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Learning Citizenship in Constrained Settings in Uganda

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Cover photo: Author (fourth from right) with citizens of Nyakahama Village, Rubirizi district after participating in the monthly bulungi bwansi (community service).
Field Photo

ABSTRACT

Citizenship and how it is promoted and learned in illiberal settings is a highly contested and contentious subject in multidisciplinary scholarship. This thesis problematises the kinds of citizenship that can be promoted in civil society spaces and what they portend for NGO-led development in constrained settings of Uganda. Conceptualising citizenship as taking place in a variety of spaces where rights and responsibilities related to decent living and dissent are contextually constructed, the thesis makes two claims: a) grassroots development is an expression of citizenship in action, and b) civil society spaces foster citizenship that is attuned to decent living and gradual change. A theoretical approach based on citizenship as a constellation of participatory, socio-material and lifelong learning is suggested. A qualitative participatory research methodology was used to explore the routine citizenship practices of communities participating in the activities of two NGOs, operating in eastern and western Uganda, respectively. Findings, reported in three original publications, show that citizenship emerging in civil society spaces is localised, active, gendered and material – learned in and through everyday belonging and social participation – but apolitical. Foregrounding the findings in the historical and public discourse that both predicts and threatens (the possible recurrence of) violence in contemporary Uganda, the thesis advances the notion of constrained citizenship as a novel way to illustrate a state-society relationship that socialises citizens to eschew dissent and embrace ingenuity and personal responsibility for development. The thesis concludes that in constrained settings where political advocacy and claim making are unpredictably and scarily untenable, the handiness of civil society spaces in enhancing citizens' material survival and incremental change should be appreciated and encouraged.

Keywords: Civil society spaces, violence, rural dwellers, constrained citizenship, learning, *olubimbi,* Uganda

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Kansalaisuus, ja tavat tukea ja oppia kansalaisuutta ei-liberaaleissa yhteiskunnissa, ovat kiistanalaisia teemoja, jotka ovat herättänyt paljon keskustelua monilla tutkimusaloilla. Tämä tutkimus pohtii, millaisia kansalaisuuden muotoja voidaan tukea kansalaisyhteiskunnan tiloissa ja mitä nämä muodot merkitsevät kansalaisjärjestön ajamalle kehitykselle Ugandan rajoitetussa yhteiskunnallisissa ympäristöissä. Tutkimus käsitteellistää kansalaisuuden ilmiönä, joka toteutuu monenlaisissa paikoissa ja tiloissa, joissa sekä riittävän hyvää elämää että toisinajattelua koskevat oikeudet ja velvollisuudet rakentuvat paikallisesti. Tutkimus esittää kaksi keskeistä väitettä: a) ruohojuuritason kehitys on kansalaisuuden käytännön ilmentymä; ja b) kansalaisyhteiskunnan tiloissa vahvistuvat sellaiset kansalaisuuden muodot, jotka keskittyvät etujen ajamisen ja vaatimusten esittämisen sijaan riittävän hyvään elämään ja asteittaisiin muutoksiin. Tutkimus rakentaa käsitteellisen lähestymistavan, jossa kansalaisuus ymmärretään sosiaalisen osallistumisen, sosiomateriaalisten parannusten ja elinikäisen oppimisen yhdistelmänä. Tutkimus käyttää kvalitatiivista, osallistavaa tutkimusotetta kansalaisuuden rutiininomaisten käytäntöjen analysoimiseksi yhteisöissä, jotka osallistuivat kahden eri kansalaisjärjestön toimintaan Ugandan itä- ja länsiosissa. Kolmessa alkuperäisjulkaisussa raportoidut tulokset kertovat, että kansalaisyhteiskunnassa ilmenevä kansalaisuus on paikallista, aktiivista, sukupuolittunutta ja materiaalista – mutta ei poliittista - ja että sitä opitaan jokapäiväisen kuulumisen ja sosiaalisen osallistumisen kautta. Ammentaen Ugandan poliittisen ilmapiirin väkivaltaistumista koskevista historiallisista ja julkisista keskusteluista, tutkimus tuottaa käsitteen rajoitettu kansalaisuus, joka on uusi tapa kuvata valtio-kansalaissuhdetta, jossa kansalaiset sosiaalistuvat karttamaan toisinajattelua ja omaksumaan henkilökohtaisen vastuun kehityksestä. Tutkimuksen johtopäätös on, että rajoitetuissa ympäristöissä, joissa kansalaisten poliittisluontoinen asioiden ajaminen ja vaatimusten esittäminen ovat ei-ennustettavuuden ja pelon ilmapiirin vuoksi kestämättömiä toimintatapoja, kansalaisyhteiskunnan toimivuutta kansalaisten materiaalisen selviytymisen lisäämisessä ja joskus takapakkiakin ottavan asteittaisen muutoksen tukemisessa pitäisi arvostaa ja rohkaista.

Avainsanat: kansalaisyhteiskunnan tilat, väkivalta, maaseudun asukkaat, rajoitettu kansalaisuus, oppiminen, olubimbi, Uganda

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated:

To the inspiration of my beautiful children: Atukunda, Amani and Emigisha;

To the memory of my late mother, Sarah K. Karembe, who did not live to reap the fruits of her sacrifice;

To recognition of the persistently brave personalities who sow seeds of hope, and challenge bigotry and zealotry in Uganda.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACFODE	Action for Development
AUC	African Union Commission
BACE	Bachelor of Adult and Community Education
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
COVOID	Community Volunteer Initiative for Development
CS-LEARN	*Theory and practice of learning to be a citizen*
DENIVA	Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GLISS	Greater Lakes Institute of Strategic Studies
GROW	*Growth into Citizenship in Civil Society Encounters*
HIV/AIDS	human immunodeficiency virus/ acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MIA	Ministry of Interna Affairs (Uganda)
MoLG	Ministry of Local Government (Uganda)
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
NDPIII	Third National Development Plan
PDM	Parish Development Model
RoU	Republic of Uganda
SACCOs	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation
SMU	Saemaul Undong model
TASO	The AIDS Support Organisation
TGE	*tusaba gavumente etuyambe*
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UIL	UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning
UNCST	Uganda National Council of Science and Technology
VSLAs	Village Savings and Loans Associations

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CONTENTS

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In this chapter, I set the stage, provide the background for my interest in the topic and justify its relevance and importance for the multidisciplinary fields of development and citizenship studies.

In this thesis, I aim to do two things to advance a notion of 'constrained citizenship': first, to make a case for understanding citizenship as local practice and action that materialises in grassroots development initiatives; second, to interrogate how and why civil society spaces promote and strengthen the kinds of citizenship they do in rural areas of Uganda. To achieve this, the thesis examines, in the context of rural Uganda, the kinds of citizenship that emerge in the community development initiatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the ways in and through which citizenship is learned in peoples' everyday participation in civil society spaces. It then reflects on what this portends for development interventions promoting citizenship and learning in constrained settings in sub-Saharan Africa. The thesis is based on qualitative participatory research conducted in two rural districts of Uganda where two NGOs have implemented a number of development programmes through grassroots associations and networks. The notion of 'constrained setting' is used in this thesis to denote historical, socio-economic and political environments that unpredictably and profoundly curtail the ability of both citizens and NGOs to challenge state institutions civically and engage them in the drive for better standards of living.

1.1 Setting the stage: citizenship encounters in constrained settings

The statement that 'poor citizens cannot advocate', which forms the first part of the thesis title, was an emphatic response by an NGO executive director during the study to my question of why the NGO he heads chose to focus on livelihood training instead of promoting advocacy. His statement expressed the view that,

while advocacy is noble, people who cannot meet the basic requirements of life may not have the agency and means to engage sustainably in civic activities that challenge the status quo. This statement was corroborated by a senior NGO official, who told me in subsequent conversations that their interventions supplement existing government development efforts to address poverty at the household level.

Regarding the citizen-state development nexus, the National Resistance Movement[1] (NRM) in Uganda has, and continues to design and implement, both macro and micro-level development programmes with the overall aim of transforming the country from a peasant to a modern, prosperous and middle-income country (National Planning Authority [NPA], 2013, 2020). A series of socioeconomic programmes targeting the poor and other vulnerable segments of the population, such as women, youth, people with disabilities and the elderly, have thus been initiated and promoted since the NRM's ascent to power in 1986 (for details see Table 1).

In the context of this thesis, the statements of NGO officials illustrate the central dilemma regarding the kinds of citizenship agency civil society-led development can promote in illiberal and authoritarian contexts in the Global South. This dilemma revolves around the question of whether NGOs and, more broadly, civil society actors should address and work towards ameliorating the socio-economic and material conditions of citizens, on the one hand, or focus on awakening and strengthening the civic agency of the poor to make claims on the state, on the other. Based on my previous personal observations of prevailing state-citizens relations in Uganda, my experiences during data collection for this study and the existing literature, I suggest that this dilemma provides the main motivation for this thesis. To illustrate, in what follows, I narrate two personal encounters that partially talk to this dilemma and contributed to my initial interest in undertaking this study.

The first encounter was a casual conversation with village-mates about matters related to citizen-state relations. In December 2010, as is the custom in Uganda, I travelled to my country home in rural Isingiro district, western Uganda, for the Christmas holiday. During this period, the country was gripped by election fever in the run up to the February 2011 general elections. Often, general elections present the most opportune moment for electorates to task elected leaders to account for their performance over the past five years, based on their promises. In this particular electioneering period, public debates at both the local community and constituency levels rotated around the failure or inability of the incumbent Member of Parliament (MP) and minister in the ruling (NRM) party to lobby for the tarmacking of a bad road connecting Isingiro district to Mbarara district. Thus, while discussing with my guests at home about

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[1] The NRM has been the ruling party under the leadership of Yoweri Museveni since 1986 when it inherited what was, arguably, a failed state. Due to regime longevity, the NRM has, over time, dominated state-public relations, stabilised the state and morphed into what scholars and commentators have called a corrupt, personalised, neo-patrimonial and mafia state (see, Chapter Three).

this, a non-literate boy I had contracted to do some casual work, rather nonchalantly quipped:

> I see people blaming the MP and the NRM government for not working on that [Ising-iro-Mbarara] road. I am not bothered [by the bad state of the road] because whether the road is paved or not, it will not make such a big difference in my life. I neither have nor will I ever own a car to drive on such a smooth road.

During the same Christmas holiday, I had a discussion on various topics related to development and politics in Uganda with my neighbour, who is also a local leader. As we exchanged views, he wondered why elites like me who are 'educated and stay in urban areas with better services such as electricity and water, are always the ones critical of the Museveni government'. This pushed me to reflect critically on whether different socioeconomic classes have similar aspirations for, and expectations of their relationship with the state. Moreover, the two conversations were happening at a time when all citizens were, ideally, supposed to be more active in their engagement with state actors. I started to review and question my own thinking about the processes of empowering and strengthening vulnerable citizens to challenge marginalisation and oppression. My prevailing thinking at that time, challenged in these encounters, was strongly anchored in the Freirean approach to community education that saw it as a means of liberating and empowering the oppressed to challenge and transform the oppressive structures they face. I further elaborate on this in Chapter Four.

The second experience that closely relates to the conceptualisation of citizenship adopted in this thesis is connected to prevailing public discourse in the form of an online campaign that emerged and trended on Facebook in the early 2010s. Under the hashtag *//Tusaba gavumente etuyambe*[2] *// (TGE)* ('we are begging the government to help us'), the campaign instantly became the butt of public debate due to its discreetly spiteful, cynical, yet veiled message against the increasingly 'unseen' state's response to citizens' pressing needs. TGE soon went viral and has remained a mainstay in the public domain, with lower segments of society often invoking it in desperation to remind and call on state actors to respond to the diverse problems that citizens encounter routinely and randomly. These range from serious issues like bad roads, ravaging drought or hailstorms, hunger, land grabbing and spates of criminality, to more satirical matters like 'domestic couple fights and underperforming English Premier League football clubs' (Buwembo 2014). For instance, regular watchers of news bulletins on local television networks should be familiar with images of ordinary citizens pleading before cameras for various forms of help from the president and/or his ministers and powerful 'informal' associates.

Several other forms of satire and mimicry fashioned along the lines of the TGE mantra have since emerged and crept into public parlance, popular music

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[2] Unless otherwise stated, the vernacular expressions used in this thesis are in the Luganda language, the dominant ethnic language of Baganda in central Uganda but spoken widely across the country. It is acknowledged that a combination of historical, social, economic and geographical factors have made Luganda the *de facto* national language (Nakayiza 2018). Hence, such expressions are often adopted by the public in their original form with little or no attempt to translate them into the respective local languages.

and societal behaviour. A common characterisation and categorisation of Ugandans into *omuntu wa wansi* (variously: the wretched, vulnerable, marginalised, downtrodden, common, poor person/citizen) and *abanene mu gavumenti* (big people/untouchables in government) has gained space and become part of everyday expressions of society-state relations across socio-economic and political divides. Others are *tuli bakoowu* (we are tired of/fed up with the bad situation), *twebaka ku tulo* (at least we can sleep), *tuli ku lwaffe* (we are on our own/we have been abandoned) and *tuli ku bunkenke* (we are on tenterhooks). During this study, different forms of these characterisations could be gleaned from participants' use of descriptors like 'us ordinary people' and 'those in government' when talking about the different experiences of being and acting as citizens in their settings. I suggest that these intersecting public experiences are key in making sense of citizenship in constrained development contexts.

1.2   Background and motivations of the study

Having set the stage for this study by narrating personal encounters with citizens' views in public circulation, I now turn to the background of the study. I begin by briefly contextualising citizenship, development and the state, and defining citizenship within the context of the study. I then go on to explain the theoretical debates from which this thesis draws, and to which it contributes.

1.2.1   Contextualising citizenship, development and learning in constrained settings

Citizenship is a slippery and contested concept that anyone can use to explain a broad array of things people enjoy and experience as (non)citizens of a given polity. Roughly, theoretical perspectives onto citizenship can be categorised as either aligned with the operations of the state (Dagger 2002; Flathman 1996; Honohan 2017; Kartal 2002; Schuck 2002) or focusing on citizenship as it occurs in multiple sites, forms and scales within and beyond the state (Clarke et al. 2014; Cornwall et al. 2011; Frey 2003; Robins et al. 2008; Yuval-Davis 1999). The statist perspective, drawn largely from European-American liberal democratic traditions, treats citizenship as a universalist, formalised and individualised experience mainly exercised in and granted by the state. Emergent perspectives, on the other hand, approach citizenship as a multilevel, particularistic, contextualised and contingent experience lived within heterogenous spaces and sites vis-à-vis the state.

     The two perspectives are not, however, diametrically opposed; rather, they are mutually overlapping and complementary with regards to the centrality of the state as the anchor of citizenship, and, in this thesis, I adopt a definition of citizenship that ties the two together. Accordingly, I understand citizenship as taking place in a variety of spaces and levels where rights and responsibilities

related to decent living, social participation and expressing dissent are contextually constructed. Simply put, citizenship, for me, entails the ability of people to live a reasonably decent material life, while enjoying belonging and social participation, which, then, should afford them the agency to resist and agitate against obstacles that (threaten to) limit their enjoyment of such a life.

The above definition and understanding resonate with discourses in international development studies and research that increasingly treat citizenship in terms that incorporate a broad array of ideals and practices. For instance, contemporary policy reports, blueprints and declarations by international bodies, civil society organisations and national governments increasingly pitch for development that is transformative, sustainable and citizen-led (African Union Commission [AUC], 2015; United Nations [UN], 2015). Such development should also be underpinned by agency and urgency (Menon and Hartz-Karp 2019) and the activeness and lifelong learning of the marginalised (UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning [UIL], 2020) to make informed and impactful decisions. This focus, which tends to place greater emphasis on responsibilities than rights and entitlements, is gaining cogency, especially in developing countries experiencing a 'rise of authoritarian and other undemocratic practices' (Melgar 2020, p. 9). In this regard, the United Nations Agenda 2030 stresses the localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure no citizen or community lags behind, while the African Union Agenda 2063 envisions a strong and prosperous Africa in a global arena that is 'driven by its own citizens' (AUC, 2015, p. 1). Such an African citizenry, it is hoped, will enjoy high standards of living and 'be actively involved in decision making in all aspects of development' (ibid., p. 8).

When it comes to understanding citizenship within the prism of development and learning in contemporary Uganda, a few things are worth noting at this stage. First, given the military and political imbroglio that characterized the post-independence period up to 1986, the Museveni regime continues to pivot its governance primarily around security and stability (Khisa and Rwengabo 2022) rather than the provision of social services to citizens. Second, like other developing countries, Uganda has danced through a number of different – but overlapping - development paradigms, including modernisation before 1986, Marxism after 1986, neoliberal orthodoxy in the early 1990's and developmentalism in the 2000's (Kiiza 2012). Third, governance in Uganda has, since gaining independence from the colonial administration, slid into different phases of ethnicised and military violence, political inertia and (semi)authoritarianism. Examined together with inconsistent socioeconomic efforts aimed at poverty eradication and inclusive development, these experiences are vital in exploring the dynamics of citizenship-strengthening and learning in Uganda.

Detailed analyses of state programmes and interventions targeting to address the vulnerability of citizens at community level have been made elsewhere by a range of scholars (e.g., Ellis and Bahiigwa 2003; Hickey 2003, 2013; Joughin and Kjær 2010; Kiiza 2012; Kjær and Muhumuza 2009; Makoba and

Wakoko-Studstill 2015). Suffice to note however that the avalanche of policies and programmes (Table 1), initiated since 1986 and covering sectors like agriculture, local governance, education, health and livelihoods, are continuously plagued by chronic elite corruption and underfunding (Scherz 2014; The Observer 2022). These programmes are also said to promote rather than cure the marginalisation of local communities (Mbazira 2013), are deeply entangled with the NRM's politics of patronage and regime survival (Joughin and Kjær 2010; Ruhunda and others 2021) and are highly politicised and, therefore, benefit 'few individuals who are politically well-connected to the ruling elite' (Makoba and Wakoko-Studstill 2015, p. 100). Moreover, whilst only 30 percent of the population is informed about state-provided services (NPA 2020), which are also perceived to be of low quality (Scherz 2014), widespread fragility means these programmes are, in most cases, the only available options for struggling citizens to resort to for essential basic services in education and health care.

At the same time, accountability for these programmes is often drowned in governmental rhetoric expressed in analogies that a) blames citizens for '*dormir [beaucoup]*' (French for sleeping too much) (Museveni 2021, p. 23); and b) draw on the notion of *olubimbi* (personal duty) to caution citizens to 'stay in their lane' and avoid politics (Ssentongo 2022b; The Observer 2010). In their broad interpretation, the two related analogies deflect state responsibility in several ways. First, they blame citizens for being 'lazy' and 'sleepy' and then, as the district chairperson of Rubirizi district told the inception workshop, challenge the same citizens 'to ask what they can do for Uganda, not what Uganda can do for them.' Second, the analogies fault civil leaders for failing to wake citizens to take advantage of multiple state proffered programmes and services to create wealth and get out of poverty based on guaranteed peace and stability.

The foregoing rhetorical narrative is aptly reflected in Uganda's current development blueprint, *The Third National Development Plan* (NDPIII) (2020/21–2024/25) (NPA 2020), and the trending Parish Development Model (PMD) programme (Ministry of Local Government [MoLG] 2021), both of which emphasise mindset change as an important pillar of the socioeconomic transformation of the population. The aim of this pillar is 'to improve spirituality, empower families, communities and citizens to embrace national values and actively participate in sustainable development' (NPA 2020, p. xviii). The development policy further asks each citizen to put Uganda first and espouse the national values and ethos of hard work, sacrifice and commitment, while taking personal responsibility for development instead of leaving it 'to only the government' (ibid.).

Table 1: A timeline of major development policies, programmes and political events under NRM regime (1986-2022)

1986: Museveni captures the reins of power	2007: Prosperity for all *(Bonna Bagag-gawale)* programme and popularisation of SACCOs as engines for rural development
1990's: Endorsement of neoliberal reforms under the aegis of IMF and World Bank	
1993: Decentralisation policy	2007: Introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE)
1995: Entandikwa (start-up capital) programme	2010: National Development Plan 2010/11-2014/15
1995: Promulgation of the 1995 Constitution	2011: General elections
1996: Presidential elections under Movement System	2011: Rebrand of Prosperity for all into Operation Wealth Creation under the military
1997: Universal Primary Education *(bonna basome)*	2013: Uganda Vision 2040
1998: Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project	2013: Youth Livelihood Programme
1999: Uganda Vision 2025	2014: National Development Plan II (2015/16-2019/20)
2000: United Nations Millennium Development Goals	2014: Rollout of Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE)
2001: Poverty Eradication Action Plan (2001-2003)	2015: UN Sustainable Development Goals
2001: Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (2001-2009)	2016: Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme
2001: National elections under the Movement system	2018: Amendment of constitution to remove presidential age limit
2001: National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS)	2019: Emyooga wealth creation initiative
2004: National referendum okays return of multiparty politics	2020: National Development Plan III (2020/21-2024/25)
2005: Amendment of constitution to remove presidential term limits	2021: National elections
2006: First general elections under multiparty dispensation	2022: Parish Development Model

Source: Author's compilation from different scholarly articles, reports and websites of different institutions, ministries, departments and agencies

In this context, civil society organisations, like citizens and cultural and religious leaders, are consistently urged to support the government's efforts and vision of transforming Uganda into a middle-income country (NPA 2013). Yet, as several reports show, when the Ugandan state is talking about citizenship and NGOs or civil society, they are not thinking about those that espouse and promote ideals of activism, democracy, accountability, dissent and advocacy (Amnesty International and others 2016; Human Rights Watch 2012, 2022; Reuters 2021). Rather, their minds are on civil society actors and groups that either partner with the state and/or work (independently) to provide services that the state cannot provide (Dicklitch 2002; Isgren 2018; Katusiimeh 2004). Such a context, as I explain in Chapters Three, Five and Six, largely influences the kind of citizenship-strengthening that NGOs can safely embark on and promote.

1.2.2   Motivations and arguments of the thesis

The thesis advances two main arguments. First, the Ugandan state has evolved and continues to evolve in unpredictably violent ways that directly and indirectly constrain citizenship. Second and consequently, rather than make claims on and civically engage the state, citizens turn to alternative civil society spaces to learn and hone skills required for survival and for the performance of multiple citizen roles in their locale. I elaborate on these central arguments by advancing the notion of constrained citizenship to reference citizenship that emerges in diverse spaces of belonging in geo-historical and political environments beset by a) a history of violence and the confounding absence of the state from the everyday material lives of the citizens, as well as the limitations of b) poverty and c) the patriarchal practices that constrain the agency of female citizens more than that of men. The notion, therefore, considers how state configurations and the existence of alternative spaces of belonging and identity produce specific citizenship trajectories, knowledge and skills that are not interpreted as anti-government. In what follows, I outline the justification for this study and what motivated it and present the debates from which the thesis draws and to which it contributes.

First, the thesis is inspired by empirical, ethnographic and longitudinal studies of change and transformation in marginal sub-Saharan Africa contexts (Brockington and Noe 2021; Holma and Kontinen 2020a; Jones 2009; King 2015; Smith 2022). These studies have suggested that in spite of, and due to state absence or failure to provide services, ordinary citizens deploy a multiplicity of strategies and tactics to secure their livelihoods and fulfil their roles as citizens. They show that instead of engaging with and making claims on the state, 'citizens adopt a repertoire of interchangeable rather than ordered, linear tactics to negotiate and assert their rights and claims of citizenship' (Robins et al. 2008, p. 1082). For example, citizens may organise in informal, cultural, religious, family and grassroots-based spaces and networks (Anderson et al. 2022; Jones 2009), enter into paternalistic alliances with the power holders (Pettit 2016; Robins et al. 2008), participate in NGO and self-help interventions (Ndidde et al. 2020; Scherz 2014) or rely on a variety of individual and collective resources, ingenuity, innovations and entrepreneurship (Brockington and Noe 2021; Smith 2022; Ssali 2018; Tamale 2004). Because these strategies are provisional and dynamic, they produce and foster different forms of citizens' agency and relations.

Second, the thesis contributes to a growing body of literature that articulates an expanded notion of citizenship beyond the political and legal state. This scholarship posits that besides and in addition to the state – whether liberal or authoritarian, developed or developing – space and time have produced heterogenous, multiple and dynamic sites, scales, spaces and settings where citizens belong and in which acts of citizenship are learned, performed and exercised (Alava et al. 2020; Clarke et al. 2014; Isin 2009; Robins et al. 2008; Yuval-Davis 2011). In following in the footsteps of such studies, the thesis responds to calls for nuancing citizenship to the 'politics of everyday life' (Annette 2009; Pettit

2016) in order to 'rethink citizenship from the perspective of citizens themselves' (Robins et al. 2008, p. 1085). It therefore provides a particularistic examination of citizenship as framed by NGO-led antipoverty and livelihood education from the perspective of those who have participated in such education as part of their everyday lives and belonging in multiple spaces.

Third, the study explores citizenship experiences in NGO-led livelihood initiatives implemented through grassroots associations of people living in rural areas of Uganda. Consequently, I use a notion of civil society spaces to convey the idea of intersecting platforms, sites and avenues through and in which ordinary citizens learn to organise (or are organised) in pursuit of issues and elements of wellbeing that the state in Uganda does not provide evenly and effectively. The concept of civil society spaces is drawn from scholarship that defines civil society as encompassing a wide range of groups, from small, informal, grassroots associations at local and neighbourhood levels, through community-based organisations and social movements to highly professionalised, national, NGOs and international civil networks (Banks 2020; Banks and Hulme 2012; Bourn 2021; Hadenius and Uggla 1996; Kreienkamp 2017). For the purposes of this study, the notion of civil society spaces incorporates a dynamic interplay of NGOs, running different antipoverty and livelihood training programmes, and a wide variety of village-based groups that act as conduits for the learning and implementation offered by these initiatives.

Treating community development as a means of strengthening and enabling rural dwellers to act as citizens, I explore how NGOs working through self-organised associations foster survival skills that promote decent living but do not engage in advocacy activities that would enable citizens to contest state inefficiencies at the local level. This allows the thesis to investigate and foreground localised forms of citizenship in a state context that encourages NGOs to concentrate on livelihood improvement and shy away from fostering dissent. Thus, I am able to interrogate the importance of improved material wellbeing to citizenship in the parts of the country where the state is approached from a mixed perspective of fear, distrust and appreciation. Paying attention to the kinds of citizenship practices learned in NGO-led antipoverty interventions provides a novel approach to understanding citizenship as constrained; meanwhile, interrogating NGOs' grassroots-based development enables us to zoom in on how the agency created relates to and strengthens the abilities to perform roles that rural dwellers define as constituting citizenship. Crucially, it also affords us the opportunity to acknowledge how the complicated civil society-citizen-state relationship in Uganda compels NGOs to embark on strengthening the kinds of citizenship and agency this study has explored.

Fourth, the thesis attempts to analyse the kinds of learning that take place when ordinary citizens participate in NGO activities in pursuit of everyday survival needs. This is addressed on two levels. One, I adopt a theoretical framework of citizenship that considers the participatory, material and lifelong learning dimensions of everyday living. This framework looks at learning as embedded in everyday practices of citizenship as survival and change, which

occur daily and informally in spaces of immediate and routine participation. In the case of rural dwellers in Uganda, it also captures the lifelong socialisation of the state's violent reaction to citizen dissent, whereby people internalise what they can (not) realistically claim from the state. Two, I deploy research methodology that is underpinned by ideals of empowerment, co-learning and co-sharing knowledge for the purposes of enhancing avenues and possibilities for dialogue, reflection and change (Ahimbisibwe et al. 2020; Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Omondi 2020). In practical terms, the choice of participatory methodology was, as I explain in Chapter Four, motivated by a belief in the adaptability and flexibility of using tools that promote the diagrammatic illustration and imagination of citizenship experiences in rural areas in a more open, reflexive and amiable manner.

1.3   Research problem and questions

On the basis of the foregoing theoretical and methodological debates, motivations and my experiences and reflections on citizenship in illiberal contexts, this study addresses a broader research problem regarding the kinds of citizenship that can be promoted in civil society spaces and the implications thereof for NGO-led development in constrained settings in Uganda.

To address this research problem, I ask the following general question:
How and why do rural dwellers in Uganda experience, learn and practice citizenship the way they do in civil society spaces?

To explore this broad question, I ask the following specific questions:
1. What kinds of citizenship emerge in NGO-led development for rural dwellers in Uganda?
2. How is citizenship learned and practiced in people's everyday participation in civil society spaces in rural Uganda?
3. What implications can we draw from the kinds of citizenship identified for pro-poor development interventions in constrained settings?

The first question addresses the types of citizens' agency, abilities and experiences that emerge in rural communities as they participate in livelihood interventions provided by NGOs through grassroots-based self-help groups. The second question tackles the dynamics and ways of learning to be a citizen in sites of routine participation and belonging, while the third question focuses on the implications of development initiatives for citizenship-strengthening in constrained settings. Combined, the three questions contribute to a contextualised exploration of the ways in which citizenship is lived and learned in rural areas, nuanced by the edgy state-society relations in Uganda to

ultimately provide the empirical grounds for the notion of constrained citizenship put forward in this study.

1.4   Study locations and introduction to the cases

In order to answer the research questions, qualitative participatory research was conducted in two rural districts of Uganda where two NGOs – one national, the other regional – implemented several livelihood programmes through village-based associations.   The study's interest was to explore people's own understandings of citizenship, how they learn to live and act as citizens and the role played by different institutions, organisations, agencies and groups in enhancing the everyday experience and practice of being and acting as a citizen.

The research was carried out in the districts of Namutumba and Rubirizi, two locations in rural Uganda. Lying in eastern and western Uganda, the respective districts were considered to provide appropriate representations of the large southern part of the country that has experienced relative and uninterrupted peace and stability since 1986. As a result, the two case NGOs have longstanding experience of implementing community development interventions that are aimed at lifting people out of poverty, unlike, say, in northern Uganda, where the state, civil society and other actors have been more involved with the dynamics of dealing with restorative psycho-social initiatives in the afterlives of war (see, Alava 2022; Lomo and Hovil 2004). The two districts were therefore chosen because they represented the dynamics of society-state relations that have emerged in the long streak of peace and stability that the southern part of Uganda has witnessed under Museveni's regime.

Moreover, the two research sites are typical cases of how politics and citizenship have been configured in contemporary Uganda. Unlike in some parts of rural Uganda where threats of land grabbing and displacement by the powerful class are real, the areas studied did not experience the existential threats that often jolt citizens into mass anger and resistance, as in the Apaa land conflict in northern Uganda (Abonga et al., 2020). Additionally, the two districts are clear cases of deepening political fragmentation and *districtisation* under Museveni to co-opt the elites and entrench his regime (Green 2010; Khisa and Rwengabo 2022). Namutumba district was carved out of Iganga district in 2006 while Rubirizi, in Ankole subregion, was created in 2010 out of Bushenyi district. The two districts, therefore, remain a bastion of electoral support for the ruling NRM[3] party on account of having enjoyed peace and stability for the last four decades.

Although 'modernity' has entered the villages, especially evident in the form of mobile telephones (and digital television in Rubirizi district), both the districts and component villages studied are still agrarian in practice and outlook,

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[3] Elliot Green claims that the creation of districts in Uganda arms Museveni with a huge carrot in the form of political and bureaucratic placements to dole out to and opportunities to co-opt many elites into a patronage system which helps him to continue winning elections (Green 2010; see also, Great Lakes Institute of Strategic Studies [GLISS] 2021)

with an estimated 75 percent of the population engaged in smallholder farming (Republic of Uganda [RoU] 2017a, 2017b). Like the rest of rural Uganda, the two districts face challenges related to gender-based traditions, including beliefs and practices such as early and forced marriages, domestic violence and teenage pregnancies (Daily Monitor 2020b, 2022b, 2022c; New Vision 2011). Moreover, as the two districts are reliant on smallholder agriculture, they are prone to the fragilities associated with the subsistence lifestyle, like unstable weather patterns, low crop prices and land fragmentation (see, COVOID 2019; RoU 2017; RoU 2016, 2017b), as well as 'a sharp decline in soil fertility and limited access to irrigation and mechanization' (Tabetando et al. 2022, p. 2).

