

A SURVEY ON YOUTH UNDERSTANDING OF
CORRUPTION AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN
RUBIRIZI DISTRICT

NOVEMBER, 2020

Table of Contents

1.0 Background to the Survey	3
2.0 The Corruption Context in Which the Pandemic Strikes	4
3.0 Survey Findings	5
3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.....	5
3.2 Knowledge on corruption	6
3.4 COVID-19 related Corruption;.....	7
3.5 Reducing corruption	7
3.6 How has COVID-19 affected youth and women	8
3.7 COVID-19 relief funds and donations	9
3.8 Government support to young women and youth during Covid-19	10
4.0 Call to actions.....	10
5.0 Conclusion.....	11
References	11

1.0 Background to the Survey

Action for Youth Development (ACoyDE), is a legally registered indigenous, non-profit making, youth focused organization founded in 2010. ACoyDE works to reshape, redirect and uphold the values of social transformative leadership and promote holistic youth empowerment programming developed and implemented by young people through advocacy, training, capacity building, and networking and engage youth in research to inform our actions.

Young people are significant part of the world population to cause any change they need. They shape the future they desire and hold ideas and standards. Youth has all the capacity and potential to thrive in the environment and lead the world in any crisis.

The unprecedented global health crisis we are facing is affecting all parts of society and changing lives and livelihoods. In all types of crises and times of need, from climate change to armed conflict or political unrest, as young people and youth-led organization we have been quick to take action and respond to the needs of others, for example, the current happenings during the COVID-19 pandemic. While attention is currently focused on those most immediately affected by the virus, In Uganda, there are many indications that the COVID-19 pandemic will have long-lasting social, cultural, economic, political and multidimensional impacts on the whole of societies, including young people,

ACoyDE continues to commit to the goals enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and respect for all human rights including economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights which fundamental to the success of public health responses and recovery from the pandemic. The best way to fight these issues is to keep vigilant, continue to press for transparency and engage in every way we can.

At a time when unprecedented levels of emergency, Ugandan, local and international companies and development partners have mobilized funds to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. While funds have been mobilized, media reports in the country indicate that, COVID-19 pandemic is giving rise to very significant risks of corruption. Massive resources mobilized to respond to the health and economic crises seem to be creating more opportunities for corruption, while many corruption prevention and enforcement mechanisms are suspended due to the emergency. This corruption risk is a rule of law problem in itself. It also compromises the pandemic response, undermining much-needed trust in public institutions, squandering supplies and resources, and impeding their flow to those in need.

It is critical to continue a strong stance against corrupt practices during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and this must be backed up by evidence for a successful advocacy campaigns. A wave of corruption-related incidents linked to the current situation underscores the importance of continuing and strengthening transparency and accountability efforts. It is based on this background that ACoyDE carried out an online survey on youth understanding of

corruption amidst Covid-19 pandemic in Rubirizi district and drawing actions against the acts of corruption in the district and country at large.

2.0 The Corruption Context in Which the Pandemic Strikes

The outbreak presents an [opportunity for scammers and businessmen to defraud citizens](#), often with the complicity of government officials, as indicated by reports from Uganda. There are also accounts of citizens evading quarantine by bribing officials in [Uganda](#), which will inevitably lead to further disease spread (VOA, 2020).

In many countries, including responses to COVID-19 have seen breaches of anti-corruption standards such as cutting corners in procurement processes, or persons in power taking advantage of the crisis to increase their private benefits. In April, media reported about [four top Ugandan](#) government officials were arrested following reports they inflated COVID-19 relief food prices (VOA, 2020).

