



Baseline Report: Empowering Marginalized Youth in Uganda

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By: Mayanja Clement

Introduction and summary

This baseline study **assessed** gaps in services for marginalized youth in Kampala to inform the refinement of project strategies and implementation plans. Data **were collected** from 50 youth, 6 LWU staff, 8 key informants, and 23 service providers, revealing that transgender youth, youth in shelters, and HIV-infected youth **were** the most vulnerable, facing unemployment, poverty, homelessness, sexual exploitation, stigma, and barriers to healthcare. Service **were noted** in mental health support, legal aid, economic empowerment, shelter safety, and access to essential health commodities, with limited confidentiality, follow-up, and equitable inclusion. The study **recommended** targeted, youth-centered interventions, including dedicated mental health counseling, peer trauma support, vocational skills start-up kits, expanded vocational courses, enhanced outreach, and strengthened safeguarding measures. These findings **provided** an evidence-based foundation for designing inclusive, responsive interventions that **enhanced** the well-being, resilience, and empowerment of marginalized youth.





About Let's Walk Uganda (LWU)

Our Mission

Let's Walk Uganda (LWU) is a human rights organization established in 2015 and registered in 2016, with the mission to advocate for the rights and well-being of marginalized individuals, particularly key populations. Under authentic and visionary leadership, LWU has consistently demonstrated commitment to fostering an inclusive society through grassroots initiatives.

Our Impact

From its early days, Let's Walk Uganda has been a leader in advocating for equality, respect, and justice for key populations in Uganda. Its pioneering initiatives, such as establishing the country's first openly queer shelter, have provided critical safe spaces for those in need.

Youth-Centered Approach

LWU actively engages and empowers young people, helping to nurture the next generation of leaders and advocates for marginalized communities.

Grassroots Leadership

The organization has exhibited remarkable growth, evolving into a beacon of hope and progress for key population rights in Uganda.

Safe Spaces

Pioneering initiatives include establishing critical safe spaces and shelters for marginalized youth who have nowhere else to turn.

Project Overview: Empowering Marginalized Youth

The project titled "Empowering Marginalized Youth in Uganda," funded by Misereor, aims to holistically empower marginalized youths through tailored support services, safe community spaces, and sustainable support networks including training youth as mental health ambassadors.

01

Safe Environment Establishment

Creating safe spaces where victims of hate crimes and those experiencing sudden life changes after HIV diagnosis can rest and be rehabilitated to overcome post-traumatic mental health challenges.

02

Mental Health Network

Improving mental health support through training marginalized youths as mental health ambassadors to monitor issues, document cases, and offer immediate peer support.

03

Crisis Response Teams

Re-energizing community crisis response teams and LWU staff through compassion fatigue management workshops and retreats.



Study Methodology

Our comprehensive methodology involved multiple data collection approaches to ensure robust findings that accurately represent the experiences and needs of marginalized youth in Kampala.



Inception Meeting

A baseline inception meeting was held with six LWU staff (four males and two females) to orient them on objectives, scope, and approach of the assessment, clarifying roles and planning logistics.



Focus Group Discussion

In-depth qualitative insights were captured through a focus group discussion with four male LGBTI respondents, exploring experiences, challenges, and perspectives on accessing support services.



Structured Interviews

Structured phone interviews were conducted with 50 marginalized youth using KoboCollect, including 18 gay, 21 transwomen, 5 queer, 3 transmen, 2 bisexuals, and 1 lesbian youth.



Service Provider Mapping

The mapping exercise identified 23 service providers, including Ubuntu Justice, Ark Wellness Hub, SMUG, and others, providing a clear picture of existing services and gaps.



Key Findings: Most Vulnerable Groups

The baseline study revealed three categories of marginalized youth requiring urgent attention, each facing unique and intersecting challenges that demand targeted interventions.



Transgender Youth

The highest priority group, consistently emerging as most marginalized due to multiple layers of discrimination. Often denied jobs, expelled from workplaces, rejected by families, leading to homelessness and forced survival strategies.



Youth in Shelters

Including minors with nowhere else to go, experiencing unemployment, idleness, restrictive rules, and sexual exploitation by shelter managers. Poor conditions often exacerbate rather than relieve vulnerability.