That aside, the two study areas had some differences. In terms of poverty prevalence and general wellbeing, Rubirizi district fares better than Namutumba, not only according to national measuring scales but also in 'development' trends observed in the community during fieldwork. According to UNICEF (2020, p. 7), 61 percent of the population in Busoga subregion is multidimensionally poor, compared to 30 percent in Ankole subregion. This trend is quite clearly replicated in the local communities studied in both districts. For example, 11 out of 40 village homesteads studied in Rubirizi district were connected to the national electricity grid and some had solar panels. There was also a pattern of residents erecting more permanent houses with cement (and in a couple of cases tiled) floors, with some having access to clean tap water. Homesteads in Namutumba district were, in comparison, more modest. None of the visited homesteads had access to clean water or electricity. Houses were semi-permanent and, in a few cases, grass thatched.

Hence, as is the case in development practice, the studied NGOs – Action for Development (ACFODE) and Community Volunteer Initiative for Development (COVOID) – intervened to address or lessen multiple citizen vulnerabilities through educational programmes and training targeting the improvement of people's livelihoods and incomes. In implementing livelihood training using grassroots associations, the case NGOs aimed to strengthen the capacities and agency of rural citizens to address different forms of fragility, poverty and vulnerability. ACFODE, a gender-advocacy NGO with national coverage, has implemented a livelihood training programme focusing on improving agricultural systems in Namutumba district. It has mobilised farmers through existing self-help groups and trained them in better farming methods, value addition and income diversification (ACFODE 2015a). In addition, it has supplied farming groups with simple farm equipment such as ground nut shellers, cassava chippers and spray pumps to enhance food production, and in turn, livelihoods (ACFODE 2015b).

In Rubirizi district, COVOID, a regionally based NGO covering eight districts in Ankole, has implemented several interventions with the primary aim of solving poverty constraints that, in the view of the NGO head, 'inhibit people from being active citizens'. The NGO claims to have pioneered and supported the establishment of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) in the

community. Known as *VSLA methodology* in the NGO literature and *akabokisi*[4] in community parlance, the savings groups have become the flagships and a pivotal element of COVOID's community development crusade. Drawing from and building on the success of the VSLA methodology, the NGO has also implemented several other community development interventions that are discussed in Chapter Three.

Overall, the two cases represented an interesting sample of ways in which NGOs strengthen citizenship on the basis of material wellbeing as opposed to political advocacy and claim making. There were, therefore, visible differences in the agency, and momentum of emerging citizenship in the two districts that could be attributed to how the two NGOs operate. While ACFODE, a national NGO, runs time-bound projects and has a scattered, projectised presence, COVOID, based in the district, is heavily present in the community on account of the multiple and holistic interventions it has implemented since 2003.
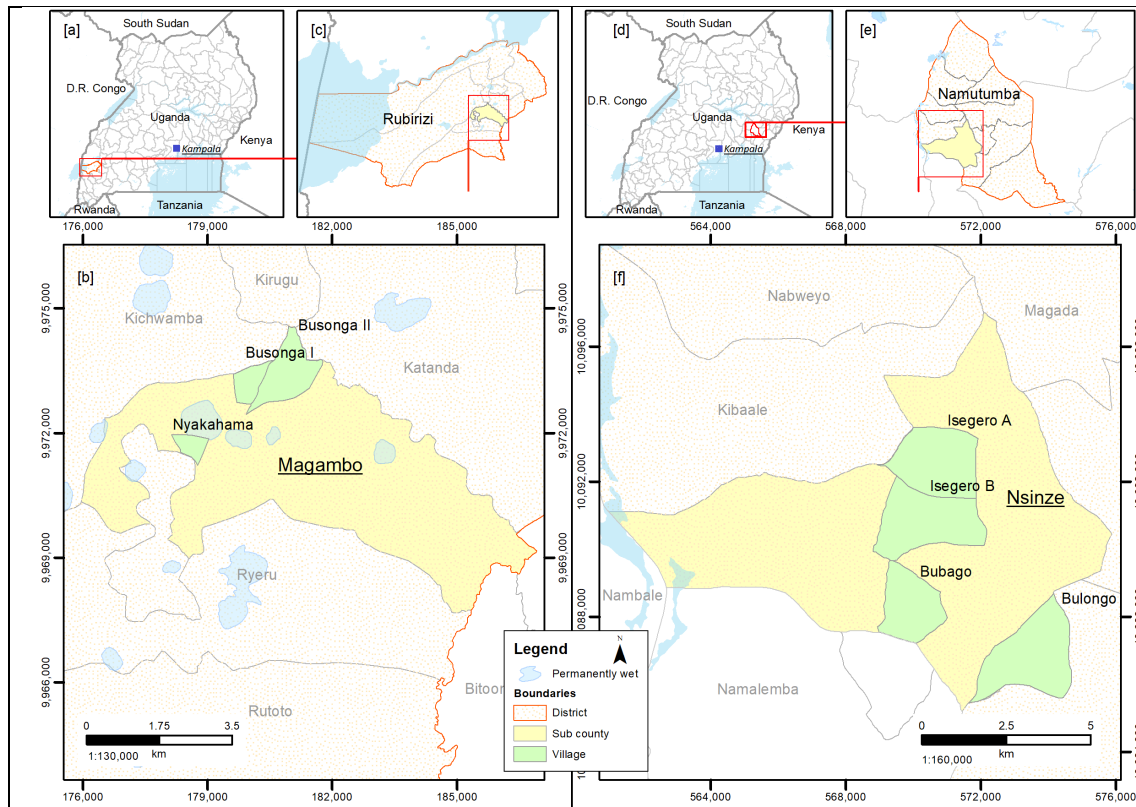
Figure 1:   Map of Uganda showing study areas

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[4] *Akabokisi* (aka-box) is a Runyankore word used in reference to the small metallic box in which group savings and records are kept. The metallic box, usually kept at the group treasurer's place, has three padlocks whose keys are in the custody of three different leaders of the group.

1.5 Original publications and the structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of the synopsis and three original publications.
The original publications and the contribution of the author are the following:

Publication I
> Ahimbisibwe, F. Karembe and Kontinen Tiina (2021). Localising SDGs in Rural Uganda: Learning Active Citizenship Through the Saemaul Undong Model. In Nhamo Godwell, Muchaiteyo Togo and Kaitano Dube (Eds.), *Sustainable Development Goals for Society Vol. 1: Selected Topics of Global Relevance* (pp. 37-49). Cham: Springer

Publication II
> Ahimbisibwe, F. Karembe and Ndidde, N. Alice (2022). Learning economic citizenship among rural women: Village saving groups in western Uganda. In Holma Katariina and Kontinen Tiina (Eds.), *Learning, Philosophy and African Citizenship* (pp. 155–176). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Publication III
> Ahimbisibwe, F. Karembe (2022). Exploring *obutyamye* as material citizenship in Busoga subregion, Uganda. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (in press)

As the PhD candidate responsible for this thesis, I am the sole author of the third publication and the first author of the first and second publications. The second author of the first publication is my main PhD supervisor and the Principal Investigator (PI) of the *Growth into Citizenship in Civil Society Encounters* (GROW) and *Theory and practice of learning to be a citizen* (CS-LEARN). The second author of the second publication coordinated the two projects in Uganda and also participated in data collection. In Publication I, the second author contributed to the establishment of the theoretical framework and provided substantial input in the discussion and conclusion sections, and the overall structure. In Publication II, the second author provided overall supervision during the study, and contributed to the framing and analysis of findings. Both co-authors also contributed to the methodological strategies of the study. I conceptualised this thesis on the basis of an extended stay and participatory field study of lived experiences in the case communities, as well as by drawing on prevailing public discourse on state-society relations in Uganda. I performed all the analysis, searched and reviewed literature and drafted and re-drafted all the publications and the thesis. Throughout this process, I was guided, supported, critiqued and mentored by the main supervisor and co-supervisor, as well as the

multidisciplinary group of researchers affiliated with the two research projects, of which this study is part[5].

The thesis is organised into six chapters. The Introduction has provided a background to the thesis, highlighting the practical and conceptual motivations for, and contributions of the study. The second chapter presents a theoretical conceptualisation of citizenship in constrained settings, based on both conventional and emergent conceptualisations of citizenship and learning. The third chapter gives an account of the historicised and contemporary nature of citizenship in Uganda and looks at the efforts of the two case NGOs to strengthen citizenship within the broader constrained context. The fourth chapter presents findings specifically examining the kinds of citizenship that develop and are learned in civil society spaces in rural Uganda. The fifth chapter discusses the findings, illustrating how citizenship trajectories of agency and participation are paradoxically entwined with legacies of violence, growing public distrust and adulation of the state. The sixth and last chapter provides conclusions and suggests both theoretical and practical contributions to the multidisciplinary fields of citizenship, learning and development.

2 CONCEPTUALISING CITIZENSHIP LEARNING IN CONSTRAINED SETTINGS

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical foundations of the notion of learning citizenship in constrained settings. To do this, first, I revisit selected conventional theories of citizenship and look at their implications for citizenship education and learning. Second, I engage with selected readings that treat citizenship as emergent, experienced and learned in contexts where the state manifests interchangeably as absent, weak and illiberal and as stable and secure. Third, I carve out a theoretical framework that understands citizenship learning in constrained contexts as participatory and lifelong, and geared, foremost, towards material and survival needs.

2.1 Conventional theoretical approaches to citizenship: Universality and formalised education

In the field of political science, where the notion of citizenship has received extensive scholarly discussion, three broad – and often overlapping – theoretical approaches have been advanced. In what follows, I provide a brief discussion of the critical arguments pertaining to the three conventional paradigms of liberal, republican, and communitarian to pave way for the conceptualisations I consider relevant for this study.

Firstly, liberal citizenship, also referred to as classical citizenship, is traced to the history of the Greek city state of Athens and the Roman empire. At its core, the liberal paradigm emphasises the relationship between citizens and the state in which the latter grants unfettered rights, entitlements and status, while the former rationally enjoys them (Flathman 1996; Kartal 2002; Schuck 2002). Such a relationship takes place in 'a particular type of state regime, parliamentary democracy' (Yuval-Davis 2011, p. 49), which is premised on watertight separation between the exercise of power by the three arms of government-executive, legislature and judiciary. The concept of liberal citizenship was

expanded by British sociologist, Thomas H Marshall who, in 1950, suggested that citizenship should bestow upon individuals a host of civil, political and social rights. Among others, these rights included freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to justice, to own property and to participate in the exercise of political power, as well as a range of entitlements like economic welfare, security and the right to live the life of a civilised being in line with prevailing standards in society (Marshall 1965, cited in Kartal 2002).

Republican citizenship, on the other hand, regards the enjoyment of the individual rights and freedoms espoused by liberals as contingent on the performance of duties and responsibilities. Thus, unlike liberalism, republicanism conceives of a 'citizen as someone who plays an active role in shaping the future direction of his or her society through political debate and decision-making'(Miller 1995, p. 443). In other words, every citizen is called upon to participate actively in political governance and to promote the common good of their countries (Miller 1995; Ron 2014) by, for instance, electing leaders, paying taxes, offering military service and obeying existing laws. This helps to create a balance 'between right and duty' (Isin and Turner 2007, p. 9). Combined, both conceptions place the state at the heart of granting and guaranteeing certain universal freedoms, rights and statuses that citizens are expected to enjoy, preserve and protect dutifully, responsibly (and even jealously).

Thirdly, communitarian citizenship provides a conception of citizenship within the purview of limitations inherent to the liberal and republic traditions. In its broadness, the communitarian perspective understands citizenship as an obligation to contribute to the common good of the shared community of belonging and identity (Björk et al. 2018; Etzioni 2011; Pickett 2001) in a context of growing individualism and disaffection. Proponents of communitarianism emphasise the idea that although individuals are free to act on their own, citizens accept and owe basic responsibilities to the common good of the nation and society where they belong (Etzioni 2011). This moral obligation to augment the common good is supposed to be reinforced by a particular culture's core of shared norms, history and identity (Etzioni 1997), which guard society against the perils of egocentrism. Thus, in addition to a concern with promoting the common good of society, citizens should also participate in the structures of self-government in a manner that advances the common interest.

Overall, although each of the three paradigms understand 'citizenship differently in regard to which aspects of it are emphasised' (Björk et al. 2018, p. 17), they are nonetheless influenced by the evolution of the European-American political and historical philosophy of a democratic state. In these contexts, citizens generally relate with the state in a structured and formalised manner following universalised and streamlined legal and political governance systems. For instance, 'in liberalism, the key to citizenship is access to rights, after which the realisation of one's citizenship is in the hands of the individual. Republicanism, on the other hand, stresses active participation, whereas communitarian theories embrace the idea of belonging as a key aspect of citizenship' (Björk et al. 2018, p. 17). Moreover, although these conceptions are

continuously reconfigured by and in response to socioeconomic and political upheavals and revolutions, they provide a strong benchmark for diverse conceptualisations of citizenship. In what follows, I give an account of how the largely Western liberal conception of citizenship influences the ways that the practices of learning citizenship as civic education, service learning and active citizenship are discussed in the current literature.

2.2 Citizenship learning as civic education and active engagement

The prevailing view within the predominantly statist Eurocentric approaches is that citizens should be knowledgeable about and espouse the civic values of tolerance, pluralism, trustworthiness, justice and fairness for democracy to thrive (Hoskins et al. 2008; Hoskins and Crick 2010; Ron 2014; Samuelsson and Bøyum 2015; Westheimer and Kahne 2004). These values, in turn, hinge on and promote civic engagement and political participation in the form of joining civic and voluntary organisations, for example, and being informed about and engaging in political issues and the deliberations that affect them. As a result, scholarship on citizenship education is based on a more or less structured and formalised curriculum that emphasises knowledge of the workings of the state gained through, for example, the school system or more formalised deliberative forums (Englund 2022; Hoskins et al. 2008; Johnson and Morris 2010). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) contend that education should aim to produce citizens who support and strengthen democratic culture in society. Drawing from a two-year study of educational programmes in the United States that aimed to promote democracy, they provided a framework of three conceptions of the 'good' citizen as personally responsible, participatory and justice-oriented, thus encompassing a broad array of roles and responsibilities, from helping the needy, volunteering in the community and paying taxes to participating in debates and fighting against injustice.

Citizenship education has also been discussed in terms of civic education (Flathman 1996), active citizenship (Annette 2009; Hoskins et al. 2008) and service learning (Birdwell et al. 2013). According to Hoskins and colleagues (2008), active citizenship is constituted by 'protest activities such as working in non-governmental organisations, signing petitions and demonstrations that assure government accountability' (p. 389). Considered necessary for stable democracy, good governance and social cohesion, these skills are best acquired through formal education providing teaching and imparting civic competencies, participatory attitudes and ideals of social justice. Moreover, a person who acquires these civic values is not only expected to be competent but also proud of bearing the office of a citizen. In this view,

> Civic education aims to engender pride in those who are accorded standing as citizens and who participate vigorously in the activities of this office, guilt in those who have

citizenship but default on its duties, and perhaps shame in those who are denied this honorific standing and are deprived of its inestimable benefits. (Flathman 1996, p. 22)

The foregoing Eurocentric conception of citizenship education has sometimes been 'exported' through civil society donor-funded projects to apply in contexts where states, although fashioned in line with a Western template, have historically evolved and behave in confounding ways that combine assemblages of communalism, coloniality, patrimonialism and (semi) authoritarianism. A strong conception exists in donor-funded civil society that civic education and awareness build and embolden citizen competencies and determination to engage with the state civically and politically (Pearce 1993). Awakening and strengthening citizens' *civicness* and their readiness to participate at different levels of the polity is considered the bulwark against excesses and acts of self-preservation by the state (Evers 2009; Selman and Parker 1997). In this regard, civil society is seen as the most appropriate space for citizens to learn to hold leaders accountable, advocate for justice for all and defend their rights and freedoms. This view is well expressed by Jenny Pearce who writes,

> An authentic civil society must involve the poor and the weak gaining real and meaningful rights as citizens, genuinely enfranchised and able to build organisations to defend their interests. It is about the rights of individuals to associate voluntarily. Constructing civil society cannot be essentially about building up intermediary development organisations to represent the 'poor': it must be about empowering the poor and enabling them to fight for their own rights as citizens. (Pearce 1993, p. 225)

The proliferation of NGOs in the Global South at the turn of 20th century owes greatly to this persuasive narrative. In regions grappling with a withdrawn state, growing totalitarianism and a dissipation of services for the poor, NGOs were and continue to be positioned as the most suited to reach and mobilise grassroots initiatives to challenge and transform structures that perpetuate poverty and marginalisation (Banks and Bukenya 2022). Armed with the rights-based approach to development (Harris-Curtis 2003), an avalanche of donor-supported, civil society-led interventions laced with buzzwords have 'gained considerable purchase in the language of mainstream development and the terrain of development policy' (Cornwall and Brock 2005, p. 1044). These buzzwords include 'empowerment', 'participation', 'poverty reduction' (Cornwall 2007), sustainable development, basic needs, capacity building, good governance (Leal 2007) and active citizenship (UIL 2020). NGOs are, therefore, being recast as the voices of voiceless citizens (Dar 2015; World Voices Uganda 2020), conceiving of their mission as one of filling the democratic void left by the retreating state (Bebbington 2004; Schuller 2009) by emboldening citizens to fight for their social and political rights (Pearce 1993).

These presuppositions present alluring and seductive images of the poor and marginalised turning into informed, active, enfranchised, fearless and empowered citizens ready to pressure the state and hold state actors accountable (Mitlin et al. 2007; Sriskandarajah 2018). In Uganda, as elsewhere in the developing world, this thinking culminated in increased financial aid 'towards promoting the "good governance agenda"' and a growth in 'the number of NGOs

that became increasing[ly] focused on implementing political activities' (Mugisha et al. 2020, p. 3). Ultimately, vocabularies of accountability, democracy, good governance and transparency often dominate training workshops organised by citizenship-strengthening NGOs, even in contexts where such notions are inconsonant with peoples' routine experiences and needs. For instance, Holma and colleagues (2018, p. 221) recount how,

> …in the early 2000s context of rural Uganda, women councillors were offered a type of democracy education that started with training material involving a description of the origins of the democracy in Ancient Greece—a place that did not much resonate with the experiences of the newly elected local councillors, some of whom were practically illiterate.

Thus, it is common to find donor-funded, civil society-led development laced with descriptions of 'participation as "opening up", "widening" and "broadening" opportunities for citizen engagement, or of "deepening" democratic practice' (Cornwall 2002, p. 51) in grassroot projects dotted across developing countries in the Global South.

2.3 Emergent conceptualisation of citizenship in constrained settings

Up to this point I have presented understandings of citizenship as normative belonging to the state, with its concomitant rights and responsibilities, including learning to be and act as a citizen. I have also showed how this thinking has largely influenced the conception of citizenship and learning in liberal democratic states and in donor-funded, citizenship-strengthening projects in the Global South. Now, I turn to a burgeoning body of scholarship in both Western and post-colonial contexts that has suggested conceptualisations of citizenship 'that transcend the nation states' (Wiesner et al. 2018, p. 12). Such conceptualisations are needed to incorporate and respond to multilevel and complex governance structures in states that are either being configured by different pressures or not necessarily rule-based and transparent. In Europe, for example, the pressures of marketisation, regionalism, localisation, European integration, migration, globalisation (Wiesner et al. 2018), neoliberalism and multiculturalism (Birdwell et al. 2013; Isin 2009) have not only changed the preponderance of the state but also 'transformed the contexts of citizenship and the concept itself' (Wiesner et al. 2018, p. 12).

In the contexts of sub-Saharan African countries, scholars have demonstrated that the state and its formation are still entangled with the histories and legacies of (neo)coloniality (Adebanwi 2017; Babikwa 2004; Kontinen and Holma 2022; Robins et al. 2008). This has come with the attendant challenges of undeveloped institutions, exacerbated gender disparities (Tamale 2020; Tripp 2017) and entrenched class formation, poverty and skewed power relations (Pettit 2016; Richard 2011; Youngman 2000). Combined, these factors have

greatly constrained the state's ability to provide services and guarantee a host of rights to citizens (Robins et al. 2008), thus weakening, displacing and configuring the state in such a way that it is no longer the sole space where citizens pay allegiance and draw their rights and livelihoods.

The notion of constrained citizenship advanced in this thesis emerges from and contributes to these contestations and debates. It draws from González's (2017) work on violence in Latin America where he observed that police monopolised and distributed state violence and security with unevenness and repression. This, he argued, resulted in stratified and constrained citizenship. On the one hand, *constrained* citizenship is 'characterized by impediments to the practice of the civil, social, and political dimensions of citizenship due to alienation from other citizens and state institutions' while, on the other, *stratified* citizenship is marked by unequal and hierarchical access to state security whereby 'some citizens become designated as deserving of protection and others of repression, based on race, class, and geography' (p. 502).

Because the state inherently inhibits citizenship, a situation has emerged whereby heterogenous other settings, sites and spaces, as well as actors – both within and outside the state – have begun to exert a strong influence over citizenship trajectories. Ranging along a continuum of 'local, national and transnational' (Kontinen and Holma 2022, p. 22), these include, among others, non-governmental organizations, churches, clubs, interest groups, functional organizations and profit firms (Frey 2003), cultural and religious institutions, solidarity groups, village associations and famers groups (Jones 2009; Kilonzo et al. 2020; King 2015; Ndidde et al. 2020). Predictably, the kinds of citizenship enacted, strengthened and promoted in these spaces of belonging are as diverse as the heterogeneity of these sites.

Burgeoning scholarship in different countries of the Global South has repeatedly highlighted the salience of elite corruption and resignation (Khisa 2016; Tangri and Mwenda 2008), growing distrust (Anderson et al. 2022), hopelessness and inequality (Pettit 2016), appeasement and repression (Harrijvan and Weerdesteijn 2020), patronage and co-optation (Friesinger 2021), bigmanism (Opalo 2011) and violent subjugation (Alava 2020) in managing citizen-state relations across developing countries. Understandably, these circumstances profoundly affect the kinds of civic activities and engagements citizens can organise and the spaces they can use to make claims on the state. Importantly, they also point to the significance of routine learning for citizens in order for them to contribute effectively and meaningfully in multiple spaces of belonging while also navigating the embedded interests of different actors.

In this regard, an argument has been made that the skills citizens need to survive are 'not born with people' (Incio et al. 2021, p. 894) but are continuously 'learned like any other skill' (Benn 2000, p. 241). Combined, these observations support the argument made in this thesis for understanding citizenship in rural Uganda as constrained, and the process of community development as key in promoting citizenship. Because the state is structurally and organisationally configured in such a way that it is difficult to provide equitable and inclusive

development, especially to marginalised communities, citizens create and enter different inter and intra-community networks to enhance their survival opportunities and search for remedies to shared problems. They may also choose to disengage in the face of a confrontational and retributive state (Bennett et al. 2013; Pettit 2016) and/or forge manipulative but mutually dependent relations with powerful patrons (Robins et al., 2008). All these strategies are learned and internalised across space and time.

At this point, it is important to note that conceptions of citizenship as multilevel and heterogenous do not question nor refute the centrality of the nation-state as the territorial and legal boundedness upon which citizenship is based (Delanty 1997). As Michael Bratton (1989) has argued,

> The state in Africa may be incompletely formed, weak, and retreating, but it is not going to wither away. We can therefore continue to learn much from a statist perspective on African politics. We should continue studying the autonomous effects of state-level politics – such as the cohesion and autonomy of the power elite, the content of ideology and policy, and the capacity of bureaucracies on social and economic change in Africa. (1989, p. 425)

Thus, the fact that people are resident within bounded geographical and political territory implies that the state's character rubs off on and influences citizens' actions due to what it does and does not permit or outlaw. The state, for example, remains the principal distributor of development to citizens (Bratton 1989; Kiiza 2012), monopolises control of instruments of violence (González 2017), (often) manipulates and controls dissent and consciousness (Alava 2020) and can conjure up dizzying forms of paternalistic-clientship relations (Friesinger 2021; Robins et al. 2008). The state, therefore continues to manifest in multiple ways and places such as 'in offices, personnel and practices that are "everywhere"' (Clarke et al. 2014, p. 158). As discussed in Chapter One, for instance, the state in Uganda projects itself as both a security and developmentalist government. It also exercises firm, punitive, benign, violent and arbitrary control over citizens in confounding ways (see., Kagoro 2016; Tapscott 2021; Tripp 2010) but equally allows a relatively open and unfettered space for apolitical and development-oriented civil society organisations and media to operate (Katusiimeh 2004). These realities are very pertinent when analysing the power centres that citizens engage with or avoid and the institutions they join and mobilise in their quest to live a fulfilling life.

In their article, *Rethinking 'Citizenship' in the Postcolony,* Robins and colleagues (2008) assert that citizenship in differently configured contexts in the Third World ought to be analysed within the prism of extant demands because, in their view, 'the imperatives of survival often compel the poor to engage with politics in a far more instrumental, improvised and contingent fashion; they tend to take what they can get, whether from the chief, the warlord, the NGO or the local government (2000, p. 1081). They suggest, therefore, 'an approach to researching citizenship and democracy that begins not from normative convictions but from everyday experiences in particular social, cultural and historical contexts' (ibid., p. 1070).

Further, they posit that 'citizen engagement with the state and other authorities does not always result in the acquisition of new political identities as rights-claiming citizens' (ibid., 1071) but in mutually reinforcing and inherently contradictory patron-client relationships that are unstable, fluid and dynamic. In war-torn northern Uganda, for instance, citizenship is constrained to the point that 'in some places more than others, the state forces citizens into submission to the degree that little or no space for critical consciousness remains' (Alava 2020, p. 92). Relatedly, in eastern Uganda, rural citizens readily discuss issues of immediate concern, such as how to conduct appropriate burial ceremonies, rather than engage with topics such as 'decentralization or democratization' (Jones 2009, p. 161). What these arguments tell us is that, far from being an abstract, universalised and determined ideal, citizenship is a contextually lived and learned experience better understood in the particular settings where it occurs.

2.4 Towards a framework for citizenship learning in constrained settings

In what follows, I provide a theoretical framework that conceptualises how citizenship is learned in settings that are constrained. To do this, I draw on a set of disparate literature sources that treat citizenship as a) the agency to act on and change one's socio-material conditions mainly by b) participating in and learning through routine activities. In all, I conceptualise citizenship learning as participatory, lifelong and geared towards changing people's material conditions. This conceptualisation is situated in three sets of literature.

2.4.1 Citizenship learning as everyday participation and 'growth'

The first set of literature focuses on citizenship and learning in dynamically and heterogeneously constituted spaces of belonging where citizens routinely take part in the activities of everyday life (Brooks and Holford 2009; Clarke et al. 2014; Cornwall 2002; Holma and Kontinen 2020a; Isin 2009). This scholarship treats citizenship as enacted in different scales, layers, sites and practices of daily and intimate belonging and identity than engagement with the legal and political state. These debates call for nuanced accounts of participation that are sensitive to the specific material, cultural and sociohistorical and political contexts in which everyday citizenship occurs. As Andrea Cornwall observes in his article, *Locating Citizen Participation*,

> Treating participation as situated practice calls for approaches that locate spaces for participation in the places in which they occur, framing their possibilities with reference to actual political, social, cultural and historical particularities rather than idealised notions of democratic practice. In different places, factors like constitutional and legal provision, governance arrangements… social movements and associations of various kinds, influence the interplay between spaces made and chosen by marginalised actors and those made available by the powerful…. In any given place, there are

many different domains for participation; officialised spaces, such as public consultations or user groups, exist alongside unofficial spaces and the spaces of everyday life. (Cornwall 2002, p. 51)

It is especially important in contexts of poverty and authoritarian rule – where the idealised 'best practices' promoted by development partners are not easily transferable (Cornwall 2002) – to recognise citizenship learning that occurs in informal everyday spaces of participation, belonging and identity, beyond the officialised platforms and institutions of the state (Banks et al. 2015; Holma and Kontinen 2020a; Yuval-Davis 2011). These may include self-help groups, community-based organisations, religious institutions, women's associations, ethnic and family groups and so on, where daily, informalised and routine associations create complex networks in which citizens participate and learn on relatively equal and reciprocal terms. In the words of Brooks and Holford (2009, p. 97), 'citizens work, shop, are parents and friends, join clubs and societies, play sports, watch television: all these and more are expressions of their citizenship. In many, if not all, of these activities, they learn.'

It is equally important to emphasise here that such spaces, where citizens interact on a daily basis, are not independent of influence, control or manipulation by different state institutions, policies and practices. In this regard, learning may be geared towards enhancing citizens' capacities to perform daily routines and improve material welfare. The same learning may simultaneously encourage or lead to fulfilment of statist responsibilities such as voting, attending school meetings and supporting children's education and immunisation.

In the course of their extensive research on citizenship practices in rural contexts in East Africa, Holma and colleagues (2018, 2020a, 2022) have engaged with the task of addressing the lacuna in theorisation of learning in citizenship studies. Drawing on different philosophical, empirical and contextual sources, they have suggested that learning in NGO-led development initiatives for the poor in authoritarian settings should be understood as gradual and incremental change rather than radical transformation. Based on John Dewey's pragmatism, they promote the notion of *growth into citizenship* as a 'theoretical framework for analysing adult learning in projects aiming to strengthen citizenship implemented by nongovernmental organizations, especially in the contexts of sub-Saharan Africa' (Holma et al. 2018, p. 215). They argue that learning often happens in situations where practice is reorganised in response to a disruption in an individual's habits and ways of living, creating the need to reflect on taken-for-granted assumptions, and, thereby, learning to change them – gradually. Against this backdrop, the suggested theory of learning citizenship focuses on incremental, long-term reorganisation of habits taking place not in 'one-off' training events, but in spaces of routine participation and 'joint activities through which people address shared issues' (Holma and Kontinen 2020b, p. 25). Later, they suggest an account of learning citizenship that builds on 'three dimensions central to contemporary debates on citizenship: the contextual, the material and the political' (Kontinen and Holma 2022, p. 19).

2.4.2   Socio-materiality of citizenship learning

The second set of literature motivates me to pay attention to the role of materiality in learning citizenship. Conceptions of learning embedded in the relationship and interaction between humans and non-human objects have gained attention in organisational and work-related studies in recent decades (Fenwick 2010, 2011, 2014; Johri 2011; Landri 2015; Moura and Bispo 2020). Socio-material approaches draw from a variety of theoretical stances including cultural-historical activity theory (Foot 2014; Nussbaumer 2012), complexity theory (Mason 2008) and actor-network theory (Law 2009). Notwithstanding the diversity of their theoretical backgrounds, socio-material approaches converge in their interest in explicating why, in the routine work of humans, 'matter matters' (Fenwick 2014, p. 45). These approaches, therefore, invite us to pay attention to 'the material presences that exert forces and are entwined with what appears to be human intention, engagement, resistance and change' (Fenwick 2011, p. 116).

According to Orlikowski (2007), material artefacts, which constitute a prominent part of human life, may take visible forms, such as clothes, rooms, desks, chairs, tables, buildings, vehicles, phones, computers, books, documents, pens and utensils. They may also take invisible forms including data and voice networks, water and sewage infrastructures, electricity and air systems. Whatever form materials take, they are fully entangled in people's work life and constitute a crucial part of 'human activity and meaning-making' (Fenwick 2010, p. 105). Socio-materiality is, therefore, not overly concerned with the presence or ownership of materials by humans *per se*, but with the abilities and affordances material artefacts transfer to multiple facets of human interaction (Fenwick 2014; Johri 2011; Moura and Bispo 2020). In this sense, materials are not just inert objects and tools designed to serve human life but, rather, active symbols and artefacts that 'produce and reproduce the conditions necessary for daily life' (Moura and Bispo 2020, p. 353).

The scholarship on socio-material learning in organisations and working life has mostly discussed the contexts of the Global North. The material elements considered include, for example, computers, digital notebooks, policy statements, printers, newsletters and electricity, which might not be so familiar and commonly used in most rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, I find the ideas of these approaches relevant for studying citizenship and the process of its learning in Africa. According to this literature, learning citizenship becomes a continuous process of improving socioeconomic and material conditions in which the gradual acquisition of different assets, as this study shows, plays a critical role. Materials are, therefore, relevant in the search for a novel way of conceptualising learning citizenship in contexts like those I studied.