Despite more than two decades of increasingly robust global efforts to combat corruption, including through the UN Convention Against Corruption, the OECD Anti-bribery Convention, and myriad national and regional enforcement mechanisms, corruption remains a persistent rule of law problem in every region in the world. In the recently released 2020 WJP Rule of Law Index, 40% of the 128 countries studied saw their corruption score decline, as compared to just 21% that improved (World Justice Project, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in large scale emergency spending by central government and local governments at rapid speed to revive the economy as well as protect the poor and vulnerable who suffer disproportionately. As countries embark on the road to a more resilient and inclusive recovery, prudent use of scarce resources in a transparent manner is critical,” said *World Bank Managing Director Mari Pangestu*, “Progress is possible in all environments and we are committed to work closely with our partners in government, civil society, and the private sector to address corruption and its corrosive impacts.” (World Bank Report, 2020)

Almost half of all people who made contact with the health sector in Uganda in 2010 paid a bribe. But by 2015 this rate was just 25%. This is an almost unprecedented reduction, especially in such a short time frame. And runs counter to the trend in other sectors where bribery remained at high levels. While Uganda’s health sector is a positive outlier on bribery, the evidence suggests the cost of controlling the vice might be too high. And the consequences of the present approach are likely to be become apparent in years to come.

As cases of COVID-19 continue to spread national wide it is becoming clear that the outbreak of this virus has implications that reach far beyond the direct impact on people’s physical health. What started as a health emergency is causing fundamental shifts in society as our local governments struggle to try and contain the crisis through the district task forces working with

ministry of health. At the height of the isolation measures a population of about 144,100 people in the survey target district (UBOS, 2020 projections) was in lockdown in Rubiriri district. Restrictions have eased in the country, but COVID-19 prevention measures such as local lockdowns, social distancing, meeting only in ‘bubbles’ and wearing facemasks remain in place.

The purpose of this rapid survey presents youth understanding of corruption amidst Covid-19 pandemic in Rubirizi district and further provides effects of the risk presented by COVID-19 pandemic on enterprises owned by youth and young women. It will also be useful to know some of the incapacities within the communities to respond and cope with such shocks and stresses. Some of the survey findings will be used to strategize and offer tailored support to affected communities. It will also be used to provide call to actions that’s informs the central and the local governments on the best approaches to end corruption and develop resilient programs that support the sustainability of women and youth owned businesses amidst Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, the survey; Examines youth understanding of COVID-19 pandemic on various indicators of corruption; Assesses youth and women owned small business performance in the event of the pandemic; and Provides possible call to action options in mitigating corruption cases and revive businesses in the district amidst COVID-19 pandemic.

The data was collected using an online forms and Google in analyzing the responses from the 91 participants.

3.0 Survey Findings

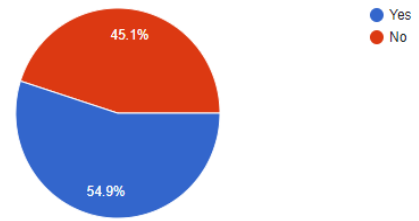
3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

A total of 91 participants responded to our online questionnaires, 65% of the respondents were males while 35% were females, this could imply that during the lockdown men accessed online media platform than the females. Results show that nearly a half 35% of respondent were youth aged between 20-24 years and 22% comprised of youth between 15-19 years. Another 18% of respondents were aged between 25-35 years, 14% were those between 10-14 years old and the least 11% of respondents were aged 35 years and above. These results are partly because during the lock down mobility for male was higher than for females. This implies that the pandemics affected women and men differently. Donors and government Covid-19 programs should apply a gender-lens in the response to COVID-19.

While the survey targeted participation from Rubirizi district which had majority participants at 64%, it also attracted a number of responses from more extra 8 districts which shared the 36%. Results further shows that 31% of respondents had only completed primary level, 29% had finished University, 26% of respondents were of secondary level of education, while 12% of the respondents had reached tertiary institution. Majority (35%) of the respondents were farmers by the time of the survey, 22% students, 10% were both businessmen/women and engineers, 8% social workers, and the rest were medical practitioners, civil servants and bankers.