HIV-Positive Youth

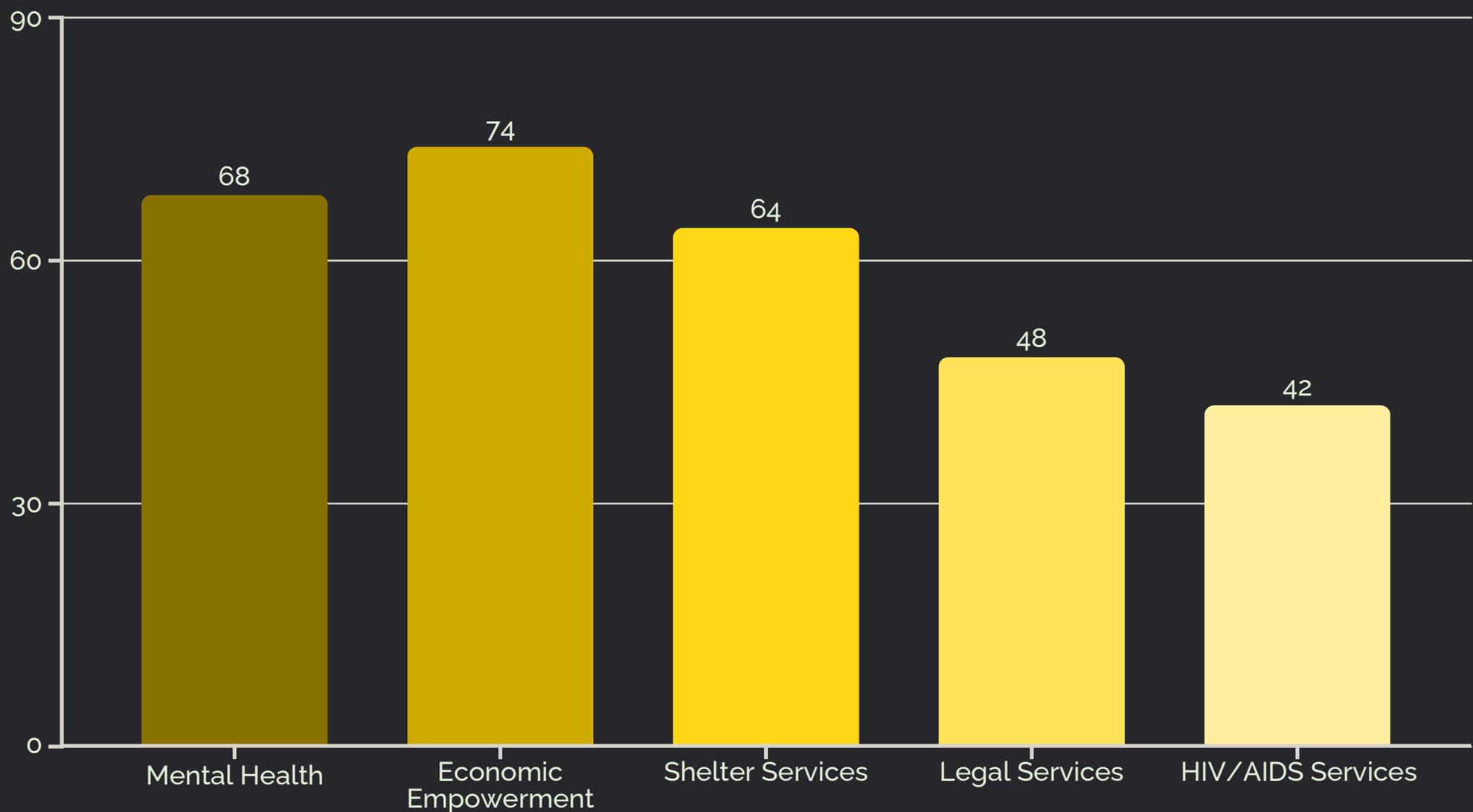
Struggling to maintain consistent access to treatment due to stigma and abuse at health facilities. Many rely on friends to collect medications, with situation worsened by commodity shortages after donor withdrawal.

Transgender youth are particularly marginalized, often expelled from homes and workplaces, with many resorting to survival sex work due to lack of alternatives.



Service Gaps Analysis

Our comprehensive analysis revealed significant gaps across all service areas, with mental health support, economic empowerment, and shelter services showing the most critical deficiencies.



Mental Health Gaps

- Lack of clear information on accessing services (32%)
- Insufficient time, privacy, or confidentiality (12%)
- Counselors don't understand youth issues (8%)

Economic Empowerment Gaps

- Limited training and skills development (20%)
- Insufficient capital or post-training support (20%)
- Limited access and fairness in opportunities (14%)