Moreover, separate bodies of literature have pointed out the importance of materiality in African everyday life. Studies of autochthony (Bøås 2009; Bøås and Dunn 2013; Geschiere 2009) emphasise the central role of land in contestations over citizenship and belonging in Africa. Claims of citizenship based on the idea of being born from the soil and, therefore, the perception that land belongs to

those who occupied it first, are common in many African communities (Dunn 2009; Mitchell 2014). Yet, while land is undoubtedly a critical element, several studies of rural change in sub-Saharan Africa show that other forms of materiality, such as money, buildings, basic household furniture and utensils (Ndidde et al. 2020), farm tools (Brockington and Noe 2021), radio, television sets and mobile phones (Vokes 2010, 2018), jerrycans, wheelbarrows (Smith 2022) and so on are crucial in shaping the everyday practices and wellbeing of citizens in marginal communities in sub-Saharan African countries.

Drawing from different development contexts, Brockington and Noe (2021) and Lister (1998) have made similar arguments on the importance of material resources in strengthening citizenship. For community development work to enable 'people to develop as citizens', Lister (1998, p. 321) argues that 'it needs resources… to help people to realise their potential and the capacity-building not just of individuals but of whole communities'. In rural Tanzania, Noe and colleagues (2021, p. 171) report on extensive cases of citizen-led rural transformation, at the heart of which are material assets and factors like land, labour, livestock, inputs and money to invest in businesses. The literature on VSLA methodology corroborates these arguments. Dagunga and colleagues (2020) and Musinguzi (2016) reveal how the village savings methodology epitomised by a three-padlocked-metallic box are crucial in enabling rural people in sub-Saharan Africa, especially women, to build strong networks, pivotal for accessing credit and other material benefits.

In Uganda, at the height of the 2016 general election campaigns, Museveni, the NRM party candidate and incumbent president, directed the prime minister to budget for 'the purchase of 18 (eighteen) million hoes to be distributed to 6 (six) million households each receiving 3 (three) hoes' (Y. Museveni, official communication, 20 November 2015). Subsequently, the promise of the primordial hand hoes by a party that claims to pursue a 'modernist' agenda raised public debate. Besides, the processes of procuring and distributing the hoes (Daily Monitor 2015; New Vision 2021; The Independent 2021; The Observer 2016) has since been entangled in Uganda's graft-riddled, patronage and class-based society-state dynamics and politics.

2.4.3 Citizenship as lifelong learning and socialisation

The third set of literature from which I draw may be represented by Delanty (2003), who has developed the notion of 'cultural citizenship' to denote citizenship learning as a process of lifelong socialisation into existing cultural norms and practices. He distinguishes between disciplinary and cultural citizenship. On the one hand, disciplinary citizenship refers to learning citizenship in formalised, fixed, rule-following classes and pertains to government policies and official membership of the polity; on the other, cultural citizenship refers to that which occurs at individual, cultural and social levels on a continuum ranging from self-knowledge to social change and transformation, including the rejection of racism and xenophobia. In his conceptualisation of

cultural citizenship, Delanty builds on Eder's (1999) work on learning and change in society and argues,

> Research has documented how citizens learn citizenship, which mostly takes place in the informal context of everyday and life and is also heavily influenced by critical and formative events in people's lives. Citizenship is not entirely about rights or membership of a polity, but is a matter of participation in the political community and begins early in life…. It is a learning process in that it is articulated in perceptions of the self as an active agency and a social actor shaped by relations with others…. It is possible to relate this understanding of citizenship to 'lifelong learning', as citizenship is an ongoing process. (Delanty 2003, p. 602)

He summarises his conception of cultural citizenship as having the task of transforming the aggregate learning and cognitive capacities of individuals into collective learning in society.

Resonating with Delanty, Avoseh (2001) recounts how, in African traditional practice, active citizenship was founded on the notion of lifelong learning and socialisation into the cultural practices of communities. First, he posits that in precolonial societies, every member was expected to be active in nation building, which, like education, 'was a lifelong process that puts the individual members of a community at the centre' (ibid., p. 480). Second, active citizenship involved participation in the entire spectrum of life, including the spiritual, moral and physical realms; it also insured against destructive egocentrism and promoted humanity. Third, 'lifelong learning in traditional society was such that it was the duty of everyone to "teach" at some point and to "learn" at other times' (ibid., 485). Peer learning through association and clear division of labour characterised the understanding of citizenship roles. Overall, (Avoseh 2001, p. 480) maintains,

> Active citizens in traditional political systems were expected to constantly think of what they can do for their communities. This same spirit dominates the role of the active citizen in the economic domain of the community's life. The individual was expected to be hardworking and be able to produce enough not just for self but also for the extended family member. Any citizen who is lazy or unproductive usually becomes the object of ridicule. An active citizen was one who was hard working and excels in her/his chosen career. The average man must for instance, in addition to other chosen career, have a full knowledge of agriculture – the planting season, harvesting and preservation.

Conceptualisations of citizenship as lifelong learning and socialisation have, however, been critiqued by scholars as promoting rather than challenging deep-seated interests and structures that constrain people from acting as citizens (Annette 2009; Biesta 2009; Martin 2003). Martin (2003) has questioned the underlying political rather than educational intent of lifelong learning at a time when European states are undergoing a crisis in state welfare provision. He argues that in the context of neoliberal reforms and the resultant shrinkage of the welfare state, lifelong learning has become 'a key instrument in this process of civic remoralization by means of which' (ibid., p. 568); citizens rather need education that prepares and empowers them 'for their unaccustomed civic self-sufficiency' (ibid., p. 575). In brief, and as Annette (2009, p. 151) has argued, the wave of lifelong learning and citizenship education provided across Europe 'may

be based more on a communitarian concern for moral and political socialization than promoting civic engagement'.

Similarly, scholars caution against the 'training-as-panacea rhetoric' (Cruikshank 2002, cited in Martin 2003, p. 567) that aims to promote good and active citizenship in a contemporary world marked by unequal power distribution. The contexts of globalisation, neoliberalism, authoritarianism, domination, increasing poverty and marginalisation create situations of learned, socialised and internalised helplessness (Freire 2000; Merrifield 2002; Pettit 2016) that is inimical to citizen agency. In his popular treatise, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire warns against the danger of internalisation of the ways of the oppressor, which can lead to self-depreciation and resignation and to situations of domination. In authoritarian settings, internalisation of helplessness can occur due to dominant narratives that legitimate power and demonstrate to the poor that things are the way they are and cannot be altered (Freire 2000; Merrifield 2002). It can also occur due to due to a lack of opportunities, which makes people susceptible to tokenistic patron-client relations that are, in the long run, damaging and harmful to citizen agency (Kelsall 2012).

Writing about why citizens do not engage, Pettit (2016) maintains that programmes promoting the ideals of human rights, democracy and citizenship often fail to challenge entrenched power due to learned hopelessness, 'well-grounded fears of repercussion, and tacit acceptance of the way things are' (ibid., p. 94). For example, he argues that while citizens in Pakistan and Uganda were familiar with notions of participation, transparency and government accountability, they doubted whether they could be realised. Moreover, as Merrifield (2002) observes, citizens' experiences are shaped by what they realistically expect from their political system after carefully gauging the possibilities of their actions within the prevailing political culture. Citizens make decisions on whether and how to engage based on this information and ensuing calculations.

In conclusion, drawing on these different sets of literature, learning citizenship is approached in this study as social participation, socio-material enhancement and lifelong internalisation. This broad approach encompasses diverse ways in which community members individually, jointly and continuously acquire knowledge, skills and assets for survival, and change in line with expectations of citizenship in routine spaces of immediate belonging and membership. The thesis foregrounds this argument in the context of the Ugandan state and claims that the prominence of these 'safer' spaces and activities is contingent on what citizens have, overtime, internalised as the state's capacity and ability to address their needs and also punish forms of dissent and civic engagement.

3 UGANDAN CONTEXT AND INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE NGOS

This chapter addresses the context of citizenship and NGOs' attempts to strengthen it in Uganda. In the first part of the chapter, I give a brief historical account of the tetchy state-citizen relationship in the country and suggest that both the historical and current configurations of the Ugandan state place profound constraints on citizenship in terms of dissent and advocacy. In the second part, I briefly discuss the ascendancy of NGOs in Uganda and their attempts to foster citizenship agency and end with a detailed description of the two case NGOs I studied.

3.1 (Pre-)colonial hangover, militarism, citizen unrest, wariness (and hope?)

The Ugandan state was born out of a forceful amalgamation of diversely administered kingdoms, chieftainships and communities during the colonial period, which spanned over six decades. Although these states had varying degrees of commercial and social inter-community contact, they maintained distinct socio-political arrangements and practised different citizenship regimes (Babikwa 2004; Quinn 2014). For example, while centralised kingdoms in the southern parts of Uganda maintained class-based, hierarchised and monarchical socio-political structures, stateless and scattered communities in the east, north-east, and northern parts of the country coalesced around simple family or clan-based governance structures. To suppress the indigeneity of the existing communities, British colonial administration devised a raft of persuasive and coercive measures including enculturation and a scorched earth policy especially in areas where they met resistance. This resulted in the emergence of citizenship mindsets that can be described as subservient, self-disciplining, uncritical and unquestioning when it came to implementing the colonial agenda (eg; Alava et al. 2020; Apter 1995; Babikwa 2004; Mamdani 2002).

In Uganda, as in most colonies in Africa, the British introduced profound reforms in education, the judiciary and politics that either initiated new and/or exacerbated existing forms of inequalities based on wealth, gender, ethnicity and class (see, Youngman, 2000). Colonialism reversed the remarkable gains women had made in the leadership and management of pre-colonial society (Tripp 2017), while in Uganda, it 'intensified ethnic divisions' (Alava et al. 2020, p. 58). Traditional forms of socialisation and worship were demonised as satanic and backward, and progressively replaced by Judeo-Christian paradigmatic beliefs and European values. A new breed of local elites, dubbed 'petit and comprador' bourgeoisie, emerged (Mamdani 1975, 2002; Youngman 2000) that mimicked the European lifestyle and outlook, alienating them from their roots and creating an enduring schism and a skewed relationship between the minority leaders and the majority led. Meanwhile, entire local communal economies were hastily integrated into Western capitalism, fatally distorting socioeconomic and political superstructures of existing societies (Babikwa 2004). Although precolonial societies did not successfully transform into purely Western systems, the process of deranging and disorienting Uganda's communalised and reciprocal citizenship arrangements was ignited.

Independence of the nation from colonial rule, achieved in 1962, brought unprecedented hope and enthusiasm; however, this was short-lived as bloody militarism and political instability fuelled by ethnic tensions soon enveloped the nascent nation. Until 1986 no less than eight presidencies had acquired and lost power through violence accompanied by gross human rights abuses, with each regime successively and rapidly turning from today's liberators into tomorrow's tormentors. These experiences weakened citizens' power and agency as various forms of civil freedoms and rights were muzzled and replaced by militarism, ethnic violence, general social breakdown and economic ruin – perpetrated by the state on the citizens (Alava et al. 2020; Apter 1995; Lomo and Hovil 2004; Quinn 2014). As Lomo and Hovil (2004, p. 15) pertinently observe, the regimes of

> Idi Amin (1971-1979) and Milton Obote (1962-1971, 1980-1985) were characterised by civil unrest and gross violations of human rights, manifested in torture, rape, extra-judicial execution and mass murders, disappearances and displacement. The perpetrators of these crimes got away with impunity and this eventually created a trend for successor governments to hunt down and visit exact extra-judicial revenge on soldiers and civilian populations associated with the ousted regimes. This practice culminated in a cycle of fear, hate, anger, mistrust, and more bloody vengeance, and served to entrench prejudices that, since the colonial period, had labelled and dichotomised Ugandans along regional and ethnic lines.

Consequently, as I show in the discussion that follows, patterns of state-inspired violence and impunity continue to haunt and characterise the Ugandan polity to date. Experiences of historicised terror and the fear (of possible recurrence) of state-inspired chaos remain relevant and central in understanding citizenship learning and practice, particularly in rural areas of Uganda.

3.2 Museveni's 'fundamental change': citizen reprieve or déjà vu?

Increasing state brutality bred citizen anxiety, terror and angst, partly creating conditions that led Museveni and his guerrilla outfit, the National Resistance Army (NRA), to capture power in 1986 after a protracted, five-year bush war. Immediately after assuming power, Museveni promised to restore hope and stability to a nation of citizens reeling from the turbulence of the previous regimes. In his maiden speech, Museveni assured the war-wary and fatigued citizens that his regime would not be 'a mere change of guard: it is a fundamental change in the politics of our country' (Museveni 2000, p. 3). Further, he declared that he was ushering in a new kind of politics that would 'address Uganda's legacy of sectarian exclusion and violence' (Lindemann 2011, p. 387). Pivoted on the so-called Ten Point Programme,[6] Museveni's early years in power saw remarkable improvement in human rights, economic recovery and restoration of citizens' hope and participation, especially in the region south of the Nile. The regime was, thus, heralded as 'having brought peace and stability to a country that had been fraught by conflict for years' (Tripp 2010, p. 2).

Arguably, the highlight of Museveni's 'fundamental change' politics was the making of a new constitution in 1995. Considered to be the most innovative, consultative, participatory and democratic constitution in the history of the country (Khisa 2020; Kjær 1999), the 1995 constitution and other progressive reforms such as affirmative and inclusive policies for women, youth and people with disabilities, decentralisation, and demystification of the gun through civic and military education, understandably breathed fresh hope and optimism into a country haunted by nightmares of war. In an attempt to build a minimum national consensus on dicey issues that had bred violence, Article 1 of the constitution tellingly states that 'all power belongs to the people' (RoU 1995). Rhetorically, this was to emphasise the supremacy of citizen-led democracy over the forces of tyranny and authoritarianism that had characterised the past years of the nascent nation. To some degree, the constitution restored, recognised and guaranteed a myriad of citizenship rights and freedoms even though it maintained a *de facto* one-party (NRM) political system and severely restricted political association until 2004 when political parties were (half-heartedly) freed through a public plebiscite.[7]

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[6] The Ten Point Programme outlined the key broad issues for the new government as: restoration of democracy; restoration of security; elimination of all forms of sectarianism; consolidation of national independence; building an integrated and self-sustaining economy; restoration of social services and rehabilitation of war-ravaged areas; elimination of corruption and abuse of power; addressing dislocation of some sections of the population; cooperation with African countries; and a mixed economy strategy (Museveni 2000, pp. 257–261).
[7] Political parties were banned by the Museveni regime on the accusation that they promoted religious and ethnic sectarianism until a referendum in 2004 authorised them following considerable pressure from the international donor and democracy community. The Movement system, now fully entrenched, morphed into the NRM and half-heartedly opened up political space to *kubegyako* - getting rid of increasing internal dissent within the party (see, Khisa 2019)

Crucially, the constitution and the Museveni regime established what, in the context of previous regimes, was considered to be a more professional and disciplined army that, in the southern parts of the country, helped in many ways to ease the restiveness that characterised the state-citizen relationship. Writing on this turnaround under Museveni in the history of the chaotic militarisation of the country, Moses Khisa observes and argues,

> A key aspect of this success was the transformation in the relations between the armed forces and the citizens, a laudable shift from the military being a major source of insecurity and predation to being a source of security and protection for the public. Undoubtedly, there was a fundamental turnaround from the military as a dreaded institution laden with pervasive criminality to a respectable arm of the state, a critical pillar for attaining empirical statehood. Citizen attitudes towards the military are largely positive. (2020 p. 299)

Against the history of military and state-inspired terror, the assurance of peace and security of person and property marked a turning point in the historically fractured state-citizenship relationship and provided one of the strongest legitimacy and entrenchment bases for the ruling NRM party. Publicly, echoes of *'twebaka kutulo'* (we can sleep soundly and peacefully without fear of state inspired terror at night) (Makara 2020) are drummed up to remind the citizens that to continue enjoying the prevailing peace and tranquillity, they must not elect the opposition, whose intent is to return the country to its violent past (The African Exponent 2016). This narrative has partly acted to strengthen and legitimise the NRM government, shielding the state from service delivery questions and scrutiny of several human rights violations and excesses, but it has also created considerable fear and apprehension among rural dwellers about associating publicly with dissent against the NRM.

As if a scripted déjà vu in Uganda's politics, as Museveni's presidency has dragged on into the fourth decade, the 'fundamental change' promised has become a highly contested notion in the country's body politic. In his song, *Freedom*, musician-turned-opposition politician, Bobi Wine, argues that the promised 'fundamental change' has instead turned into 'no change' and 'democracy' into 'hypocrisy'. Another song, *Bizeemu*, by musician Ronald Mayinja, bemoans the recurrence of the historical ills and mistakes that justified Museveni's war against the brutal regimes of Amin and Obote. According to Oloka-Onyango (2013), the steady slide into the tumultuous past has been witnessed in what he has termed as *constitucide*, the death of the letter and spirit of constitutionalism. The anti-climax of constitucide was the amendment of the constitution to remove the safety valves that had been inserted to guard against state power abuse and ensure peaceful transition of power. Procured through a combination of roughshod political skulduggery and military violence, the amendments – the first, in 2005, to remove presidential term limits, and the second, in 2017, to scrap the presidential age limit – paved the way for a possible life presidency.

For a country that has not seen a smooth transfer of power from one president to another, the tinkering with the constitution has been a big blow to citizens' hopes for an end to the cycle of violence. Moreover, Museveni's

presidency has increasingly pivoted on militarism and militarisation of almost all facets of the country (Kagoro 2016, 2020). The military is represented in parliament, with military officers serving in the cabinet and in the civil service bureaucracy as heads of government departments, including agriculture extension services, policing and crushing political dissent (Curtice and Behlendorf 2021; Tapscott 2021). This has resulted in what Jude Kagoro has termed a '"trinitarian" constellation in which President Museveni, the military and the NRM party essentially function as one and the same' (Kagoro 2016, p. 157). Fears of what appears to be a vicious repeat of the state-inspired military violence of past regimes are rife, as horrific, movie-like images, footage and stories of state-inspired military kidnaps and torture continue to dominate diverse media platforms (see, Daily Monitor 2022a; Nile Post 2020a; Reuters 2022; The Economist 2021).

3.3 Unpacking Uganda's constrained settings

Up to this point I have attempted to describe how the past history of violence has significantly shaped the state-citizen relationship into what I conceptualise as constrained citizenship in Uganda. I have illustrated how the history of violence has been exploited by Museveni's regime to subdue citizens and keep them under a cloud of fear and trepidation. In what follows, I identify and describe three interrelated factors that I consider to be critical in constraining the practice of citizenship in present Uganda. These are neoliberalism, patronage politics and the 'informal' state; poverty and inequality; and traditions of patriarchy. Foregrounding these factors, which are by no means exhaustive, in the nation's turbulent history, I am able to explain the kinds of citizenship that NGOs emphasise and that develop in the communities studied.

3.3.1 Neoliberalism, patronage politics and the 'informal' state

Neoliberal orthodoxy dominates much contemporary commentary and scholarship on how development and state-citizen relations have been configured in Museveni's Uganda. For several years, Uganda has been hailed by donors as a success story of market reforms and projected as the 'poster child of structural adjustment' (Young 2001 in Khisa, 2013, p. 210). Therefore, extensive implementation of neoliberal policies has, as I show in the following discussion, wrought and coincided with profound limitations on the relationship between the state and its citizens at various levels. In a recent volume, *Uganda: The dynamics of neoliberal transformation*, edited by Jörg Wiegratz and two colleagues (2018), contributors give detailed and extensive accounts of how neoliberalism-induced 'commodification, commercialisation and marketisation' (Wiegratz et al. 2018, p. 9) have profoundly permeated and configured the entire superstructure of Ugandan society, including social relations, the economy, politics, violence and foreign policy.

The dilemma when attempting to capture this complex transformation, the editors argue, lies in the prevalence of two irreconcilable narratives: 'Uganda as a success' and 'Uganda in crisis'. The 'Uganda as a success' narrative celebrates the visionary and stable leadership of Museveni, applauding the reforms he has introduced to turn the fortunes of the country around, to move from a scarcity of basic commodities to their abundance. It is often supported by parading impressive statistics and qualitative socioeconomic and political indicators from the period since 1986. Central to this narrative – promoted by multinational corporations and donor groups, scholars, government officials and ordinary NRM supporters – is the claim that although some work still needs to be done, Uganda is on an unstoppable trajectory of steady progress and development (NRM 2016). Notably, a cross section of NRM supporters also argues that, given the strong foundation laid by Museveni's government, lingering challenges and problems will be gradually overcome. Reminding the population to keep in mind the pre-1986 political mayhem, and insisting that 'Rome was not built in a day,' they maintain that 'Uganda can never have been better' (Wiegratz et al. 2018, p. 1).

Conversely, the 'Uganda in crisis' narrative presents an increasingly doomsday picture of Uganda as country in a state of free fall and decay. Articulated by hustling *muntu wa wansi* on the street, opposition political actors, independent media, activist civil society, some sections of the religious community and a deluge of scholars and mainstream and social media commentators, this narrative denounces the NRM regime as corrupt, neo-patrimonial, oppressive and inefficiently ostentatious. Consequently,

> The state has come to be associated with increasing political repression, a decline in public services and generalised economic insecurity…. Uganda has experienced recurring food shortages and chronic indebtedness, and a social crisis characterised by increased inequality, widespread violence and increased criminality…. One can listen to it on TV news and debates, in churches and mosques and read about it via media articles and social media platforms. (Wiegratz et al. 2018, pp. 2–3)

It is fair to argue that these bifurcated opinions about Uganda shape much of the heated public discourse and contestations over socioeconomic and political development and state-society relations in Museveni's Uganda. From the development purview, 'regime longevity has granted Museveni a politically rare chance to flirt with Marxism (1986–9), embrace orthodox neoliberalism (1989–97), and eventually, rediscover developmentalism' (Kiiza 2012, p. 211), albeit without renouncing neoliberalism. Relatedly, many political science studies present Museveni's Uganda as an indistinguishably patrimonial (Asiimwe 2013; Kelsall 2012; Titeca 2006), competitive authoritarian (Kagoro 2016), hybrid (Tripp 2010), informalised (Khisa 2013) and arbitrary state or regime (Tapscott 2021). Taken together with the 'Uganda as a success' and 'Uganda in crisis' narratives, it becomes difficult to characterise Uganda as either a fully-fledged, market-led or half-hearted developmentalist economy – or a completely authoritarian, semi-authoritarian, or fully militarised polity.

Let me illustrate. First, while Uganda has been praised as a successful neoliberal story, and runs a fairly competitive market economy, it has also, over

time, crafted several socioeconomic development interventions targeting the poor (Francis and James 2003; Hickey 2013; Kjær and Muhumuza 2009). Second, while there are horrifying tales of repression of dissent, and perceptions and persecution of civil society advocacy as 'antigovernmentalism' (Tripp 2010, p. 3), there is also space for development-oriented and apolitical NGOs and other actors to carry out their activities largely undeterred and unmonitored. The relationship between state and citizens is, therefore, configured in confusing and surprising ways. While state-proffered services are tinged with patronage (Datzberger 2018; Joughin and Kjær 2010; Kalinaki 2020) and decried as useless and graft-riddled (Scherz 2014), the public only protests against them in a meek, sporadic and uncoordinated manner that is unlikely to cause the state to rethink them (Mbazira 2013). Moreover, it is common practice to crush regime critics or attempts to organise, while pro-regime demonstrations are allowed.

Scholars and commentators have also argued that rather than lead to a lean, market-led, efficient, competent and privatised political economy, neoliberal Uganda has produced the opposite: state largesse, extravagance and a mafia state. Shorn of responsibility to citizens, scholars argue, the NRM government has acquired huge amounts of foreign capital in the form of loans and aid that has been largely used to oil the ever-increasing patronage network, [8] co-opt numerous elites, buy military hardware and compromise the opposition with monetary inducements (see, Friesinger 2021; Kalinaki 2020; Khisa 2013, 2016; Tangri and Mwenda 2008, 2019). Thus, it is argued that neoliberalism has not only enabled but also coincided with Uganda's becoming a 'personalised', 'informalised', 'vampire' and 'mafia'[9] state (Daily Monitor 2011, 2016b, 2019a; Tangri and Mwenda 2008; Wiegratz et al. 2018). Its apex has been the emergence and growth of an intricate patronage-clientelist network in large part fuelled by the vast resources and reluctance of the donor community to hold Museveni's government to high standards of democratic practice due to his embrace of neoliberal orthodoxy. Hence, instead of deepening civic scrutiny of the state, neoliberal donor reforms have 'reinforced the propensity of political leaders to use the state and its resources to maintain themselves in power' (Mwenda and Tangri 2005, p. 451), while also violating citizens' rights with impunity.

During the various electioneering cycles, NRM politicians dole out monetary gifts to their electorates in order garner votes (Vokes 2016; Wilkins 2016). At the same time, NRM officials led by Museveni have been quoted in various media warning citizens that if they vote for opposition candidates (Daily Monitor 2018), they will be denied services as their areas will be 'deleted from

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[8] The Great Lakes Institute of Strategic Studies (GLISS 2021) has compiled a comprehensive report detailing how, in an explicit case of gerrymandering, the NRM has increased the number of electoral areas at every election cycle. For example, from 1996 to 2021 the number of districts increased from 39 to 146 and constituencies from 214 to 353.

[9] The notion of Uganda as a mafia state started in 2005 when the then Vice President, Professor Gilbert Bukenya, complained publicly that a mafia clique in government were trying to frame him and end his political career. Since then, the term mafia has gained cogency in public and private life, with several people, including cabinet ministers and opposition figures, pointing out the existence of powerful, mafia-like cliques in various government sectors that wields insurmountable power over the state.

the map' (PML Daily 2018). Worse still, in doing so, they would have either committed suicide by 'hanging themselves' (Nile Post 2018), or wasted their own time and votes (New Vision 2019), because it is only Museveni's NRM party that has the financial resources to solve voters' multiple problems (Daily Monitor 2019b). Patronage is therefore backed up by explicit messages that intentionally intimidate and cajole citizens into making decisions that favour the ruling regime. Ultimately, the spaces, practices and experiences of citizenship analysed in this thesis draw from this befuddling context and, as I claim, constitute constrained state-society relations.

3.3.2 Poverty and inequality

Poverty constrains citizenship in multiple ways, and in Uganda it is multidimensional, lethal and unequally distributed across different geographical regions (eg., NPA 2020; Oxfam 2016; UNICEF 2020). Debates on citizenship, poverty and inequality in Uganda are framed around two broad arguments: namely, 'poverty as structural' and 'poverty as personal'. Popular within critical scholarship and civil society, the 'poverty as structural' argument maintains that growing poverty and inequality have been embedded within systemic and skewed global and national power structure constellations from imperialism and (neo)colonialism to the current capitalist and neoliberal exploitation (eg., Branch and Yen 2018; Hickey 2003; Oxfam 2016; Tamale 2020; Wiegratz 2019). This narrative politicises poverty and inequality and 'calls for a dismantling of the capitalist neoliberal system' (Tamale 2020, p. 52) if profound changes are to be realised in structures and systems that are corrosive to citizenship. Oxfam (2016) articulates this view more succinctly in its report on Uganda, *Who is Growing*. The report identifies the key drivers of poverty and inequality as 'inappropriate economic policies such as over liberalization, inequitable access to productive resources, gender based marginalization, governance regime, unfair tax systems as well as conflict and instability' (2016, p. 15).

The second narrative, 'poverty as personal', maintains that individuals are almost solely responsible for their own predicaments because they are lazy, weak, unproductive, and generally unimaginative and lacking innovativeness (Museveni 2021; NPA 2020; NRM 2016, 2021). Popular with the government bureaucracy and ruling political class in Uganda, this narrative challenges the poor to take advantage of socioeconomic programmes offered by the state in order to remedy their own deprivations. This neoliberal responsibilisation rationale which is supported by the World Bank, absolves the 'Ugandan state …of responsibility for remedying people's harsh conditions, which [are] instead to be solved through people's own agency' (Branch and Yen 2018, p. 85). Treating poverty as apolitical, localised and individualised, this narrative depoliticises anti-poverty efforts. For example, in its election manifesto, the ruling NRM party urges citizens to embrace science, technology, engineering and innovation which are 'universally recognised as fundamental ingredients for poverty eradication, wealth creation and sustainable development' (NRM 2021, p. 184).

This view is also dominant in several current government development blueprints, the Uganda Vision 2040 and NDP III, which acknowledge poverty as the main hindrance to the country's aspirations to transit to middle income status (NPA 2013, 2020). In particular, the overreliance on subsistence agriculture, the mainstay of an estimated 75% of the population, accompanied by a dearth of livelihood options among smallholder farmers, is blamed for persistent poverty across and within the regions. For instance, reversals in poverty levels recorded in 2017 are blamed on droughts which caused crop failure 'within the regions and economic groups that largely depended on crop farming as their source of livelihood' (NPA 2020, p. 19) in Uganda.

In situations of poverty and state absence, the agency of citizens to engage and make claims on the state is constrained, causing them to adopt other strategies to meet (and secure) their material needs (eg., Brockington and Noe 2021; Smith 2022). In this vein, scholars have argued that when confronted with unreliable and inaccessible services, citizens in Uganda do not make claims on the government, which they, at the same time, have low expectations of. Rather, they resort to multiple sources including begging from friends and relatives and relying on multi-pronged patronage 'to find resources to pay for private services' (Pettit 2016, p. 93) and learn 'to adapt and innovate to fill the gap' (Ssali 2018, p. 179). Similarly, Jones (2009, p. 10) recounts how the villagers in rural eastern Uganda, turned to 'religious and customary institutions as sites of innovation and transformation' to address challenges related to an absent government.

3.3.3   Traditions of patriarchy

Several scholars have posited that citizenship is gendered differentially according to context (Boatcă and Roth 2016; Lister 1997; Longwe 2002; Munday 2009; Ndidde et al. 2020; Sümer et al. 2020; Yuval-Davis 1999). In rural areas of Uganda, gendered citizenship is manifested, enacted and lived as a networked and systemic experience based on patriarchal beliefs and practices. The 'longstanding tradition that the man is the "head of the household"' (Longwe 2002, p. 3), has wider implications for citizenship rights and the status of women. As a pattern that produces, reproduces and legitimises male domination over both private and public spaces, patriarchy tends to treat women as 'second-class' citizens in many respects (Munday 2009; Seely et al. 2013; Walby 1994). Despite state reforms and civil society-led advocacy to empower women in Uganda, vestiges of restrictive traditional and customary norms, values and practices continue to influence everyday citizenship in different ways and parts of the country.

These traditions reinforce, for example, unequal gender division of labour in an increasingly volatile, marketised economy. In her book, *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*, feminist and scholar Sylvia Tamale writes,

> In Uganda, as is the case elsewhere on the continent, women are primarily responsible for sustaining their communities and families.... On a daily basis, they are involved in energy and time-intensive work: subsistence agriculture for home consumption; care

work for the needs of others including husband, children, the elderly and the sick; and various forms of non-market work that involves collection of water and fuel for cooking. Women also engage in voluntary community activities such as funeral wakes, weddings, rites of passage ceremonies, etc. And, of course, in addition to this work, many also labour in the formal and/or informal market sector, effectively working double, even triple shifts, simply to ensure that family needs are met. (2020, p. 294)

Further, patriarchy constrains women's rights by maintaining a pattern of male domination and female subordination that is expressed in a number of cultural norms, especially those that discriminate against and/or treat women differently when it comes to property ownership and inheritance. There are other practices that also dehumanise the status of women, such as female genital mutilation, widow inheritance, a preference for boy children and early and forced marriages due to poverty and expectations of bride wealth (Daily Monitor 2020b, 2022c; New Vision 2011). As is the case in other agrarian societies, 'women's land tenure rights are fragile' (Nyakato et al. 2020, p. 63) and contestable in rural Uganda, and when it comes to family land and other productive resources, women have access but limited control rights. Cases of widows and orphans being roughly evicted from their marital property by in-laws are frequently reported in Ugandan media. This is in spite of several laws that have been enacted to protect women from this practice including, foremost, the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda and Domestic Relation Act, 2010 (RoU 2010). For, as this study shows, efforts that enable women to acquire, control and own assets such as land and other property simultaneously challenge patriarchal customs and strengthen women's citizenship status and agency in multiple ways.