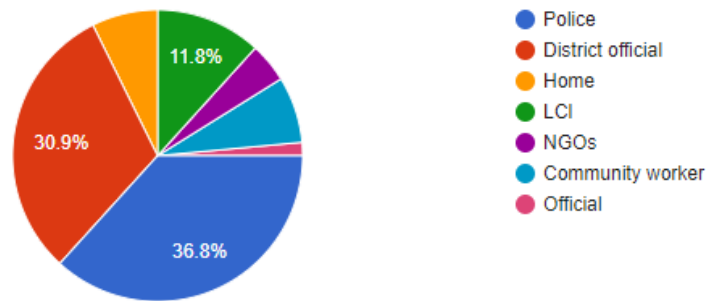
3.2 Knowledge on corruption

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of having strong anti-corruption controls and preventive safeguards, and that future measures should take into consideration their enforcement through digital and/or remote instruments. The survey findings reveal that 55% of tattle participants indicated having knowledge on corruption, a part from the 45% of respondents who said they never knew anything relating to corruption.



The 55% of the respondents who knew about corruptions mentioned Embezzlement of funds, false accountability, bribery and extortion unequal distribution of resources, and paying for documents to be officially stamped by local councils as some of the quick examples of corruptions cases in their communities. The findings also indicates that the most appropriate sources of information on corruption are ratios 39%, newspapers 26%, in homes at 25% and finally 7% of respondent mentioned community libraries.

Further analysis of the survey responses indicates that 58% of the respondents had ever witnessed a corruption scandal in their community, compared to the 42% who said they never witnessed any case of corruption. And the highest number of scandals are revealed to have been committed by police and district officials or civil servants in Rubiriza district, as indicated in figure below;

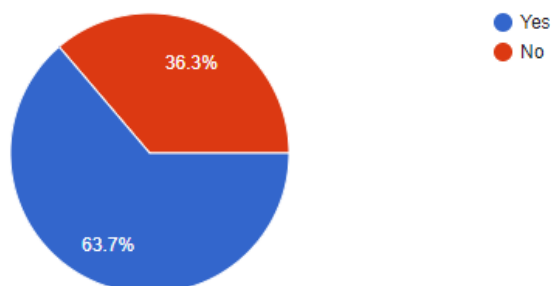


Source:primary data (online)

The survey results relates to what A report by the Inspector General of Government (IGG) listed that district civil servants as the most corrupt public officials in the country. The 2018 report titled ‘Bi-annual Inspectorate of Government Performance report to Parliament’, also named districts of Kampala and Wakiso as among the districts with the most corruption cases. The report to Parliament is based on complaints raised between July and December last year. The corruption complaints against the district officials such as the chief administrative officers, district chairpersons and town clerks are 31%t of the total cases reported to the IGG.

3.4 COVID-19 related Corruption;

Our survey reveals increasing COVID-19 corruption scandals at local governments, 64% of the respondent said they have heard about covid-19 related cases compared to the 36% who indicated not knowing about any scandal, as shown in the figure below;



Source:primary data (online)

These findings are evidenced with what was reported on 4th April 2020, four top Ugandan government officials were arrested following reports they inflated COVID-19 relief food prices. The defendants worked in the office of Prime Minister and ran a program to provide food relief for the most vulnerable amid the coronavirus pandemic. They were arrested for causing government losses in excess of \$528,000. The head of the anti-corruption unit in the State House, Lt.Col. Edith Nakalema, said she received a directive from President Yoweri Museveni to investigate the way the program was being run. The findings of this survey imply that strong and capable leadership, backed by a health workforce with the necessary expertise, is the cornerstone of an effective response to pandemics. However, in many of local governments in Uganda, corruption and lack of transparency have led to the recruitment of people who cannot implement complex treatment protocols, reducing the ability to handle a crisis. This issue is pertinent at a time when health systems are under pressure to recruit as many workers as possible to handle the crisis.

The survey findings revealed, whereas corruption scandals have intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic, similar cases of corruptions existed before the pandemic, 63% of the respondent mentioned having interface with corruption in your life before Covid-19 while the least 37% said no. Our pre-COVID world also provided plenty of bread crumbs that we can follow to see where opportunists may take advantage of economic-stimulus packages and public financial assistance programmes. 'It's a shame that the coronavirus doesn't spread through public tenders. We'd know exactly who will get it.'

