
**Policy Brief: Analysing the Impact of COVID-19 on Relations
Between Residents, Workers, Organizations, and State
Authorities in Ugandan Urban Areas**

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1.1 Introduction

Uganda, like many countries around the world, has been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic¹. Since the first case was confirmed in March 2020, the government has implemented a series of measures to contain the spread of the virus, including lockdowns, travel restrictions, and social distancing guidelines. These measures have had a profound impact on the social, economic, and political fabric of society, particularly in urban areas, where population density and economic activity are high.

One of the most significant impacts of the pandemic has been on the relationships between residents, workers, organizations, and state authorities in urban areas. The pandemic has disrupted traditional patterns of social interaction and economic activity, leading to tensions and conflicts between different actors². For example, the closure of businesses and the loss of income has led to protests and demonstrations by workers and traders, while the implementation of lockdown measures has created challenges for residents who depend on daily wages to survive.

At the same time, the pandemic has also created opportunities for collaboration and cooperation between different actors. For example, community-based organizations have played an important role in distributing relief supplies and raising awareness about the virus, while state authorities have worked to improve access to health services and other essential services³.

Despite the importance of understanding the impact of COVID-19 on these relationships, there has been limited research on this topic in the Ugandan context. This has created a critical gap in understanding how the pandemic has affected the dynamics of social and economic life in urban areas, and how different actors have responded to the challenges it has presented. Therefore, there is a pressing need for research that can provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on relations between residents, workers, organizations, and state authorities in Ugandan urban areas.

2.1 Problem Statement and Justification

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the social, economic, and political fabric of societies around the world, including those in Ugandan urban areas. As the virus has spread, it has disrupted traditional patterns of social interaction and economic activities, leading to widespread uncertainty and anxiety. This has had significant implications for the relationships between residents, workers, organizations, and state authorities in these areas, which have been characterized by tensions, conflicts, political and power imbalances.

¹ Ministry of Health, Uganda. (2021). COVID-19: Situation update for Uganda. Retrieved from <https://health.go.ug/covid/>

² United Nations Development Programme. (2020). COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis, Envisioning the Recovery. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/crisis-prevention-and-recovery/covid-19-and-human-development.html>

³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2020). Uganda: COVID-19 Situation Report No. 9 (as of 19 June 2020). Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/uganda-covid-19-situation-report-no-9-19-june-2020>

Despite the importance of understanding the impact of COVID-19 on these relationships, there has been limited research on this topic in the Ugandan context. This has created a critical gap in understanding how the pandemic has affected the dynamics of social and economic life in urban areas, and how different actors have responded to the challenges it has presented. Without a comprehensive understanding and planning for these issues, it will be difficult to develop effective policies and interventions that address the needs of various stakeholders and promote sustainable development in these areas especially the urban informal settlements.

In response to this gap, ACTogether Uganda in partnership with Makerere University-Urban Action Lab and University of Manchester under the COVID Collective consortium conducted a study dubbed “**COVID Responses: Towards Social Justice and Lessons to Support More Resilient Livelihoods in Facing Future Crises**”. The aim of the study was to identify and analyse individual and strategic coping responses to the pandemic and establish how Covid-19 has changed relations between residents and workers, the organisations that represent them and government authorities at local, regional and national scale.

Therefore, the purpose of this policy brief is to highlight key findings from the study and make policy recommendations for the various actors concerned with planning, preparedness and pandemic relief handling in case of any reoccurrences.

3.1 Objectives

1. To understand the impact of COVID-19 on relationships between different actors in Ugandan urban areas.
2. To identify effective strategies for responding to the challenges created by the pandemic.
3. To inform policy and practice for building more resilient and sustainable urban communities in Uganda.

4.1 Approach and Methodology

This policy brief is based on research that was conducted by ACTogether Uganda/ National Slum Dwellers Federation of Uganda and partners including Makerere University and Local leaders. A mixed-methods approach was used to achieve the objectives of analysing the impact of COVID-19 on relations between residents, workers, organizations, and state authorities in Ugandan urban areas. Qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, were used to explore the experiences, perspectives, and behaviours of different actors in urban areas of Kampala City in response to the pandemic. The quantitative method, including purposive random sampling during the Household survey to explore pandemic related challenges and related demographics. The study was conducted in Naguru II, Mulago II and Nakulabye informal settlements in Nakawa, Kawempe and Rubaga Division respectively within Kampala City.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This section briefly presents key findings of the study, with focus on coping mechanisms within the study area and the challenges that the selected areas are still grappling with.