3.4   NGOs and citizenship-strengthening in constrained settings

Having illustrated the conditions that constrain citizenship in Uganda, I now focus on how the civil society spaces of NGOs and grassroots associations promote the learning of skills and the production of knowledge and dispositions that strengthen localised citizenship. I begin with a brief account of NGO growth in Uganda, specifically showing why NGOs prefer the service provision approach to advocacy campaigns in promoting citizenship. Then I describe the two case-study NGOs, showing how and why they work with and through locally mobilised spaces of grassroots groups to implement livelihood programmes.

A historical account of how, why and with what consequences civil society in Africa has transitioned from independent, political and member-based associations into the current largely donor-dependent, unaccountable, apolitical and gap-filling NGOs has been discussed elsewhere by scholars (Dicklitch 2002; Fowler and Mottiar 2022; Mugisha et al. 2020). Like most countries in the Global South, Uganda has, over the last four decades, witnessed a phenomenal proliferation of NGO activity. Available records show that the number of

registered NGOs in Uganda jumped from 280 in 1986 to 4,700 in 2003 (Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations [DENIVA], 2006) and to the current 13,000 NGOs registered by the National Bureau of NGOs (Ministry of Internal Affairs [MIA] 2020). This unprecedented growth of NGO activity coincides with two interrelated global and national trends in the history of the country. At the global level, there was the popularisation of the Washington Consensus by Western donors, and the emergence of the women's emancipation movement. At the national level, the NRM guerrilla outfit had captured state power and quickly embraced neoliberal macroeconomic policies, introducing a raft of reforms to stabilise the country, empower women and fight against HIV/AIDS scourge.

In the meantime, accused of fermenting religious and ethnic sectarianism, political party activities were restricted in favour of the monolithic, 'individual merit'-based Movement system (Makara 2010; Makara et al. 2009). This effectively outlawed and consequently stunted organised civic engagement and dissent. How, then, do NGOs born of this context respond to the challenges of strengthening citizenship in (semi)authoritarian and patrimonial Uganda? Do they provide the services supposed to be the state's responsibility or do they embark on emboldening the citizenry to demand the services themselves and express dissent? There is no clear answer to the above questions in most of the commentaries on NGO-state relations in Museveni's Uganda. Scholarship, commentary and lived experiences in Uganda show increasing state restrictions on and persecution of civil society organisations and institutions that aim to challenge the status quo (De Coninck 2021; Katusiimeh 2004; Kreienkamp 2017; Red Pepper 2022; Reuters 2021). Dissenting cultural and religious leaders, in particular, are often cautioned to stick to their roles and avoid trespassing into politics which they do not clearly understand (Ssentongo 2022b; The Observer 2010). As a result, Katusiimeh (2004) argues that NGOs in Uganda have been co-opted into NRM's politics as development partners rather than its critics.

Susan Dicklitch (2002) shares a similar view and adds that a combination of heavy donor dependency, financial paucity, lack of accountability to grassroot constituencies and a retributive regime have rendered NGOs in Uganda apolitical purveyors of service provision and poverty alleviation, robbing them of empowerment, advocacy and watchdog roles.

> Consequently, most [NGO] programs [in Uganda] focus on more concrete objectives like safe water provision, primary health care, income generation and credit rather than intangible pursuits such as political empowerment. Even more "civic minded" NGOs, like human rights NGOs, do not address politically "hot" issues fearing regime retribution…. Ugandan NGOs increasingly have served primarily a "gap-filling" role…. "Gap fillers" tend to be apolitical and narrowly focused on certain practical activities, such as provision of education, safe water, medicine and AIDS services. The willingness of the Movement regime to allow NGOs to multiply, especially NGOs that are engaged in poverty-alleviation and service provision, suggests that it is an indirect beneficiary of NGO activities as well. (Dicklitch 2002, pp. 21–22)

The above observation talks to the conundrum many NGOs, non-state actors and citizens face in Uganda. Confronted by a (semi)authoritarian regime that treats any form of dissent and claim making as insurrection, many NGOs have opted

to 'play it safe' (Makara 2003) by avoiding open advocacy campaigns that can be construed to be and are treated as inciting the population to challenge the status quo politically. Child (2009, p. 244) has claimed that 'within this system, NGOs who focused predominantly on poverty alleviation and basic service provision flourished with the financial help of international donors'. This context often places NGOs between two hard decisions: either to supplement the government's efforts to fight poverty and be lauded as a development partner or to attempt to raise civic awareness on political and human rights infringements and be accused of fomenting insurrection, thereby facing possible suspension and/or de-registration by the state (Human Rights Watch 2012; Reuters 2021). As we shall see in the next subsection, the NGOs in my two case studies focused on the former and worked to improve the household incomes and livelihoods of the poor in the rural communities studied.

3.5 Ideas of learning and strengthening citizenship in case NGOs

In the following discussion, I explore how Uganda's context has influenced the efforts of two NGOs to strengthen citizenship. The cases show that, in order to balance their activities and avoid possible confrontation with the state, they have avoided advocacy and claim making. Instead, in the two cases studied, the NGOs focused on training community members to improve their livelihoods by supporting self-help groups as a nucleus from which to address the citizens' socio-material conditions.

3.5.1 Action for Development (ACFODE)

Established in 1986, ACFODE is one of the most dynamic national gender advocacy NGOs in Uganda, considered a success story among southern development NGOs (Kontinen and Ndidde 2020). The NGO has, since its inception, been at the forefront of championing the gender agenda in Uganda through both claim-making and service provision efforts, fostering the early growth of the women's movement in several ways. For example, it played an important role during the processes and deliberations of making Uganda's new (1995) constitution (ACFODE 2015b; Makara 2003) and was instrumental in the 'inclusion and enactment of gender-related human rights provisions, the preamble, the National Objectives of State policy and women's representation at different levels of political governance' (ACFODE 2015b, p. 28). Regarding service provision, ACFODE sponsors needy girl children in primary schools, funds women's small income-generating projects and trains them in basic skills (Makara 2003). The NGO's citizenship-strengthening interventions have, therefore, involved the promotion of inclusive development through a combined approach of national-level advocacy of good governance, human rights and women's empowerment with community development programmes to address persistent gender inequality (Kontinen and Ndidde 2020).

A typical example of a professionalised and bureaucratised NGO, ACFODE has extensive national coverage of all regions of the country, is heavily donor funded and urban based. More critically, despite being urban-based and headquartered in Kampala, the NGO has been at the forefront of promoting gender inclusiveness with a strong outreach to the most vulnerable citizens in rural areas of the country. Namutumba district in Busoga subregion, where the study was conducted, is considered one of the poorest parts of the country (NPA 2020). Several reports and scholarly studies show that the region is also a hub of entrenched patriarchal beliefs and practices (Kontinen and Ndidde 2020) that in many ways fuel incidents of early marriages, teenage pregnancies, gender-based violence and general poverty (eg., Daily Monitor 2020b; New Vision 2011; RoU 2016; ACFODE 2015b).

In strengthening citizenship, ACFODE works with existing community-organised groups built on the values of solidarity, self-help, togetherness and shared fates and opportunities. In the case of Namutumba district, ACFODE implemented several livelihood programmes to address famine, malnutrition and domestic violence, and increase household income. The training particularly emphasised knowledge and skills connected with food security, production, storage, value addition and marketing (ACFODE 2015b). These kinds of learning emphasise the acquisition of livelihood knowledge and skills that equip poor citizens to address their material wellbeing needs through improved nutrition, farm production and income diversification. Such interventions carried out within the community were thought to contribute to poverty reduction and, specifically, build women's agency in countering the prevailing gender-based and related challenges.

3.5.2 Community Volunteer Initiatives for Development (COVOID)

COVOID started in 2003 as a community-based organisation and became an NGO in 2010. Unlike ACFODE, which was established at the height of the women's emancipation crusade to champion the cause of women's empowerment at the national level, COVOID was started by a 'son of the soil' who got inspiration from his experience of working with an international NGO, Plan International-Uganda. The aim of starting COVOID, in the heartland of NRM's neo-patrimonial politics, was, therefore, not to promote claim-making activism but to solve community problems associated with prevailing poverty and the plight of women and children. Initially, the NGO focused on enabling rural communities to care for children but over the years it has transitioned 'to offering a holistic approach to women's livelihoods and the general wellbeing of the entire community' (COVOID 2019, p. 8). Covering about five neighbouring districts in western Uganda, the NGO claims to have become a voice in addressing broad and multiple thematic issues of livelihoods and gender, health, education and capacity strengthening and climate change reduction in the region of its operation (COVOID n.d).

For example, in 2005, the NGOs pioneered the village savings model – popularly known in the community as *akabokisi* – as its flagship project, to

address issues of poverty in the area. The VSLA methodology has been framed by the international development system as a magic wand for poverty reduction and financial inclusion of the poorest sections of society who are not served by the elitist and bureaucratised formal financial system (Allen 2006; Burlando and Canidio 2017; CARE 2019; Hendricks and Chidiac 2011; Musinguzi 2016). VSLAs are also considered an important mechanism for the socioeconomic empowerment of women. COVOID runs over 2,000 VSLAs spread across its area of operations: the most enduring intervention in its efforts to address poverty and achieve the inclusive development envisaged by the United Nations global SDGs[10] in the community. COVOID has, in addition, adopted the 1970s Korean, village-based development model, *Saemaul Undong* (UNDP 2015) to domesticate and localise the realisation of some of the SDGs in selected villages in Rubirizi district (COVOID 2016).

3.6   Learning citizenship in ACFODE and COVOID

Whilst the two NGOs operate in different geographical regions, the citizenship programmes they provided in the studied communities focused on equipping participants with the material and knowledge wherewithal to address poverty and its attendant consequences. As already pointed out in this section, the two NGOs could well have been influenced to address existing conditions of poverty and its attendant marginalisation as a more pragmatic way of strengthening citizenship than engaging in advocacy campaigns. Faced with rural areas – strongholds of Museveni's politics of patronage and punishment – the NGOs' choice of training to improve livelihoods and address poverty resonates with narratives that position the poor as responsible both for their poverty and for finding solutions to it. Therefore, the two NGOs chose to go with existing forms of organising local citizens and focused on content that was not alien to the rural communities' logistical and social capacities to learn and implement. As they took part in NGO initiatives, community members engaged in collaborative practice that combined elements of everyday participation, peer imitation and learning, thus operationalising the skills, knowledge and attitudes emphasised in the training sessions.

Notions of citizenship and learning emphasised by the two NGOs in the two regions did not aim or explicitly attempt to challenge inherent structural inequalities and contradictions. Nor did they target instilling critical consciousness of injustice. Rather, they opted to strengthen citizenship with livelihood interventions that augmented the government's efforts to improve household incomes by challenging and equipping citizens to get out of poverty under their own steam rather than waiting for government to come to their

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[10] COVOID claims in various documents that it aligns its interventions to localise achievement of SDGs, particularly: 1-No Poverty, 2-Ending Hunger, 3-Good Health, 4-Quality Education, 5-Gender Equality and 13-Climate action.

rescue. For instance, in its Strategic Plan (2018/19-2022/23), COVOID acknowledges the political and politicised nature of community challenges constraining citizenship in its area of operations. These include, among others, the patriarchal belief 'that the responsibility of cooking is for women', corruption, the violation of human rights, 'the disintegration of public services, increasing poverty and failed health and education systems' (COVOID 2019, p. 9). The NGO, however, aims to solve these problems by continuing to educate, sensitise, mobilise and support the community 'to understand and appreciate their challenges and work to improve them… by setting priorities and co-designing interventions that can help to improve their situations' (ibid., p. 19).

As for ACFODE, the activist journey that birthed it and informed most of its formative years saw it become a pioneer vanguard of emancipatory women's politics, as it was not afraid to politicise women's issues (ACFODE 2015b). This activist and transformative stance has, however, somehow faded as the NGO wrestles with several contextual constraints (Kontinen and Ndidde 2020). To begin with, the NGO has been faced with the unenviable task of striking a delicate balance between survival and transformative impact in a (semi)authoritarian regime. Thus, according to Kontinen and Ndidde (2020), ACFODE has had to balance activism and reform in a political environment where questioning broad gender advocacy issues, democratisation and human rights is unwelcome to the state. This tactical manoeuvre has increasingly shorn ACFODE of its original transformative mission, forcing it to change tack from high-level boardroom and elitist advocacy and structured workshop training sessions to open "under the tree" dialogues to embed its programmes in 'existing daily practices and social power constellations in communities' (ibid., p. 184) and bring on board, men, cultural and religious leaders.

These tensions have partly led ACFODE to focus on implementing community livelihood and educational programmes that, as this study shows, attempt to address real and existential needs at the grassroots level, in line with political realities, and having a positive impact on the material livelihood needs of community members. These illustrations bring to the fore the kinds of tensions with which NGOs working in Uganda's (semi)authoritarian regime have to contend in their efforts to promote civic consciousness and initiate processes of transforming the marginalised from passive clientelism to active citizenship. They alert us to the longstanding debate over whether civil society should oppose or collaborate with the status quo, and whether it should transform or reform societal structures that legitimate and reproduce inequality. From the evidence of the two cases studied, it appears this debate is far from being settled as arguing for or against either choice is a matter of context.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins by clarifying the philosophical underpinnings and motivations for the study. It then describes the research design, methods of data collection and analysis, and study participants. It ends with reflection on the notion of positionality in the research, the successes and limitations of the methodology and how complex ethical issues were negotiated in line with the principles of the research methodology used.

4.1 Interest in the study, choice of methodology and literature

My first interface with the concept of citizenship was at Makerere University while teaching a course unit titled Political Economy of Adult and Community Education (ACE) to third year students in 2005. At the time, I understood and approached the concept of citizenship from a rather minimalist perspective that parallels citizens against clients in a polity. With time, everyday encounters with and experiences of citizenship, outlined in Chapter One, furthered my interest in exploring everyday practices of citizenship in Uganda, where 75 percent of the country's estimated 45 million people live in rural areas. Public discourse and narratives in Uganda seemed to suggest a progressively growing gulf and disconnect between ordinary citizens and the ruling elites, citizens' lowered expectations of state institutions and socialised fear of the sort of violence the state can unleash onto those who challenge its power (see Tapscott 2021). Inspired by Freirean critical education thought and drawing on both my personal background – which I explain later in this chapter – and academic experience,[11] I began to interrogate, debate and reflect on several questions including: a) Who and what causes (and can challenge) persistent citizen vulnerability? b) Can

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[11] As a student and, later, lecturer of the Adult and Community Education (ACE) program at Makerere University since the early 2000s, I developed a keen interest in academic studies of and debates over notions of learning as a tool for the empowerment, transformation and liberation of marginal societies.

collective learning and empowerment be a panacea for citizen fragility? c) Which institutions support and benefit from weak citizenship and how can they be used to reverse the order? d) How can citizens be empowered to contest injustice? and so on.

The conceptual, methodological and empirical design and focus of the study emerged from these initial thoughts. Conceptually, I started to think of citizenship in these contexts as 'constrained', 'weak', 'fragile', 'vulnerable', 'marginalised' and 'impoverished'. Such experiences, I surmised, would best be explored by and through a research methodology that is sensitive to poor citizens' empirical and lived experiences and can concurrently promote elements of learning and empowerment. Participatory methodology fitted these criteria because it is idealised as a research experience that is interactive (Macaulay et al. 1999), empowering (Janes 2016), co-learning and collaborative (Ahimbisibwe et al. 2020; Omondi 2020), flexible and iterative (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995), open and dialogical (Chambers 1994) and reflexive (Batool and Ali 2021). These ideals made participatory research resonate with the positionality I carried into the research process. Influenced by both lived and academic (theoretical) knowledge of what it means to be a rural dweller in Uganda, I was able to immerse myself in the communities yet maintain a reasonable professional space in which to study, analyse, interpret and report on the study findings as I did. I also collected literature from a vast array of multidisciplinary sources and fields including adult learning and education, development studies, social sciences, health sciences, agriculture and livelihoods, to which participatory methods of inquiry have been flexibly adopted and adapted.

4.2 Philosophical underpinnings of the study

Every research process is underpinned and guided by explicit or implicit philosophical and theoretical paradigms (Hunter et al. 2002; Mayoux and Chambers 2005). For instance, Hunter and colleagues (2002, p. 390) argue that 'the processes of data gathering and inquiry are tied to the researcher's philosophical and theoretical perspective', which provides 'a critical theoretical lens with which the researcher approaches the phenomenon and identifies the strategies to collect or construct data' (Thorne 2000, p. 68). In the following discussion, I briefly present the two research paradigms used, and show how they informed the study designs, implementation and reportage of the findings.

4.2.1 Interpretivist paradigm: a focus on people's own interpretations

The interpretivist paradigm in social sciences builds on the ideas of scholars who generally reject the positivist postulation of there being objective, factual and scientifically verifiable truth about the world. Researchers working in the interpretivist paradigm embrace the complex and dynamic quality of the social world in which the researcher(s) and participants collaboratively and holistically

understand, analyse, interpret and describe their social reality (Leitch et al. 2010; Slevitch 2011). This is achieved by 'generating thick and rich descriptions of actual events in real-life contexts'(Leitch et al. 2010, p. 70). According to Usher and colleagues (1997, p. 183), the interpretivist paradigm acknowledges the fact that researchers and the world are co-constituted and mutually constituting, and it is, therefore, 'impossible to separate the observer and the observed, the interpreter and the interpreted, the researcher and the researched, background, method, science and culture'.

In applying the interpretivist perspective to this study, my aim was to understand people's own meaning, experience and interpretations of the notion of citizenship as a lived experience. Consequently, I hoped that a detailed study and analysis of community members' own histories, life journeys and daily practices, and of interacting with NGOs and in other spaces of association, would provide useful insights into the extent to which these encounters constitute and shape citizenship experiences. Community members' original narratives would facilitate a nuanced and novel understanding of what it means to be a citizen in such multiply constrained settings.

4.2.2   Emancipatory paradigm: Participatory learning, reflection and power

The epistemological standpoint of the (critical) emancipatory paradigm is that research processes should generate knowledge that serves the purpose of emancipation (Usher et al. 1997), egalitarianism and empowerment (Williams 2005), and community learning and action (Baum 2016; Omondi 2020). In employing this theoretical lens, my intention was to add elements of learning and reflection to a community's own interpretation of everyday citizenship in order to visualise the possibilities of change and alternatives. Research influenced by an emancipatory paradigm, Usher and colleagues (1997) argue, places emphasis on the relationship between power, politics, inequality and knowledge, to serve the broader interests of social justice, freedom and democracy. It follows, therefore, that the primary aim of any research conducted for the purposes of emancipation is to challenge political power structures through a process of consciousness raising or *conscientisation* (eg., Berthoff 1990; Freire 2000). Hence, research underpinned by emancipatory undertones contains a political agenda of unmasking fetish ideologies to produce new insights that 'emancipate the disempowered' (Pring 2000, p. 250) through a conscious process that engages communities in activities that 'democratize and decolonize knowledge production' (Janes 2016, p. 72).

Although I did not set out to realise these core political objectives of creating awareness to challenge structures of power or liberate the marginalised, I nonetheless found the epistemological and methodological claims of co-learning, co-participating, co-sharing, co-construction and de-colonisation of (local) knowledge (Graeme and Mandawe 2017; Melissa Leach and Scoones 2007; Ninomiya and Pollock 2017; Tobias et al. 2013) appealing. As theoretical starting points, I found these attributes helpful in researching and reporting on citizenship in rural Uganda and, as explained later in this chapter, these

attributes were, throughout the process, key in the continuous attempts to deal with issues of positionality, reflexivity and co-learning.

4.2.3   Combining paradigms: Seeking learning and social change

Overall, in this study I adopted an approach that combined both the interpretivist and emancipatory lenses. An attempt was made to collate community interpretations of citizenship with (possible) elements of learning, change, reflection and imaginaries of future possibilities. Moreover, at an epistemological level, the interpretivist and emancipatory paradigms emphasise the illumination of knowledge within historical and contextual worlds, the collaborative role of research participants as sense-seekers and sense-makers (Lincoln et al. 2011; Usher et al. 1997) and the commitment of such research to emancipating the marginalised (Buskens and Earl 2008). In short, research is a participatory exercise during which the researcher and the community engage in mutual learning with the aim of promoting dialogue and social change (Castleden et al. 2008, 2010; Tobias et al. 2013; Yang 2015). These ideals informed the choice of data collection and analytical methods, as well as the lenses deployed to interpret and report the findings.

For example, in the process of conducting this research with rural participants, I continued to engage with questions of what learning and emancipation are, and what is and is not political, pondering on how and whether these goals could be realised or achieved within the framework and limitations of the study and the context of people's living conditions. Whereas I could not, with certitude, answer these and many other questions lingering in my mind at the start of the research, I was convinced that, to some extent, the flexibility and adaptability of participatory research methodology would trigger new ideas, reflections and relations and, in the process, foster learning. I will return to and expound on these ideas later in the ensuing sections of the chapter.

4.3   Research design and methods

4.3.1   Qualitative research

This was a qualitative participatory research design. Literature defines participatory research as a bottom-up exercise (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995), as a process of empowering the marginalised and vulnerable (Buskens and Earl 2008; Usher et al. 1997), of sharing the power of decision-making (Bourke 2009), and of co-producing and analysing knowledge with local people (Stewart-Harawira 2013; Tobias et al. 2013). Further, participatory research is conceptualised as a partnership premised on mutual respect, collaboration, education and action for social change (Macaulay et al. 1999) and as participation, control and critical awareness (Minkler 2004). At its core, participatory research is often associated with principles of egalitarianism, justice, fairness and co-learning, empowerment,

local capacity building, participation and cooperation (see, Ahimbisibwe et al. 2020; Buskens and Earl 2008; Omondi 2020; Tobias et al. 2013). For the purposes of this study, participatory research was understood as the process in which the researcher and participants jointly attempt to make sense of and illustrate the notion of citizenship as experienced, practised and learned at the grassroots level. This was to be achieved through the employment of diverse participatory tools to facilitate the diagrammatic illustration and visualisation of institutions and practices of citizenship, as narrated by members of the communities studied.

In the context of this study, the choice of participatory research methods was informed by the conviction that localised citizenship is best investigated by listening to and capturing the articulations of everyday stories, histories and perceptions. The ultimate aim was to explore the kinds of citizenship (and) learning that occur(red) in communities partaking in livelihood interventions provided by NGOs in rural villages in Uganda. The study was part of two larger projects that explored citizenship and learning in various contexts in Uganda and Tanzania. Specifically, it focused on exploring experiences of citizenship and learning revolving around the activities of two selected NGOs promoting livelihood education programmes in eastern and western Uganda, respectively. The study is, therefore, based on the experiences of community members who were actively involved in the grassroot development programmes of the two NGOs – ACFODE and COVOID – introduced in the previous chapter and further discussed in what follows. The NGOs were, therefore, the entry point into the communities. The main themes of the study concerned definitions of citizenship, the (non)significance of spaces of everyday belonging and participation and resulting learning, obligations and responsibilities. It also interrogated issues regarding citizenship practices emerging out of NGO encounters and interventions.

4.3.2   Methods of data collection

Different qualitative participatory methods were used to gather research data. Material was collected in two phases: first, in April 2017 in Namutumba district, eastern Uganda and second, in July-August 2019 in Rubirizi district, western Uganda. In both sites, research participants were community members who had been or were active participants in the NGOs studied and, therefore, village self-help groups. The study also interviewed NGO officials and board members, local focal persons and local government officials at district and subcounty levels (see, Table 2). The chapatti/Venn diagramming method was used to enable participants to identify and reflect on the relative significance of the institutions, agencies, organisations and networks to which they belonged and contribute.

In Namutumba district, the study employed semi-structured in-depth individual interviews (n=30) at the household level in the three villages of Bubago, Isegero and Bulongo. Key informant interviews with a district focal person (n=01), members of staff (n=06) and board members (n=03) of ACFODE were also conducted. The in-depth individual interviews in households were conducted using participatory tools of story-telling (Christensen 2012) and Venn

diagramming (Adebo 2000; Ahimbisibwe et al. 2020; Rufina 2013). These were supplemented by observation and informal conversations during interactions. Narrations and definitions of citizenship as experienced by participants were visualised and illustrated through Venn diagramming exercises. The aim was to enable participants to reflect, identify and narrate stories of (non)significant institutions, organisations, groups, agencies and networks of everyday belonging and participation, inclusive of the NGO at hand if relevant. Conducted in the local Lusoga language, interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The main themes of the study focused on definitions and articulation of citizenship, places of belonging, practices promoted by the NGO and future aspirations of the community members.

The second phase of data collection in Rubirizi district, western Uganda, was four tiered. The first and second levels involved identifying COVOID as a case study and designing research methodology with a representative of the NGO at a workshop at Makerere University in Kampala. This was followed by organising an inception workshop at the COVOID offices in Rubirizi in June 2019. It was attended by NGO staff, representatives of the communities and district leadership. The main purpose was to introduce the research project and collect preliminary data on the broad theme of citizenship.

The third and most comprehensive level involved an extended stay in the communities for three months. This was informed by lessons from the first phase on the inability of the time-restricted research exercise to realise some of the ideals of participatory research. Hence, the data collection methodology was designed with the understanding that the complexities related to change and learning in NGO encounters required both the time and skill to participate in and observe different happenings and activities that constitute everyday citizenship. Carried out in the villages of Busonga and Nyakahama in Rubirizi district, the study used a combination of multiple qualitative and participatory research methods to gather data.

These included in-depth interviews with community members (n=40) using a tool called a ladder of citizenship, key informant interviews (n=06), and focus group discussions (FGDs) (n=04) that were based on seven-day activity diaries and historical timelines. The ladder of citizenship was particularly used to illustrate individual participants' perceptions of what constitutes citizenship and how the experience of being a citizen can be improved using the imagery of climbing a ladder (see, Figure 2). A seven-day activity diary was compiled by selected members of village savings groups over the course of a week, with each participant listing, in an exercise book, the daily activities performed from the time they woke up until when they went to bed. After a week, they discussed the contents of their respective diaries in an FGD. Historical timelines were used to capture the past and current developments and milestones in the life and journeys of communities with the NGOs and other development actors.

Picture A: A female participant's ladder of citizenship characterising bad/good citizenship along the continuum of failure to educate children *(bottom rung)* to educating children up to (Makerere and Kyambogo) university level *(top rung)* in Rubirizi district.
Source: Author's field photo

Figure 2:   A sample of participants' illustrations of 'citizenship' through a ladder of citizenship *(above)* and Venn diagram *(below)*

Picture B: A female participant's Venn diagram showing multiple spaces of her belonging and participation in Namutumba district.
Source: Author's field photo

The fourth and last step was research dissemination workshops held in the two research communities and at the district headquarters. Conducted two years after the research period, in December 2021, the main aim was to share with research participants and communities the findings of the study, generate debate and seek feedback and clarifications on some of the emerging issues. More clarity was, for example, sought on why rural dwellers identified with the NGO and not the state, the progress different projects had made or failed to make, the persistence of domestic violence and so on. This material was crucial in validating findings but also in the further analysis of some of the issues emerging from the data.

Worth noting is that in both phases, document review was undertaken to collect and record information about the concept and practice of citizenship at NGO, district and national levels. For instance, to understand the case NGOs' philosophies and ideas about citizenship, I reviewed their strategic plans and related literature in both hard and soft copies, and information available on their respective websites and other online sources. District-specific information was gathered from official district profiles (eg; RoU 2016, 2017c, 2017b, 2017a). Also reviewed were official Government of Uganda documents including the 1995 Uganda Constitution (RoU 1995) and the current national development plans and blueprints (NPA 2013, 2020).

In addition, the methods were supplemented by different levels of informal and spontaneous engagement with and in everyday community activities afforded by a) my extended stay in the communities (in the case of Rubirizi district); and b) considerable experiential knowledge of the traditions and social customs of the communities. In all, I participated in a series of community activities in which localised citizenship practices – such as rotational group farming, village savings groups' meetings, community service, burial functions and community market days – were enacted. In conducting participatory research, staying and involvement in everyday community life was an important element for several reasons. First, it brought me closer to the typical everyday experiences of poverty and the shared hustles, struggles, hopes and optimism related to overcoming it. Second, it significantly contributed to the process of building a friendly and convivial atmosphere, critical for free and open interaction and the sharing of ideas in participatory research. Third, engagement in community activities was an important way of triangulating the data (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2007) to ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of findings (Lennie 2006; Lincoln et al. 2011) and minimise the bias commonly associated with qualitative and participatory research designs (Galdas 2017).

Table 2:   Data collection in two study sites

Category	Namutumba District	Rubirizi District
Villages	Isegero, Bubago, Bulongo	Busonga, Nyakahama
Individual interviews	32 (4 M, 28 F)	40 (12 M, 28 F)
FGDs	-	04
NGO management & staff	06	04
NGO Board	03	-
Participatory tools used	Storytelling, Venn diagramming, in-depth interviews	Ladder of citizenship (participation), Daily activity profile, historical timelines, in-depth interviews, FGDs
Local Gov't officials	-	02
Other informal/ participatory research activities in community	community walks, observation of homesteads, touring of livelihood projects	participation in community activities and functions: monthly village and weekly VSLA meetings sessions, communal work, funeral ceremonies, market days
Documents reviewed	ACFODE's strategic plans, Magazines, District profile, national development blueprint	COVOID strategic plans, Minutes of village meetings, District profile, national development blueprint

4.3.3   Methods of data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research has been identified as an exercise that requires methodical and rigorous methods to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. This, according to Nowell et al. (2017, p. 1), 'demonstrate[s] that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner with enough detail to enable the reader determine whether the process is credible'. Moreover, because the researcher gets immersed in and closer to research during the process of data collection and data analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2016), he/she becomes the primary instrument for analysis (Maguire and Delahunt 2017), and 'makes all the judgments about coding, categorizing, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing the data' (Starks and Trinidad 2007, p. 1376). This calls for transparency and reflexivity (Galdas 2017; Yang 2015) on the part of the researcher to ensure the credibility and believability of findings. Moreover, because participatory research often generates huge volumes of descriptive and narrative data and texts, it requires careful choice of data analysis strategies. Therefore, I chose data driven analysis methods so as to navigate and manage such large and rich sets (White et al. 2012) and ease the processes of identifying relevant themes of each community's illumination of citizenship experiences for improved interpretation and reporting.

Material for Publication III was collected in April 2017 in three villages of Namutumba district, eastern Uganda. Research data for Publications I and II

were collected between July and August 2019 in two rural villages in Rubirizi district, western Uganda. All the three publications are therefore based on empirical data and reporting. In the following section, I discuss the different methods of data analysis used in the original articles: thematic analysis (Publication I and III) and the framework approach (Publication II). I begin with a brief description of the process of data handling and management and then show the steps I followed in analysis of data.

Table 3:   Publication, study area, data used and method of analysis

Publication	Study area	Material used	Method of analysis
I	COVOID, Rubirizi district	In-depth interviews, Minutes of village meetings, participation in communal work and village meetings, FGDs, field notes	Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Clarke and Braun 2013; Maguire and Delahunt 2017)
II	COVOID, Rubirizi district	FGDs, seven-day activity diaries, participation in rotational group digging activities, observation of VSLA activities	Framework analysis (Parkinson et al. 2016; Srivastava and Thomson 2009)
III	ACFODE, Namutumba district	In-depth interviews, observation, Venn diagramming, village/homestead tours	Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Clarke and Braun 2013; Maguire and Delahunt 2017)

4.3.3.1   Thematic analysis

The first analytical method used was thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Clarke and Braun 2013; Maguire and Delahunt 2017; Nowell et al. 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2013), defined as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79). According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), its goal is to identify important and interesting patterns in the data or themes and use them to address the research or say something about an issue at hand. Thematic analysis was used in data analysis for Publications I, 'Localising SDGs in rural Uganda: Learning active citizenship through the Saemaul Undong model', and III, 'Exploring *obutyamye* as material citizenship in Busoga subregion, Uganda'.

