"There will always be help, food and shelter for everyone"?

Culture and social protection for the very poor in Uganda

The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda, 2009

Table of Contents

Summary

In spite of continued growth, millions of Ugandans remain in long-term, extreme poverty. They are also likely to continue being by-passed by the opportunities that economic growth offers, mostly to the 'active' poor. Recognising this, Government and other development actors are turning their attention to policy initiatives geared towards 'social protection'. These initiatives might however borrow much from elsewhere, in the process neglecting the local cultural context, and failing to build on existing indigenous protection mechanisms that are susceptible to being strengthened.

This case study, part of the CCFU *"Culture in Development"* series, presents findings on the interface between culture and 'traditional' social protection mechanisms for the very poor in three regions of Uganda – Buganda, Lango and Ankole. Research focused on the prevalence and functioning of such mechanisms, the reasons for their survival (or withering), the benefits they provide, and their beneficiaries. A mixed picture emerges, with several traditional mechanisms overlapping, some disappearing, others adapting to new circumstances. In many areas, communities evolve in a cultural context that is still much informed by the values and practices associated with 'tradition' and with ethnic culture.

This document goes on to suggest several policy implications and makes the point, for a start, that social protection initiatives could usefully take this cultural context into account. Secondly, it is proposed that policy could build on (rather than substitute) these traditional solidarity values and mechanisms. If these today appear insufficient to address all the economic and social challenges that the very poor face, the latter can nevertheless (at least at times and for a time), turn to the opportunities such mechanisms offer, or at least invoke the values of solidarity that have (and do still) inform them, for support.

Some mechanisms have indeed shown resilience, adaptability and a degree of inclusiveness that can provide opportunities for future growth. The recent restoration of the kingdoms and other cultural institutions in Uganda offers a favourable context for some of these practices to be revived, in a way that responds to current challenges. Social responsibility to help one in need (such as by the youth to the benefit of the elderly) can be capitalised on, especially using channels people are familiar with. Thus, the clan often provides a potentially effective system through which common values and principles of solidarity can be reinforced. One could, for example, consider

- Revitalising and capitalising on the community spirit of collective responsibility for orphan care, protection of assets, as well as youth responsibility towards the elderly.
- Involving clans in food security, and cash transfer scheme management.
- Recognising and empowering traditional institutions (e.g. with a seat on local council for kingdom and chiefdom representatives) to protect the very poor and provide relevant information.

The paper indeed indicates that cultural leaders in some areas still derive legitimacy – especially in domains relevant to social protection – that point towards a need to include them in policy implementation. They often provide a recognised source of information, can act as a point of dissemination, and frequently retain responsibility to mobilise collective action that addresses critical concerns of the very poor.

Research results also indicate that these mechanisms display several limitations. One is the reciprocal nature of many collective benefits, at times excluding the very poor; another is the risk of 'adverse incorporation' and exploitatitve realtionships. Supporting such mechanisms will therefore have to take these limitations into account, such as by incorporating different types of contributions by the poorest to groups, that are not necessarily monetary.

Should some of the conclusions and policy pointers presented here be considered, policy makers may feel daunted by the task of scaling-up what currently remain localised, if often beneficial, culturally-driven and sustained solidarity mechanisms. How does one now move to the national level? Rather than designing a completely externally-inspired social protection initiative, however, the findings indicate that much might be gained by strengthening *existing* mechanisms and building on *existing* values, rather than starting afresh. This would however require a re-examination of attitudes among policy makers and implementers towards cultural resources and values. It would also require 'cultural mainstreaming' in government ministries and agencies. This should foster a more sympathetic understanding of the potential that one's cultural heritage affords in all aspects of life, including the value of solidarity towards the less fortunate in the community and the nation.

1. Introduction

A citizen's perspective on social protection

While social protection is generally defined as public actions aimed at reducing vulnerability and providing support to those trapped in poverty (whether in terms of social insurance, social assistance or laws and standards to protect citizens), this paper is also informed by a 'political' and 'transformative' view which extends social protection to address *both* causes and symptoms of extreme poverty and thus considers equity, economic, social and cultural rights, rather than confining its scope to targeted income and consumption transfers.

It is also informed by a perception of social protection that goes beyond public actions and a set of policies and programmes – to a citizens' perspective that includes not only formal ('public', as well as 'private'), but also non-formal systems and values of social protection, such as those based on kinship and traditional values of solidarity and reciprocity.

The national context, culture and social protection

In spite of lowering levels of poverty, millions of Ugandans remain in long-term, extreme poverty and are likely to continue being by-passed by the opportunities that economic growth offers, mostly to the 'active' poor. Currently, the chronic poor account for about a quarter of Uganda's population, or approximately 7.5 million people.

Recognising this, Government and other development actors are increasingly turning their attention to 'social protection'. A national social protection policy is at design stage and a number of initiatives are being implemented or being planned including, for instance, Universal Primary Education, health care reform and a health insurance scheme, the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund, interventions for vulnerable children, a Functional Adult Literacy programme, the National Social Security Fund, a pilot cash transfer scheme, etc.

These interventions have also in part been justified by the observation that family and other informal support mechanisms for the poor are under increasing strain. At a recent conference on 'Social Protection for the Poorest in Africa', however, evidence was advanced that such mechanisms endure. A submission on 'The impact of the AIDS epidemic on the families and households of the oldest people in rural Uganda', for instance, remarked that "*Higher socio-economic status, large family size and reciprocal relationships with kin and neighbours were particularly important in shielding the elderly from the negative effects of AIDS-related deaths among their children; elders without these factors fared particularly badly*". The 2006 Uganda National Household Survey similarly indicates that 21% of Uganda's households look after an orphan, without public assistance. Such a figure exemplifies the strength of social networks to protect the very poorest from shocks and guarantee a minimum standard of living. It is these 'informal systems', and the cultural context that informs them, that constitute the focus of this case study. Although culture is often negatively perceived in Uganda, as 'backward', and therefore generally to be avoided, this study adopted the perspective that, while this may at times be the case, there may also be positive aspects of local culture that are essential to inform how individuals and communities act and define themselves.

Similarly, might social protection policy initiatives borrow much from elsewhere, without building on indigenous protection systems that could be strengthened? It can be advanced that, while government will normally have to play a leading role in social protection initiatives, it is possible that these will be more effective if they clearly reinforce, whenever possible, existing informal, family- or community-based mechanisms. One objective of this research has been to give an indication of the validity of this statement and, if valid, to suggest what could be done to reinforce such mechanisms.

Research in Buganda, Ankole and Lango

To examine the prevalence of 'traditional' social protection systems, how they operate, the reasons for their survival (or withering), their beneficiaries, how they affect the social capital of the poorest; and opportunities for strengthening or revitalising them, field research was conducted in three rural areas: 4 villages in the traditional kingdom of Buganda; 3 villages in a pastoralist environment (Ankole) and 3 in a region emerging from conflict in the North (Lango). In addition to reviews of the literature, field work included observation, semi-structured and life history interviews, focus group discussions and wealth ranking exercises with altogether approximately 340 respondents, from December 2007 to July 2008.

As an ethnic group, the Baganda represent about a fifth of the national population. All respondents met in this region had experienced political, social or economic shocks, to varying degrees, mostly related to civil strife and the HIV crisis. With norms and traditions revolving around the institution of the king, or *Kabaka*, they had entered what was for many a period of mourning after their kingdom was abolished in the 1960s, until the current government restored it as a 'cultural institution' in 1993. This restoration, though not without its detractors because of its 'a-political' nature, provided a fresh impetus for the monarchy and, more broadly, for Kiganda culture (the two being inextricably linked) to re-surface.

Ankole, to the West, was also a 'traditional kingdom', similarly outlawed in the immediate post-colonial period. Contrary to Buganda, however, it was not restored in the 1990's, in part because the rather monolithic cultural make-up in Buganda (excluding the significant immigrant communities) is not replicated in Ankole. Today, rural Ankole communities are still often categorised along two sub-ethnic groups, described by respondents as the *Abaliisa,* primarily cattle keepers (or *Bahima* in the literature), while the *Abahingi* (or *Bairu*) are cultivators, though a significant population of both groups has diversified into other activities. The monarchy was associated with the dominant *Abaliisa* and, with a move to individual land ownership, much of this going to members of the political elite, and eventually creating in many areas patron-client relationships between the *Abaliisa* land-owning elite and the *Abahingi* agriculturalists.