1. **Health related coping mechanisms:** According to the study findings, workers resorted to wearing masks and gloves while working to protect themselves and their customers from contracting the virus. In addition, handwashing and social distancing strategies were also reportedly emphasised by business operators especially when the lockdowns were about to be lifted and during the first four months when the economy was fully operating. These and other short-term measures to curb the virus came as directives from the office of the president and took immediate effect as and when it was stipulated.
2. **Re-location mechanisms:** The study further revealed that street vendors shifted their locations and operated in smaller groups, and others closer to their housing units or within settlements to limit the spread of the virus. These changes point to new dynamics around informal work configurations in preference to shorter travel distance and time that culminates into reduced expenditure on transport to more convenient work spaces established in informal settlements.
3. **Innovations through using natural herbal medicine:** In a bid to find alternative medication for the COVID 19 virus, locals resorted to self-made home remedies. Whereas, this was partly due to limited access to healthcare facilities and a lack of trust in the healthcare system, the remedies provided opportunities for curing minor illnesses like flu, cough and fever. The findings indicate that individuals used remedies such as; herbal teas, steam inhalation, and traditional medicines that were believed to boost immunity and cure COVID-19 related symptoms.
4. **Emergence of mobile businesses:** As an example, the findings of the study revealed that some hairdressers started offering mobile hairdressing and shaving services to clients who were unable to leave their homes as a way of maintaining their customer base while generating some income during the crisis. It also identified evidence on diversifying merchandise or stock of sale and switching to selling essential items that were highly on demand during the pandemic.
5. **Diversification of merchandise:** Much as the pandemic slowed down a number of businesses especially because of reduced mobilities, it presented opportunities through the production of goods and services that were needed to curb the spread of the virus. Some street vendors and residents for example revealed to have started making and selling face masks, hand sanitizers and food items like fruits, vegetables, cereals which were on high demand during the crisis.
6. **Emergence of new financing mechanisms:** The residents and workers also reportedly relied on savings accumulated prior to the pandemic and loans from social networks to support livelihoods and sustain businesses during the pandemic and its aftermath. In addition to accumulated savings, some workers and residents formed avenues to establish grassroot loaning and savings systems to not only mobilise emergency

finances but also cushion themselves against the effects of the pandemic on food, water, energy, sanitation and health risks and vulnerabilities that were worsened by the crisis.

7. **Leveraging Virtual Communication Technologies:** The study revealed that, in response to crisis related social challenges, informal sector workers and residents leveraged on virtual communication technologies to stay in touch with their friends, family, and customers. These reportedly used social media, messaging apps, and video conferencing platforms to maintain social connections while observing social distancing measures.
8. **Community Support Organizing:** Informal sector workers and residents in Kampala city formed community support groups to address social issues arising from the pandemic especially around social protection and relief support mobilisation as well as health care services access. The findings of the study revealed that a number of formerly disorganised groups in the informal sector transport and vending enterprises have come together to necessitate collaborations around innovative resource pooling in form of savings, access to financial support and protection or advocacy against exclusionary city authority or government policies and actions.
9. **Changing grassroots relations with government:** The COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique opportunity for government and the informal sector workers and residents to build a more cooperative relationship that can potentially facilitate inclusive resilient recovery, sustainability and resilience. The results indicated that such efforts have increased awareness, preparedness and response to health-related risks and emergencies in communities due to the existence of a collaborative working framework between community structures and city or government authorities.
10. **Livelihood and economic empowerment initiatives:** a number of government programmes and projects like the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP), Community Driven Development (CDD), National Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities (NSG-PWDs) and Social Assistance for the Elderly (SAGE) that were leveraged upon to support people in their communities to recover from the crisis effects. It was reported that communities are always trained in business and financial management, and supported on how to manage the grants provided by the government.
11. **Land Tenure Insecurity:** Land and property rights dispossession is still a challenge across all informal settlements in the city. FGDs and KIIs revealed that Naguru II is highly at risk of eviction since no single resident had a clear idea on land ownership in the area. Residents indicated to be under fear on matters about land and are unsure whether they will be able to secure tenure rights since the government (which would have supported them to get tenure security) also has interest in the land where they are residing. In Kawempe, urban commercial development and expansion trends are squarely leading to forced relocation in the communities.
12. **Business recovery initiatives (Parish Development Model):** The government launched a series of new programs, business recovery initiatives and skills development opportunities for informal workers and residents in Kampala so as to enable resilient recovery and sustainability of livelihoods of urban residents. Our interviews indicated that the Government of Uganda secured loans from the World Bank and African Development Bank (ADB) to recover small businesses from the crisis related economic

effects and shocks. For the urban youths, several skills development programs were launched at different centres in the communities of Nakulabye, Kawempe and Ntinda where the young girls and boys could go and reach out to such training centres for training in vocational skills like hairdressing, tailoring, carpentry, cosmetology, electronics and mechanics.