In preparation for thematic analysis of the data sets for the two publications, I started with transcription. Data pieces were transcribed in the Runyankore (household interviews, FGDs) and Lusoga (in-depth interviews) languages in which the interviews were conducted and then translated by a language expert into English and electronically stored in a clearly named folder on my laptop secured by a strong password, and later stored in a protected storage environment provided by the University of Jyväskylä. Photocopies of village community meetings, conducted in the local Runyankore language, were kept in

a file, while my field notes, written in an exercise book in a mixture of English, Lusoga and Runyankore, were also put in a file. For Publication I, analysis of the data to identify relevant themes then roughly (and flexibly) followed the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The first step, familiarisation with the data, involved the use of computer highlights to note ideas in soft copies, which I then jotted down in a notebook. Ideas in hardcopy data pieces were identified using pen, paper and highlighter markers. This led to the next step of identifying common threads in different data sets that spoke of how the SMU model was inspiring joint citizenship efforts to deal with shared challenges and opportunities at the village level. The third step focused on searching for themes which were initially interpreted under three categories: responsible neighbourhood, hard work and citizen vigilance. The fourth step involved an ongoing process of reviewing and refining the themes to capture the process of learning active citizenship practices and activities intended to promote the inclusive development espoused by SDGs.

The fifth step involved ongoing consultations with co-author and supervisor in order to define and name the themes appropriately to ensure that they captured and told a coherent story of how the SMU model was promoting active citizenship as it localised SDGs. The sixth and last step was writing up findings by knitting together the identified themes using a combination of verbatim voices from the participants, field observations and my own analysis as a researcher and participant in community activities. In the end, the thematic analysis process enabled us to put together themes that answered the question of how the NGO was using the SMU model to localise the implementation of SDGs by reawakening the spirit of collective citizenship based on the collective slogan of 'We Can'.

Thematic data analysis for Publication III followed same steps of familiarisation with the data. The next step, that of identifying common threads in different data sets, focused on the localised conception of a citizen as *omutyamye* and citizenship as *obutyamye.* This was followed by searching for themes such as property(lessness) and (gendered) citizenship, NGOs' contributions to material acquisition and so on. The fourth and fifth steps involved reviewing and refining the themes into sub-themes of *obutyamye* as citizenship *in, for* and *with* the community, inequalities of gender and property ownership and ACFODE's efforts to strengthen *obutyamye*. The sixth and last step was knitting together the identified themes and writing up the article, using a combination of verbatim voices, local nomenclature and my own reflections and observations.

4.3.3.2   Framework analysis/approach

Material for Publication II, 'Learning economic citizenship among rural women: Village saving groups in western Uganda', was analysed using framework approach (Parkinson et al. 2016; Srivastava and Thomson 2009). First used in the health sciences, but increasingly employed across multiple disciplines (Parkinson et al. 2016), the framework approach 'involves a series of

interconnected stages that enable the researcher to move back and forth across the data until a coherent account emerges' (Ritchie and Lewis 2003, citied in Mackintosh and Sandall 2016, p. 258). The framework is considered to be 'generative and driven by the original accounts and observations of the people it is about' (Srivastava and Thomson 2009, p. 77). It is also argued that it is a 'flexible tool that can be easily adapted to generate themes' (Gale et al. 2013, p. 3) to analyse research that has specific questions, a limited time frame and a pre-designed sample of issues to study.

These features made framework analysis well suited to the aims of this study. To begin with, whereas the study was guided by the philosophy and spirit of participatory research, it had a set of pre-prepared, semi-structured questions. Data for this publication was based on FGDs, seven-day activity diaries, participation in rotational group digging activities and other community spaces, and observation of savings group activities in two villages in Rubirizi district. Data was transcribed in Runyankore, and then translated into English. Soft copies were stored in password-protected files on the computer. Pictures of notable features around households and in communities were taken using smartphones and uploaded onto the computer. A notebook containing field notes and observations was also kept.

Data analysis for this article flexibly followed the five stages proposed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) as cited by Srivastava and Thomson (2009), namely: *familiarisation, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting and mapping, and interpretation. Familiarisation* with the data commenced during field interviews and observation as it became evident that savings groups were vital in strengthening socio-material wellbeing, especially of women, who formed a slight majority of membership. Increasingly, a trail of conversations and observations in the community pointed to acquisition, financial stability and material assets as means of promoting women's status. The reflections, written down in shorthand in a field notebook, then provided the cue for the next level of identifying a thematic framework; this focused on checking and searching printouts of the data. Using highlighters, instances in which participants mentioned both clear and fuzzy ideas of economic wellbeing and learning were marked.

The next level, *charting*, involved paying close attention to sections of the data that related to the learning and changes mentioned by participants. These instances were then carefully 'sifted, charted, sorted' (Srivastava and Thomson 2009, p. 72) and given headings/sub-headings in a manner that sought to tell a coherent story about manifestations of learning economic skills among women. Finally, the stage of *mapping and interpretation* involved, first, writing/noting down and explaining broader ideas of gendered citizenship, traditions, economic livelihoods and change, and, second, making sense of what all these implied for the articulation and practice of women's economic citizenship in a rural context. To facilitate interpretation and analysis, the study zeroed in on three broad themes of learning: everyday participation, non-formal training and awareness and peer imitation.

4.4 Reflections on the methodology

4.4.1 Positionality and reflexivity

The positionality of researchers and its influence on the participatory and qualitative research process has been discussed by a number of scholars (see, Agee 2009; Ahimbisibwe et al. 2020; Muhammad et al. 2015; Takacs 2003; Tobias et al. 2013; Yang 2015). For example, while Takacs (2003, p. 27) exhorts researchers always to reflect on the important question – 'How does who you are shape what you know about the world?' – Agee (2009, p. 432) makes the critical argument that researchers should develop 'capacities to examine how their position in relation to participants influences their own roles and perspectives in the inquiry process'. In a recent study of citizenship practices in East Africa that used participatory methodology, I and my colleagues give a detailed account of and reflect on how we negotiated and navigated our complex positionality as privileged, elite members of academe to conduct participatory research in rural communities of Uganda. Among other strategies, we show how we used the native language spoken by the community, declared optimal ignorance of community issues, engaged in informal chitchat before and after interviews and courteously declined to sit on specially prepared seats for guests, opting to sit where the participant sat. These practices, we maintain, significantly reduced power gradients and created a relationship of openness, mutuality and reciprocal learning, as well as dialogue about localised citizenship (Ahimbisibwe et al. 2020).

In the sub-sections that follow, I give an account of my life experience and then reflect on how this background could have influenced my current worldview and positionality throughout the research process. I do this by reflecting on the three levels of reflexivity that emerged, namely: overall reflection on my positionality, association with NGOs and the ways in which the research process promoted reflection among research participants.

4.4.1.1 My episodic life experience and worldview

Roughly, four major episodic events have gradually contributed, to differing degrees, to shaping my perspectives on life. First, I grew up in typical peasant conditions of rural poverty and deprivation. To raise money for my education, my parents and I adopted several strategies including menial work on the family smallholding, relying on the traditional communal spirit and practice of borrowing money from neighbours, relatives and friends at no interest, and selling off part of the family land. Yet, amidst these difficulties, as a male child I was privileged to receive an education, unlike my older female siblings. Second, despite this humble background, I was enrolled in a middle-class secondary school built on the philosophy of providing poor but brilliant boys from humble Catholic families with quality, subsidised, affordable and inclusive education. Here, I met children from rich backgrounds and experienced the reality of social inequality first-hand. Glaring cases of this social gulf were evident in all aspects

of our lives, from our respective personal belongings (bedding, clothes, shoes, suitcases, pocket money, eatables), through issues of school fees payment, to personal expression and self-confidence.

However, perhaps the critical turning point was when I joined Advanced Level education and studied European History. The 1789 French Revolution and its child, Napoleon Bonaparte, and the subsequent revolutionary episodes which freed Europe from the shackles of bigotry and other obscurantist ideals, were particularly illuminating. From a poor and timid rural boy with low self esteem, I became an avid debater and keen follower of national and international current affairs. I developed a more critical and analytical perspective onto many social and political issues and became a daily reader of the independent *Daily Monitor* newspaper and keenly listened to British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio programmes, especially the *Focus on Africa Magazine*. Third, I joined Makerere University as an undergraduate student and later as a junior lecturer on the Bachelor of Adult and Community Education (BACE) programme. During this period, I came into contact with and developed a passionate interest in critical theories and arguments about oppression, marginalisation and inequality. Elucidated clearly in Paulo Freire's (1972) radical philosophy, these notions resonated with my prior life experience. Moreover, critical theories presented the *raison d'etre* of adult learning as championing the liberation of marginalised sections of society by challenging dogmatic structures of oppression and false consciousness.

Fourth, and consequently, as a young academic, my belief in the emancipatory power of education and learning was strengthened. I developed a strong interest in the broad disciplines of philosophy, political economy, gender studies, participatory learning and transformation. In all, my commitment to and deployment of participatory learning and research methodology crystallised from these life (personal and academic) experiences.

4.4.1.2   Managing privilege and power

The above narration gives a snapshot of the position I carried into the research as a person who grew through an unprivileged experience of rural life to become a privileged, male, elite academic, heavily leaning towards a critical, emancipatory education and research paradigm. At a personal level, this positionality has strongly influenced not only my pre-understandings (Thirsk and Clark 2017) of the research communities but also 'shaped the resulting knowledge construction' (Graeme and Mandawe 2017, p. 3). For example, drawing on my outlook as a university academic burning with revolutionary ideals about the transformative potential of learning, I chose a participatory methodology to conduct this study. At the same time, I remained reflexively attentive to the limitations of achieving some of the ideals and goals, given the context of the participants.

This conscious self-awareness was handy throughout the research process. At the risk of sounding as if romanticising my research encounter, my previous life experience, coupled with long-term professional practice and knowledge of the local languages and other social customs of the research areas, made it

relatively easier to 'immerse' myself in the community. For example, on the basis of childhood experience, it was not difficult to participate in community activities such as digging, community work, market days and funeral ceremonies. These were activities which, in addition to providing moments of (re)learning, also rekindled fond childhood memories of agrarian practices that supported our livelihoods and leisure. Years of elite, urbanised and individualistic lifestyle had replaced these practices, which in many ways formed the bedrock of community citizenship as I grew up. These experiences were vital as they also enabled me to maintain professional distance and critically reflect on their implications for understanding citizenship as a learning process.

Aside from enhancing my *(right)* positionality, this activity, known in Ankole as *okutoondora* (stripping off the outermost layer of the ripened bananas to get the fresh fruit), rekindled nostalgic memories of this popular livelihood source, which raised a big part of the school fees for my education. Source: Author's field photo

Figure 3:   Author's community 'immersion' and learning during participatory research

At the community level, my reflexive positionality generated moments and patterns that encouraged participants to reflect on and (re-)articulate their everyday practices and struggles both to meet survival needs and change their households and communities by participating in spaces of immediate belonging and identity. As discussed in the chapters that follow, these spaces were more localised and nuanced to existing material conditions of the people than focused on the state. Whereas I cannot claim with certainty that the participatory research experience produced profound change, in my judgement there were visible moments of reflection, learning and debate, and a sincere exchange of ideas. Some of these moments are discussed in the subsection that follows, where I reflect on the successes and failures of the methodology.

4.4.1.3   Working through NGOs: Challenges and opportunities

As already noted, the research process involved our working with and through established NGOs, which entailed different levels of interaction before, during and after the study. For example, we established a working relationship with the case NGOs and attended various office and field activities with NGO staff. During the study, our field guides often introduced us variously as *'abas(h)omesa'* (teachers) or *'abagenyi'* (visitors) from COVOID and ACFODE, respectively. Therefore, it is possible to say that, in the eyes of the participants, we were no different from the NGO workers and visitors that they usually received, which could have influenced our conversations and responses. To minimise this challenge, we did an extensive introduction in which we clearly explained that we were neither workers nor special guests of the NGOs but independent researchers from Makerere University and that our interest was in having an open conversation about the things they do as people living in that village. Moreover, our research questions started with general conversations about the main theme of citizenship (*obutyamye* and *obutuuze)*, practices, and institutions that strengthened citizenship, and only slowly moved to specific NGO-related questions and probes.

4.4.2   Research ethics

Ethical tensions exist in participatory research in regard to the incorporation of formalised, conventional research procedures to its implementation. In what follows, I discuss the ethical issues related to confidentiality and anonymity, participant compensation and consent seeking, and highlight how they were negotiated in the implementation of this study.

The suitability and application of Western-based and influenced research ethics, regulatory approaches and protocols within the contexts of developing countries has been widely debated (Araali 2011; Jegede 2009; Morris 2015). There is an emerging concern that the perceived bureaucratisation of ethics (Morris 2015) not only runs counter to the philosophy and spirit of participatory research (Ahimbisibwe et al. 2020) but also to traditional social African practices of trustworthiness and sincerity, and contextual challenges related to the orality of

the poor (Ahimbisibwe et al. 2020; Araali 2011). For example, the official ethical clearance and practicalities of this study were determined at two levels with different and overlapping demands. At the national level, all research clearance in Uganda goes through three stages: first, the ethical clearance by an appropriate ethical committee (in this case The AIDS Support Organisation [TASO] and Makerere University School of Social Sciences ethical committee for the two respective research projects); second, research clearance by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST); and, finally, security clearance by the Office of the President of the Republic of Uganda.

These levels place different bureaucratic demands on different stages of research implementation, including research tool design, compensation of participants, consent seeking and many others, demands that may run counter to the ideals of participatory research. In addition, there were also demands by international funders that required financial accountability systems that were rather inconsistent with and unfamiliar to a largely informal, non-literate environment, such as asking for receipts from *boda boda* riders. Seeking consent, compensating participants, managing confidentiality and ensuring the anonymity of participants become intricately entangled in the contextual realities of the people in rural settings. These tend to be characterised by a culture of orality, the long-held view that appending a signature to a paper may lead to being defrauded and the potential of exhibiting a condescending elitist attitude, one of not trusting the courtesy provided by the participants. Therefore, reflexive researchers ought to find creative ways of managing these contradictions that balance the demands of research ethics but also respect the context of the participants.

At the implementation level, the research team made efforts not to appear out-of-the-ordinary or sophisticated during the research process. For example, we dressed unobtrusively and used the common means of community transport, the *boda boda* motorcycles. We walked in the villages to conduct household interviews and participated in various community activities. Further, we used culturally sensitive practices to negotiate and manage ethical issues of consent, anonymity and compensation of participants (Ahimbisibwe et al. 2020; Araali 2011; Jegede 2009). To begin with, we carried a modest compensation fee (approximately €1.25) for household interviews which we gave at the end of the interaction. This was not done in the formal manner of payment for a service but as part of traditional visiting practices based on reciprocity, encapsulated in the saying *mutuure niyo murongoore* (lit.: one good turn deserves another). Moreover, we also made modest financial contributions ranging between €100 and €150 to the projects being run by self-help village groups that participated in FGDs. Further, signing the consent form was often done at the end after a deeper, trusting, relaxed, and convivial relationship had been built, rather than at the beginning of the interaction.

Usually, the interaction began with self-introduction by the researchers and participants. This was followed by a brief verbal outline of the research topic, followed by an inquiry about whether the participant consented to being part of

the study. At the end of the interview, it would be much easier for the participant to sign the voluminous consent forms without hesitation, and/or even bothering to read through several pages of it. Participants also did not find any issue with being anonymised as they often asked us to note down their telephone numbers or requested photo moments with the research team after both the individual and community interactions. This level of openness could have been due to several factors, such as our coming through an NGO that they had worked with and trusted, having local guides known in the community and managing positionality by, for example, speaking the language and trying not to appear distinctly different from them, and our spontaneous willingness to do what we found the participant doing and participating in community activities.

4.4.3   Successes and limitations

According to Cornwall and Jewkes (1995), participatory research is more of an attitude or approach than a series of techniques, implying that the success or failure in achieving its objectives is affected as much by the researchers' 'attitudes as by their training' (p. 1671). As already mentioned, I was trained in critical theories that emphasise the role of adult education and learning as liberative and transformative for the marginalised and vulnerable. In choosing to use participatory methods of data collection, I was aware that the realisation of its ideals hinged greatly on practical and contextual realities in the research communities but also on my positionality as a researcher. In the ensuing discussion, I look at the instances of success and the limitations encountered during its implementation, then touch on the ways in which the limitations were negotiated to minimise bias and strengthen the rigour and trustworthiness of the findings.

It is not my contention to suggest here that this study contributed to both the short-term and long-term empowerment, transformation, learning and knowledge co-production envisaged by participatory research (Pain 2004; Williams 2005). Rather, I intend to argue that there were observable moments and patterns during the interactions within the communities that can genuinely be characterised as gradual change and learning. In the case of this study, this was manifested in intra and inter-personal debates, back and forth reflections and changes in arguments, claims of self-awareness and visualisation of new aspirations among the research participants. These moments happened during group and individual participatory research exercises, conversations and interviews.

During the drawing of the ladder of citizenship, for example, some participants, unprompted, pulled out books and started to note down and copy the finished ladder, often drawn on the house floor, a table or any other hard surface. In some instances, participants insisted on not erasing the ladder because they needed to use it to teach and inspire other family members, particularly school-going children when they returned in the evening. Similarly, other participants claimed that the ladder had inspired them and vowed to work harder to ascend the highest rung identified, while others acknowledged that

they had not reflectively thought about their level of citizenship and contribution to the community.

Second, during FGDs based on the seven-day activity diaries, participants pointed out an unequal division of labour related to gender and class. For instance, there was general consensus during group discussions that, given the activities they had listed in their diaries, women did more work than men, while others maintained that their daily subsistence work was more laborious and tiring than that of educated elites in formal offices. Third, in drawing the Venn diagrams, participants also variously commented on how the whole exercise had helped 'open up my brain' to appreciate the significance of the different institutions to which they belong and contribute as citizens. Overall, the openness of the environment in which research took place, plus my extended stay in the community and resulting participation in several activities, created a rapport conducive to mutual, relaxed and reciprocal co-learning encounters, and offered opportunities for participants to speak, ask and share their views.

The potential of participatory research to produce consequences that run counter to its avowed ideals of promoting co-learning, empowerment and so on has been debated by several scholars (e.g., Castleden et al. 2010; Lennie 2006; Muhammad et al. 2015). For example, Lennie (2006) has highlighted the ability of participatory research to produce unintended disempowering effects due to factors related to power and knowledge differences among those involved. Equally, Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) maintain that participatory research is certainly not a simpler alternative, and that working with local people is far from easy as communities may see little of interest and/or no benefit in the knowledge being generated. This, they argue, may create an unhelpful and cynical perception that research participation is only useful to the outside researchers and not the community.

While I did not meet any notable challenges related to community nonchalance and cynicism, as a researcher I kept asking myself how much or to what extent the study was contributing to processes of learning, change, transformation and empowerment among research participants, as anticipated by the interpretivist and emancipatory paradigms. Learning, change and empowerment are arguably long-term processes that cannot be said to result from time-limited research encounters like the one I was conducting, which was, moreover, taking place in restrictive socioeconomic and political environments.

Even though I employed participatory tools, stayed in communities, and interacted and engaged with community experiences as much as possible, it was not the intention of this study to promote the kind of transformation based on political agitation and change. However, what I can attest to, and which has already been reported, is that the methodology gave birth to reflection on citizenship as lived, everyday experiences of being useful with and to others in the community. It could be conclusively argued that these bits of reflection, along with the practice of 'letting the community take a lead in the research process' (Omondi 2020, p. 11), contributed to spontaneous learning and perhaps, in some way, to incremental awareness and change among the research participants. On

my part, the research encounters prompted constant reflection on the contradictions and tensions embedded in the application of critical learning theories and the political agenda of participatory research in constrained environments. They also provided time to continue reflecting on the kinds of citizenship that predominantly welfarist NGO interventions are able to promote under the prevailing circumstances.

5 FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present a summary of the major findings of the study contained in the three independent publications. First, I outline the publications and their main arguments. Second, in response to the principal research question, I discuss the kinds of citizenship that emerge in civil society spaces in rural Uganda and outline their implications for development initiatives that aim to foster citizenship in constrained and illiberal settings.

5.1 A synopsis of publications

In this sub-chapter, each publication and its contributions are summarised.

Publication I: Ahimbisibwe, F Karembe and Kontinen Tiina (2021). Localising SDGs in Rural Uganda: Learning Active Citizenship Through the Saemaul Undong Model. In Nhamo Godwell, Muchaiteyo Togo and Kaitano Dube (Eds.), *Sustainable Development Goals for Society Vol. 1: Selected Topics of Global Relevance* **(pp. 37-49). Cham: Springer**

In this chapter, published in an edited book on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we examine the ways in which a Korea-based community development model, Saemaul Undong (SMU), is being implemented by COVOID in western Uganda to promote the realisation of global SDGs. Through a process the NGO calls the 'localisation of SDGs', rural dwellers are mobilised into different forms of active citizenship premised on the three principles of the model: namely, diligence, self-reliance and cooperation. The chapter argues that the domestication of the model was aided by the extent to which it resonated with both the context of the local population and the state's narrative challenging citizens to take responsibility for their own development.

　　We draw on sociological theories of the travel of global ideas (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996) and the domestication of worldwide policy trends (Alasuutari 2009; Alasuutari and Qadir 2013) to illustrate how SMU ideology was translated

into local nomenclature and practice to inspire moments of visible change in people's livelihoods and citizenship practices. We show how the model's nomenclature, ideology and principles were translated into the local language and practices of the area, giving it a local complexion as a strategy capable of assisting people out of poverty. The domestication started by translating the name from Saemaul Undong to '*Samwiri Odongo*' and the spirit of 'we can do' to '*nitubaasa*'. This, in the community sense, promoted and reinvigorated ideas and notions of learning active citizenship, manifested in the concerted way the villagers acted on their issues.

Findings further show that the three pillars were translated into actionable deeds: diligence into hard work and frugality; cooperation into active participation in community affairs; and self-reliance into responsible, useful and confident belonging in the community. In practical terms, these ideals manifested in trends and patterns of phased shifts from mud and wattle houses to more permanent and improved homes, passing bylaws against certain practices and behaviours, joint community service projects and negotiations leading to services being supplied by the district leadership. We concluded that a model of this nature, with the capacity to build momentum and promote learning to be active citizens, has the potential to reduce the debilitating impact of poverty. However, we also cautioned that, despite the apparent success of SMU in promoting active citizenship in areas where it is implemented, its impact remains limited and scattered across time and space, and it lacked the capacity to address systemic inequalities that characterise and constrain citizen-state relations in most developing countries.

Publication II: Ahimbisibwe, F. Karembe and Ndidde, N. Alice (2022). Learning economic citizenship among rural women: Village saving groups in western Uganda. In Holma Katariina and Kontinen Tiina (Eds.), *Learning, Philosophy and African Citizenship* **(pp. 155–176). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.**

This chapter explores the ways in which women learn knowledge, skills and attitudes of economic citizenship, defined as economic self-reliance, which strengthens women's citizenship status in traditional settings in Uganda. It argues that, through participation in VSLAs, women acquire diverse capacities that enable them to become economically and socially empowered and useful in the community. Drawing on notions of participatory learning (Mayoux 1998; Pretty 1995), we examine the dynamics of learning economic citizenship whereby rural women collaboratively acquire and implement skills and knowledge from their membership in the savings schemes. Presenting VSLAs as hubs of citizenship activities, we make an argument that saving groups are primary arenas in which communities can associate, learn and enact practices and skills that strengthen their economic livelihoods, thereby reinforcing their status as citizens.

We report findings based on a mix of participatory research techniques involving FGDs, seven-day activity diaries and observation of weekly meetings of the groups. We show three ways in which women collaboratively learn economic citizenship skills as everyday participation, non-formal training by an NGO and peer learning and imitation. We argue that in a country where the gap between the legal status and real practice of women's empowerment among rural women (Ndidde et al. 2020; Tamale 2020) is still wide, spaces such as VSLAs provide a critical avenue to the realisation of women's economic citizenship at family and local levels. Citing cases from the fieldwork, the chapter further elucidates how economic empowerment strengthens agency when women and men come together and learn to save money, contribute towards communal ceremonies and aspire to leadership positions in the community.

We also grappled with the question of the kind of women's empowerment that matters, and how it can be learned in poor communities to promote citizenship. We concluded that although VSLAs were meeting women's basic and strategic needs and generally promoted gender interdependence, this was not an even and uniform experience across households in the community. We therefore proposed that more effort be put into consistent training and bylaws to address attitudes and behaviours that still linger on and militate against women's full realisation of citizenship.

Publication III: Ahimbisibwe, F. Karembe (2022). Exploring *obutyamye* as material citizenship in Busoga subregion, Uganda. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (in press)

In this publication, I draw on the ideas of Naila Kabeer (2006) and Lorenzo Baglioni (2016) to explore the preponderance of material assets and resources in the construction and conception of citizenship in Busoga subregion, eastern Uganda. Contributing to the emergent debates over multiple conceptualisations of citizenship, I adopt the notion of *obutyamye,* the local term for citizenship, to illustrate how people's description of a citizen is tied up with what people have and draw on to eke a living. I contend that whilst *obutyamye* connotes a broad understanding of citizenship as being *in, for* and *with* other community members, it is also inherently unequal in terms of gender and those without property. Findings showed that ACFODE's livelihood interventions in rural Busoga focused on training members in livelihood interventions that improved ways of farming and led to better yields and incomes. Second, these interventions were implemented through village-based groups that are built on communal values of mutual and reciprocal belonging. Third, the interventions strengthened the capacity of households, particularly women, to acquire properties of their own and, consequently, enhanced their citizenship status.

In conclusion, I argue that the articulated notion of material citizenship is not based on rigid and inflexible community rules of engagement but rather on mutual coexistence among people who share similar interests by way of their physical residence. I suggest that, given the limited capacity of NGOs, it is only

the state that can decisively transform the persistent systemic structures that nurture, nourish and reproduce inequality.

5.2 Understanding, learning and practices of citizenship in constrained settings

In this section I discuss how the findings address the three main research questions. Put together, the three publications suggest that in the studied rural communities in Uganda, citizenship and the process of learning citizenship are localised to spaces of immediate belonging, identity and routine participation and cooperation. The localised conception of citizenship is analysed within the context of both the historical and current state-citizen relationship, which is, paradoxically, marked by fear, mistrust and resignation on the one hand, and appreciation of the security and peace offered by the state on the other.

5.2.1 Material, gendered and active conceptions of citizenship

The first research questions concerned the kinds of citizenship that emerge in local communities as they participate in development interventions promoted by NGOs through self-organised groups. The three publications illustrate three ways in which localised forms of citizenship are evident: 1) in local words used to define and describe a citizen and citizenship; 2) in the activeness of community members when it comes to matters of shared interest; and 3) in gendered perceptions of being a citizen.

First, local words for citizen/citizenship are *omutyamye/obutyamye* in Lusoga and *omutuuze/obutuuze* in Runyankore. The words emphasise the foundational importance of material resources to being a citizen in the community. Literally translated, the terms mean 'the one seated' or 'the act of being seated, residing, living or staying in a place'. At the heart of a community, *'seatedness'* (Ndidde et al. 2020, p. 110) is the possession of physical assets, especially land, the principal source of livelihood for rural smallholders. In Publication III, I illustrate how permanence of residence is the basic foundation of being a citizen *in, for* and *with* the community, underpinned by values of reciprocity and equality that are deeply rooted, communal African ways of organising society (Benda 2012; Kelsall 2011).

In most rural African settings, citizens traditionally played and fulfilled their roles and obligations towards each other in a reciprocal and mutually beneficial manner. Thus, small communities, rather than the universalised state (see, Fine and Harrington 2004; Kelsall 2011) provide the immediate spaces of belonging, identity and interaction. Subsequently, villages, places of worship and extended kinship provide the loci in which people organise for the purposes of addressing shared socio-cultural contingencies such as bereavement, voluntary rotational labour, saving money, weddings and so on (Avoseh 2001; Jones 2009;

Musinguzi et al. 2020). More recent studies show that rural citizens in East Africa have added NGOs to the list of spaces of everyday interaction because of the crucial role they play in materially enabling them to function as good members of society (Holma and Kontinen 2022) where the idea of belonging is on relatively equal terms, even though socioeconomic differences may exist.

Second, the activeness of localised citizenship was manifested in both civil society organisations and personally generated activities in which community members engage to improve their living conditions. Active citizenship as conceptualised in Publications I and II does not emphasise the normativity of claim making, popular with liberal notions of citizenship. Rather, it illustrates the resilience of ordinary citizens in overcoming and finding means of dealing with the constraints of poverty and the dearth of state-provided social services. It also manifests in the ensuing agency learned through everyday hustles to achieve both immediate survival and long-term aspirations at household and community levels. Such agency, considered by some scholars to legitimate rather than challenge conformist politics (Biesta 2009; Schugurensky 2006), is in this context vital for people engaged in routine and enduring hustles to find the resources and means that sustain their existence. In ordinary life, people's livelihoods are dependent on tilling small pieces of land to grow food, labouring to pay school fees and meet medical bills, and taking care of family needs and community obligations. In fulfilling most of these obligations, citizens rely not on the state but on their own efforts and, increasingly, on NGO interventions that build on what they have. Ultimately, in situations where membership of the state does not guarantee either a decent living or the right to dissent, efforts that enhance personal abilities to address these pressing life concerns are seen as a godsend.

Third, in Publications II and III, I explain how NGOs' interventions are supporting women to learn vital skills of economic citizenship and gradually changing their own and the community's perception of women's status. Village savings groups, largely dominated by women, were reported to be instrumental in empowering women beyond economic means, boosting their confidence and community leadership acumen and furthering peer learning. In most rural areas of developing countries, women are central in the provision and maintenance of family and community welfare, yet they remain the face of poverty and vulnerability (Tamale 2020). Moreover, even though the study targeted active participants in NGO and community activities, the gendered nature of citizenship was apparent in several ways. As discussed in Publication III, local definitions of citizenship replicated universalistic conceptions (Munday 2009; Walby 1994) and implied, for example, that 'women do not have the same access to citizenship as men' (Walby 1994, p. 379). The primacy attached to property ownership and traditional marriage practices strengthened the conceptions of male citizenship.

Further, the two publications note the persistence of unequal gender division and distribution of household labour, as well as the persistence of different traditions and cultural beliefs (Bird and Espey 2010) that deny female children life-changing opportunities. At the same time, while there has been

increased legislation, awareness creation and affirmative action by state and civil society, women continue to occupy subordinate positions at the household level and to bear the brunt of poverty and inefficient state provisions in education, health and agriculture. Consequently, women's dominance of NGO antipoverty programmes owes much to the gendered division of labour and the magnitude of the responsibility they shoulder at household and community levels. Their participation, is therefore, a means to acquire knowledge, skills and resources that, as the findings show, not only enable them to fulfil socially ascribed roles and obligations but also improve their citizenship agency and status.

5.2.2   Citizenship learning as participation in civil society spaces

The second research question sought to explore how citizenship is learned and practiced in people's everyday participation in civil society spaces. In Publications I and II, the dynamics of how learning overlaps and intersects with different forms of citizenship observed during the study are explored. The publications show how community members acquire the knowledge and skills to implement what NGOs train them to do. Using non-formal models of training but also drawing on community members' informal ways of organising and learning, ACFODE and COVOID provided training in several livelihood options to build communities' resilience to poverty and marginalisation.

To begin with, the NGOs provided content that not only resonated with what people possess but also intertwined with and strengthened people's understanding of what it means to be citizen in the community. Improved agricultural systems, gender relations, the formation and leadership of self-help groups, improved farming and post-harvest handling methods, the importance of working together and an emphasis on the education of children formed the core of the non-formal training sessions provided by the case NGOs. Second, the training sessions took place in the communities and involved the use of gardens, role models and field visits to demonstrate in practical ways how certain knowledge could be implemented. Third, knowledge was instilled using simple demonstrations, examples and symbolism familiar to the community. As a consequence, there was visible application of knowledge and skills in the two research sites in the shape of uniformly serried and spaced gardening in Namutumba district and the gradual adoption of the practice of thinning banana plantations following the symbolism of *nyina-omuhara-omwijukuru* (Runyankore: mother-daughter-granddaughter) in Rubirizi district. These modest practical interventions were reported to have resulted in improved quantity and quality of yields and, despite unstable crop prices, better and competitive markets.