Lango, in Northern Uganda, for long exhibited less centralised governance features, dominated by clans, than in the kingdoms. The last two decades of insurgency, as the Government battled the Lord's Resistance Army, was cited there as the major factor contributing to extreme poverty. This insurgency has led to loss of life and property, trauma, disability, abduction, and disruption of social and economic activity. Before government decided that people go to camps, their way of life was dominated by the need to be constantly on the run. Food supply dwindled with fields abandoned. The shock with the longest impact was however reported to be the loss of cattle to rustlers from neighbouring Karamoja, especially in 1988 and 1989 when *"…almost everybody lost their cattle. This brought complete poverty."* The economic and cultural effects of this loss are still felt today and at least in part explain the deep and widespread poverty witnessed in this region of the country.

Data collection in Namayumba (Buganda), Kirungu (Ankole,) and Barlonyo (Lango)

The multiple faces of extreme poverty in the research areas.

In addition, households are often affected by famine when rains fail. Finally, although the epidemic has hit all parts of Uganda, HIV/AIDS has especially affected areas where armed conflict has been intense.

Poverty and vulnerability in the study areas

The nature of extreme poverty in Uganda - and vulnerability to extreme poverty - has been largely documented. The 2005 report on Chronic Poverty in Uganda for instance describes its extent, complexity and the *'web of inter-related factors'* that account for its persistence, including lack of access to productive assets, lack of education, and constraints on other forms of human and social capital. Poor people can become chronically poor as a result of shocks, including insecurity and HIV, and more long-term processes, such as land fragmentation. To these must be added gender inequities. In sum, *"with no surplus to save, low levels of human, social or political capital and few productive assets, escape routes for people in chronic poverty are profoundly limited."*

In the study areas, respondents identified the very poor (typically constituting at least 10-15% of the local population) as those without access to means

of production, often without food, and those without social or other means of support. Alcoholism, defaulting on loan repayments leading to loss of assets, especially land, and crop failure contributed to this. Women and children were generally worse off, with the latter rarely attending school.

The very poor included, in Buganda and Ankole, old people, sometimes migrants, sick and neglected by relatives; in Ankole, those without cattle, who often look after cattle for a minimal salary and whose children do not attend school as they too tend animals for others. Widows evicted from their marital homes by their in-laws were also singled out, as well as orphans staying with elderly grand-parents, unemployed school drop-outs, and poor people with a disability or families with disabled children. In Lango, the very poor also included direct victims of the war, widows whose husbands were killed, children who had been abducted and maimed, street children, including the traumatised; the elderly abandoned in camps and those who turned to begging. It also included those entirely dependent on NGOs, and young girls who resorted to marriage, to transactional sex, had left school and worked as bar attendants or brewers of local gin. Older childless individuals and unmarried men, who are especially prone to food deficits, ridicule and isolation, also featured.

2. Community Social Protection and Welfare Mechanisms

In all the villages visited, both the poor and non-poor cope with shocks, using various mechanisms either of a 'traditional' or more recent nature, but informed by long-standing values of solidarity. All these operate in interlocking and overlapping ways, they have neither clear cut boundaries, nor do they always have a rigidly defined membership. Respondents, anthropologists and other sources help us to re-construct a rich and complex picture.

If we take the example of Buganda, we can identify 'traditional' mechanisms which include a number of family-linked systems (diagram). The clan *(ekika)* is valued for giving a sense of identity and pride, belonging and friendship, as well as for help in times of difficulty, when death of a family member occurs. The extended family at different levels provides an important coping mechanism for a large number of orphans and widows, reflecting the extent to which the strong bond of family togetherness is appreciated. It also provides a means for incorporating foreigners into a nuclear family, but has been affected by the devastating deaths of fathers, uncles and aunts due to HIV/AIDS. Some of the respondents were of the view that in-laws were often most dependable.

Beyond the family, community-based systems (the community itself, *munno mukabi* - an informal, community-based, mutual help group that pools resources to respond to emergencies) denote the value of solidarity itself. Some respondents named their communities as the most important means of coping, because whenever they are faced with a difficulty, the clan or in-laws arrive when village people have already done the biggest part. Other 'mechanisms' included friendship: belonging to a group of friends or some kind of network, however informal, applied to the very poor among our respondents, even though this might not translate into material benefits, but results in 'belonging' and 'recognition'. There were also self-help groups of recent creation: while the practice of group formation was until the 1950s not part of Kiganda

culture, there are now numerous and often based on *'omukwano nfanfe'* (true friendship). All groups have members and a leadership structure, and some were to a degree triggered by the desire to access external benefits. These typically include youth groups involved in HIV/AIDS awareness, piggery, and caring for the elderly; widows associations; farmers associations, and women's groups for various economic activities. The poorest are however often excluded from such groups because they cannot raise the required amount for membership, even by contributing their labour (see second diagram).

In the other study areas, somewhat similar pictures emerge. Thus, in Ankole (see second diagram), 'traditional' mechanisms also included a number of family-linked and community-based systems, friendship mechanisms, and self-help groups. All the *Abahingi* and *Bakiga* met in particular mentioned 'friends' as an important source of assistance. Contrary to

Accessing benefits by the poorest in Buganda

To support the very poor in Buganda, 'true friendship', 'extended family' and 'community' form the first layer of coping mechanisms; they are closer and their presence is felt. '*Munno mukabi*', the 'clan', and 'self-help groups' are in a second layer, they are relatively far.

The contemporary benefits of clans are multiple…

"People of the same clan relate easily" Timothy Muwonge, key informant, Masaka.

"You do not find Baganda dying on the road due to lack of food….even when you are in difficulty or a strange place and just mention your name, you will be supported" Ernest Ssempebwa, key informant, Kampala.

"Clans bring back joy and are necessary" Agali Awamu Women's Group member, Luguzi village, Buganda

Alphunse Otim in Barlonyo, Lango, says the clan can still beat a man before the clan members, elders, other adults and children, and sometimes the shame forces members to behave appropriately.

"We have an emergency fund for clan members who are in difficulty" Member of Kisokyo Women's Organic Farmers' Association, Kisokyo village, Masaka

"When one is suffering or in difficulty, members of the community would ask "Toyina babo?"(Don't you have relatives?) Members of Gakuwebwa Munno Women's Group, Buyikuzi village, Masaka

"The clan system will stay around for long…I do not see it dying at all. Even the smallest kid knows that. Though it is somehow segregative, once people are of the same clan, they automatically "switch on (…) Some clans may not be so cohesive today, but arrangements have started to strengthen them through meetings and the radio." John Muwanga, St. Jude Family Projects, Masaka

Lily Abwang, in Obangageo, Lango, says that following her husband's death, her brothers-in-law fought over her land and threatened to evict her. Her father-in-law, an advisor in the clan, defended her and she was able to retain it. She says she received help from the clan because her father-in-law holds an influential position in the clan and they listen to him, although she is not sure the clan would have listened if he were an ordinary clansman.

…but not for everyone

"The clan is very far" Muhese Benon, very poor person in Mwoya III village, Kiruhura, Ankole

"I was born in Butambala… I came to this place in 1973…My legs are now paralysed… My nephew may bring me trousers and I may not see him or anyone from my lineage for 4 or 5 years" Abbas Ssemuko,

amongst the poorest in Luguzi village, Buganda.

"The clan is not very helpful-we are very few members of my clan in this area" Evaristo Tibagirya, poor elderly widow, Kirungu village, Ankole.