3.5 Reducing corruption

The outstanding recommendation to bring an end to corruption was; respondent massively indicated reporting identified corrupt official to the courts of law and be reprimanded and charged for causing government loss is the most effective approach the reduce the device. In

addition to this, they mentioned also that strengthening the Anti-corruption unit, having the right leaders in office, teaching young men and women the right values in schools and communities, mass sensitization about the danger of corruption, having laws and policies enforced equally, civic dialogues and engagement, Informing people of what corruption entails, some people pay for services the government has freely given us because of lack of information/knowledge; and finally educate people on integrity, honesty and it's benefits and preach the Gospel of Christ to them. These findings implies that, the Covid-19 emergency requires that corruption risk mitigation is built into the donor support provided to the response to prevent further damage to societies, and maintained in existing investments. Donors and government support to programs at local lever should leverage their aid/support and influence, wisely building on the experience of past crises.

3.6 How has COVID-19 affected youth and women

The survey findings revealed that COVID-19 have affected youth and women in various ways, and among them they mentioned, loss of jobs, loss of lives, loss of property, closure of businesses where they got a living, suspension of funding to some sectors, limitations on movement during the lock down hence affecting many youth and women activities, closure of school has led to more school dropout and our sisters getting married at a tender age, and finally prices of almost everything have raised when people are economically not doing well.

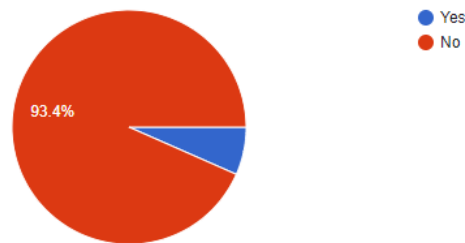
Women owned business have further been affected, since the lockdown women who were working turned their faces into daily household chores, hence giving less or no attention to their business. The finding shows that COVID-19 affected women business in a number of ways including; increased domestic violence, low turnover leading to business failure, young girls got married, family break downs, businesses which were operating on loans could not afford paying back, access to health services for women was also a challenge and finally Markets were stopped operating yet it's the place for income generation among women.

This implied that there is need to combine a gender lens in anti-corruption measures is important to ensure that controls introduced to reduce disease or corruption risks do not further marginalize or disadvantage women and other vulnerable and marginalised groups. Pandemics [affect men and women differently](#). The risks to women arise in many ways. Firstly, [the majority of healthcare workers are women](#). Second, social isolation increases their household burdens due to the larger role they play in child-care, food preparation, and other household tasks. Added to this is the fact that they are responsible for caring for the sick and the elderly, so if family members are infected, they will have to step in. Another real danger is the diversion of public resources away from important health services such as maternity and obstetric care, vaccination, and other forms of primary health care putting the lives of women and children at risk

3.7 COVID-19 relief funds and donations

Of the respondents who participated in the survey, 88% of the respondents when asked whether they knew about any Covid-19 relief fund and donations, they indicated that they knew about it, and only 12% did not know. This imply that, the fact the president and government openly called to citizens and other private companies contribute towards the Covid-19 relief programs, Billions of money was collected from all over the country in addition to the loan the government obtained from international sources.

