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Unemployed Ugandan Youth Gravitate to Sports Betting

By IMTFI Researchers [Bruno Yawe](#) and [Kizito Ssengooba](#)

Sports betting can be described as the activity of predicting sports results and placing a wager on the outcome which may result into a loss or a win. About 62% of Uganda's youth are not in any form of employment and the majority of them live in urban centers (ActionAid International Uganda, Development Research and Training and Uganda National NGO Forum, 2012). The growth of the internet and mobile devices with quick access to odds has made betting much more accessible.

In particular, sports betting has spread among Ugandan youth like wildfire. Several sports betting companies have recently set up shop in urban and semi-urban areas around the country.

Unemployed young people gather at these betting parlors to gamble on things like televised soccer matches. On the weekends, hundreds of sports betting outlets are filled with young gamblers, most of them without any regular income. At the betting parlors in Kampala and its neighborhoods, young men watch soccer matches on flat-screen TVs. Every day, betting companies put a lineup of games for the public to bet on. For every game, there is a team of analysts who analyze the strength and prospects of each team. The stronger the team is, the higher the likelihood of a win but the lower the odds and return. The average bet size is about US\$ 0.5. With this information, a prospective wager will place bets and wait for the results. Many unemployed youth are being lured into predicting sports results and placing bets by popular FM radio stations. Youth in the Wakiso and Kampala districts have embraced sports betting for survival because they have no jobs and see this as an opportunity to make some quick money. Majority of the youth interviewed said "I would rather try my luck with betting UGX 1,000 (US\$ 0.5) and hope to win and meet my pressing needs than living without any hope at all." Some say it is a good source of income, but others are not so sure.

Lucrative, Legal Lure

The business of sports betting is give and take. For example, if everybody should bet on Barcelona today and Barcelona loses, betting shops benefit. Conversely, if everybody should bet on Barcelona today and Barcelona wins, betting shops lose while the customers benefit. Betting shops hire young people to work at their branches around the country, thereby creating hundreds of jobs. Although these sports betting operations are legal in Uganda they are not adequately regulated by the government. Before January 2014, there were no clear laws or guidelines to govern gambling in the country. Because of this lack of laws, some companies refused to pay up when somebody won a bet.

Deep Concerns

With the increasing presence of betting shops, some officials charged with youth welfare are very excited and are in agreement with their operation in the country. They argue that they will help to promote the government's poverty reduction strategy by providing some employment opportunities to the youth. They claim that as more sports betting shops are licensed, more employment opportunities are created in the country. But not everyone



Billboard of a betting shop in Kampala (Photo by authors)

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Youth viewing match fixtures (Photo by authors)

agrees that this is a positive thing. Gambling is bad for Ugandan society. This is because the majority of youth are no longer going to school nor seeking gainful employment. They spend the entire day at the betting parlors. Some say the expansion of legal sports betting is fueling vices like the use of tuition fees for betting (among in-school youth); theft and cheating; more illegal street gambling; and sapping young people's motivation for finding jobs.

But back at the betting parlors unemployed youth say that they do not have much choice. They argue that there is no adequate social protection to shield them from the adverse effects of joblessness. They are not betting because they want to bet. Rather they are betting because they want to make a living. Gambling in general

Ugandan society is sitting on top of a gambling problem time-bomb

and sports betting in particular is growing rapidly, and Ugandan society is sitting on top of a gambling problem time-bomb. Gambling and betting represent new drivers of chronic poverty among Uganda's youth. Many youth are abandoning participation in productive activities in favor of gambling, especially sports betting. This has emerged as both a rural and urban phenomenon and has increased idleness, diverting would-be productive resources in the hope of winning bets. There is need for proper regulation of the gambling industry and more sensitization on the dangers of this practice. To address the adverse effects of gambling, [Gamble Aware Uganda](#) provides support, information, and advice to anyone suffering from gambling problems. The high unemployment rate among Uganda's youth poses a serious threat to the country's well-being. The unemployed youth are likely to become a source of instability if the government does not plan for them early enough. There is need for urgent intervention to plan for the idle youth population who are likely to become a problem to the country's security.

Read more in Bruno Yawe and Kizito Ssengooba's [Final Report](#).

Click [here](#) to listen to a radio program on sports betting on Uganda Radio Network in which Bruno Yawe was a participant. The program took place on 10th January 2014 at Makerere University.

Posted by Anonymous at 8:12 AM



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