"The clan cannot handle today's challenges, such as helping to educate children" A group of men and women, Kigarama village, Ankole

"I am 85 years old and I left Burundi at the age of 14…I returned twice to visit but that was long ago… later I married, but my wife died…I am alone…and I do not intend to go back to Burundi" Andrew Lukomeye, Luguzi village, Buganda.

respondents in Buganda, however, many also spoke of government support as a major coping mechanism, such as with free primary education, which some called 'bursaries for poor children'. These positive feelings were not extended to the traditional ruler's government: reflecting our earlier remark, *Abahingi* respondents pointed out that land distribution had excluded them. As a result, they were locked into servitude, roaming from place to place in search for work or land to hire.

In Lango, traditionally, a number of social and territorial groups also existed, to which individuals belonged, owed their loyalty and through which they were moulded into Lango culture. These included the clan *(atekere),* the lineage *(Jo Dogola)*, the family at different levels, age groups and others. Traditional leaders (*Rwot* and *Jago*) had their sphere of influence corresponding to a clan or allied clans. As elsewhere, the clan and groups of clans had protective economic, social, religious, legal and security functions. Women 'belonged' there and were passed on through inheritance, while cattle were also considered clan property. The clan system was described as 'strong', and there was always someone responsible for the very poor, including people with a disability, the destitute, orphans, and the elderly. Individuals could also seek help within a lineage. Even during the LRA insurgency, respondents cited how affected clan leaders in Moroto, Otuke and Dokolo counties in Lira negotiated for arable land from leaders in the neighbouring district of Apac. They also gave cassava and simsim to displaced people to
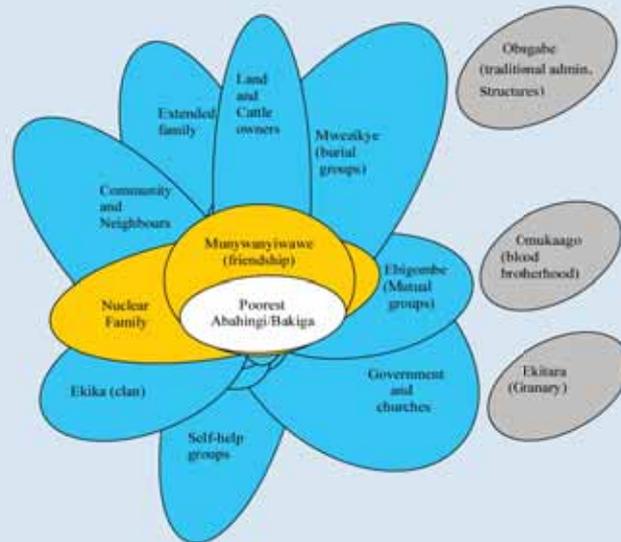
The interlocking and overlapping nature of solidarity mechanisms in *Abahingi/Bakiga* communities in Ankole

- Mechanisms that provide support to the very poor
- Mechanisms that provide less support to the very poor
- Extinct mechanisms

cultivate and advocated for clans mates to help. Forming self-help groups has however nowadays become an important means to cope with the crises resulting from the insurgency: some of these groups exhibit elements of solidarity and hard work, but many respondents felt that the responsibility for taking care of the poor has been left to NGOs, in the process fostering a 'dependency syndrome', especially in camps.

Ancient traditions abandoned in the face of contemporary challenges

In all the villages visited, respondents told us that the level of support from 'traditional' mechanisms has declined because of changing circumstances, such as increased poverty, HIV/AIDS and a weakening value system. In some cases, mechanisms have altogether disappeared and remain for the older people to reminisce. Thus, in Buganda and Ankole, as the kingdoms receded into memory, the tradition of the *omukaago* (blood brotherhood) vanished, as did the *olusuku ggandalyasajja* (a household garden of plantain, sweet potatoes and cassava) and the *ekyagi* or *ekitara* (a granary in Buganda, Ankole) to ensure food supply at

Omukaago and the good old days?

Bertha Namatovu, at 103 years, recalls how she and her husband lived at a time of trust, when people worked together in gardens, especially during land preparation and harvesting. They would help at traditional celebrations, including marriages, when the community would assist the groom and bride with the arrangements. Friends and community members would prepare millet flour, fetch firewood, and buy wedding dresses. Most people were farmers, with few assets, but shared the little they had. Bertha recalls how her husband and a friend assisted in paying school fees for the late Kyeyune. They helped him because he was a relative.

"In those days, there were not as many orphans as there are now. When a man was on his death bed, he would instruct a friend or a relative to take good care of his children and wife. This caretaker would normally take over the wife. In most cases, the friend would be a 'Munywanyi' ('a blood brother')." This would be someone with whom the deceased had taken *Omukaago*, a common and highly regarded practice. In the past trust among the people was high: *"One would even show you where he has hidden his money so that in case of death you can retrieve it …and people used to advise each other. Omukaago happened mostly during the reign of Kabaka Muteesa I. By the reign of Muteesa II, the practice had started fading away because people trusted each other less – most people care more about money than friends"*. B. Namatovu, Kwata-Kasabo village.

Lango: diminishing support from children

Zechariah Abwang, aged 116, has five children alive, mostly living in his village. They however do not support him and they have taken most of his land. His only support has come from his widowed daughter-in-law, Lily.

For 80-year old Alphunse Otim in Barlonyo, having children, some of whom live and work in Lira and Lugazi, has not translated into support. Worse still, one of his sons left with him five grand children to look after.

Although looking after orphans themselves, Aljeo Okello, and his wife, residents in Barlonyo, have been abandoned by their children

difficult times, in part at least because the latter were enforced by the king's chiefs. Beyond this, elderly respondents noted that in the past there was much sharing and cooperation between people of the same village. For instance responsibility for raising children and orphans belonged not only to a family but to a community, the 'whole village or clan', so a child would not suffer from the loss of parents.

In Buganda, respondents especially associated such changes with the gradual weakening of the monarchy, the custodian of values and norms, from the time of its co-option by the colonial authorities. In Ankole, the landless would get land

from those who had more; today everything that was free has turned commercial: "*one cannot get free milk or even free obushera* (millet drink)*".* Similarly, the practice of blood brotherhood broke down because of the monetary economy: *"the value of friends was replaced with cash…Money compensated for many things…there was no need of omukaago".* Other forces were at play too: the clan was observed to have weakened, especially in Lango and Ankole where, in the past, people of the same clan usually resided in the same locality and the bond would be strong. Over time, with land scarcity and population growth, young people have been moving away in search of work and land. Finally, where traditional administrative structures have been re-instated in the 1990's, these often remain largely ceremonial because their mandate is limited to cultural matters and they only exist alongside government structures.

In Lango, multiple crises have weakened traditional solidarity mechanisms 'across the board'. It is especially in areas that have been affected by conflict that both traditional and more recent solidarity mechanisms have been severely disrupted. Once they cease to be of value, they vanish, even if temporarily. Thus, with displacement, cooperative labour groups did not have the environment to function; and, with massive cattle rustling, the *Jo Awi Dyang* – keeping animals in one kraal, with one person looking after several people's cattle – disappeared with the cattle. Similarly, the extended family no longer plays the role it used to play. Some of the poorest respondents pointed to their children as a source of support when fleeing, but others had to find refuge in camps because they had nowhere else to go. If relatives still take care of orphans, they now prefer to support them from a distance, without the additional burden of providing housing, food and clothing. Support given to a poor relative is based on pity, mindful of what others might say if there is no care: *"These days our people have copied a culture that came from Europeans and prefer to say: 'I want my own thing' and not 'ours'".* Some respondents also thought that support to widows had weakened in the face of the HIV crisis, which discourages widow inheritance, a factor leading to high poverty levels for women headed households as there is reduced support from men within the clan. This, an elder stated, is a problem throughout Lango: widow poverty will remain a problem unless the clan finds alternative means of supporting vulnerable groups.

Adaptation and incorporation: the evolution of community groups

With time, people thus found that traditional mechanisms based on kinship and family relations could no longer support them in the face of 'modern' shocks: new ways to cope were devised, but these were often based on ancestral values and practices, and informed by changing contexts, evolving ethnic mix and sometimes the availability of external support. The *munno mukabi* groups in Buganda and the communal labour groups in Lango provide two examples.

