to address these constraints. At the level of individual experience, social, economic, legal and cultural factors combine to create significant obstacles to adaptive behaviour that require both quantitative and qualitative research to understand and, where possible, to mitigate them.

Factors influencing successful income diversification and adaptation

Both male and female respondents identified *“capital and training”* as the most important factors in starting a successful enterprise. The importance of family support and networks varied. One group said it was not important, another said families provided a supporting environment; they might, for example provide *“the premises to run the business”*. This was closer to the view expressed by one of the male respondents who identified family networks and support as important, particularly in selecting and helping to start up the enterprise.

When women were asked about the main threats and risks facing their investments, these were ranked:

1. Theft in retail shop business
2. Too many debtors
3. Inadequate regular customers
4. Disease outbreak for crops and livestock
5. Decrease in fish numbers

Men saw the main threats to investments as:

1. Theft of fishing equipment in the lake due to lack of security

2. Seasonal demand for commodities and basic services as motorcycle boda boda transport services
3. Lack of operational funds to take care of for example dairy cattle, i.e. purchase of fodder and livestock drugs
4. Lack of business management skills such as record keeping

Examples of specific farm business risks cited by men highlighted vulnerability to global market price changes (e.g. failed investment in vanilla) and vulnerability to crop failure (e.g. reliance on household maize production as animal feed for poultry farms).

These discussions underline the continuing impact of gender inequalities in determining an individual's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and should not be overlooked in the wider discussions of resilience and promotion of an 'enabling environment'.

Migration: focus groups with younger men and women

We wanted to explore the role of migration in the lives of younger residents of Bulebi. Focus groups explored the economic, social and gender related factors influencing migration. Everyone in these groups knew people in the village who had been away for longer or shorter periods

Many younger men migrate to neighbouring fishing sites such as Gaba, Buvuma islands for periods of 2-4 weeks during the peak fishing season. Those travelling to urban areas, such as Mukono, Jinja and Kampala left for longer periods of 2-3 months, mainly to do petty trade or casual labour. There was also some migration back to family home areas including Soroti, Mbale and Arua.

Women often left to do domestic work and could be away for a number of years.

Generally, respondents felt that migration was something positive, but most said they would only go away if there were good opportunities to work. Others were less cautious and *"would rather leave than die in poverty even if it means going to Juba, Southern Sudan"*.

The main factors holding these young people back were low levels of education, lack of capital to start new businesses elsewhere and pressure from the family not to move away.

Depending on the purpose of migration, to make the best of leaving the village, they explained that people needed:

- Money (at least 200,000 UGX-1,000,000 UGX) to start a small business, and the necessary skills and equipment
- Fishing skills and equipment, including nets and boat
- Commodities to be traded and market linkages
- Local language and connections with people in your destination
- Education/ vocational skills and English to at least secondary education (S.1 to S.4). This was now necessary for jobs *"as low as a house help"*.

The main opportunities for young people were in employment in enterprises, although jobs were not available in rural areas and were limited in urban areas. The problem was that *"local people from places like Bulebi lacked capital - and there was in little industrial or agricultural development to provide jobs."*

Both groups stated that young women and men faced similar challenges, although one group said that *“the young women are more vulnerable and normally sexually exploited due to desperation.”*

The second group explained that women were at a disadvantage in accessing family assets to support their ambitions *“young men can use any family asset like land without any question as opposed to young women”*.

They all felt people had least chance of success if they were forced to leave their home due to poverty, natural calamities such as floods or political insecurity

Governance, community organisations and changes in the natural environment

Older men and women were asked if they had observed any changes in the local environment since their youth. All groups said there had been changes, the most important of which was increasingly erratic weather. This also meant that rain fed vegetable production was no longer possible and there had been an increase in pests and diseases. These changes were attributed to population increase, deforestation and *“reckless bush/swamp burning either for leisure or to ease hunting”*.

This was not a new phenomenon and had been a problem for many years. A second group referred to *“the rampant cutting of trees, destruction of the swamps through sand mining along Lake Victoria causing significant environment degradation”*. As well as population growth, this group also referred to *“wealthy people who have decided to buy any land including wetlands. Government is also not enforcing the law to stop encroachment of the wetlands.”*

They felt that implementation of existing environmental laws was needed to protect wetlands, forests and water resources, and that issues of impunity needed to be addressed, to stop those with power who were responsible for *“arbitrary cutting of forests and depletion of natural resources.”*

They highlighted the problem of poor waste management, *“there is no law regulating use and disposal of polythene bags which is leading to serious land degradation”*.