6.1 Policy Recommendations to the government

Based on the key findings of the study on the impact of COVID-19 on relationships between residents, workers, organizations, and state authorities in Ugandan urban areas, ACTogether Uganda hereby suggest some possible policy recommendations to Government and the Private sector;

1. The Government of Uganda should develop a long-term plan that includes measures to address the root causes of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as improving healthcare infrastructure and systems, promoting research and development of effective treatments and vaccines, and addressing the social and economic factors that contribute to the spread of the virus.
2. The government should adopt or encourage mixed-use planning as a strategy for creating more sustainable and liveable urban environments. Mixed-use developments bring together commercial, residential, and other land uses, which can reduce the need for people to travel long distances to access goods, services, and employment. This can result in fewer traffic congestions and greenhouse gas emissions.
3. The Government should regulate production, use and marketing of local or traditional medication to ensure that the use of natural herbal medicine as an alternative medication for COVID-19 or any other pandemic should be approached with caution, with research into efficacy and safety, regulation and standardization, education and awareness-raising, and collaboration and partnership between traditional and modern healthcare practices.
4. Government should support the development of mobile business models through incentives, training, infrastructure, and ecosystem development, as well as collaboration between the public and private sectors and civil society. This will strengthen the resilience of enterprises and their ability to recover from shocks such as the COVID 19 pandemic.
5. The Government should put in place mechanisms to support and encourage businesses to adapt to changing market demands through innovation and creativity, and to facilitate collaboration and partnerships between businesses, government, and civil society to create sustainable and resilient supply chains.
6. There is need to facilitate the development of innovative and sustainable financial systems that can help individuals and businesses overcome economic challenges and build resilience to future crises through microfinance institutions, financial education, digital financial technologies, and social safety nets.
7. The government should also invest in digital infrastructure and promote digital literacy to enable greater access to and adoption of virtual communication technologies, encourage the development of virtual marketplaces and e-commerce platforms, and

address the digital divide to ensure that everyone has access to the opportunities and benefits of virtual communication technologies.

8. There is need to strengthen social protection programs within urban areas. The pandemic and indeed the key findings of the study highlighted the need for social protection programs that provide support to vulnerable populations such as women, children, people living with disabilities and the youth during times of crisis. The government should explore ways to expand and improve existing social protection programs in urban areas, such as cash transfers, food assistance, and health care services. These should follow criteria that is not only gender responsive but also ensure inclusivity of especially the urban poor at all level.
9. The government should facilitate the enhancement of coordination and communication among and within the community and grassroots (Parish, local council) structures. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of effective coordination and communication between different actors in urban areas, including residents, workers, organizations, and state authorities. Government should promote the development of well-coordinated multi-stakeholder platforms and networks that facilitate communication and collaboration between these actors, and ensure that information and resources are shared effectively.
10. The government should strengthen the support of small and medium-sized enterprises: The pandemic has had a significant impact on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in urban areas, which are a key source of employment and economic growth for majority of the urban active poor population. Government should continue to explore ways to provide targeted support to SMEs, such as access to credit, training, and business development services, to help them survive and recover from the pandemic through for example the Parish Development Model and Youth Livelihood program to boost or sustain financial inclusion and local livelihood projects.
11. The government should aim to build resilient and sustainable urban communities. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of building resilient and sustainable urban communities that are better able to withstand and respond to future crises. There is need to promote policies and programs that support sustainable urban development, including investments in green infrastructure, public transportation, and affordable housing, as well as efforts to reduce urban sprawl and promote compact and walkable urban design.
12. To address land tenure insecurity in informal settlements, the government should prioritize strengthening land governance, regularizing informal settlements, promoting community knowledge, participation and empowerment, balancing development and social equity, fostering collaboration and coordination among government agencies, and undertaking legal and policy reforms.

7.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of COVID-19 on relations between residents, workers, organizations, and state authorities in Ugandan urban areas especially Kampala City has been profound and multifaceted. This policy brief has highlighted several key findings and policy

recommendations to address the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities presented by the impact of the pandemic during all Country's partial and total lockdowns.

Firstly, health-related coping mechanisms such as wearing masks, handwashing, and social distancing should be emphasized and enforced as directives from the government to protect both workers and customers. Additionally, the emergence of mobile businesses and the diversification of merchandise should be supported through incentives, training, infrastructure development, and collaboration to ensure economic resilience and adaptability.

Furthermore, the use of natural herbal medicine should be approached cautiously, with rigorous research, regulation, education, and collaboration between traditional and modern healthcare practices or doctors. Leveraging virtual communication technologies can promote social connections while observing social distancing measures, and governments should invest in sensitizing local citizens around digital infrastructure, promote digital literacy, and foster digital entrepreneurship to enhance access and adoption to these technologies.

Moreover, the issue of land tenure insecurity in informal settlements requires comprehensive action and efficient implementation. The government should strengthen land governance, regularize informal settlements, involve residents in decision-making processes, balance development and social equity, foster collaboration among agencies, and undertake legal and policy reforms to ensure tenure security, protect residents' rights to own or use land, and promote sustainable urban development for appropriate delivery of social services.

By implementing these policy recommendations, the Government and other development partners will ably mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19, enhance resilience, and create more inclusive and sustainable communities to potential related urban pandemic or crisis. It is crucial for government authorities, organizations, and stakeholders to work together in a coordinated manner to address the complex challenges and seize the opportunities presented by this unprecedented global crisis.

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