Luguzi village: survival and evolution of a traditional systems and values

An active *munno mukabi* group had existed for many years in Luguzi but was disrupted by the 1981-86 war which displaced group members. Upon return, a new group was formed. While retaining the initial principle of *munno mukabi* of supporting those in need, it incorporated income generation initiatives.

In the new group, all members make an equal mandatory monthly contribution of U.shs 1,000. An additional collection *(amabugo)* is made to support a bereaved member. Those who do not have food or money to contribute when required, borrow to meet their commitment.

Some group members participated in further training that triggered an appreciation of the need to be enterprising

The Luguzi sub-group keeps livestock

While *munno mukabi* has changed over time, but has remained true to its original principle: a way of life, an abstract reference to the spirit of sharing, especially at times of death, sickness and celebration of marriage. Over the years, some communities perfected the system by choosing *munno mukabi* leaders and registering members, establishing '*munno mukabi* groups'. The restoration of the monarchy in 1993 and the current drive to strengthen Buganda's cultural roots and institutions sped the process. With the emergence of self-help groups with a bias towards income generation, 'pure' *munno mukabi* groups were however becoming less attractive. Younger people joined the new groups

and to share knowledge on farm and livestock management: *"... everyone must be helped to improve and cooperate. Without unity we will remain poor...."* The group purchased cooking utensils and gas lamps that are hired out at social events. Some members engaged in livestock rearing and formed a sub-group through which they collectively sell milk to a large commercial dairy. With increased incomes, members started supporting other social events, such as weddings and graduation celebrations: *"A child's upbringing is not only for its parents but for the entire village."*

Although they mentioned their limited capacity to help HIV/AIDS affected members, they found means to support them: families, rather than individuals, were enrolled as members so that a family could continue to benefit even if the active member became ill. Members are involved in community activities and can make individual contributions to support non-members in times of difficulty too. Support to a community member however often depends on his or her contribution towards solving other people's problems.

In Luguzi too, a group of youth are mobilised by the Local Council Chairman and a female mentor to help the elderly and vulnerable, in accordance with the cultural value of supporting those in need. The youth, who are all schooling, spend their holidays repairing pit latrines, kitchen sheds, slashing and cleaning their compounds. When they work at an old person's home, they prepare their own food and do not expect payment from the beneficiary.

The youth also help to clean around boreholes and roadsides. They are sensitised about HIV/AIDS, collective responsibility, helping one another and team work. They also visit schools and other villages where they undertake campaigns on HIV/AIDS. They are encouraged not to focus on being financially rewarded, but on the spirit of solidarity. The youth feel they benefit from their work because they make friends and feel gratified to help the elderly.

leaving the 'pure' ones mostly to the older generation. Many young people thus stated that *munno mukabi* is just about death or sickness, yet they have other compelling demands, such as those related to HIV/AIDS and large numbers of orphans to care for. Because of this, *munno mukabi* groups had changed: some had started income generating activities (often after an exposure, travel or training event elsewhere), while others evolved into new self-help groups but retaining the principles of *munno mukabi*, highlighting its role not only as a coping mechanism, but as a societal value. Women in Kisa Kya Maria Group thus referred to their members as '*Banywanyi'* (blood 'brothers') – people they fall back to in times of difficulty, underlining how a modern group derives strength from traditional values. As *munno mukabi* turned towards economic benefits and monetary values, the very poor, unable to make financial contributions, have however found themselves increasingly excluded.

The evolution of work groups in Lango is equally instructive. Traditionally, solidarity mechanisms included the *wang tic* ('work line') comprised of twenty to forty people in a village, headed by the *adwong wang tic* (guardian of the *wang tic*). The *adwong wang tic* was responsible for order at the beer party after work, when each member had toiled on their fields in turn. This was an 'economic group', but it would also open up fields for the elderly, while young women would provide cooked food to an old person living nearby. Colonialism turned the *wang tic* into a territorial unit with its previously elected leader now appointed village chief, responsible for tax collection, maintaining law and order and mobilising members for forced labour. People responded by creating *awak* cooperative labour groups, whose leaders were elected and whose membership transcended *wang tic* boundaries. After the 1960 drought, a majority of the peasants, unable to provide the millet brew needed to compensate the visiting labourers, also became unable to access cooperative labour. The requirement that the beneficiary of labour offers millet brew was abandoned but, with an increasingly monetised economy, *awak* members were also in constant need of money. This led some *awak* teams to turn to wage labour teams, mostly for the benefit of the richer farmers, called *akiba,* where the group sets a day to work on a farm for pay, the proceeds are saved and divided amongst members at the end

The importance of the family

The family in Ankole presents a prominent mechanism for the very poor to cope with various shocks:

- *"I sleep in a house built by my sons …I stay with my grand children…My brother-in-law is suffering from asthma but it is his children who help him"* – Evaristo Tibagirya, a widow in Kirungu village

- *"We came with our sons and daughter-in-law from Kagonji in Mbarara to hire and cultivate land in this area"*- Mr. and Mrs. Batamba, very poor people, Kiruhura

- "*If I had no wife I would be dead*". Bitamanya Eriya, an elderly man in Kirungu village.

- *"I became blind 4 years ago…I now stay at home with my son…my other son is married and stays on the same piece of land"*– Zewulia Kalombe, a very poor old blind widow, Kirungu village

In Kwata-Kasabo, Buganda, 8 widows were met. Each was asked how they coped after their husband's death. Some of their views:

- '*My husband was killed in 1986 and left me with 7 children. Some are at school, others are not. Two children were taken by their aunties during the funeral.'*

- '*I have been widowed for 20 years…I resisted efforts by my husband's young brothers to make me their wife…. and returned to my father's home where I live with my 2 children'*

- '*I have been a widow for a year. My husband died when I was pregnant and with 4 children. I work in the village to take care of the children. I have been assisted by my relatives…my aunties in Kampala provide occasional help such as soap and oil. The Banyoro in the village also help me'*

Motherly care for a severely disabled child in one of the poorest households in Namayumba village

of the year. The system further evolved when the millet brew, from a token of appreciation, became an item for sale. Today, *akiba* groups collect money, usually weekly (about U.shs 1,000), from which one can borrow without interest, although they target economically productively individuals, often leaving the very poor out. New mechanisms have therefore developed: *alea alea* and *kwanyu kalulu,* for instance, are groups where members cultivate each others' fields in turn after picking numbers. The major requirement here is that one should be strong enough to dig. For people considered poor and elderly, the groups upon request will cultivate, provided the beneficiary pays back the group from the harvest, either in cash or in kind, within 12 months. In Otgole, where many groups thrive, Moses Olum thus lamented: "*These days the groups have changed: what used to be done in turns and one repaid by digging, now you have to pay to become a member.*" Hence *leja leja,* labour practiced daily by the poorest peasants and households: those who participate receive very low pay, often resulting in continuous debt with the rich peasants to refund cash advances.

Ankole: friends are very helpful for the very poor

- *"I have 8 children and I labour hard to feed them…but friends are most helpful because they even helped me to raise this term's school fees"* Mujuni, labourer, Kazo village, Kiruhura.

- *"My sons and daughter in law do not help me…but my two friends, Joventa and Miriho, help me. When I am sick, they bring me water"*- Idivina Kabigumira, a very poor widow with 3 sons and 4 married daughters, Kirungu, Ntungamo.

- John Musinguzi, 26 years old and Jacob Mugume, 28 were hired by Mr Kanyatsi as cattle keepers. John, an orphan, is a grandson to Kanyatsi, while Jacob is not related. Both young men own cattle in their respective homes. They exchange cattle amongst themselves – an in-calf cow may for instance be kept by one so that he benefits from the milk. In times of difficulty they turn to friends for support and loans. They often meet their friends after work and discuss issues related to it. If a problem is work-related, they turn to their employer for help. John and Jacob are planning to start a savings and credit group with their friends. They learnt about the benefit of groups from a progressive group in Kitaji cell, their village.