A plantation thinned according to the symbolism of mother-daughter-granddaughter in Busonga village, Rubirizi district.
Source: Author's field photo

A household garden of maize and vegetables intercropped in rows in Isegero village, Namutumba district.
Source: Author's field photo

Figure 4:   Rural dwellers' implementation NGO livelihood knowledge

These findings are pertinent to understanding processes of learning citizenship and change in rural contexts, and resonate with arguments advanced by Holma and her colleagues (2018). In their view, NGO training based on the workshop model and promoting abstract notions such as 'accountability', 'good governance' and 'democracy' may alienate people and, for instance, make it 'more difficult for women to abandon their domestic chores, children, and work in the fields in order to be able to participate' (2018, p. 22). Besides, as I explain in this thesis, civic competences are loathed by the Ugandan state. Working through village groups, the NGOs' emphasis on contextualised knowledge and skills resonated with the material living conditions of the participants and, in modest ways, assisted the communities to find solutions to pressing challenges. Moreover, the non-formal training triggered a range of collaborative ways of learning that linked knowledge with action customised to the prevailing ways of living, with a view to improving and not radically changing them.

Further, the three publications report that NGO interventions promoted habits of learning to do positive things. Peer-to-peer imitation, healthy positive competition, the we-can-do spirit and the notion of *obutyamye* strengthened citizens' capacities for learning, frugality and saving, joint decision-making and gradual change in the communities studied. A male participant in Rubirizi narrated how COVOID taught the village many things, such as 'how you can look after livestock, how to expand social capital and friendship so as to learn and copy something helpful to your life'. Cases of positive changes were reported in both research sites. In both research sites it was also rare to find a household that did not have basic sanitation facilities or maintain a backyard vegetable garden and rear some animals and poultry that acted as sources of diversified income to cater for emergency cash needs, such as sickness or school fees. These modest and incremental changes were visibly shaping citizenship agency and renewing hope and optimism for the future within the context of state profligacy and absence.

5.2.3 Implications for citizenship-strengthening in constrained settings

The third research question explored the implications that can be drawn from NGO interventions to strengthen citizenship in constrained settings. In the three publications, I have illustrated that addressing citizens' material needs is foundational for building different forms of agency, albeit on a small scale. In the case of this study, agency is better achieved in spaces of immediate belonging where citizens learn multiple skills and 'positive' habits from the NGOs' presence and interventions in the community. Moreover, unprobed, citizens did not seem to mention or talk about state actors such as the parish chief, government extension workers or subcounty chairperson. Rather, frequently and spontaneously, they spoke fondly of the NGOs, their extension workers and trainers and, in the case of COVOID, the executive director.

Several reasons can be advanced to explain this. First, NGOs socialise citizens to see and treat the state as merely an enabler and not a provider of services, maintaining that they are there to support the state to fight poverty.

Implicitly, as reported in Publication I, NGOs strengthen the narrative of *you-start-addressing-your-own-problems-and-government-finds-you-where-you-have-reached*. This narrative, also popular with state actors, challenges citizens to make claims on themselves by asking what they can and must do to better their own living conditions instead of making claims on the government. Second, an explanation may be found by turning to separate arguments made by scholars such as Tapscott (2021) and Jones (2009) on the relationship citizens enjoy with the state in Uganda. In arbitrarily governed Uganda, Rebecca Tapscott maintains, citizens seem to be aware of the lurking threat of the state, which is capable of unpredictably turning violent, and therefore they regularly self-police to 'negotiate the resulting systems of uncertainty' (Tapscott 2021, p. 196). Or perhaps, as in the community of Oledai, eastern Uganda, citizens in the two districts thought of the state in the same way as the occasional but sometimes destructive dry-season rains (Jones 2009). When citizens experience, perceive and internalise the state in this way, it starts to be less significant in fulfilling their material life needs, leading to the prominence of NGOs and village associations in providing solutions to rural dwellers.

Against this backdrop, village savings groups were identified in both research sites to be the most important spaces of routine interaction, belonging, identification and economic empowerment. They were claimed to be behind the observable patterns of improvement in socio-material aspects of the communities and as spaces for peer-to-peer learning, for grooming leadership and for abandoning negative practices like wastefulness and extravagance, self-pity, laziness, gender-based violence, drunkenness and so on. In cases like SMU, where the village got a water connection from the state national water body and a grader from the district to open up the road, it was more through lobbying than outright advocacy.

Notwithstanding emerging agency and decent modes of living, it is crucial to remain cautious when understanding citizenship and change in civil society spaces. This study is not an attempt to project civil society spaces as profoundly impacting on and transforming systemic and structural impediments to the full realisation of citizenship rights and obligations. It is indeed the state that is legally and structurally obligated to address deep-rooted constraints at local and national levels that cannot be transformed by and through the limited capacities of village groups and NGO interventions, which also remain scattered in different places. Moreover, it can be argued that by working towards addressing some of the issues of socio-material poverty, NGOs in Uganda intentionally or unintentionally produce a similar situation as that in Nigeria. According to Smith (2022), in Nigeria, ordinary citizens' ingenuity, improvisation and everyday hustle masks their profound disappointment with the government's failure and official dysfunction. Yet, through their practice, citizens reinforce 'the very inequalities and injustices that struggling Nigerians most lament' (Smith 2022, p. 2). In all, although the publications illustrate the kinds of incremental changes and learning that are critical in the everyday lives and practices of citizenship,

they also point out that profound and systemic obstacles can and should be meaningfully tackled by the state.

6 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Discussions

In this section, I return to the three research questions I asked in the Introduction. These were: What kinds of citizenship emerge in NGO-led development among rural dwellers in Uganda? How is citizenship learned and practiced in people's everyday participation in civil society spaces in rural Uganda? What implications can we draw from the kinds of citizenship identified in pro-poor development interventions in constrained settings? I discuss the findings of the study by reflecting on these questions when analysing the kinds of citizen agency, learning and participation that NGO community development initiatives can birth and foster. This is against the backdrop of prevailing public discourse that is, on the one hand, cynical about and resigned to the state's (in)capacity to provide solutions and, on the other, appreciative of the peace and stability it provides. I argue, however, that within the purview of these views, grassroots development enables the exercise of certain kinds of citizenship as incremental change in material living conditions, although not as dissent and advocacy.

6.1.1 Citizen agency: material wellbeing and self-reliance

Most literature on civil society and development treats citizen agency as the voice and ability to influence decisions in a democratic polity (Bifulco 2013; Carant 2017; Zanello and Maassen 2011). The citizen agency reported and discussed in this study, however, did not manifest in 'activities of people that participate at the social and political life… to influence the decision-making process' (Zanello and Maassen 2011, p. 366) at the macro level. Nor was it associated with struggles for political participation, democracy, justice, human rights, freedom, accountability and equality – struggles which are, undoubtedly, prevalent in Uganda. Rather, agency in the areas studied manifested as an 'increase in the ability to make change in one's environment' (Holma and Kontinen 2020b, p. 17) at household

and village levels. This agency could be discerned in reported and observable capabilities to improve material wellbeing and reduced worry about finding the money to educate children, access medical care and meet routine survival expenses. Several studies conducted in rural Uganda point to the presence of similar agency where state absence and inefficiency catapult rural dwellers into cultivating their agency as citizens to handle multiple problems and concerns.

For example, in his book, *Beyond the State in Rural Uganda*, Ben Jones (2009) recounts the progress achieved in Oledai village in eastern Uganda, where the state was visibly absent. As he writes,

> Villagers operate in a constrained environment, one of limited opportunities where there is little overlap between what is written about development in rural Uganda and the actual experience of what it is to live in the countryside. Instead, many significant changes belong to logics, structures and practices that have a different provenance. Customary and religious institutions define the parameters for social action. In Oledai, as in much of the world, life is organised around a more disparate set of spaces that nonetheless continue to promise the possibility of change. (Jones 2009, p. 165)

Jones' view is shared by King (2015) who studied civil society efforts to promote citizen participation and democratisation in western Uganda. Her findings suggested that 'within state governance spaces that operate according to an informal, neo-patrimonial system' (p. 753), citizen participation would be better enhanced not by promoting notions of good governance but through local savings and producer associations which would 'take rural communities closer to linking representation with social justice' (ibid., p. 754).

Similarly, Lister (1998), who studied the process of community development in Northern Ireland, found that its crux was not solely about what the disadvantaged communities achieved in practical terms. It was also about how members of that community were involved 'in working for change and the impact this involvement can then have on those individuals' capacity to act as citizens' (Lister 1998, p. 229). So, by contributing to modest and gradual improvements in grassroots levels of material wellbeing in the study locations of this thesis, the NGOs also triggered moments of continuous learning and change based on peer competition and support. For example, during the study, participants reported on community members replacing wastefulness, laziness and profligacy with frugality, diligence, and joint planning and saving. When I went back to the two research villages in Rubirizi district to disseminate the findings, two years later, in December 2021, I found that this agency and momentum had continued apace. More new homes had been erected, while some, at different stages of construction in 2019, had tiled floors and other forms of 'modern' finishing. Further, village rotational farming groups had formed a cooperative company which jointly and competitively marketed their bananas. The group was also making wine, hence adding value to the bananas, although the market for this particular product remained a concern.

6.1.2   Learning citizenship: negotiating the constraints in self-chosen spaces

Recent reports by UNESCO (UIL 2020, 2022; UNESCO 2016) give detailed accounts of how lifelong learning and sustainable development goals are achievable through the promotion of active citizenship, broadly understood to encompass living dignified and decent lives and tackling issues of poverty, climate change, gender, justice, equity, unemployment, violence and so on (UNESCO 2016). This understanding interlinks lifelong learning for the marginalised with claiming, asserting and achieving multiple rights 'regardless of political regions and modes of government, or environment' (UIL 2022, p. 113). This conception suggests, like the findings of this thesis show, that active citizenship emerges and is learned in the course of multiple efforts and strategies routinely deployed by the poor to support livelihoods and tackle everyday survival challenges collectively and mutually. Continuous learning, therefore, hinges on daily and equal participation on account of being physically resident in the community.

Moreover, the presence of NGOs in the communities seems to have become a significant part of what people do, think, learn and achieve as citizens. While community members belong, pay allegiance to and participate in diverse social, ethnic, religious and political groups and institutions (Holma and Kontinen 2020b), they largely credited their modest material improvements to the knowledge, skills and cooperation acquired through NGO livelihood interventions and associations. Thus, trajectories of citizenship that emerge in combined NGO and small-scale spaces of everyday belonging and participation can be said to constitute the learning of 'citizenship as a gradual process of participation' (Holma et al. 2018, p. 220), shaped by the realisation that citizens' dissent and clamour is not only perilous but also prone to manipulative patronage.

Further, in contexts where there is no existential threat to citizens' collective livelihoods, rural citizens are less likely to engage with active agitation against the state. For example, a comparative study of service delivery protests by Mbazira (2013, p. 265) established that, unlike in Uganda, protests in South Africa 'are usually well organised and normally planned at open public meetings', although he does not clearly state the reasons for poor organisation of protests in Uganda. Katusiimeh (2015), however, attributes the near absence of civil disobedience in the dysfunctional Ugandan polity to citizens' fear of the vengeful state machinery and the brutality it visits on those who express dissent through strikes, protests, demonstrations and riots.

> They [citizens] say those actions are too dangerous, as people who have repeatedly engaged in such protests end up losing their lives or getting blacklisted and are then unable to benefit from other desirable government programs.… Some participants expressed fear at being labelled enemies of the state. (2015, p. 96)

In such circumstances, learning to be and act as citizens is likely to happen in 'spaces that citizens themselves shape and choose' (Cornwall 2002) than those created by or associated with the state. These spaces where voluntary and

sometimes obligatory community activities take place, 'help people to develop as citizens' (Lister 1998, p. 231) as they participate and contribute on relatively equal terms. Grassroots development, therefore, translates into learning and action wherein daily experiences become the curriculum; peers, the teacher; community, the school; farmers' gardens, the classrooms; daily hustles and challenges, the examination; and achievement, the certificate. In this regard, several participants often claimed that since they started interacting with and participating in NGO programmes 'something in us changed', 'our brains opened' and 'we are no longer the same'.

Some critical scholars brand this as the depoliticisation of development and argue that such programmes legitimate rather than radically transform embedded power structures (for these debates see, Banks 2020; Dagnino 2010, 2016; Gaynor 2011; Hammett 2018; Rahman 2006; Sakue-Collins 2020). However, on the basis of empirical findings, these efforts can neither be seen nor dismissed as meek surrender to self-pity and total resignation in the face of survival difficulties in a state that is capable of dishing out unpredictable and overlapping doses of reward and punishment. While NGOs in Uganda may not protect vulnerable citizens from the overstretching and controlling hand of the state, they do – at least in the case of this study – minimise the pain of poverty and helplessness arising out of state failure and inefficiency. These kinds of organising in and by civil society, I opine, provide critical relief to poor and marginalised citizens facing individual and collective pain and helplessness in postcolonial states like Uganda, even if it remains scattered and localised to particular settings.

6.1.3 Why citizens (dis)engage in Uganda: cynicism, fear, patronage and hope

Up to this point, I have attempted to illustrate the kinds of agency, learning and participation that emerge in civil society spaces. I have illustrated how this kind of citizenship is more attuned to solving material and survival needs than promoting dissent and advocacy against non-performing state institutions. In what follows I bring the above arguments into dialogue with different accounts of why citizens choose to (dis)engage with the state the way they do.

From the prevailing public perception and insights from this study, it is plausible to claim that to an ordinary citizen, the Ugandan state manifests in four main ways. First, it is more often seen through regular images of and encounters with malfunctioning, broken and disintegrating public infrastructure than, for example, the impressively tarmacked highways or affluence of upscale urban residential areas. Dilapidated health facilities overflowing with patients, some sleeping on floors, collapsing or shoddily constructed public school systems, mysterious fires destroying schools and iconic public buildings (e.g., Al Jazeera 2022; BBC 2020; New Vision 2010), impassable roads and urban sewage systems choked with both biodegradable and plastic waste characterise public life. Second, the state manifests as a theatre of unbridled corruption at its different levels (Faller 2015; Tangri and Mwenda 2008), with unapologetic brutal

crackdowns, lethal attacks on opposition political figures, ruthlessness towards any form of civic dissent (Curtice and Behlendorf 2021; Nile Post 2020a), and harrowing accounts circulating of citizens being kidnapped and tortured by state actors (Daily Monitor 2022a; Human Rights Watch 2022; Nile Post 2020a; The Economist 2021).

Third, the Ugandan state is perceived as space where the ruling class live in extravagance and ostentation while both regime outlaws and security apparatchik act with brazen partisanship, impunity and condescension towards critical and dissent voices (Daily Monitor 2020c) particularly, the opposition who the regime has framed as 'enemies', 'useless', 'promoters of imperialism', 'insurrectionists', 'backward' and 'unpatriotic'(Nile Post 2020a, 2020b; Rubongoya 2018). Fourth, the state also manifests in the several socioeconomic policies and developmentalist interventions targeting sections of the poor and the relative peace and security prevailing in the country (NRM 2016, 2021). Taken together, the four manifestations that are habitually and repeatedly displayed through mainstream and social media have taken a profound toll on citizenship in Uganda.

Over time, citizens in Uganda, including the participants of this study, have learned and internalised that the state is organisationally and structurally incapable of providing basic social services efficiently, equitably and evenly. During this study, these mixed perceptions often came to the fore when I probed the relationship rural dwellers had with the state. Whilst unmistakably appreciative of the 'peace and stability' the state guarantees, some participants wondered why 'we waste our time' voting for politicians who pad themselves with hefty monetary privileges, while the real issues affecting a common person, like the low prices of agricultural produce, remain unaddressed. Others argued that government programmes often 'bypassed' them and only benefited a select few, usually local campaign agents of the ruling party. Yet others suggested that agricultural inputs are supplied late, after the planting season, and are of poor quality that do not germinate or, if they are animals, that die within weeks of receipt. While this study could not confirm these claims, it is important to note that, across the country, allegations of this nature (of graft, fraud and poor quality) against state-sponsored programmes are the norm rather than the exception (e.g., Chimpreports 2013; Daily Monitor 2016, 2017).

Publicly, citizens repeatedly complain that state actors *befaako bokka* (the ruling classes are individualistic and egocentric) and, therefore, *tuli ku lwaffe* (we, the poor, are on our own). A leading Anglican cleric, incensed by the growing culture of endemic corruption and personalised greed was reported by local media warning politicians and bureaucrats against turning the country's motto from For God and My *Country* to For God and My *Stomach* (TrumpetNews 2018). An undated satire by Little Brian Comedy that has been shared widely on Uganda's social media (WhatsApp) space summarises this cynical description of the state.

> A government (in Uganda) is a group of people living in our country (I don't want to mention their names) chewing fat money, buying expensive cars for themselves and

their wives, sending their children abroad to study, sending their slay queens to Dubai for shopping, sending their families to India for treatment, constructing big houses in Kololo and Muyenga[12] while citizens are dying of poverty.

Although intended as comedy, the satire is corroborated by scholars, commentators, critics and officials of the ruling NRM government. In his newspaper column in the state-owned Sunday Vision newspaper, a government spokesperson bemoaned the death of intellectual debate, which he says has been replaced by 'personal attacks, harsh judgement, self-preservation,… obscurantism and dirty tricks [to] become the dominant face of NRM politics' (Opondo 2022, p. 13). Nobert Mao, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, cautioned state actors to pay attention to the loss of public trust manifested in increasing public ridicule, with comedians referring to the legislature as *legis-looting*, the judiciary as *judi-sharing* and the executive as *execu-thieves* (NTV 2022). On many public occasions, prominent NRM politicians, collaborators and bureaucrats are seen displaying and presenting cash in sacks and brown envelopes to different sections of society (BBC 2013; Médard and Golaz 2013; The African Report 2013; Vokes 2016) mainly to reward political defectors and rent seekers from different interest groups. A parliamentary report on the Emyooga[13] fund found that, because it was announced and gained momentum during the 2021 election campaigns, the beneficiaries saw the programme as enticement to vote for the NRM or as 'a reward for "voting well"' (Ruhunda and others 2021, p. 4).

These experiences have socialised the population into deep and complex levels of appreciation and disparagement of the state, consequently affecting their (dis)engagement with the Museveni regime on many issues. Illustrative of this argument is, for instance, the observation that although the Ugandan state has, since 1986, designed and implemented several antipoverty policies and interventions, over 70 percent of the population is not informed of and, therefore, does not benefit from these programmes (NPA 2020). The lack of awareness and low uptake of state-sponsored programmes could be attributed to the prevailing perceptions. Almost all socioeconomic programmes meant for poverty eradication are roundly turned into jokes and satirised by (sections of) the public. For example, universal education, known as *bonna basome* (that all may study), is mockingly described as *bonna bakone* (that all may become idiots) (Scherz 2014), while Prosperity for All, dubbed *bonna bagagawale* (let everyone be rich), is often taunted by critics as *bonna bagwagwawale* (let everyone be silly) (Buwembo 2015) and '*bona bagwe* (failure for all)' (Wiegratz 2016, p. 95) and prosperity for few (Makoba and Wakoko-Studstill 2015). During the dissemination workshop in Rubirizi district, I asked why citizens do not seem to identify with these state programmes. From politicians to technocrats, reasons ranged from their lack of

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12 Kololo and Muyenga, upscale residential areas in Kampala, are known to be exclusively habited by ruling bourgeoisie in Uganda.
13 *Emyooga* (sing. *omwooga*) is a Runyankore term meaning specialities. The Microfinance Support Centre website (www.msc.co.ug) shows that the fund, launched by Museveni in August 2019, targets 18 categories/enterprises/*emyooga* covering the majority of hitherto, financially excluded Ugandans engaged in similar specialised enterprise categories.

publicity and poor monitoring to the languid attitude of government workers. More tellingly, the head of district security argued that, as the state, the 'most critical development programme is peace and security which every citizen enjoys'.

Nonetheless, amidst this cynicism, poor households, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, still benefit from public education and health services because they do not have an alternative. Across the country it is only the children of the poorest who go to public (usually day) schools providing universal (free) education. The well-off families enrol their children in generally expensive (usually boarding) public and private schools where the quality of learning and education is believed to be better. In many ways, therefore, universal education and socioeconomic programmes are the most prominent manifestation of state presence in most rural areas. However, as already explained, these very programmes continue to be dogged by poor performance and citizen mistrust. For instance, the high drop-out rate of children remains an endemic problem for universal education (Daily Monitor 2020a; New Vision 2012), while misinformation, inefficiency, graft and low uptake remain critical challenges for government antipoverty programmes (Kjær and Muhumuza 2009; NPA 2020; Scherz 2014; The Observer 2022). This could perhaps explain why participants in the study often described a much better citizen as one whose children were no longer enrolled in universal public schools but private ones and one who actively participated in NGO interventions.

The foregoing discussion illustrates the paradox of understanding citizenship, development and the state in Uganda. While, on the one hand, citizens seem profoundly distrustful and disdainful of the state and the socioeconomic services it proffers, on the other, they are grateful for the peace and stability and somehow partake of the services instead of expressing dissent and advocating for their improvement and overhaul. Why then, do citizens choose to find alternatives to engaging the state in such settings? I respond to this in the conclusion section and suggest that such a dilemma be conceptualised as constrained citizenship.

6.2 Conclusions

In this section, I present the conclusions of the thesis and outline my contributions to the existing body of scholarship on the contested notion of citizenship in development studies.

First, the study has illustrated that citizenship emerging in NGO-led development is localised, gendered, active and attuned to material survival and aspirations at the local level. In foregrounding these findings in the context of Uganda, a country that has undergone episodic political violence and authoritarianism, I illustrated the dilemma NGOs may face in promoting citizenship as advocacy and claim making. In such settings, NGO training does

not focus on addressing 'what makes and keeps people poor' (White 1996, p. 8), but on how and what the poor can and need to do to get out of poverty. Subsequently, citizenship strengthening is pillared on self-reliance, hard work and playing an active part in associational life, rather than advocacy and dissent to assert rights from the state, even though the strategic policies and visions of many NGOs[14] are couched in the language of justice, empowerment, equality, accountability, human rights and democratisation.

While some scholars critique these efforts as embedding the poor in a financialised capitalist system (Nega and Schneider 2014) that depoliticises, dilutes and robs development of its transformative sting (Dagnino 2005; Gaynor 2011), this study notes that village savings groups are not run on an explicit profit-making agenda but on helping members have a reliable source of cash to address daily and emergency expenditure needs. Moreover, the experiences of smallholder farmers, semi and non-literate casual workers and teenage mothers struggling to meet basic livelihood requirements mean that politicised and abstract versions of citizenship may carry less meaning and relevance in the broader context of state reprisals on those who express dissent elsewhere. For example, despite the apparent frustrations, poor citizens queue to vote for politicians at various levels, enrol children in the universal education system, and go to public health centres when sick. Thus, the socioeconomic programmes dismissed and caricatured by the public are in most cases what are available and accessible to poor citizens in rural areas.

Additionally, unlike urban areas, rural areas do not face existential threats to livelihoods that can trigger activism and mass anger. Generally, typical rural dwellers grow their own food, fetch water from an open stream, collect wood fuel from the nearby bushland and are, like the casual worker (in the Introduction), not frequent travellers beyond their villages (except in cases of sickness and other emergencies) and therefore do not regularly encounter the messy public transport system *en masse*. Besides, if advocacy is to be mobilised, the nearest service level of government, the subcounty, is often located a couple of kilometres away from the component villages. Furthermore, the subcounty is, in the broader politics of the state in Uganda, powerless because of what Jones (2009, p.145) describes as a 'political and civil administration that is turned upwards and outwards', with each layer of authority 'depending on the next level up in the system rather than the level below'. Therefore, it would not make much sense to make claims on such a visibly powerless institution, leading to a joke circulating in the public domain that *gavumente yetaaga obuyambi* (the government is, itself, in need of assistance).

Second, this thesis has shown that citizenship is learned, experienced and practised in spaces of everyday interaction that are also embedded in internalised state power. Two important arguments emerged from this. One, everyday hustles for survival and regular associational interactions, coupled with

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[14] The vision of ACFODE is 'a just society where gender equality is a reality' while in its strategic plan COVOID acknowledges corruption and inefficiency as inimical to service delivery (see, COVOID 2019).

voluntary and obligatory community responsibilities and expectations, make people active rather than passive citizens, albeit at the local level. For example, in Rubirizi the study was conducted in 2019 as the euphoria of the 2021 national elections gathered pace, and in Namutumba in 2017, a year after the 2016 national elections. One would, therefore, have expected that in both areas participants would mention citizenship in terms of civic duties like checking whether they appear on the voting register, attending political rallies or participating in electing leaders of their choice. Instead, participants defined citizenship in terms of good neighbourliness, ownership of material and economic resources and taking care of children's educational, nutritional and health needs, and insisted that NGO initiatives were enhancing their capacities to meet these obligations.

This brings me to the second argument – the prevalence of the contradictory perception of the Ugandan state as inefficient but stable (and even magnanimous). The view that Museveni's Uganda is the most stable and peaceful state since the country's establishment as a nation-state in the late 19th century dominates public perceptions and has also been hinted at by scholars such as Philipps and Kagoro (2016). Often tinged with latent fear and helpless adulation of the state, and in consonance with the 'Uganda as a success' narrative, this view holds that the NRM government has saved the southern part of the country and, from the mid-2000s, also the northern part, from decades of militarised ethnic violence. Proponents of this view – who include NRM government officials and supporters of Museveni– often remind critics of the regime that if it was in past regimes, they would not go on 'public media abuse the president and his government and go back home to cuddle their children and spouses.' Moreover, a view held by rural dwellers and expressed latently by, participants in this study is that, while the state may be corrupt and inefficient as a provider of social services, it has at least guaranteed peace, empowered women and other vulnerable groups and created an environment for everybody to learn what to do as long as they do not joke around with this peace (Daily Monitor 2014). Moreover, if each citizen shoulders their responsibility, Uganda, they say, would be far better than it is today.

NGO-led development activities for rural communities are, therefore, implemented within the foregoing conditions and contradictions. Understandably, from the perspective of the widespread crackdown the state often visits on pro-democracy civil society organisations (see., Amnesty International and others 2016; Deutsche Welle 2021; Reuters 2021), many NGOs become pragmatic about forms of citizen agency that are allowable and can be fostered in the space in which they operate. After all, as Jones (2009, p. 163) poignantly puts it, 'development is an open-ended business, best explored through a range of activities and ideas'. In constrained settings marked by state dysfunction, concomitant poverty and persistent traditions that are biased against women and collectively inimical to the exercise of citizenship, it appears convincing that grassroot development arms poor citizens with feasible solutions to problems of material and survival nature.

Last, this thesis is not an attempt to romanticise forms of localised citizenship identified at community level as profoundly impactful and transformative when it comes to the full realisation of citizenship as decent living and freedom to express dissent. Neither is it the intention to present the simplistic idea that 'communities nowadays are sleeping beauties that need a kiss to be awakened' (van der Veen 2003, p. 581) by NGOs vending promises of livelihood improvement. Rather, it has claimed that, when local spaces of belonging are supported by NGOs to impart content consonant with grassroots practices, a purposed trajectory of learning and gradual change can be generated in diversely constrained rural communities in sub-Saharan African contexts. On the one hand, given the experiences of poverty, neglect and squalor which rural dwellers routinely encounter, the empirical evidence of changes generated in the areas under analysis reinforce the case for treating NGOs' antipoverty efforts as avenues for citizenship-strengthening. On the other, given the increasingly punitive political environment in which they operate, NGOs can meaningfully contribute to citizens' decent living, and only negligibly to citizen dissent. Thus, taken together with the confounding ways in which the Ugandan state has historically and contemporaneously evolved, the executive director's view that 'poor citizens cannot advocate' makes contextual sense, and perhaps civil society instruments that fund liberal notions of citizenship in international development need to pay attention to this.

6.3   Contributions of the thesis

In this final section, I elaborate on the main contributions of my study both to conceptualisations of citizenship and the practice of strengthening citizenship.

6.3.1   Theoretical contributions: Advancing a notion of constrained citizenship

Building on specific theories that treat citizenship and learning as intricately embedded in and entangled with the sociohistorical and political cultures of postcolonial contexts in which they occur, and drawing on the empirical findings, I suggest the notion of 'constrained' citizenship as best explaining the kind of citizen-society relations I have explored.

Constrained citizenship happens in situations where poverty and traditions of patriarchy, on the one hand, and state configuration, on the other, reinforce each other so that citizens approach the state from a perspective of combined fear and adulation, meanwhile taking personal responsibility for the wellbeing of themselves, their families and communities. In this sense, the state proffers minimal and lacklustre services tinged with patronage, subtle threats and repression while citizens find alternative sources to either complement or replace such provisions to strengthen their material, survivalist wellbeing. Within this setting, I argue, grassroots development becomes critical for the expression of

citizenship as social participation, learning and agential self-reliance, since socialised adulation and apprehension of the state stifle dissent and claim making. Understood this way, the notion of constrained citizenship contributes to and adds nuance to studying citizenship from a multidisciplinary approach and provides a novel framework for conceptualising forms of citizenship that respond to specific historical and geographical terrains like those researched in this study.

The suggested notion of constrained citizenship resonates with the existing literature on understanding citizenship, especially across the diverse contexts of the Global South, where both power and poverty are unevenly distributed. Kabeer (2005) suggests that citizenship can be compromised when power is fused in the person of the absolute monarch or when it operates in situations where the market, state, community and family relate in a disharmonious and differentiated way. In such settings, she argues, 'political disenfranchisement, social marginalization, cultural devaluation, and economic dispossession come together in various combinations to define the condition of exclusion and marginalisation' (Kabeer 2005, p. 15).

Echoing a similar idea, González (2017) argues that, although citizens were recognised by law in pervasively unequal and extraordinarily violent Latin America, the unevenness, hierarchised and deficient provision of security by the police denied citizens their multiple rights, leading to constrained and stratified citizenship experiences. In Francophone West Africa, scholars have paid attention to politics of autochthony (Bøås 2009; Dunn 2009; Geschiere 2009; Mitchell 2014) to illustrate the uncertainty and contestations over citizenship belonging in (post)colonial states. They illustrate, for example, that citizenship has been framed in alignment with conflicts pitting 'autochthons' – sons of the soil – against 'allochthons' or migrants (Dunn 2009; Mitchell 2014). Such conflicts pit one group claiming rightful citizenship against another, dismissed as 'foreigners', resulting in displacement, exclusion, alienation and, in some cases, fratricidal wars and communal violence (Bøås and Dunn 2013; Espeland 2011).

Feminist scholarship has voiced related arguments critiquing, for example, the masculine bias inherent in both the notion and practice of citizenship across different cultures (Bird and Espey 2010; Munday 2009; Ndidde et al. 2020; Tamale 2004, 2020; Walby 1994). Using euphemisms and catchphrases such as 'citizenship is gendered' (Munday 2009), 'feminisation of poverty' (Chant 2008), 'poverty has a female face'(Lister 1997) and 'second class citizens' (Seely et al. 2013; Tamale 2004), feminist scholars have demonstrated the complex ways in which the institution of citizenship differentially treats women vis-à-vis men. They have challenged power structures and privileges embedded in sociocultural, political and economic constellations, and highlighted the negative impact that macro-economic policies have had on women (Chant 2008, p. 166).

Consequently, they suggest that development should be gendered to align with the interests of women so as uplift societies from the mire of poverty and marginalisation. In rural areas, such as those studied here, unequal labour division, disproportionate access to and control over productive resources, and

lack of life changing opportunities such as education continue to fuel gender-based violence and early marriages (Daily Monitor 2022c; New Vision 2011), leading to (rural, poor) women's perpetual subordination and impoverishment.

Jethro Pettit (2016) studied citizenship promoted by Sweden-supported civil society in Uganda, Nicaragua and Pakistan and found evidence that citizens' ability to engage in civic and political life was constrained by externalised factors related to power, poverty, patronage and patriarchy, and internalised factors such as stress, helplessness, fears of repercussion and tacit acceptance of the status quo. Alava (2020) recounts the spectre of decades of violence hovering over the Acholi region of northern Uganda and coins the notion of subdued citizenship. She argues that contrary to idealised theories of good citizenship, 'citizens [in this region] engage in the body politic on the basis of uncertainty and misinformation and relate to the state primarily through submission and aversion' (ibid., p. 90). In studying the governance system adopted by the Ugandan state under Museveni to control citizens, Tapscott (2021, p. 14) employs the notion of 'institutionalised arbitrariness' as an 'approach to authoritarianism today—one that is based more on fragmenting alternatives to state power than on exercising iron-fisted control'. She contends that, under this arrangement, the state emasculates both citizens and alternative power centres, limiting their capacity to mobilise for political claim making and forcing them into self-policing.