They also referred to poor sanitation and the failure of community members to use pit latrines *“leading [to the] outbreak of sanitation-related diseases such as diarrhoea”*.⁸

Government service delivery to support livelihoods was considered to be weak: *“although the government NAADS-Operation Wealth Creation scheme provided seedlings such as coffee, mangoes and oranges these interventions do not have a significant impact”*.

The lack of feeder roads was also a problem, which had *“greatly affected production and marketing of agricultural produce in Bulebi”*. Health facilities were poor and ill equipped, and there was no accommodation for teachers.

⁸ It should be noted that there was only one lavatory block in Bulebi for a population of several hundred people.

Other factors with a negative impact on livelihood security included the absence of electricity, “rules and regulations regarding fishing equipment”, and evictions creating landlessness and associated problems.

Women also highlighted the lack of irrigation for vegetable production. As they rely on manual watering, the introduction of irrigation services would have a significant social as well as economic impact, by reducing time spent in their gardens.

Community associations

Finally, groups were asked about community associations in Bulebi: what they did, who could join, were there any membership fees or restrictions? Did these associations provide any kind of additional security or safety nets?

Associations included:

- An unregistered and informal community association “*A friend in problems*”, which offers social support and a safety net for members who fall on hard times. They have a life member fee of 5,000 UGX and contribution of 2,000 UGX during funerals plus in-kind contributions such as food and firewood.
- Two SACCOs, (which were considered less effective than the informal community association). “*Bulebi Women’s Group*” which has a life membership fee of 10,000 UGX. They purchase utensils such as cups and plates which are communally kept and used for occasions such as funerals and weddings. They also contribute money to support sick members, or sometimes withdraw from their small savings etc. The other group provides furniture to members in turns and has a life membership fee of 10,000 UGX.

Respondents explained that the third area of support within the community was provided by extended families, particularly during cases of prolonged illness, marriages and funerals. Support was given in the form of cash and food if households were facing specific challenges.

Discussion

These interviews provide some insight into the drivers of social and economic adaptation and change in Bulebi. However, the IHM data shows the limited scope for further adaptations without changes in policy and investment at national and sub national levels. Profits from business enterprise are extremely low and are heavily dependent on the agro-fishing community to generate demand for goods and services. Any further decline in these activities is likely to result in business failure, loan defaults and potentially further growth of ‘negative coping’, including high-risk illegal and semi-legal activities. Additional research could usefully look at loan defaults and the average longevity of small enterprises.

The study provides a picture of gradual adaptation, with households and individuals acting autonomously and opportunistically, as possibilities arise. The scope for further adaptation of this kind now appears extremely limited. Earlier ‘adaptive’ changes took place in the 1990s at a time when traditional income sources were under stress from the collapse of global coffee prices and market liberalisation. At this time, the other traditional local cash crop, bananas which were

exported to Kenya, was hit by wilt disease and returns from fishing were also diminishing. This led to some households selling their land to migrants who had arrived during the civil war of 1981-1986 and had moved to urban areas. For those who remained, changes took place in household economic dynamics, with women turning to small enterprise to 'put food on the table' as they faced further decades of decline in both fishing and agriculture; there was little intervention from government to support new infrastructure, oversee existing regulations, or provide alternative income sources.

Reflecting on contemporary conditions, focus groups described how environmental degradation, the loss of wetlands, lake pollution and poor sanitation are impacting directly on people's lives. These are seen as issues only government can resolve through better regulation, investment in infrastructure and law enforcement rather than issues for community groups. The community organisations described in the focus groups were primarily mutual benefit societies, supporting members in times of difficulty, and providing informal savings and loans to those who meet membership criteria. They do not appear to take on wider issues of environmental protection, rubbish clearance etc. and a more detailed ethnographic study would be needed to explore these issues in greater depth. However, data from the individual household surveys combined with qualitative information from focus groups, points to men and women working intensively to sustain their families, with a focus on survival in circumstances made more difficult by an unpredictable climate and weak governance.

Reference

Petty, C., Ngoleka, S., Acidri, J., Machuki, H., Achiro, E., Alip L., (2016) Assessment of rural livelihoods in two lakeside communities, Mityana and Mukono districts, Uganda. Evidence for Development Working Paper: 7 DOI [10.5281/zenodo.5113335](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5113335)