Bare survival in Kwata-Kasabo village, Buganda: a resident (top right) helped an abandoned immigrant (immediate right) found on the road side, giving him land to grow food and to build a shelter (bottom right)

Philanthropy and minimum safety nets

In conclusion, where traditional solidarity mechanisms survive, a resident is normally assured of the absolute minimum requirements, such as shelter, food and a burial place. In Buganda, for instance, everyone, including the very poor and immigrant workers, are buried on common obutaka land or other land acquired by a clan member for burial. Mechanisms based on family structures such as the clan, extended family and in-laws, as well as friendship and community support benefit the very poor, either as blood relatives or adopted members. In Ankole, among the Abahingi, the poorest are mainly supported by family and friends, while the very poor Abaliisa are mostly helped by the extended family and the 'sub-tribe' as a whole. Even those who move away from their ancestral homes in search of land or work usually move as a group of relatives, clan members or neighbours. Where circumstances have allowed – especially away from conflict areas - out of sympathy and a persistent spirit of sharing, the poorest are provided with a range of benefits. Many orphans and children of very poor parents are thus cared for by their grandparents or aunts who cater for

their housing, medical and other needs. Other very poor people may eventually become part of a 'host family'. Immigrant workers can be provided with housing, or land to build a temporary shelter and grow food. Households with disabled children can be supported by their host communities. Some widows met were rendered homeless after their husbands' deaths, but are able to cope using traditional mechanisms, sometimes translated in shelter and land to grow food.

These mechanisms are however not without their drawbacks: cooption into a 'host family' for the very poor can for instance result in the assisted person living in a 'master servant' relationship, with quasi-forced labour – cultivating, collecting firewood or water. This can result in dis-empowerment, as some of the very poor in a Buganda village intimated: *"We pray for the rich to get wealthier because they help the poor."* Secondly, exclusion of the very poor from the benefits of traditional welfare mechanisms can deepen as these evolve. Examples include community groups mentioned above, with their subscription-based mechanisms, the requirement to contribute and the reciprocal nature of their support. Thus, in Ankole, at many clan meetings, contributions are made to a welfare fund: these are only intended to support the contributors.

3. Social Capital Building

If traditional solidarity mechanisms make a contribution to the welfare of the very poor, do they also build their 'social capital'?

Access to information

Respondents described a number of cultural mechanisms through which residents, including the very poor, access information. These include the clan, as in Buganda and Ankole, where information is shared, such as on deaths, last funeral rites or land matters. In addition every clan or sub-clan normally convenes '*okumanyagana'* (interacting with each other – *'kumanyana'* in Ankole) where men and women are encouraged to take part, meet children and interact with other members of their lineage. People may be mobilised through radio announcements or by word of mouth and are asked to carry along some money for development initiatives. Traditionally, information was also passed to everyone, including the very poor, through the administrative structures of the kingdoms. In Ankole, this however mainly related to the payment of oppressive taxes. In Buganda, the poor also had access to the '*kitawuluzi'* (the chief's court), where information would be shared and disputes settled. With the chiefs' reinstatement in the 1990's, they provide a conduit for information and are engaged in activities to revive Buganda's norms and values, such as fundraising for the *Kabaka*'s Education Fund, and traditional marriage ceremonies or last funeral rites. While it is normally the active poor who make use of these opportunities, the very poor often maintain relatively strong linkages with their clans and will make an effort to travel and attend these functions. They are included in all these events, as they are in village meetings where Local Councils provide information, including on government initiatives. Respondents stated that no one objected to their contributions and they felt that they were heard. When the elderly speak, they are often listened to and their ideas are welcomed, because of age, experience and exposure.

In Lango, respondents reported that, depending on the level of cooperation within a particular clan, they sometimes call meetings and inform members

"Information from friends is very important"

■ Batamba, a 56-year old landless man, lives in a shack with his wife on land hired from Mbabazi, a widow in Kenshunga. They survive on hired land for cultivation. This is the second time they have left home to hire land. They learnt of available land for hire in Kenshunga through friends. They said other poor people also tell each other where there are such opportunities.

■ Zewulia Kalombe is a poor blind settler in Kirungu from Kabale. She does not move because of her disability, but she has friends in the village, Topi, Sarafina and Busera, who visit her almost daily.

■ Bitamanya Eriya is an elderly man in Kirungu village. He neither has the energy to attend meetings nor to reach the trading centre, but his elderly friend Andreya Rwitugu with whom they fought during World War Two, visits him daily to give him the news from the trading centre. Bitamanya says he comment on every item of information provided by Rwitugu!

Andreya Rwitugu and other World War II veterans keep each other company in Kirungu village, Ankole

Keeping networks and social capital alive in Buganda

- *"The very poor fetch firewood and sell in the villages because the active poor are busy practicing zero grazing. They need someone to fetch water and firewood. The firewood is free in the forests."* - Fred Kasaija, Namayumba parish chief.

- *"I converse well with the people, fetch firewood and water for them"* Ocuri Soroto, a labourer born in Teso, but currently living in Luguzi, Buganda.

- *"My friends include Frank, Masaana, and Magendelo's sons…We visit each other, mainly on Sundays. We also visit a friend, Mike Salongo of Agali Awamu Savings and Credit Society."* Berna Nakasi, amongst the elderly poor women in Luguzi, Buganda

- *"I meet and greet people in the village and at Namayumba trading centre where I also enjoy a drink at the bar. I also attend clan meetings in Kyadondo at least once a year. I sell my dental herbal medicine in Busunju weekly market and meet friends, such as the market master."* Munywani Muzibe, a blind person amongst the 'poorest' group in Luguzi village, Buganda (see below)
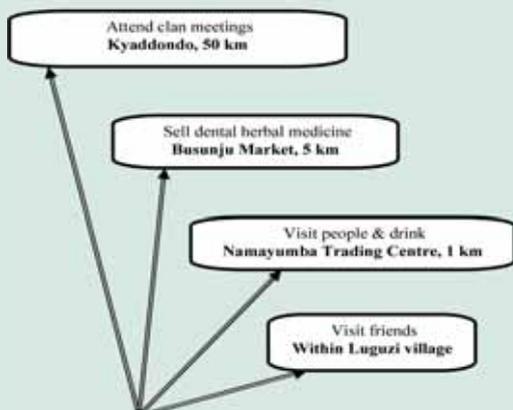
A very poor blind man, a resident of Lugazi photographed at Busunju market where he goes often to sell dental herbal medicine

on issues such as land, death, and murder cases. In some areas, information trickles down from the *Won Nyaci* (the head of all clans) who summons the *Awitong* (clan head) to deliver to a general meeting. Some clans have also adopted the use of radios to pass on information.

Many respondents also share information through friends and by virtue of their membership in self-help groups. Some groups have also undertaken awareness raising activities and study tours. In Ankole, the very poor, particularly the elderly, widows, casual workers, and the landless observed that friends were their most important source of information for personal development. In Lango, community groups were also an avenue for sourcing information for elderly and isolated people. At regular group meetings, issues of common concern are discussed and, in the process, a communal spirit is strengthened but, as elsewhere, membership requirements can preclude the presence of the very poor from such fora.

Risk management

In Buganda and Ankole, the main risks identified by the very poor include death, illness, loss of assets (e.g. land to credit institutions, or cattle theft), and drought. Many of the very poor have over the years managed these risks through traditional structures and institutions. The clan and the village are prominent in this respect. In Ankole, it also includes wealthy land and cattle owners as patrons. There is also a strong bond among the *Abaliisa* as a sub-ethnic group and this provides a form of initial social capital, mirroring the widely held belief that any person who works cannot be poor and many of the poorest manage risks through casual labour on farms. Today, such a worker who works for a wealthy *Omuliisa* is able to acquire cattle, possibly as a gift from the employer, and escape poverty: *'Such a person can even be given the wealthy man's daughter in marriage because it is believed he will make it in life.'*

Identifying with a clan, especially in Buganda, along with family and village, is still one of the most common forms of social cohesion and many benefits accrue from this. In addition, belonging to a clan motivates positive social behaviour, and provides a source of esteem – which reduces conflict. However, when feeling inadequate, the very poor often choose not to relate with their clans mates, and there is also a view held among some of them that clans only help those who are already prosperous. In Ankole, the clan has long been a source of protection, as people stayed close to

each other for protection against wild animals and to search for food together in times of drought. Most people still to some extent identify with a clan, many of which have *'ebigombe'* (groups for rotating funds). While remarking that clans help those who are already well off, the very poor still expressed their pride in identifying with their clans.