In Uganda and in the context of this study, the notion of constrained citizenship is better explained by the analogy of *olubimbi,* which literally means 'digging allocations' but is diversely used to mean individual responsibility, clearly marked boundaries and lines of duty. The analogy refers to the practice in traditional farming systems whereby each household member was allocated a specific patch to dig which they had to accomplish or face various sanctions. First popularised by Museveni as a catchphrase for the 1996 presidential election campaigns (Mushengyezi 2003), the concept of *olubimbi* has since become common when talking about issues related to politics, development and state-society relations in Uganda under the NRM regime. It is, for instance, used to challenge citizens to take up their own responsibilities and contribute towards nation-building (Mushengyezi 2003); to defend the NRM government against criticism or deflect complaints of their not doing much to uplift the standards of living of the poor (The Independent 2019); or to warn particularly critical leaders of cultural, religious and civil society to concentrate on their roles and stop trespassing into politics (Ssentongo 2022b; The Observer 2010).

In the aftermath of the 2009 Buganda riots[15], Museveni, while at a function to celebrate a coronation anniversary of a traditional ruler in the neighbouring Bunyoro kingdom in June 2010, told his audience,

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[15] Also known as the Kayunga riots, the demonstrations that spread across central Uganda region were sparked off when the advance team of traditional King of Buganda, led by the katikkiro (prime minister) was blocked by police from entering Kayunga district, a territory under the Buganda kingdom in 2009 (see, Philipps and Kagoro 2016; The East African 2009).

When people are in the garden digging, each one uses a hoe to till their portion *(olubimbi)*. There will be no problem if each concentrate on their portion. Now, if you suddenly jump into my *lubimbi,* I [might] cut your head and there would be no case… Have you ever seen me baptising people?... Do you think I don't know the words said when baptising?... I know all of them. Should I recite them?… I am a Christian, but I cannot baptise anyone because baptising is not my *lubimbi*…. we reserved that *lubimbi* for the priest. (The Observer 2010)

In sum, the subtle message conveyed through the variously repeated analogy, is that should citizens and (critical) civil society veer into mobilising against and questioning the status quo, repercussions can be dire. These threats force alternative centres and voices of power, including civil society and media, into silence, with each taking their turn to self-regulate and self-preserve to avoid being branded as anti-government (see, Katusiimeh 2015; Red Pepper 2022; Ssentongo 2022a) and hence, risk being punished by the state. In the process, citizenship as coalesced dissent gets fragmented (Khisa and Rwengabo 2022; Kjær and Katusiimeh 2012) and focuses instead on survival and achieving a decent life, one attainable and possible within the confines of the prevailing circumstances.

In contemporary Uganda, self-regulation and self-preservation manifest in several instances. They are seen and heard in the muted silences and acquiescence of prominent civic leaders and professional associations in the face of mounting injustice and gross human rights abuses; in the elites' scramble to enter and be co-opted by the patronage system; in public discourse that disparages government programmes and officials; and in ordinary citizens' resigned participation in (and withdrawal from) state-proffered programmes and services that they regard as not good enough. More crucially, although not openly or frequently discussed by research participants, I argue that self-regulation and self-preservation could be read in the emerging citizen agency in civil society spaces as active and localised, albeit apolitical amidst a dearth of state interventions.

The notion of constrained citizenship therefore denotes a kind of society-state relationship based on socialised and internalised submission, fear, indifference, helplessness and adulation, leading to lowered expectations of the state, on the one hand, and learned and improvised activeness, ingenuity and gradual change within localised spaces of belonging, on the other. Further, the notion also implies that, although legally constituted and recognised as members in a state, citizens relate to it on the basis of sloganeering, misinformation, narratives and public discourses that both threaten violence and socialise citizens to expect less from the state. This then, impels citizens to relate to each other in a reciprocal and mutual way through informal and social spaces of learning and participation to compensate for the state's inability to provide material wellbeing and survival services. Within the prism of the findings of this study, this relationship is also underpinned and complicated by conditions of poverty that debilitate human agency, and traditions that challenge the citizenship capabilities of certain sections of society, such as women.

Faced with the truth of state authority, profligacy, inefficiency and threats of violence, on the one hand, and concomitant poverty, marginalisation and

gender-based inequalities, on the other, constrained citizens relate with the state and each other in two main ways. One, they summon and draw on multiple sources to address their survival and development needs. For instance, in the communities examined in this study, they embrace and implement NGO livelihood initiatives with enthusiasm and momentum. They also self-mobilise and embark on routine learning in localised sites of peer belonging and participation. Two, they (may) enter into relations and networks with different state and non-state big people; disparage and shun state officials; and also partake in available government programmes and activities. These kinds of relations, however, remain fleeting, indeterminate and skewed against them, and in the case of last option, citizens face a similar dilemma as opposition actors in (semi)authoritarian regimes – that of having 'to participate in the regime's institutions and protest against them at the same time' (Bertrand 2021, p. 591). By enrolling their children in public education or seeking treatment in public health care systems, poor citizens face the conundrum of partaking in programmes they ridicule, mock and untrust.

6.3.2   Contributions towards practice

The second contribution relates to practices of citizenship-strengthening in the constrained settings of developing countries. From the perspective of the notion of constrained citizenship, it looks convincing that citizens living under profound and systemic constraints need knowledge to be able to function in their daily hustling for a decent living. The knowledge they need is contextually practical and builds on the prevailing abilities and limits of the community to inspire continuous learning, change and self-reliance. Such results not only aid in lessening the burdens of poverty, gender discrimination and marginalisation, but also have the potential to set rural dwellers on a trajectory of modest, gradual improvement in agency, enabling them to fulfil different obligations and responsibilities at the local level.

Moreover, in a context where citizenship as legal belonging is incontestable but does not translate into equal and fair entitlement to and enjoyment of decent and dissenting life, NGO initiatives come in handy to fill the void, even if results often remain scattered and projectised. Thus, in areas where the practice and understanding of citizenship is structurally and circumstantially constrained, the efforts of various communities and organisations contributing to challenging some of the said constraints must be addressed in any analysis.

The contingencies needed are not those that enable the poor to fight for democracy and justice but rather those that strengthen their often limited material capacities to compensate for deficiencies in democratic governance. This does not in any way suggest that good governance and democracy are irrelevant. Rather, on the basis of arguments and claims made in this thesis, I posit that wherever and whenever they live or belong, citizens need and should have good and decent shelter. Citizens' children should access and acquire quality education. Citizens need to feed and to be healthy. When they fall sick, they should not worry about the cost and quality of medical care. Citizens should also

participate in decisions that shape and strengthen their citizenship and voice their dissent so that decision-makers may act. Most of these needs overlap as entitlements and responsibilities, emphasising the vitality of a mutually respectful rather than distrustful state-citizen relationship.

In this thesis I have illustrated how the state in Uganda does not purposefully enable citizens meet these needs but, instead, allows apolitical NGOs some space to promote programmes that improve the material wellbeing of citizens but not the expression of dissent. The NGOs and the local associations can therefore be said to be the 'effective' government in the lives of rural dwellers as far as enabling them to act as citizens at the local level is concerned. As in Nigeria where the dysfunction of the state has turned 'every household into its own government' (Smith 2022), civil society spaces in rural areas of Uganda have, as several participants tellingly pointed out during the research, become *omuzaire waife* (our caring parent), 'the second Jesus Christ' and 'our liberators from the poverty mire'.

Understandably, a household which, under the aegis of NGO interventions and its own efforts, shifts from a mud and wattle to a (semi)permanent house with improved amenities and moves children from low quality public to better quality private education, thereby triggering neighbours to follow suit, is, to all intents and purposes and in the eyes of the community, a responsible and better citizen. There is, therefore, a strong case to be made that such grassroots development that enables poor people to achieve these hitherto unimagined material improvements and agency, do promote and strengthen certain forms of citizenship, even if attuned to decent rather than dissenting living. Perhaps this explains the celebratory tone that seems apparent in this thesis.

6.4   Areas for further research

There is a need to explore the medium and long-term implications of incremental change in the lives of ordinary citizens for political claims and the accountability of the Ugandan state. The emergent capabilities and agency exhibited by community members in civil society spaces is for now concerned with apolitical issues of survival. Could this agency be channelled into purposeful mobilisation for structural change within the limits of the retributive state system? How can it be done and with what possible consequences for NGOs and ordinary people? Can some of the models studied, such as the Saemaul Undong, VSLA methodology and training in improved farming systems, work in areas that are poor and not supported by the resources and presence of an NGO? How can the example of the models be taken up by the state to address poverty and promote active citizenship?

This study was not able to explore the experiences of community members who did not belong to solidarity groups or any form of village-based associations. Such people are often the poorest of the poor, and often remain excluded in

multiple ways, since they may not be able to participate equally in the common everyday spaces. How and what kind of agency do such people exercise, how do they access the basics of life and why do they not join the others? Finding answers to these questions would shed more light on the dynamics of citizenship, development and learning in rural settings in states that are inegalitarian and illiberal.

Ultimately, this thesis has explored why, and illustrated how advocacy, claims-making and the freedom to dissent elude poor citizens within constrained environments in sub-Saharan Africa. Contributing further to scholarship on the dynamics of citizenship, learning and change, the thesis has drawn on Ugandan rural settings to demonstrate how NGOs use and complement rural dwellers' associational networks and their efforts to strengthen citizens' agency to survive and realise incremental changes. Against a history and background of state brutality and unpredictability, complicated by poverty and patriarchal traditions, I have argued that citizens find it safer to learn and adopt a repertoire of decent living strategies than civically challenge the status quo in Uganda. Accordingly, I have advanced the notion of constrained citizenship, which, within the prism of problematising the kinds of citizenship materialising in constrained settings, can be illustrated by two paradoxes. On the one hand, grassroots development produces citizens' agency and practice that seem to be relatively stable compared with those associated with advocacy, which Anderson and colleagues (2022, p. 8) argue are 'all too fleeting and easy to roll back' by the state. Yet, on the other hand, citizens' fragility and the projectised nature of NGO activities mean that such gains remain scattered and prone to erasure. In the absence of a functional state, the long-term illness of a family member or meeting the costs of privately sponsored university education can easily eradicate or reverse material gains while also placing indelible emotional stress and helplessness on the household.

LYHENNELMÄ (SUMMARY IN FINNISH)

Kansalaisuus ja kehitys ovat nousseet keskeiseksi akateemisen huomion kohteeksi globaalissa etelässä tapahtuneen autoritarisuuden muotojen uudelleennousun myötä. Tämä väitöskirjatutkimus pohtii, millaisia kansalaisuuden muotoja voidaan tukea kansalaisyhteiskunnassa, sekä mitä seurauksia näillä muodoilla on kansalaisjärjestöjen edistämälle kehitykselle Ugandan rajoitetuissa ympäristöissä. Tutkimus on toteutettu aikana, jolloin aktiivisten, osaavien ja voimaistuneiden, omien kohtaloidensa muokkaamiseen osallistuvien kansalaisten on nähty olevan avainhenkilöinä transformatiivisessa, kestävässä ja kaikki mukaan ottavassa kehityksessä niin globaalisti kuin paikallistasoillakin.

Tutkimuksessa kansalaisuus määritellään köyhien ihmisten mahdollisuutena elää kohtuullisen kelvollista materiaalista elämää samalla kun he nauttivat kuulumisen ja sosiaalisen osallisuuden kokemuksesta; minkä osaltaan pitäisi mahdollistaa toimijuus, jolla vastustaa ja taistella tällaista elämää rajoittavia esteitä vastaan. Kansalaisuus käsitteellistetään siten ilmiönä, joka tapahtuu monenlaisissa paikoissa ja erilaisilla tasoilla, joissa kohtuullista elämää, sosiaalista osallistumista, ja tyytymättömyyden osoituksia koskevat oikeudet ja velvollisuudet rakentuvat kontekstuaalisesti. Tämän erityisen kansalaisuuden ymmärryksen pohjalta tutkimus argumentoi, että ruohonjuuritason kehitys voidaan ymmärtää aktiivisena ja käytännöllisenä kansalaisuutena paikallistasolla. Tämän lisäksi tutkimus pohtii kansalaisjärjestöjen köyhyyden vähentämiseen tähtäävissä interventiossa toteutuvaa kansalaisuutta suhteessa tämän päivän Ugandan kärjistyviin valtion ja yhteiskunnan välisiin suhteisiin.

Kansalaisten oppimisen, toimeentulon, ja valtion kanssa vuorovaikuttamisen käsitteellistämiseksi tämä tutkimus hyödyntää useita aikaisempia tutkimuksia, joissa kansalaisuus ymmärretään kehkeytyvänä, kontekstuaalisena, monikerroksisena, monitasoisena, dynaamisena, ja tietyissä paikoissa käytännössä toteutuvana. Näitä teorioita yhdistellen, tämän tutkimuksen teoreettinen lähestymistapa määrittelee kansalaisuuden sosiaalisena osallistumisena, sosiomateriaalisen tilanteen paranemisena sekä elinikäisenä oppimisena ja sosialisaationa. Lähestymistapa mahdollistaa kansalaisten pärjäämisen, asteittaisen muutoksen, kansalaisuuden toimijuuden ja valtion pelkoon sosiaalistumisen dynamiikan tutkimisen Saharan eteläpuolisessa Afrikassa.

Tutkimus toteutettiin Ugandan maaseudun kylissä käyttäen laadullista ja osallistavaa metodologista lähestymistapaa kansalaisuuden jokapäiväisten käytäntöjen analyysissa yhteisöissä, jotka osallistuivat kansalaisjärjestöjen kehityshankkeisiin. Tapaustutkimusjärjestöt – ACFODE ja COVOID – toteuttivat useita kehityshankkeita ruohonjuuritason ryhmien kautta Namutumbassa Itä-Ugandassa ja Rubirizissa Länsi-Ugandassa. Tulkinnalliseen ja emansipatoriseen tutkimusparadigmaan pohjautuen tutkimuksessa käytettiin useita osallistavia tutkimusstrategoita ja työkaluja. Näitä olivat Venn -diagrammi, kansalaisuuden tikapuut, viikon toimintapäiväkirjat, avainhenkilöiden haastattelut, yhteisön jäsenten puolistrukturoidut haastattelut, fokusryhmäkeskustelut, epämuodolliset

keskustelut, aikajanat, yhteisöjen toimintaan osallistuminen, sekä tutkimuksen alustavista tuloksista keskustelu yhteisöjen kanssa.

Kolmessa alkuperäisjulkaisussa raportoidut tulokset osoittavat, että kansalaisyhteiskunnan toiminnassa kehkeytyvä kansalaisuus on paikallista, aktiivista ja materiaalista; se on mukautunut olemassa oleviin rajoitteisiin, mutta myös jokapäiväisen osallistumisen kautta välittömiin kuulumisen yhteisöihin. Verrattain poissaoleva valtio, joka toisaalta kierrättää väkivallan (mahdollisen uudelleen esiintymisen) uhan narratiiveja, pitää köyhyyttä kansalaisten vikana, eikä pysty kunnolla käsittelemään naisiin kohdistuvia ennakkoluuloja, edesauttaa sitä, että maaseudun kansalaiset improvisoivat sosiaalisten suhteiden ja oppimisen mahdollistavia innovaatio- ja selviytymisstrategioita. He eivät tee strategioita osoittaakseen tyytymättömyyttä valtiota kohtaan tai taistellakseen demokratian ja oikeudenmukaisuuden puolesta, vaan välttämättömyydestä sekä vahvistaakseen usein puutteellisia materiaalisia kapasiteettejaan demokratiavajeen kompensoimiseksi. Ugandassa, missä valtio voi reagoida yllätyksellisesti ja rankaista kansalaisaktivismia ja sitä tukevia kansalaisjärjestöjä, kansalaisuus toteutuu enemmän kelvollisen elämän tavoittelun kuin valtiota kohtaan esitetyn tyytymättömyyden muodossa.

Tutkimuksella on kaksi pääkontribuutiota. Ensiksi, se kehittelee rajoitetun kansalaisuuden käsitettä kuvaavaan sosiaalistuneeseen ja sisäistettyyn alistumiseen, pelkoon perustuvaa yhteiskunnan ja valtion välistä suhdetta, joka johtaa toisaalta mataliin valtioon kohdistuviin odotuksiin ja toisaalta, opittuun ja improvisoituun aktiivisuuteen, osaamiseen ja asteittaiseen muutokseen paikallisissa kuulumisen paikoissa. Toiseksi, ei-liberaaleissa konteksteissa, joissa kansalaisuuden käytäntö ja ymmärrys ovat rakenteellisesti ja olosuhteellisesti rajoitettuja, kansalaisten monenlaiset (ei-poliittiset) pyrkimykset köyhyyden ja avuttomuuden helpottamiseksi pitäisi ottaa huomioon ja niitä pitäisi tukea kansainvälisessä kehityspolitiikassa ja -käytännöissä.

Lopuksi tutkimus ehdottaa huomion kiinnittämistä rajoitetuissa ympäristöissä tapahtuvaan kansalaisuuden tukemiseen liittyvään paradoksiin. Toisaalta, ruohonjuuritason kehitys tuottaa kansalaistoimijuutta, joka näyttää olevan stabiilimpaa kuin se joka yhdistetään etujen ajamiseen ja vaatimusten esittämiseen. Kuitenkin toisaalta, kansalaisten hauraus ja kansalaisjärjestöjen toiminnan projektiluonteisuus tarkoittaa, että tällaisen kehityksen hyödyt jäävät usein hajanaisiksi ja helposti häviäviksi. Kun hyvin toimivaa valtiota ei ole, perheenjäsenen pitkäaikainen sairaus tai lapsen yliopistokoulutuksen maksaminen voi helposti tuhota saavutetut materiaaliset hyödyt, ja samalla aiheuttaa voimakasta stressiä ja avuttomuuden tunnetta kotitalouksissa.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

LOCALISING SDGS IN RURAL UGANDA: LEARNING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP THROUGH THE SAEMAUL UNDONG MODEL

by

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LOCALISING SDGs IN RURAL UGANDA: LEARNING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP THROUGH THE *SAEMAUL UNDONG* MODEL

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are premised on the principles of 'leaving no one behind' and transformative development. Achieving the goals requires active citizens that are engaged in community development and claiming their rights. The chapter explores the ways in which a local NGO uses *Saemaul Undong* (SMU), a Korean community development model, to localise holistic achievement of a number of SDGs. Drawing on theories of the travel of global ideas in institutional sociology and based on participatory research including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participation in community activities, we analyse how SMU's three pillars of self-help, diligence and cooperation were domesticated and translated in a local community in western Uganda. Findings show how the pillars were translated into practices of active citizenship such as hard work, responsibility and enhanced participation, which contributed to the improvement of livelihoods and to general efforts of local realisation of SDGs. The process successfully promoted active citizenship as community development. As a consequence, we recommend that localisation of SDGs needs to emphasise the promotion of active citizenship to support their holistic achievement in the spirit of enhancing inclusive development.

Key words: active citizenship; domestication; localisation; SDGs; Saemaul Undong; Uganda

1. INTRODUCTION

The localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve transformative and inclusive development where 'no one is left behind' has been presented as the raison d'être of *Agenda 2030*. For instance, whilst the *Agenda* is described as being of 'unprecedented scope and significance for the entire world', the process of its making 'paid particular attention to the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable' (United Nations General Assembly 2015, p. 3) to highlight its localisation intent as 'an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people' (ibid. 12). Conceptualised as a process of 'taking deliberate efforts to make the

aspirations of the SDGs become real to communities, households and individuals, especially those who are at risk of falling further behind' (Steiner 2017), localisation requires multilevel stakeholders and local communities to participate in 'defining, implementing, and monitoring at the local level, strategies aimed at achieving global, national and sub-national goals and targets' (United Cities and Local Governments 2019, p. 16). Overall, citizens' participation in decision-making about their everyday lives is seen as a cornerstone in achieving the SDGs (Menon and Hartz-Karp 2019; Sriskandarajah 2018), especially in Africa where countries are gravely constrained with insufficient resources to implement national

and global development agendas (Nhamo 2017).

However, different ideas on how to promote the necessary 'activeness' circulate in the international development discourses On the one hand, models such as citizens' engagement (Gaventa and Barrett 2012) and social accountability (Hickey and King 2016; Sriskandarajah 2018) emphasise citizens' activeness in claiming their rights and keeping governments accountable. On the other hand, models of community development and empowerment emphasise local participation manifested in the active role of ordinary citizens to identify and address their own problems as well as help and learn from one another in mastering their shared destiny (Ibrahim 2006; Menon and Hartz-Karp 2019; Nhamo 2017).

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are often explicitly committed to the localisation of SDGs and supporting general community transformation through initiatives that promote active citizenship. Conceptualising active citizenship as 'constructed, learned and performed in practices taking place in communities involved in joint activities with an aim of taking care of shared issues' (Holma and Kontinen 2020a, p. 25), this chapter scrutinises a community-based development model, *Saemaul Undong* (SMU) being used by an NGO in rural Uganda to promote, domesticate and customise SDGs at a local level. The model, originating from South Korea (hereafter Korea), is widely acknowledged for heralding the rapid transformation of (mainly rural) Korea in the 1970s (Douglass 2013; Eom 2011; Park 2019; Yang 2017). SMU is anchored in three principles: self-help, diligence and cooperation (Park 2019; UNDP 2015; Yang 2017). Originally, it focused on challenging

peasants to embrace change and break away from dependency, and to stop backward peasantry practices and features of 'hunger, poverty, idleness, gambling, alcohol drinking, low agricultural productivity, and lack of energy' (Iqbal and Milon 2017, p. 70). The model has been marketed and promoted by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Korean NGOs, global personalities such as the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, and other international organisations, as a possible panacea for reducing rural poverty in developing countries. Consequently, in several African countries, there are experimentations of the model being perceived to resonate with the *Agenda 2030* mission of inclusive and transformative development.

The Community Volunteer Initiative for Development (COVOID) was founded in 2003 as an indigenous grassroots NGO with a focus on empowering and strengthening the capacities of the community to support the rights and needs of children (COVOID 2016). The NGO is headquartered in Rubirizi district, in south-western Uganda, (approximately 365 km from Kampala), and it mainly focuses on building community capacity to 'ensure that the child is very safe'[1]. Like many rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, Rubirizi is largely agrarian with 79 per cent of its 129,149 inhabitants eking out a living from subsistence agriculture (Republic of Uganda [RoU] 2017). However, unlike other districts in more excluded regions of the country, Rubirizi falls in the western region, which has been socially and politically stable with a comparably lower poverty index of 6.8% compared to the national average of 21.4% (RoU 2017). The district is also religiously homogeneous, with about 75 per cent of the population belonging to the Roman Catholic denomination. The village of

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[1] In an interview with the founder, who is also the executive director, he revealed that although the NGO keeps changing and responding to many global and national development forces, COVOID remains focused on ensuring the

wellbeing of children, a vision he emphasised can only be realised if the general community, especially women, overcome poverty and are able to provide the basic necessities of life.

Nyakahama, perched on the outskirts of the sprawling Rubirizi town council, is a hilly community covered in leafy green banana plantations, a staple and cash crop in western Uganda. However, the village still shares some of the characteristics of rural communities, such as poverty, social exclusion, land shortage and fragmentation (RoU 2013, 2020).

In an attempt to address these challenges at the grassroots level, in 2015 COVOID started to pilot the SMU model in order to localise the achievement of the following SDGs: 1. Poverty, 2. Hunger, 3. Health and Well-being, 4. Inclusive education, 5. Gender equality, 6. Clean water and sanitation, 10. Reduced inequalities, 12. Responsible consumption and production (COVOID 2016). The use of this localisation model was inspired mainly through personal networks and random encounters, such as reading a local newspaper article about how SMU was transforming the village of Busanza in western Uganda. Later, on a trip to Bangkok, Thailand, the executive director met some Koreans who shared with him how the model transformed Korea from a poor country into a developed one (COVOID 2016).

Theoretically, the chapter draws on institutional sociology and its conceptualisation of the travel of global models as processes of translation (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996) and domestication (Alasuutari 2009, 2015; Alasuutari and Qadir 2013). These conceptualizations contend that instead of assuming blueprint models designed in one location will be diffused and adopted in another, the analysis should pay attention on how they change during the travel. The focus should be in the ways in which models are adapted when perceived as responses to some existing societal needs and rhymed with the current processes in any particular location. Based on a qualitative case study in Nyakahama village in western Uganda, in this chapter we ask how SMU's three pillars of diligence, self-help and cooperation were translated and domesticated in the encounter between an NGO and a community in a particular case of localising SDGs.

We examine the kinds of practices of active citizenship that emerged, and show how the model rhymed with the contextual needs of the local population and resulted in steps taken towards realization of SDGs in the community. We further point out how the model and its pragmatic principles and values fitted well in the country's neoliberal narrative that challenges citizens to take responsibility of developing themselves and families out of poverty taking advantage of the prevailing peace and stability, rather than holding government accountable for services and citizenship rights (Makara 2020).

This chapter is organised in five sections. First, a literature review on SMU and the conceptualisations of translation and domestication of global ideas is provided. The second section describes the study context and methodology, while the third section presents empirical findings on how the three pillars of SMU were translated into actual practice in the community. The fourth and fifth sections, respectively, reflect on the tensions concerning active citizenship inherent in the SMU, and conclude by highlighting the importance of contextual analysis in engendering inclusive development that leaves no one behind.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Saemaul Undong (translated as 'New Community/Village Movement') was launched in the 1970s during the regime of Korean President Park Jung-Hee as a rural development model to challenge peasants to embrace change and break away from dependency. The model, premised on the pillars of self-help, diligence and cooperation, was implemented through a 'carrot-and-stick' approach that combined elements of government support and villagers' self-help (Han 2012, p. 10) with

competition, punishment, training and mind-set change (Engel 2017; Odularu 2009). Increasingly, SMU is being presented by KOICA as an ideal model for 'participatory rural poverty alleviation and a blueprint for poverty alleviation with many developing countries expressing interest of replicating it in the hope that it will help them reproduce Korea's exceptional growth' (Jeong 2017, p. 160), and experimented by several international development agencies. For instance, the UNDP has developed a *Saemaul Initiative Towards Inclusive and Sustainable New Communities* as a guide to nations on how to localise and make the SDGs reach the poorest and most marginalised people who have the least resources and remain furthest behind (UNDP 2015).

In this chapter, the journey of the SMU model from 1970s Korea to a local community in contemporary Uganda is conceptualised by drawing on the institutional sociology of the global travel of models, ideas and policies, which argues that we should not perceive such travels as global diffusion or adoption of ready-made blueprint models. Rather, the global spread of ideas is understood as a process of translation (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996) and domestication (Alasuutari 2009, 2015; Alasuutari and Qadir 2013). In these accounts, nations and people are not passive adopters of ready-made models, but active creators who translate external, globally circulating ideas for their own use (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996) and domesticate global models through active reconfiguration to match local conditions and needs (Alasuutari 2009).

Global ideas travel easily if they are perceived as responses to existing societal needs, if they are seen as a fashion to be followed, or if they are practiced by successful peers who should be imitated (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). The promoters of SMU, present Korea as a successful peer, a miracle of development to be mimicked, and the SMU model as a way to overcome livelihood challenges typically experienced by many rural communities. In the process of domestication (Alasuutari 2009), models are not just adopted, but are turned into actual practices embedded in certain local conditions, actors' own interests and already existing processes. The processes of translation, domestication or customisation result in the model gaining meanings that are different from the original blueprint, but more consistent with the particular community.

Consequently, we contend that SMU has increasingly gained popularity in global development because it challenges peasants to embrace change and break away from dependency through hard-work and self-help while speaking to many contexts, including the African indigenous value systems (Avoseh 2001) and existing political contexts. According to Park (2019), Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda and Ethiopia are among the African countries the most actively experimenting with the SMU model. However, in these countries, the model has mainly been promoted by Korean development actors, including Korean NGOs, as in the case of Rwanda (Nauta and Lee 2017). Thus, these experiments have remained largely scattered and, as our case illustrates, random and voluntary.

SMU formally entered Uganda in 2009 when two village projects were established in central districts of first, Wakiso and later, Mpigi with the collaboration of Korea *Saemaul Undong* Centre, KOICA and UNDP. The model was enthusiastically welcomed by the Ugandan state, perhaps partly due to its ideology that strengthened and rhymed with the narrative of what Buire and Staeheli (2017, p. 174) conceptualise as 'individualised, depoliticised and neoliberal subjects who work to enhance self-sufficiency' to meet their needs without pressuring governments for providing services. Moreover, Uganda's history of self-help spirit that is strongly etched into traditional community beliefs and practices (see; Twesigye et al. 2019) further provided a fertile ground for SMU. Senior government

officials visited Korea to benchmark the SMU model. For example, in May 2013, President Museveni visited the *Saemaul Undong* Centre in Sungham, and applauded the centre for the opportunity the model provided for Uganda to refocus on the country's lost communal traditions (Park 2019). In the same vein, in 2015 Vice President Edward Sekandi told a convention organised by the Uganda *Saemaul Undong* Centre in Kampala that SMU's emphasis on diligence, self-help and cooperation was the 'best approach' to overcome Uganda's dependency syndrome problems (ibid. p.331).

Whilst the politicians have seemingly been impressed by the transformative potential of SMU, the model has not been mainstreamed in the Ugandan government policies and blueprints as an official national development approach. Instead, the *Saemaul Undong* Centre, KOICA and the UNDP have been at the helm of promoting the SMU development model in Uganda with a broad goal of 'transforming communities with a long-term shared vision of a better life for all, and an infectious enthusiasm for local development, sustained by volunteerism at the community level' (Park 2019, p. 326). As our case shows, SMU villages continue to spring up in scattered and random ways in different locations of the country.

The notion of domestication as active reconfiguration and adaption of models to local conditions and needs (Alasuutari 2009) guides our analysis of SMU's promotion of active citizenship. The pillars of SMU emphasise self-reliant and collective citizenship manifested in joint efforts to address challenges related to, for instance, poverty. In bringing new kinds of practices under the banner of diligence, self-reliance and cooperation, the SMU model might potentially trigger learning and reformulation of citizenship practices (Holma et al. 2018; Holma and Kontinen 2020b). These new practices could provide a more enabling institutional environment for the emergence

of disruptive innovations to significantly improve local livelihoods (Adegbile and Sarpong 2018), in accordance with SDG9 that focuses on industry and innovations.

Such promotion of active citizenship as community self-reliance centred around improving material livelihoods differs from the notion of active citizenship envisaged by the human rights-based approach common in civil society and donor discourses, which espouse ideas of good governance, accountability and democracy (Dagnino 2007; Gaventa and Barrett 2012; Gaynor 2011; Sriskandarajah 2018). For instance, in the context of the achievement of SDGs, Sriskandarajah (2018, p.1) calls for political bite and mounting pressure on governments through an 'accountability revolution' where 'citizens will hold governments accountable to the promises they made in 2015 … to deliver a more just and sustainable world by 2030'. In contrast, SMU emphasises hard-working and self-reliant citizens with a changed mind-set and the mentality of 'we can do' (Doucette and Müller 2016), occasionally interspersed with religious-laced slogans such as 'God helps those who help themselves' (Jwa 2018, p. 197).

In this vein, SMU is based on a particular idea of active citizenship, where rather than pressuring the state for solutions or paying attention to realization of rights and democratization (Jeon 2019), citizens are challenged through reward and punishment to actively engage in voluntary community activities, find solutions to their problems and collectively aspire for transformation. Therefore, it becomes interesting to explore how NGOs are applying the ideals of SMU to spur the community into mind-sets and practices of self-reliance in the Ugandan neoliberal and hybrid regime that combines elements of freedom, authoritarianism, state withdrawal, patronage, elite corruption and stability (see; Kalinaki 2020; Makara 2020; Mwenda and Tangri 2005; Tripp 2004).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research material was collected through a participatory methodology that combined in-depth interviews (n=20), group discussions (n=2) and active participation in everyday community activities and functions such as village meetings, communal work, funerals and religious ceremonies. The first author stayed in the community for an extended period of three months (from June to August 2019), and was therefore able to often take evening and weekend casual walks in the community and spontaneously engaged in informal conversations with different categories of community members in, for example, bars, places of worship, homesteads, markets, restaurants and gardens. The use of the multiple methods was in line with the principles of participatory research, which emphasises the promotion of mutual learning, knowledge co-construction and the empowering potential of the research process (Ahimbisibwe et al. 2020).

