

Leveraging and Enhancing the Voices of the Indigenous Peoples of Uganda and Efforts to Manage Child Trafficking in Karamoja, Uganda

On August 31, 2023, partners constituting Makerere University, School of Public Health, ResilientAfrica Network (RAN), Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), and Gulu University Constituent College (GUCC) in Moroto brought together 89 multidisciplinary researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and donors at a project dissemination workshop in Hotel Africana, Kampala Uganda. This dissemination event featured the findings from six research interventions conducted under the “[Voices of the Indigenous People of Uganda](#)” project. The project was funded by USAID Uganda under the [LASER PULSE](#) (Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research: Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine) program led by Purdue University. It was supported by the Karamoja Regional Development Initiative (KAREDI) and the Southwestern Uganda Regional Coordination Initiative. The research projects focused on addressing the plight of Uganda's indigenous peoples, specifically the Batwa in the southwestern region and the Ik, and Tepeth in the Karamoja subregion. The interventions also addressed issues related to child trafficking in Karamoja.). Purdue, RAN, MUST, and GUCC have been in this partnership executing the project activities since 2019.

In his opening remarks, Prof. William Bazeyo, the [Resilient Africa Network](#) (RAN) Chief of Party welcomed all participants noting that Makerere University and the entire RAN team was and will remain grateful to all partners who have supported and continue to support the ongoing research and innovation related work. Notably, Prof. Bazeyo thanked USAID for funding the efforts to raise awareness and to document the plight of the indigenous peoples of Uganda. Prof. Bazeyo said, “*We are committed to working with these communities because what matters most is what we do and can do with the communities in which we live and serve to impact them positively*”. He urged all n participants to embrace the sharing of their research and innovation outputs, noting the importance of putting them to use.

Prof. Elzeus Rutebemberwa, Deputy Dean at Makerere University School of Public Health representing the Dean Makerere University School of Public Health in his remarks said: “*With research, we should endeavor to go to the communities not to solve problems but make them better and combat existing pressing challenges*”. When we approach research this way, we shall enable communities to develop faster. “*The problems of today are a result of the mistakes done in the past; we should now focus on carrying out research to inform the future*”, he added. He acknowledged Makerere University partners including the donors in this case USAID who have continuously supported and funded research and innovation among other efforts. He also noted that the major role of research institutions is to find solutions that will propel the country to the future.

Dr. Betty Bugusu, Technical Director, LASER PULSE, Purdue University then had an opportunity to share about LASER PULSE and its activities. She noted that LASER PULSE is a consortium that brings together Purdue University (al lead), Makerere University, Indiana University, University of Notre Dame, and Catholic Relief Services. *“The LASER PULSE team is implementing its activities through a growing network of 3,000+ researchers and development practitioners in 74 countries”* Dr. Bugusu said. Practically, LASER PULSE collaborates with the USAID missions, bureaus, independent offices, and other local stakeholders to identify research needs for critical development challenges. In addition, LASER PULSE funds and strengthens the capacity of researcher-practitioner teams to co-design solutions that translate into policy and practice.

Hon. John Paul Kodet, Chairperson KAREDI was represented by Hon. Mark Abuku, Former LC V Kaabong District. He noted that KAREDI was initiated to support efforts to respond to the regional challenges. He also shared a concern that there are many NGOs in Karamoja though several have not registered impact given that poverty (67%), illiteracy (75%) among other community pressing challenges were still high. “KAREDI is here to support efforts towards realization of development for Karamoja, it is therefore paramount that we decide and plan with facts generated from research” Hon. Kodet said.