Staying or growing up in a village, regardless of ethnic background, also entitles a person, including a very poor person, to some benefits, especially a sense of belonging and security. As part of the community, the very poor are expected to participate in communal work and to attend marriage and other cultural occasions. Through this participation, the village recognises their presence and they are offered support when they encounter difficult times. This sense of belonging and recognition empowers them to take up local opportunities to their benefit, even if this is only sustenance at village ceremonies. In Ankole, during community events such as a marriage, the poor may not be invited, but participate in the preparations, fetching water and firewood, and stay around to enjoy the occasion. Participation is concretised in Buganda and Ankole in bulungi bwa nsi (burungibwensi in Ankole). Literally 'for the good of the world', this refers to community work, when everyone in the village volunteers in activities, such as maintaining community roads.

The elderly count

'Being blind does not stop me from attending a meeting. Many of the clan meetings and UPC party meetings are held under this mango tree, where we are seated. Some meetings are held in church so, if there is transport, I make sure I attend. When in meetings I listen to people's views, they listen to mine. I ask many questions but also my advice is heeded'. Musa Olum, 80, Anywal village, Apac.

The other view: "the poor don't talk"

Muhese Benon, amongst the poorest in Mwoya III village, Kiruhura, is one of the few persons in Ankole who insisted that the poor are not listened to in village meetings. He explained: *'I attend village meetings and I contribute…a poor person can raise a hand to speak but the people do not listen. Even in Church they are not listened to. Even at school meetings they do not pick on us to contribute. Even in groups such as Mwezikye, the chairman does not listen to the poor people. As a result, the poor befriend other poor people who cannot do much for each other. 'Omworo takutesa' (the poor cannot talk)…'*

In the past, *burungibwensi* also helped to fight off wild animals. On a typical day of *bulungi bwa nsi*, the village chief would in the past sound a drum and everyone would assemble to undertake the specified activity together. *Bulungi bwa nsi* is still practiced in most of the villages visited in Buganda, although the drums have been replaced by word of mouth and the King's chief replaced by a Local Council Chairperson. Indeed, in these villages, the roads and water wells were in good condition, which was attributed to *bulungi bwa nsi,* in which most members of the community took part. The very poor said that they are informed of such occasions and they participate, thus improving their social standing in the community. As members of a group said, *"The very poor people provide labour during bulungi bwa nsi… and it is through such communal events that their role is recognised. Whenever they get into difficulty we reciprocate by helping them."* The '*bulungi bwa nsi'* tradition is being revived by the Buganda kingdom as part of a 5-year development plan.

Recognition and a sense of belonging

For the very poor, traditional mechanisms thus play a vital role to ensure individual recognition - a gap that government and NGOs do not fill since they often target the active poor. Thus, by attending meetings and ceremonies and contributing to discussions, the very poor are able to interact with persons of all backgrounds, including local opinion leaders, and to feel valued. Through such occasions, they also keep informed about local affairs. By residing in the village, participating in activities such as *bulungi bwa nsi* and benefiting from community solidarity, the very poor also feel connected, trusted and part of the neighbourhood. These result in tangible benefits: they have networks of friends who provide mutually beneficial relationships and friendships that ensure they are settled citizens and are able to survive, even with little or no public assistance. Some were provided with land to grow their food, or given shelters to reside in, and expressed satisfaction with their membership of the village community. It could also be observed that the very poor did not appear to face stigma. Those who became part of families and communities (such as immigrants), enjoy the sense of security that stems from being known and accepted.

Abaliisa get help to escape from poverty

- Simeon Barahire, a *Muliisa* in Kiruhura, explains that poor *Abaliisa* would traditionally receive cows from other *Abaliisa*, while the poor *Abahingi* would not receive any assistance from other *Abahingi* because it was usually not available. He adds that if poor *Abaliisa* happened to be sick or with animals that had died from diseases, the *Abaliisa* cared for such people and in many instances they would compensate them for the lost animals.

- A group of *Abaliisa* met in Kenshunga felt that anyone (a *Muliisa*) can progress as long as he found employment at a rich man's farm as a manager or casual worker, after which he would accumulate savings from the salary and invest in a small business. After 3 or 4 years, this person would be able to buy land and become a household head.

- Phoebe Kyomukama (a key informant) says most of the small shops in Kiruhura town are operated by *Abaliisa* who were formerly very poor farm workers or dependants.

In contrast: Patron-client relations

- *"I take care of my workers (Abaliisa)…I pay their children's school fees, house them, provide medical care and other needs. I know many other cattle keepers who also take care of their workers like me."*- James Bulange, cattle keeper and cultivator, Nyamotonyo, Ntungamo

A council of Bakiga elders provides guidance and support to the immigrant community in Kirungu village, Ntungamo

In the village or the clan: A sense of belonging

"My legs are paralysed…I just put my jerry can at the roadside and when the children go down to the stream, they pick it to fetch water for me" Abbas Ssemuko, Luguzi village, Buganda

"I have night blindness…the people always assist to guide me home" Andrew Lukomeye, Luguzi village, Buganda

"I belong to the Buhwezu clan; we normally have clan meetings where we get to know each other. Even people with young children bring them." Mujuni, a poor person from Bushenyi but local resident. Kazo village, Ankole

"I come from Kabale to visit my clansmates - Mrs. Karibanda, a poor widow in Kigarama village, Ankole

Some shortcomings are however also evident: the nature of the information available is limited, especially on matters critical to individual and collective survival (such as land). Community meetings focus on parochial issues and avoid those with political overtones. In Ankole, remote communities are especially cut off from externally-oriented information. Lack of access to information, in spite of people's requests, provides an indication of a critical gap between the people and their government leaders, which traditional mechanisms are unable to completely bridge. Because the very poor do not belong to self-help or *munno mukabi* groups, they can also miss opportunities to improve their livelihood through exposure to new ideas, as well as the opportunities to influence decisions concerning village priorities. The very poor can also be tied into long-term exploitative relationships - they become dependent on friends or 'relatives', instead of being able to build their self-confidence and self-sufficiency.

Culture in development series: Culture and social protection

4. Conclusions and Policy Implications

This study points to a set of overall conclusions and remarks that may inform policy development. Some are cross-cutting; some, given the variety of social and cultural contexts described above, are more relevant to a particular region or situation.

Ethnic culture and "traditional" social protection mechanisms count

Uganda's rural communities evolve in a cultural context that is still much informed by the traditions, practices and governance systems associated with earlier generations. In particular, the ways in which the very poor survive are informed by values and practices, though constantly evolving, that many residents continue to relate to ethnic culture. In Buganda, these are still firmly associated with the Kiganda monarchy. In Ankole, cultural practices and values manifested through various welfare mechanisms are also entrenched. In Lango, in spite of a weakening of cultural mechanisms to support the poor, those that exist still have their roots similarly grounded.

Today, as opposed to the past situation, traditional systems are often insufficient to address the growing economic and social challenges that communities are facing. Nevertheless, they adapt and when the very poor experience extreme hardship, they can (at least at times and for a time), turn to them and to the values of solidarity, trust and participation that have (and still do) inform them, for support.

If some of these traditional practices have been challenged by a perceived irrelevance to the present development context or by extreme social shocks (such as those experienced because of conflict in Lango and parts of Buganda), the principles and values that inform them are still considered not only valuable by those who directly benefit from them, but also an element to define personal and collective identity. Hence the help to beggars, the elderly who are isolated and others, dictated by clan, family or community solidarity, or by values which, if not adhered to, will bring disrepute and shame to the person who disregards

them. This can provide often more effective, culturally familiar (and at least more immediate) support than turning to government programmes.