However, when asked whether respondents think the funds were utilized for what they were meant for? The results were negative, the majority 93% of the respondents who knew about the funds indicated that they don't know whether it was put to the right use, as indicated in the figure below;



Source:primary data (online)

In addition to these findings, it was further indicated that, of the respondents participated in the survey almost none 95% had ever received any donations from COVID-19 relief donations by the time of the survey. Only 5% of respondent indicated having received poor quality beans and posho which they never even ate. Since even the masks they were promised were never delivered to them. These findings implies that, some forms of face-to-face corruption may diminish owing to social and physical distancing but this can hardly be called a silver lining of the current crisis, where the public is not being told how the collected funds were used. Corruption that is hidden from the public in ordinary times is likely to continue, and may even thrive. Holding power-holders to account will be vital, but how possible will it be including when opposition politicians, the media and oversight bodies may face pressure to refrain from questioning the actions of leaders and governments to avoid being criticized for 'politicizing' COVID-19. Being able to speak up publicly on corruption COVID-19 related or not is more vital now than ever. There need to be visible guarantees of resourcing for law-enforcement agencies, oversight bodies, anti-corruption agencies and whistle-blowers to make it clear that the system is still working.

3.8 Government support to young women and youth during Covid-19

The survey results shows that the government has not done much in supporting youth and women, 87% of the respondents said they haven't not seen much regarding youth and women support by government apart from sensitizing the public on social distancing and use of masks. Only 13% indicated government support but they were not specific on which support they received. As a result a number of suggestions were proposed by the respondents help young women in the business affected by COVID-19 and the majority mentioned that there is need to; Offer recovery low interest loans, or stimulus package such as interest free loans, extending health services to rural areas, invest in entrepreneurship skills development schemes, connect youth programs to local people, devise favorable strategies and policies to raise their business back, and finally need to be empowered with information and resources to build sustainable enterprises.

To achieve all these, the justice system must be allowed to continue to function in order to enforce sanctions and rule on cases of corruption, thereby maintaining systems of accountability during a state of emergency. The relevant anti-corruption and criminal justice agencies should issue [strong warnings against fraud and corruption](#) in crisis response measures, and prepare to launch investigations against those who are abusing their public positions to profit from the crisis.

4.0 Call to actions

- ❖ There is urgent need for short, mid and long-term analysis on the ways that opportunists are likely to exploit this crisis including building organized-crime and corruption intelligence and analysis into our health and socio-economic interventions.
- ❖ Urgent need for the government to create youth and women in business scheme to offer recovery low interest loans, or stimulus package such as interest free loans and invest in entrepreneurship skills development programs.
- ❖ Covid-19 pandemic requires urgent action from all involved in national and global health response. In this moment, safeguarding corruption *must* be prioritized alongside the health and livelihood response. At the same time, it is important to avoid premature or poorly-thought-out reforms that can do more harm than good, such as overwhelming a society's capacity to absorb aid and put it to effective use.
- ❖ Construct social spaces for negotiations around norms through providing an infrastructure for normative dialogue in the health and social development sectors, for example through online portals or convening discussions. Building positive norms around integrity which can be done through connecting social status and prestige with integrity.
- ❖ Donors should channel funding through existing channels that already apply anti-corruption best practice for health.

- ❖ It is important to keep involving civil society organisations in the important role of monitoring health outcomes and procurement systems, to track budget spending, and provide user feedback.
- ❖ Pandemics affect women and men differently. Donors should apply a gender-lens in the response to COVID-19.
- ❖ Practitioners seeking to ensure and build integrity in the health sector require a thorough understanding of the social forces that perpetuate the corrupt practices
- ❖ The crisis also provides an opportunity to strengthen leadership and governance in the sector, clean up ghost workers, and improve salaries and benefits for health workers. The COVID-19 crisis has shown that transparency should be strengthened throughout the medical private sector to ensure that profit-making does not override public interest.

5.0 Conclusion

Basically, the uses of pandemics crisis such as COVID-19 can create the favorable conditions to generate a massive corruption in developing countries and least developed countries. The underlying intuition is that the COVID-19 is going to be a focus of corruption, which jointly determines the increment of countries debt and hence the impact on the public finances. We hope that our call to action are put into consideration to contribute to a better Uganda without corruption opportunity amidst crisis. Our survey results confirm that the COVID-19 crisis have had a significant impact in the increment in the corruption cases. Given the high opportunity costs of using fiscal resources and request of international loans (credit) to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 in country but when less is being done on ground.

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