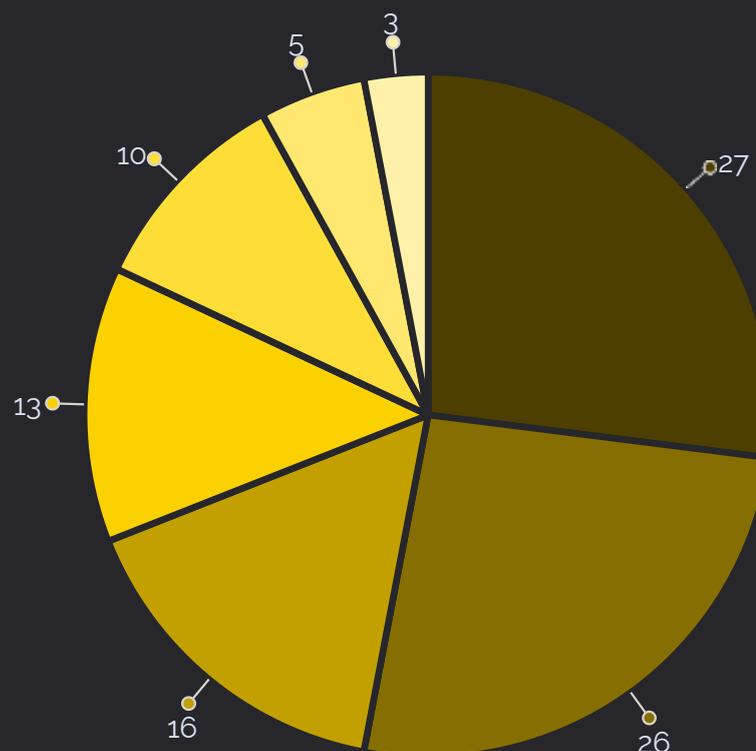
Shelter Service Gaps

- Food insufficiency and unmet basic needs (36%)
- Mismanagement and unfair practices (16%)
- Overcrowding and limited time (10%)



Barriers to Service Access

Marginalized youth face a complex interplay of social, structural, and logistical barriers that significantly hinder their ability to access essential services and support.



- Fear of Exposure
- Stigma/Discrimination
- Limited Information
- Distance/Transport
- Legal Risks
- Cost of Services
- Other

The analysis revealed that **54% of respondents reported being affected "very much"** by these barriers, with an additional 16% stating "quite a lot," demonstrating that a substantial proportion of youth experienced moderate to high levels of obstruction in accessing services.



Demographics and Targeting

Understanding the demographic characteristics of marginalized youth is crucial for designing targeted interventions that address the specific needs of different subgroups within the community.

Gender Identity Distribution



- Male
- Female
- Bisexual
- Transgender
- Queer

Age Distribution

The age distribution revealed that marginalized youth were concentrated in the 20- 29 age range, accounting for **82% of respondents**, with a mean age of 26.1 years.

- Ages 25 - 29: 46%
- Ages 20 - 24: 36%
- Ages 30+: 18%

98%

Unmarried

No explicit reasons given apart from economic challenges

84%

Formal Education

Had some form of formal education, with 62% completing secondary school

22%

University Completion

Suggesting barriers to higher education that programs could address



Implementation Plan and Safeguarding

A comprehensive implementation plan has been developed with clear timelines, safeguarding protocols, and monitoring frameworks to ensure effective and safe service delivery to marginalized youth.

Phase 1: Preparation (Months 1-2)

Recruit staff and ambassadors, conduct baseline assessment, secure mental health hub space, procure equipment, and develop safeguarding guidelines.

1

2

Phase 2: Capacity Building (Months 3-4)

Train 20 youth ambassadors in mental health and peer support, train staff on trauma-informed care, and produce mental health guides.

3

Phase 3: Service Delivery (Months 5-12)

Operationalize mental health hub, roll out peer-led outreach, conduct compassion fatigue workshops, and facilitate referrals.

4

Phase 4: Monitoring & Adaptation (Throughout)

Weekly ambassador reports, quarterly reviews, beneficiary feedback sessions, and continuous adaptation based on emerging needs.

Safeguarding Principles

All interventions prioritize **Do No Harm**, best interests of youth, confidentiality, non-discrimination, and meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Based on comprehensive baseline findings, we present six key recommendations to strengthen services and support for marginalized youth, ensuring evidence-based, inclusive, and impactful interventions.



Strengthen Mental Health Support

Designate specific days for mental health services with known focal persons. Ensure confidentiality as cornerstone of all interventions. Provide periodic retreats for staff to prevent burnout.



Prioritize Friendly HIV & SRHR Services

Partner with friendly facilities like MARPI and Alive Medical Services. Introduce outreach clinics and community-based drug delivery. Re-establish essential commodity supplies.



Improve Legal Protection

Adopt effective follow-up models, expand community paralegal capacity, establish modest legal assistance fund for urgent cases like arrests or evictions.



Implement Safeguarding Reforms

Reform shelter management with clear policies, background checks, complaint mechanisms, and zero-tolerance for abuse. Allow supervised economic activities.



Strengthen Economic Empowerment

Include start-up kits and seed funding beyond training. Provide business mentorship and market linkages. Explore cooperative enterprises for transgender youth.



Improve Service Coordination

Establish clearer communication about available services. Form coordination forum among providers. Professionalize toll-free line with proper staffing and protocols.

"The findings provide a comprehensive understanding of vulnerabilities, barriers, and service gaps, serving as a critical foundation for designing responsive interventions that enhance mental health, legal protection, economic empowerment, and overall resilience among marginalized youth populations."