Dissemination session Opening Panel (Photo Credit: Makerere University-RAN)

Mr. Fred Ngabirano, Commissioner Youth and Children at Uganda's Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development graced this engagement as Chief Guest and officially opened the session. In his remarks, he ignited discussions about child trafficking and indigenous populations in Uganda sharing about his engagements in related work with the dissemination session participants. *"The Government of the Republic of Uganda is already working on policies to further support and protect indigenous communities in the country. I am happy that our development partners are part of these efforts"* Mr. Ngabirano said. He committed to the Ministry's availability and willingness to support all efforts directed towards improving the livelihood of Uganda's indigenous populations and averting child trafficking. He called out loud for mindset change which he emphasized is crucial for all of us if we are to preserve culture and heritage.



Mr. Fred Ngabirano, Commissioner Youth and Children at Uganda's Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development giving his remarks (Photo Credit: Makerere University - RAN)

It was during the project dissemination session when participants received the project research findings from the researchers and further engaged in discussions on how the project is addressing the plight of the indigenous peoples found in Karamoja and southwestern Uganda, as well as issues related to child trafficking. Among what was shared were findings from an intensive review of the extant literature that was conducted informing this published [desk review report](#). In addition, findings from consultations with the Batwa Indigenous Peoples of southwestern Uganda also published in an online [report](#) were highlighted. Similarly, findings from community consultations with the Ik and Tepeth Indigenous Peoples as well as voices from communities affected by child trafficking in the

Karamoja subregion published in an online [report](#) were shared during this dissemination session.

It was also fulfilling to engage in discussions as researchers and innovators shared about the interventions that have been implemented in Karamoja subregion including;

- *Project 1:* Redeeming the So-Lang language from extinction among the Tepeth indigenous communities, implemented by Karamoja Youth Effort to Save Environment (KAYESE), a local NGO in Moroto.
- *Project 2:* Improved livelihoods for the Ik community in the vicinity of mobile ecotourism camps through sustainable cultural tourism activities, implemented by Kara-Tunga, an ecotourism-based NGO in Moroto
- *Project 3:* Eliminating child trafficking in Napak district through integrated approaches, implemented by Ecological Christian Organization (ECO)

Additionally, projects that have been implemented in southwestern Uganda including the following were showcased.

- *Project 4:* Employing an integration of mutual aid groups and informal saving schemes to alleviate gender-based violence among the Batwa in Kanungu, southwestern Uganda. The project is led by researchers at MUST in collaboration with Action for Batwa Empowerment Group (ABEG), a local community-based organization located in Bwindi, Kanungu district.
- *Project 5:* A Holistic Approach to Education for the Batwa people in Southwestern Uganda, implemented by a team from Makerere University School of Education in partnership with grassroots organizations in Rubanda and Kisoro districts.
- *Project 6:* Sustainable Education Responses for Batwa Children (SEREB), implemented by Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT) in Kisoro, Rubanda and Kanungu.



Presentation by some of project Implementers 1



Presentation by some of project Implementers 2

Mr. Abel Bizimana, LC V Kisoro while closing this engagement noted that the amplifier of all the speeches and presentations is cash and therefore there is need to continue mobilizing resources to support research and innovation for the benefit of our communities. *“Let us continue to inform the work we are all doing by identifying and sharing the socio dynamics and demographics of the places where work is currently taking place”* Mr. Bizimana said. In the same spirit, he re-echoed the need for Government

buy-in to support and push the ongoing efforts to the next level. He thanked all stakeholders for being a part of the engagement and wished all safe travels back home.

A Highlight of the Media mentions

NBS Television on X – The recent research by Makerere University indicate that child trafficking remains a big problem for human capital development in Karamoja sub-region
<https://twitter.com/nbstv/status/1698409818933882919?s=20>

Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) Television - Voices of the Indigenous Peoples, government working on affirmative action to uplift these communities
https://youtu.be/YeEWQ_EdU5k?si=rfOhmcfhXCK_Pf6q

New Vision Publications - Researchers tipped on solution finding
https://www.newvision.co.ug/category/news/researchers-tipped-on-solution-finding-NV_168976

New Vision Publications - 60 percent of Batwa do not won land
<https://newvisionapp.page.link/nJeE>

Radio Sapientia 94.4



FM –

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