► *Policy implications:* Social protection policy initiatives could usefully take this cultural context into account. Anti-poverty initiatives should complement, *even build on* existing solidarity mechanisms (rather than substitute them), use them as entry points, and utilise existing structures and the values that guide them. The restoration of the traditional cultural institutions offers an opportunity in this respect. This could take very practical forms, such as borrowing on the *ekigagara* (stretcher) of Western Uganda to improve its design and promote its use elsewhere. Or giving space to the elderly to advocate for culturally-based social protection on dedicated radio programmes.

► Uganda presents a diverse cultural context and, if solidarity mechanisms often reflect ethnic culture, this implies that a blanket, nationwide prescription and methodology will not yield as promising results as an approach that recognises cultural particularisms. Thus, an emphasis on clan-based structures might well yield better results in Buganda, say, than in Ankole. Similarly, the study of traditional welfare mechanisms in Ankole provides helpful insights to the understanding of social protection in an ethnically diverse community from which policy makers can draw purposeful lessons.

Some of the mechanisms assume positive characteristics

Some mechanisms have shown resilience, adaptability and a degree of inclusiveness that can provide opportunities for future growth. In particular:

■ *Tangible, non-material and low-cost benefits accrue sustainably to the poorest*
Notwithstanding their weakening in some cases, the very poor have in the face of shocks and vulnerability resorted to, and have been supported

by, informal solidarity mechanisms, such as the family, the clan, a circle of friends or neighbours, occasional community workgroups. Such mechanisms not only provide welfare benefits, but also more intangible and essential help: they allow the very poor a measure of recognition in their communities and, through the values of solidarity, trust and participation, enhance their social capital. The elderly can for instance contribute in a village meeting because they are considered to have accumulated a wealth of wisdom over the years. By contributing to discussions or to communal work, the very poor feel recognised, connected, trusted and part of the neighbourhood.

This value base is essential to understand why such mechanisms often prove resilient and sustained; not only are they meant to provide support during challenging times, they are resorted to in all situations. In contrast to a good number of external interventions, they are also low-cost, self-sustained and can cover large numbers of beneficiaries. Thus, mutual self-help group often have long-term (or at least indeterminate) horizons, locally-rooted community support to the vulnerable incurs few transaction costs, and clans in Buganda provide a point of reference for thousands of people at a time.

► *Policy implications:* Poverty reduction programmes could usefully seek to strengthen sometimes weak but evidently useful 'traditional' mechanisms. Such mechanisms can be used as entry points to implement national social protection programmes. Such institutions include the *akiba* and *alea alea/ alulu* work groups, the clans, and self-help groups.

► Solidarity mechanisms should not be overlooked while deliberating formal social protection policies; they can at least play an important complementary role, given attributes of low cost, sustainability and large coverage. They also provide important intangible benefits (participation, trust, inclusiveness) and thus provide another area of complementarity with other interventions.

■ *Groups are a cultural phenomenon* The principles of helping one in need have been retained and incorporated in new development groups because they are considered to be an important means to support one another. These include *munno mukabi*, the *akiba* and *alea alea* groups, *mwezikye* burial groups, clan-based and

other self-help groups. These do not operate outside the scope of our understanding of culture, tradition and their values of 'togetherness', 'community' and 'neighbourliness'.

Many of these groups focus on savings and credit as a strategy to tackle poverty. *Abahingi* communities for instance place much emphasis on the monetary gains from their interaction with extended families, clan members and networks of friends: thus, all the *Mwezikye,* clan-based and more recently formed groups have one thing in common: *bika oguze* (save and borrow). These groups may often prove more vibrant, better culturally rooted and therefore more sustainable than groups inspired by external actors (NGOs, Government) and often driven by the prospects of outside support.

They may however foster consumption, rather than long term investment (such as when the *akiba* proceeds are spent on festivities) and they often exclude the very poorest in the community, who cannot afford the 'entry fee' and are seen as potential liabilities, unless some system exists to incorporate them, such as when repayment of group labour contributions is deferred until harvest time.

This is one area where the very poor themselves, as well as some key informants, suggested ways in which the very poor could be involved in social protection schemes: '*Sensitise self-help and munno mukabi groups to include us'.* In Lango, '*if the akiba groups were not demanding entry fees, the poor would be much better protected'.*

► *Policy implications:* Groups often express a social responsibility to help one in need which can be capitalised on. They can provide conduits for the poor to organise themselves and benefit from other government programmes. A *bulungi bwa nsi* day could also for instance be dedicated for the youth to help the poorest.

► Where groups exclude the poorest, social protection initiatives could for instance aim at empowering community women's associations to reach the most vulnerable. The *alea alea* that digs in turns, if aided with improved technology, can increase acreage and improve food security. These can help the very poor materially, and widen their networks and exposure, since they may not require a financial subscription on their part.

Revival of Buganda's traditional mechanisms: The model home concept and bulungi bwa nsi

The Buganda kingdom launched a model village in Gombe, under the 5-year royal development drive. This is implemented by Home to Home, a local self-help group, whose membership is open to any resident. It follows a concept of livelihood improvement called 'model home', referring to the characteristics of a typical Kiganda home. The project centres around 3 themes: home hygiene, food security and income generation. Every home is thus required to:

- Practice good hygiene, including a well ventilated kitchen with a fuel saving stove and a clean bathroom.
- Ensure availability of food all year round, with staples, herbs, fruit trees, and a vegetable garden, as well as a 'Kababa's garden' with at least 50 bunches of matooke (plantain).
- Start income generation activities, such as rearing local chicken, goats or pigs. The matooke from the Kabaka's garden can be sold and the money saved to pay school fees in the future.

The group also undertakes munno mukabi, offering help to members at times of death or sickness. It also assists non-members, such as older people, disabled persons and those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Group members say their initiatives have resulted in greater solidarity. Kingdom officials are impressed by the work done – blending positive aspects of culture with modernity. Gombe was officially recognised as the kingdom's model village, prompting the Kabaka and people from other areas of Buganda to visit.

A system of incentives to include the poorest in groups, such as access to basic technical assistance or priority access to Government programmes, could also be envisaged.

► Similarly, 'traditional' savings organisations can be taken advantage of in the design of programmes that seek to augment household incomes, including developing these organisations' capacities in savings and credit management, as well as project planning. Groups can be linked to sources of credit, thus enhancing the tendency to save (rather than consume) group surpluses. These may provide more effective vehicles, based on a spirit of cooperation, than any hurriedly assembled and externally-inspired savings and credit cooperatives.

■ *Strong immediate and extended family ties* These are still considered the first option for support in times of hardship and celebration for many among the very poor, although the extended family is often straining from demands being placed on its better-off members, while 'individualistic tendencies' were often decried by respondents.

► *Policy implications:* Commitment and loyalty within families make them viable points of entry for support especially for orphans, the elderly and people living with disabilities.

► Supporting saving mechanisms within the extended family could also be considered, especially where these savings are tagged to future benefits, e.g. an education fund for the children in an extended family or clan.

Hygiene is only one theme stressed in Gombe

■ *The clan* This still provides a sense of identity, belonging, pride and security for many people, including the poorest. The 126 recognised clans in Lango are still influential in conflict resolution and in arranging marriages. Respondents recalled that young men in the clan would build houses for old people houses while the young women cooked for them, and some respondents thought that charitable practices could be revived within clans. In Buganda, clans remain strong self-mobilisation tools.

► *Policy implications:* The clan provides a potentially effective system through which common values and principles can be reinforced, such as with regard to collective initiatives for food security, support to the vulnerable and clans-mates in need, and education and responsibility for children / orphans. They could also provide points of entry for campaigns related to HIV, the fight against corruption, and for mainstream development programmes.

► Clans could provide a means to protect the assets of the very poor, if empowered by law and policy, at minimal recovery cost to the aggrieved party.

Additional opportunities

■ *Food security* - The *Ekyagi, ekitara* and *olusuku* – the compulsory homestead granary and plantation – also provide opportunities, if adapted to current circumstances. In Ankole, for instance, there were many requests by respondents to have the *ekitara* reactivated. Many elderly *Abahingi* respondents recalled the benefits of the granaries, as implemented during the pre-independence period and suggested that government considers reintroducing them in all rural communities.

► *Policy implication:* Development programmes can incorporate an aspect of 'food security for all' by restoring the principle of saving seed and food in rural communities. Access to the very poor would have to be assured, and the possibility of restoring granaries at parish or sub-county level could be investigated. This could include collective efforts to establish home gardens recognising non-monetary contributions such as labour, to enable the very poor have a stake in the food and seed stored.

■ *Harmonising administrative authority* – Traditional cultural rulers at village level, such as the *Omwami* in Buganda or the *Adwong wang tic* in Lango, have seen their powers reduced, their authority partly taken over through the Local Council system, and their right to levy taxes abolished. Nevertheless, they still often mobilise communities for public functions and handle local disputes, including conflicts over land. In places, they also mobilise community action not only to maintain wells, roads, and bridges but also to support the very poor in times of critical illness or death. *'Assistance for the very poor could be channelled through the village leadership structures',* some respondents suggested.

► *Policy implications:* For the poor who are vulnerable to risks, such as loss of assets, including land and cattle, traditional institutions can be recognised by law and policy to protect such assets at low cost to the poor, while maintaining harmony.

► The *Omwami's* responsibility to trigger collective action towards addressing critical concerns of the very poor and ensuring that they are included in initiatives that do not necessarily involve monetary contribution could be strengthened.

► Traditional local structures can also be recognised by local government to mobilise communities and participate in local governance and in designing programmes that benefit the poor. In some areas, a seat for cultural leaders on local councils might be both acceptable and useful, to voice the concerns of the very poor and promote cultural values of solidarity and responsibility.

■ *Youth support to the elderly* Reviving values that encourage the support that the youth give to the elderly and vulnerable (repair simple structures, compound maintenance) and incorporating this into development initiatives will occupy the youth's time constructively and lay a foundation for future social responsibility. Some existing experiences may be instructive in this respect.

► *Policy implication:* Research can be undertaken to explore how cases where the youth support elderly and vulnerable members of their communities can be scaled up. Given past experience, structures can be created within clans to revive charitable work, taking advantage of the clan youth wing, where

these exist. Youth can be trained in basic construction skills and teamwork for social responsibility.

■ *Communication* - Information is essential for empowerment. In communities where meetings were not held, the very poor proved less informed about important issues, such as the productive use of assets or land eviction, resulting in anxiety and limited commitment to contribute to local development initiatives. 'Traditional' values are important in this respect: the elderly can for instance contribute in a village meeting because of the respect their age and wisdom command.

▶ *Policy implications:* Regular and relevant information needs to be provided to the very poor, to enable them better address their concerns and know where to get support through government and other development programmes. In many communities, the cultural leader, such as the *Omwami*, is a recognised source of information and can act as a point of information dissemination.

▶ The very poor can make a contribution to local debates and programmes that concern them: giving them space is a step to empowerment and enhances the relevance of development initiatives. 'Cultural information spaces' can be well-suited to enhance this participation.

Taking limitations into account

Where reciprocal benefits are involved, the very poor are often excluded. Thus, significant support is often only enjoyed by paid up members of self-help groups. Second, one might find that there is a counter-productive emphasis on consumption: the *akiba* for instance apportion and use up savings during festivities, as opposed to using them for, say, household investment. Third, solidarity mechanisms, while inspired by traditional values of 'togetherness' and 'neighbourliness' can assume exploitative characteristics that trap the very poor into a situation akin to bondage. Fourth, traditional welfare mechanisms do not always unite people beyond their ethnic sub-divide. Thus, any form of cooperation or solidarity between the two different Banyankole sub-tribes, can be tenuous.

▶ *Policy implications:* Programmes that take advantage of existing informal structures should recognise their inherent limitations. Compensatory mechanisms to promote equity could include strengthening the values and practice of *munno mukabi* and other groups to include the vulnerable and the very poor by incorporating types of contributions that are not necessarily monetary, or that can be deferred, and introducing training, competitions, tours, awards and other incentives for groups to include and care for the very poor. Where traditional solidarity mechanisms are used as conduits in the implementation of social protection interventions by NGOs or Government, equitable access and investment in assets could become conditionalities if, say, a self-help group is to benefit from credit or small grants.

▶ Rural communities practicing *munno mukabi* or belonging to similar groups can be given technical advice on savings and credit, simple investments and risk management, to broaden the concept of supporting one another to address current challenges.

Scaling up and linking to current social protection efforts

Should some of the conclusions and policy pointers above be considered, policy makers may feel daunted by the task of scaling-up what currently remain localised, if often beneficial, culturally-driven and sustained solidarity mechanisms. Much currently happens in families, communities or villages, both in terms of tangible and intangible benefits: how does one now move to the national level?

While this is an entirely legitimate question, would similar - if not greater - misgivings not accompany the design of any completely externally-inspired social protection initiative? The findings of this study indicate, to the contrary, that much might be gained by strengthening the *existing* mechanisms and building on *existing* cultural values, rather than starting afresh.

Can synergy be built between formal and informal social protection mechanisms? Other experiences from the Conference on Social Protection for the Poorest in Africa

"*Some evidence suggests that cash transfers may facilitate growth or strengthening of informal social protection measures. In Zambia, Schubert finds that cash transfers enabled participants to engage in local rotating savings clubs, known as 'Chilimba', by forming groups and paying a portion of their cash transfers into the fund each month. In Ethiopia, the Productive Safety Net Programme has fostered the regeneration of a rotating savings scheme known as 'ikub' (…) used to purchase livestock and agricultural inputs (…) So it seems plausible that cash transfers that increase income in poor households may rejuvenate informal social protection mechanisms, rather than displacing them.*" (Sabates-Wheeler, Devereux, Guenther, 'Building synergies between social protection and smallholder policies')

Further, it has been observed that since the abolition of traditional cultural administrative structures in 1967, the central and district governments that replaced them have not been particularly effective in preserving and promoting solidarity and equity values, arguably (given the spread of corruption, especially in the public sector, and other social evils) even the opposite.

The International Conference on Social Protection for the Poorest in Africa held in Uganda in September 2008 not only noted the possible synergy between cash transfer schemes and informal social protection mechanisms (see Box), it also emphasised that social protection endeavours in low income countries require sustained political support. 'Political sustainability', for which a design in tune with public attitudes about poverty and redistribution, and an established record of transparency, effectiveness and impact were singled out as necessary, also provided a strong focus of discussion. Public 'buy-in', as well as 'government buy-in' were felt to be crucial. 'Building on the existing' would go some distance in meeting this objective

Building on the existing would also entail a review of the role of cultural institutions at all levels, carefully taking into consideration Uganda's rich cultural diversity, with a view to assigning them a greater role in promoting tradition-based social welfare and engagement for the very poor than currently is the case (or is envisaged). These institutions, large and small, are the custodians of the norms and values upon which the solidarity mechanisms described in these pages are based.

In Uganda, where formal social insurance for the majority of the needy and vulnerable is still a distant prospect, traditional mechanisms can, with judicious support, potentially fill the gap, in a sustainable and culturally attuned fashion.

► *Policy implications:* Attitudes among policy makers and implementers towards cultural resources and values need to be re-examined to foster a more sympathetic understanding of the potential than one's cultural heritage affords in all aspects of life, including the value of solidarity towards the less fortunate in the community and the nation.

► While this could even involve a review of the school curriculum, it could also include 'cultural mainstreaming' in government ministries, agencies, and the private sector. This would contribute to a number of positive outcomes, including an appreciation of the contribution traditional values and norms make towards social protection, as well as making 'frontline' implementers (NGOs, local governments) more attuned to cultural contexts, resources and possible linkages.

► Any efforts to 'refresh' or support existing mechanisms should involve the respective cultural institutions. Such support should not mask the need to sensitise anew clans, traditional chiefs and communities on traditional solidarity mechanisms and supporting the very poor, in view of changed local circumstances and possible 'conservative' mindsets.

► A focal point or unit in-charge of 'traditional social protection' could usefully be established within the ministry responsible for social protection. This would be charged with coordinating and promoting culturally-based welfare efforts through support to institutions such as clan structures, BUCADEF (Buganda Cultural and Development Foundation), village based initiatives, etc.