The extended stay in the community enabled close observation, built close rapport with community members through informal discussion, and helped in the triangulation of information with different methods. All of these actions contributed to the management of bias or, in the vocabulary of qualitative and participatory research, to the increase of this research's rigor and trustworthiness (Galdas 2017; Guba and Lincoln 2005). A qualitative thematic analysis with deductive orientation was conducted. SMU's three principles of self-help, diligence and cooperation were used as an analytical framework. The material was organized under these three themes particularly from the point of view of active citizenship practices, and a rich description of the content of each theme was produced.

4. FINDINGS

In this section, we present the empirical findings, and show how SMU's principles of diligence, self-help and cooperation were domesticated and translated into specific citizenship practices in the interaction between COVOID and the community.

4.1 Diligence as hard work and frugality

The domestication of the SMU model in resonance with the everyday life and experiences of the community could be seen in, among other things, the terminology in the Runyankore language used by the community. *Saemaul Undong* was domesticated to *Samwiri Odongo*[2] and the whole ideology became known as *Enkora y'aba Korea* ('Work ethos of Koreans'). The principle of diligence was translated as *okukora n'omutima,* which literally means 'putting your heart into what you are doing' or 'working tirelessly to achieve what ordinarily seems insurmountable'. COVOID used diligence to inculcate a work ethic that encouraged community members to work hard and practice frugality. The main message articulated in COVOID's training was that if residents did as SMU taught them to do, they would end poverty and develop as the Koreans did in the 1970s.

In addition, and perhaps in line with the implicit goal of engendering financial inclusion to achieve SDG1 (No Poverty), COVOID integrated the SMU model into the already existing practice and culture of communal saving, the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). The NGO claimed to have trained community members in habits and practices of diligence such as frugality, joint planning and saving at the household level, target setting and healthy competition. These were in contrast to the existing practices of household conflicts and

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[2] When the SMU model was introduced, the locals could not easily pronounce the words *Saemaul Undong*, and instead localised it to Samwiri (Samuel) Odongo. Samuel, pronounced

Samwiri, is a popular Christian/biblical name in Uganda, while *Odongo* is a popular name in Acholi, one of the dominant ethnic groups in northern Uganda.

neglect, wastage, and reckless spending and jealousy.

> In the VSLAs, we have been training them to compete in savings not spending. Then after saving enough, you can compete positively. Now I can say that in the village and as you may have seen during your research visits, households are now competing to build a good house roofed with Sembule[3] iron sheets. They are moving away from the traditional white iron sheets that are associated with poverty. (Interview with executive director, August 16, 2019)

Thus, the integration of the SMU model with the existing joint community practices, such as an ingrained village culture of saving, further strengthened its domestication and created new momentum for local citizens to believe in their abilities to end their poverty. In different interactions, several community members revealed how SMU had taught them to be frugal and avoid a culture of reckless spending. Probed on what had changed, they responded: *'Tukaba turiira eryo… Hati titwakiriira eryo'*, (meaning: 'we used to spend [eat] money [recklessly] as if we would not live the next day, but that habit has stopped'). At an individual level, community members narrated how a switch from consumption of expensive fish to home-grown sources of sauce such as beans and green vegetables, freed some money for saving in the village saving association. Taken together, the dietary change prompted by frugal habits inadvertently promoted the notions of good health; and responsible and sustainable consumption emphasised by SDGs 2 and 12, respectively. At the community level, the village meeting on 5 March 2017 resolved that each household

was to make a monthly contribution of 2,000 Uganda shillings (approx. €0.50) which would be deposited into the village account that the same meeting resolved to open in a saving and credit cooperative (SACCO) run by COVOID. This practice was evident during community meetings attended by the first author during fieldwork.

To encourage the emerging spirit of diligence, COVOID adopted SMU's dual implementation strategy of 'motivation based on carrots and competition', along with training and fostering 'missionaries' (Odularu 2009, p. 156). For example, the NGO provided the community with basic farming tools and items such as wheelbarrows, pangas, tarpaulins and gumboots to use in joint community activities. It also periodically organised inter-household and intra-cluster competition on aspects such as the building of relatively better and permanent homes, sanitation, participation in community projects, projects generating household income, and children's education.

The winning households and clusters were further incentivised with additional rewards to boost the SMU spirit. At a national level, 'Nyakahama SMU village participated in the inter-SMU village competitions[4] held in 2016 at Kampiringisa SMU village in central Uganda, and emerged as the winner among the three new entrants and third overall of the eight villages that participated in the competition' (FGD with Nyakahama community members, 12 July 2019). For this performance, the village was later visited by officials from the Korean implementing agencies and UNDP and received an assortment of agricultural equipment and a

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[3] In Uganda, Sembule iron sheets are high-gauge and high-end pre-painted coloured roofing materials often used by rich people and, therefore, in many communities they are a mark of social class. This is in contrast to the low-gauge white iron sheets predominantly used by low-income earners.

[4] The SMU village competition is organised and sponsored by the Korean government through the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Government of Uganda

huge signpost declaring Nyakahama village to be a *'Saemaul Undong* Ambassador'.

In the community, the strengthened work ethic was further evident in increased commitment and renewed voluntary participation in joint activities such as opening up and maintaining community roads, attending meetings, and households' efforts to improve their material conditions. For instance, a random walk through the village revealed a noticeable trend in households shifting from old traditional mud-and-wattle houses to newly constructed, more modern permanent housing units, some of which were connected to solar energy and digital television. Also visible were households at different stages of preparedness to construct new houses, including cleared spaces and kilns in their compounds and the incremental purchase, accumulation and storage of building materials such as metal sheets and cement. In addition, most households maintained a backyard vegetable garden, a standard drying rack and some livestock, especially goats, pigs or chickens as supplementary income for the family as a demonstration of the diligence demanded by the SMU model. Although not all the homesteads in the community were at the same level and quality, these local initiatives point to the village's journey and determination to meet SDGs related to equality (SDG10), sanitation (SDG6) and sustainable communities (SDG11).

4.2 Self-help as responsible, useful and confident community membership

Translated as *okweyamba/okwekwatiramu* in the Runyankore language ('helping oneself' or 'getting personally involved'), self-help entails the recognition that it is the individual's responsibility to find solutions to one's own predicament without depending on others. In community practice, it is premised on the understanding that poor people with a shared fate of depravity and marginality can overcome their hardships through selfless collectivisation and aggregation of individual efforts (Avoseh 2001; Ibrahim 2006). SMU's

idea of the need for communities to 'help themselves' is easily domesticated in African landscapes, where communal self-help has been valued throughout nation-building processes. It also resonates well with the traditional practice and spirit of *bulungi bwansi* ('community service'): the obligation of every member to provide voluntary contribution in times of shared challenges, crises and joyous moments, such as funerals, marriages and, increasingly, poverty.

Moreover, COVOID's training messages focused on encouraging citizens to embrace the attitude of *Nitubaasa* ('We can do') and habits of voluntarism, self-reliance and inclusiveness. The pillar of self-help emphasised a certain attitude towards the government. COVOID trained communities that 'with the SMU model you do not wait for the government, you start addressing your problems, then government can find you where you have reached' (Interview with executive director, 13 August 2019). In addition, it showed that 'people should identify their problems and then work on those problems by themselves' (Interview with SMU model community facilitator, 12 August 2019).

These messages not only reinforced the pre-existing common self-organising initiatives and practices but also led to the emergence of new forms of self-help among citizens. Hence, monthly communal work on issues such as maintaining village roads, joint projects of brick-making, mandatory monthly meetings and savings, individual household income generation projects and community vigilance started to take root in the community in addition to the pre-existing ones that revolved especially around burial and wedding ceremonies. Minutes from several monthly village meetings show that community members became more active and started to discuss and suggest solutions to the agreed problems. For example, a village meeting on 29 April 2019 tasked the chairperson of the Local Council I (LCI) together with SMU village committee to

move around the village and identify homesteads that still had mud-and-wattle houses. The meeting resolved that the community would, starting from July 2019, begin to construct modern houses for them. There were several other cases of self-help that the village continued to deliberate upon and to find solutions for, such as improving participation in funeral arrangements, group farming and organising village households into ten-home clusters (*mayumba ikumi)*.

4.3 Cooperation as active participation in community affairs

Mutual cooperation in the SMU model means working together to achieve a shared goal (Kim 2015). In the local language of Runyankore, the pillar of cooperation was translated as *okukwatanisa,* which simply means working or identifying with others at all times. It emphasises the idea of an active citizen who, in concert with others, contributes selflessly towards the common good of society. Cooperation, manifested through identifying and working with others, is a prerequisite for belonging and identity, while non-cooperation is generally treated as laziness, aloofness and bad neighbourliness, and may attract ridicule and isolation. In the implementation of the SMU model, cooperation involved infusing the spirit of collective action to ensure that each household participates and benefits in joint village projects and activities. The cooperation espoused by the SMU model was an inclusive one, distinct from the selective participation often mobilised by conventional NGO project approaches to target beneficiaries, often a small section of the community, and achieve time-bound predetermined outcomes.

> The SMU model challenges all village members to work together without leaving anyone behind whether it is communal work or during funerals and other community ceremonies. We have also started working jointly on our gardens through the *mayumba ikumi*

arrangement. (Interview with vice chairperson, SMU committee, 16 August 2019)

Furthermore, discussions with several community members emphasised that good citizenship manifested in working together for mutual benefit. Good cooperation was said to be crosscutting, from households to the immediate neighbourhood through to the entire community:

> According to me, good citizenship is when there is mutual cooperation between spouses at the household level. For example, when there is that cooperation, the family will be able to educate children, be welcoming and peaceful, and generally have development projects. But this cooperation at the family should extend to the community. So, to me a good citizen must also cooperate with community members in all activities such as *Samwiri Odongo*, saving groups and burials. (Interview with former leader SMU committee, 16 July 2019)

At the community level, COVOID emphasised the importance of regular community meetings and helped in the establishment of SMU village committees that worked hand in hand with existing village political structures in spearheading the mobilisation efforts of the model. The understanding of the NGO was that such strategies would foster more cohesive and participatory decision-making as well as increase the community voice for advocacy, all of which somehow contributed to the SDGs' overarching goal of inclusive development that leaves no one behind. For example, a female participant talked about how the SMU model had reawakened the practice of attending meetings, especially among men:

Meetings used to be attended by women in this village, but since the introduction of *Samwiri Odongo,* men have increasingly appreciated the importance of meetings and are now more involved in community projects. (Female participant interview, 23 July 2019)

Although the meetings still have only average attendance, the open, free and dialogic deliberations often focus on finding solutions to the common problems in the village. For example, during a community meeting on 29 July 2019, the poor attendance of meetings was highlighted as one of the challenges facing the implementation of the SMU model. In several other meetings, several by-laws were passed and fines ranging from 10,000 Uganda Shillings (UgX) (approximately €2.50) to 30,000 UgX (approximately €7.50) were suggested to be imposed for uncooperative and deviant behaviour in the village. The listed deviant behaviours included drunkenness, failure to attend meetings, failure to send children to school, failure to participate in communal work, *okwonesa* (meaning a failure to restrain ones' animals from destroying neighbours' crops), operating local bars at restricted times and defaulting on burial contributions. While we were not able to establish the level of enforcement or compliance with these fines, the decision illustrates well the 'stick' element of the SMU model in enhancing cooperative behaviour.

5. DISCUSSION
In this section, we reflect on the emerging active citizenship practices being emphasised and learned through the SMU model, and the ways in which these localised practices potentially contributed to achieving SDGs at the village level. We posit that the SMU can revitalise the spirit of communal development, important in mobilising for inclusive grassroots transformation and poverty eradication envisaged by the SDGs. At the same time, however, it falls short in promoting the organised state-level implementation necessary to overcome critical citizenship constraints that limit the overall achievements of the SDGs in any country. In this regard, we identified some persistent tensions related to the kind of 'active citizenship' promoted through SMU, which should require further attention and analysis.

First, we identified a tension between communalist and individualist citizenship. The SDGs' rallying call to leave no one behind encapsulated in the localisation crusade presupposes a highly inclusive, homogeneous, democratic, and egalitarian context (Menon & Hartz-Karp 2019; Weber 2017), where communities are supposed to share similar ideals of work ethics, aspirations and problems, further strengthened through models such as SMU. In reality, while it is broadly true that citizens in rural communities such as Nyakahama generally have a shared fate of poverty and marginalisation, these are experienced differently at personal and household levels. Factors such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status influence citizenship and the enactment of practices of self-help, diligence and cooperation.

Whereas SMU relies on communal values as the drivers of self-reliant, cooperative and frugal citizenship, it simultaneously offers a counter-narrative of individuals that should take care of their own affairs, inadvertently promoting practices of selfishness and individualised accumulation. In our case, this tension manifested, for instance, in the practice of each household having its own backyard garden of green vegetables, while picking vegetables from a neighbour's garden was punished according to the by-laws. It also showed as poor attendance of meetings by community members, especially males engaged in labour mobility outside the village to ensure household income.

Second, there are continuous tensions between the positive transformative potential of the self-help ethos promoted by SMU, and its obvious shortcomings when it comes to

transformations in structural constraints for citizenship, such as poverty and inequality. Critical scholars have suggested how notions of self-reliance and self-help being promoted by the United Nations to localise SDGs are just subtle attempts to depoliticize development, dampen dissent and replace state accountability with community self-reliance (Buire & Staeheli 2017; Gaynor 2011; Telleria 2018; Weber 2015, 2017). In the same vein, critical observations have pointed to the SMU model's tendency to support authoritarianism and disregard issues such as human rights and democracy (Kim et al. 2011; Jeong 2017). Thus, these critical points of view maintain that transformative development should be able to establish a link between issues such as poverty, market, freedom and democracy in order to have a chance to end global exclusion (Telleria 2018)

In the attempts to localise SDGs in contexts such as Uganda, the SMU model conveniently fits the popular public narratives on holding communities responsible for their own development. The SMU's principle of rural development based on communal ethos resonates with the emphasis on citizens assuming responsibility for their own and national development advocated by the state (RoU 1995, Objective. XXIX). Thus, such models can weaken poor citizens' agency to demand equality from an unfair system (Telleria 2018) characterized by the political economy of neoliberal state withdrawal (Wiegratz et al. 2018) and semi-authoritarian rule based on a clientelist relationship between state political elites and ordinary citizenry in Uganda (Alava et al. 2020; Kalinaki 2020; Muhumuza 2009; Mwenda 2007; Titeca 2006).

Yet, from the localised perspective of incremental learning and change in citizenship practices (Holma et al., 2018), the domestication of the three pillars of SMU promoted individual and collective enthusiasm to try to surmount the problems of poverty and marginalisation. By engaging

with collective hard work combined with notions of self-help, the community members improved their material conditions, and boosted the confidence and assertiveness they later exercised in demanding services such as clean water and road-grading equipment from the district offices. The changes related to construction of new permanent houses, growing a culture of saving, the education of children, advocacy for clean running water resulting from joint efforts, combined with regular meetings that offered dialogical spaces for citizenship expression, were significant for local contributions to achieving the SDGs. The instances of communities learning to solve their own problems and 'not waiting for government' may appear as a depoliticised means to shield duty bearers from responsibility, but at the same time, they are pragmatic ways of dealing with the prevailing contexts in this very moment.

6. CONCLUSION

The chapter showed how a Ugandan NGO used the three pillars of SMU to inculcate active citizenship in a rural community in its effort to localise SDGs. The pillars of the SMU model were translated, domesticated and locally customised: diligence into practices of hard work and frugality; self-help into responsibility, usefulness and confidence, and cooperation into the willingness of the community to jointly participate in activities that addressed different issues of their shared destiny. Each pillar spurred joint and regular community activities, which contributed to changes in resonance with inclusive development central to SDGs. Moreover, by addressing joint problems of immediate concern, the community incrementally learned to be active in shared affairs, including helping the most vulnerable in the spirit of leaving no one behind. They also gained capacity to takes steps to realise some of the SDGs, such as reducing poverty and hunger while achieving decent accommodation, social inclusion, improved water and sanitation, local infrastructure and responsible consumption.

The analysis showed how development models travel globally in multiple ways, ranging from a high-level campaign by global institutions and national governments to civil society networks and, as in our case, through random individual encounters by NGO leaders. Consequently, in line with the concepts of domestication and translation, the models are continuously interpreted, domesticated, customised and contextualised in ways consistent with the conditions, interests, needs and circumstances of the given actors. Therefore, instead of expecting a model such as SMU implemented in Uganda in the late 2010s to produce outcomes similar to those it produced in Korea in the 1970s, we should conduct nuanced analyses of what kinds of changes the model can promote in different contexts.

The activeness promoted in domesticating the SMU model emphasised more of community members' initiatives to solve their own problems than increasing citizens' engagement in claiming their rights related to the achievement of various SGDs and access to public services. Hence, the smooth domestication of the model in the encounter between the NGO and the local community, we suggest, resulted from the way it provided opportunities to address immediate problems, and rhymed with existing local practices of active citizenship manifested in individual initiatives and not being antagonistic towards either local or national values the prevalent political system or power holders.

As a consequence, we contend, that despite the apparent success of the NGO in using SMU to promote active citizenship, the impact remains limited and scattered across time and space. Domestication and localisation of SDGs in selected villages does not create the requisite citizen momentum and capacity to address asymmetrical and historical power structures and systemic inequalities that characterise citizen-state relations in most developing countries. It is not possible to speculate what the consequences for national development would be, if, beyond the rhetoric of endorsement by politicians, SMU was implemented nationwide in contemporary Uganda.

Finally, we suggest that in the efforts to localise SDGs of, for and by the people, any model that generally promotes holistic learning and practices of active citizenship has the potential to enable marginalised people to work together to reduce the constraints of poverty. Thus, models can, to some extent, help achieve the inclusive ideal of leaving no one behind particularly at community level. However, in each case, the potential realises in different ways, and detailed analysis of the contextualised potentialities and limitations to promote transformative development is continuously needed.

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II

LEARNING ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP AMONG RURAL WOMEN: VILLAGE SAVING GROUPS IN WESTERN UGANDA

by

Learning Economic Citizenship Among Rural Women: Village Saving Groups in Western Uganda

Karembe F. Ahimbisibwe and Alice N. Ndidde

1   INTRODUCTION

The concept of economic citizenship is conventionally defined within the prism of rights to work, to own property, to earn wages and to access social benefits (Kessler-Harris, 2003; Lewis, 2003). However, among development practitioners and in gender studies, the notion is often understood from the perspective of addressing and combating female poverty to promote women's economic independence and realize their full and equal status in society (CARE, 2019; Lister, 1997). This chapter presents an empirical analysis of ways in which women learn skills and practices of economic citizenship in rural Uganda in the context of a local NGO's programmes. The NGO uses village savings and lending associations (VSLAs) to enable women to acquire the means to access and control resources in settings where history, traditions and norms regard women as "second class citizens" (Nyakato et al., 2020; Seely et al., 2013;

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155

Tamale, 2004). We use the notion of economic citizenship to conceptualize how women's participation in NGO-initiated VSLAs enables joint and supportive acquisition of multiple skills and financial resources, which combine to address and challenge some of the limitations to their rights and freedoms at community level.

Different forms of village solidarity groups have existed for decades across Africa, mainly to boost communities' capacity to deal with issues that require joint and mutual help (Benda, 2012; Rodima-Taylor, 2013). Historically rooted in African associational life, these self-organized groups have been vital spaces for mobilizing different forms of citizen agency during times of community misfortune and celebrations. Practices of reciprocity, self-reliance and mutuality form the bedrock of different types of solidarity groups, such as bereavement associations, rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), village saving groups and rotational farming groups. VSLAs in particular have recently been popularized in development discourse as a panacea for rural poverty and financial exclusion of the majority population not served by conventional financial institutions (Allen, 2006; Muganga, 2020; Mwansakilwa et al., 2017). Better known as the *VSLA methodology*, as it is popularly referenced in the NGO nomenclature, the approach was first pioneered by CARE International in Maradi, Niger, in 1991 (Allen, 2006). It has since been replicated across African, Asian and Latin American countries to promote financial inclusion of the unbanked, especially 'impoverished and uneducated rural women' (Allen, 2006: 62). Although they serve both men and women, the majority (75%) of the current, almost 6.5 million VSLAs members in Africa are women (CARE, 2019).

In practice, a VSLA is a group of 15–30 self-selected members who pool their money in a fund which provides a source of loan capital (Allen, 2006: 63). Members then borrow at lower and affordable interest rates to expand and grow not only the fund but also members' households and asset base. VSLAs are, thus, operated at the village level and, in our case, created and trained by a local NGO. Members are required to buy shares at weekly meetings and to pay a compulsory nominal fee to a special welfare fund that acts as emergency support for members facing unforeseeable crises requiring cash. VSLAs are run on a cyclic model of between nine and twelve months, at the end of which 'members receive what they have paid in through share purchase plus interest proportional

to their shares' (Green, 2018: 110). Thus, VSLA methodology is entirely self-managing and does not receive external capitalization (Allen, 2006). Rather, it views the task of donors, especially NGOs, to be that of capacity building through a pool of community-based trainers and the provision of lockboxes (Maliti, 2017) that act as safe custody for group documents and cash.

Based on our recent participatory research in rural communities of eastern Uganda (see Ahimbisibwe et al., 2020), we argue that saving groups are primary arenas for communities to associate, enact and learn practices and skills that reinforce citizenship. This is corroborated by several studies which show the crucial role VSLAs play in Uganda in empowering the marginalized with diverse abilities that enable them to realize socioeconomic development. For example, VSLAs have mobilized communities in different parts of the country into self-generated income initiatives and addressed vulnerability in war-affected areas (Malual & Mazur, 2017), provided platforms for strengthening women citizenship at local level (Ndidde et al., 2020) and enabled women to become less dependent on men through diversification of economic ventures (Musinguzi, 2016). As most of the studies highlight the transformative impact of VSLAs on women's livelihoods, less is known about the everyday dynamics of learning in VSLAs (see Matunga, this volume). Therefore, in order to combine the concept of learning with the strengthening of economic citizenship, we draw on the notion of participatory learning (Mayoux, 1998; Pretty, 1995), which maintains that collective and supportive ways of sharing knowledge and experiences lead to sustainable and transformative impact among marginalized groups. We first explore the ways economic citizenship learning takes place in VSLAs, and second, how this learning contributes to enhancing women's citizenship in the local context.

In what follows, we review the literature on notions of economic citizenship and participatory learning, followed by a brief description of study context as well as methods of data collection and analysis. We then present the study's findings that illustrate the collaborative ways in which women learn to be economically self-reliant. Finally, we reflect on the impact of participatory learning on women's economic citizenship and conclude that VSLAs are platforms for women to acquire several skills that strengthen various aspects of their citizenship in the community.

2   Participatory Learning as an Approach to Acquiring Economic Citizenship

In this section, we discuss the concept of economic citizenship with particular reference to women's economic empowerment, the notion of participatory learning and the VSLAs as arenas of women's participatory learning to improve their socioeconomic status.

Economic citizenship is often linked with acquiring and enjoying liberal rights and freedoms related to adequate wages for self and family support, decent and equal work and labour participation and legal and financial independence in society (e.g., Kessler-Harris, 2003; Lewis, 2003). Kessler-Harris (2003: 158–159), for example, defines economic citizenship as:

> the process of bestowing upon women the right to work at the occupation of one's choice (where work includes child rearing and household maintenance); to earn wages adequate to the support of the self and family; to a non-discriminatory job market; to the social benefits necessary to sustain and support labour force participation; and to social environment required for effective choice including adequate housing, safe streets, accessible public transport, and universal health care.

In the same vein, Lewis (2003) argues that economic citizenship should focus on promoting gender autonomy, independence and the equality of men and women within the family and workplace. She then calls for the need to 'secure a more equal gendered distribution of paid and unpaid work' (ibid.: 183) to change the male breadwinner model that constructs men as having the responsibility to earn and women as care providers for the family.

However, writing from the context of the Global South, scholars such as Harris-White et al. (2013) and Tamale (2020) present the dilemma of applying the concept of economic citizenship, if based on 'notions of liberal individualism and universalism' (Tamale, 2020: 210), to contexts where citizenship is practised in a collaborative, albeit socially constrained, gendered way. They opine that economic empowerment based on exclusive promotion of liberal rights and freedoms between men and women often faces backlash and resistance from 'hierarchized religions and reconstructed cultures that are deeply internalized through everyday practices and systems of power' (Tamale, 2020: 209).

Our previous research findings support these arguments. For example, in our recent study of citizenship practices, we showed how in rural Uganda, citizenship is inextricably localized, active and gendered (Ndidde et al., 2020). These contradictory and complex practices occur under the rubric of traditional norms and practices that construct the status of a woman vis-à-vis her relationship with a male, either a father or husband (ibid.: 112). The point we make in this chapter is that attempts to promote women's economic empowerment in such settings must at the same time be sensitive to women's multifaceted citizenship experiences (see Del Castillo Munera, 2021). Arguably, for poor rural women engaged in subsistence farming and other unstable and unregulated informal jobs, economic citizenship may mean no more than the struggle to acquire basic survival means.

Hence, VSLAs as avenues for access to safe and affordable capital, regular interaction, and peer learning and competition (Hendricks & Chidiac, 2011; Musinguzi, 2016; Mwansakilwa et al., 2017) may provide a more realistic route out of poverty than outright engagement with deeply socialized beliefs entrenched in gendered power dynamics, as advocated in feminist literature (e.g., Acker, 1987; Kessler-Harris, 2003; Thompson, 2017). Consequently, the notion of participatory learning (Mayoux, 1998; Pretty, 1995) facilitates understanding of how VSLAs can act as forums for women to learn and implement multiple skills and knowledge related to both economic empowerment and gendered citizenship roles. Participatory learning is premised on enabling the marginalized to generate and share knowledge that is collectively empowering and challenges power inequalities (Mayoux, 1998). Social movements and civil society organizations that apply participatory learning view the community as the key source of knowledge that is multiple, fluid, contextual and trusted, and leads the poor to 'collective action for social change' (Missingham, 2013: 35), self-reliance and sustainability (Wetmore & Theron, 1998). However, in a context like rural Uganda, where learning environments are characterized by marked uncertainties (Pretty, 1995), novel ways are needed to investigate how they promote and support sustainable acquisition and utilization of knowledge.

In general, the participatory learning approach resonates well with the VSLA methodology, which has been presented as an initiative that impacts positively on the livelihoods of vulnerable groups of citizens, especially women across African countries (Allen, 2006; Bannor et al., 2020; Green, 2018; Hendricks & Chidiac, 2011; Muganga, 2020; Musinguzi,

2016). For example, in Ghana, VSLAs sharpened women's business nous and built their confidence to diversify into off-farm practices during the drought period (Bannor et al., 2020), while in Zambia, they facilitated access to affordable credit for hard-to-reach and unbanked rural areas (Mwansakilwa et al., 2017). In Rwanda, Benda (2012: 243) argues that beyond the provision of income to the marginalized poor, VSLAs acted as critical post-genocide spaces for building social capital and 'restoring trust to a relatively recently fragmented, and highly traumatized community'. According to Kesanta and Andre (2015) in Tanzania, VSLAs are long-term models for poverty eradication because women who participate in them support their children's education, health and livelihoods. Additionally, in Mali, VSLAs spread nutrition messages from group to group and have created a number of community treatment centres to address malnutrition (CARE, 2019: 6).

Overall, these cases highlight the role played by VSLAs in strengthening the link between women's economic and social empowerment and more localized citizenship practices. However, they offer little insight into the ways in which learning takes place in VSLAs, and whether the learning leads to both sustained economic empowerment and the adjustment of inequalities, as proposed by the participatory learning approach.

3   STUDY CONTEXT AND METHODS

In this section, we provide a brief background of Uganda's gendered citizenship, introduce the context of the study and describe the methods used to collect and analyse data.

The reality of women's citizenship in Uganda can be analysed in the two contradictory dimensions of legalese and the living experiences of rural women. Legally, the rights and dignity of women as equal citizens are enshrined in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (RoU). National Objective XV of the constitution declares, 'The State shall recognise the significant role that women play in society' (RoU, 1995). Specifically, Article 33, clause 4, emphasizes women's economic rights, stating, 'Women shall have [the] right to equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities'. The progressive legal and political regime has been supplemented by a generally autonomous gender-focused NGO sector (see Tripp, 2000) implementing various interventions to address poverty and related structures that discriminate against women. However, in spite

of these efforts, women, especially in rural areas, continue to face challenges due to structural power relations and practices entrenched in a long history of patriarchy (Ndidde et al., 2020; Tamale, 2020). For instance, women are primarily responsible for sustaining their communities and families and are, as a result, involved in energy-sapping and time-intensive subsistence agriculture, provision of family care, various forms of non-market work and voluntary community activities (Tamale, 2020: 294).

Rubirizi district, where this study was conducted, is found in Ankole sub-region of western Uganda. With over 75% of the population engaged in subsistence agriculture (RoU, 2017), the district is still characterized by some agrarian social and cultural norms that treat women unfairly. For example, the deep-seated 'cultural notions of innate male authority' (Nyakato et al., 2020: 76) place restrictions on women's control and ownership of economic resources and legitimizes preferential treatment of male children as heirs. Among other things, these norms abet early marriages and gender-based violence while reinforcing unequal gender division of labour.

Against this background, Community Volunteer Initiatives for Development (COVOID) started in 2003 as a community-based organization, becoming an NGO in 2010, to offer a holistic approach to women's livelihoods and general well-being (COVOID, 2019: 8). The NGO focuses on broad issues of livelihoods and gender, health, education and capacity strengthening, and climate change reduction (COVOID, n.d.). To achieve the mission of empowering the community, the NGO pioneered the VSLA methodology in 2005. Currently, it supports over 2000 VSLAs spread across five districts of western Uganda (COVOID, n.d.: 1) as one of the most visible antipoverty interventions in the community. However, it acknowledges that social and cultural traditions such as the 'known example that the responsibility of cooking is for women' (COVOID 2019: 19) and other gender constructions may constrain its programmes' impact on women and generally, entire community.

Material for this chapter was collected through qualitative research that used participatory tools in two villages of Busonga and Nyakahama in Rubirizi district. Three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with members of VSLAs, based on a seven-day activity diary. The tool was introduced to participants during the weekly group meetings. Members were then asked to write down all the activities they performed each

day of the week. After seven days, these diaries were discussed by the members in an FGD. Composed of 12–18 VSLA members, the majority of whom were women, FGDs focused on the kinds of activities participants performed daily, how they learnt these activities and the role played by the NGO and VSLAs in enabling their performance. The selected research participants were active members of VSLAs since it was not the scope of this study to explore the various (and often complementary) roles of other actors—the state, church, market and civil society—in empowering women in diverse ways.

In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with COVOID senior members of staff ($n = 3$) who were involved in the implementation and supervision of the NGO programmes. These interviews were conducted in English, the country's official language, while FGDs were held in Runyankore, the lingua franca of the community. Both lasted between one hour to one hour and thirty minutes. These methods were further supplemented by the first author's three-month (June–August 2019) stay in the community, which enabled spontaneous and informal participation and observation of much of the daily life in the community. A framework approach (Smith & Firth, 2011; Srivastava & Thomson, 2009) was used to analyse the data. The process involved intensive, manual back and forth reading of key informant interviews and FGD transcripts and participants' daily diaries while marking and noting recurring themes in notebooks. This was enriched by reflections and insights from informal community interactions and observations. As a result of the analysis, we identified the ways of learning and instances of strengthening economic citizenship discussed in the section that follows.

4   Three Ways of Learning Skills that Strengthen Women Economic Citizenship

In this section, we present the findings of the study. Based on our analysis, we identified three main ways in which women acquire and learn economic skills and knowledge which strengthened their citizen status and rights at the community level.

Learning through Everyday Participation in Group Activities

The entirety of VSLA methodology is a hub of collaborative learning activities for the members. Saving earnings on a weekly basis, attending

weekly meetings and applying for, utilizing and repaying loans are characterized by routine learning for all members. The resultant solidarity and trust acquired through participation spilled over into more associational benefits and practices of citizenship, such as rotational group farming and other community responsibilities. Our study, for example, found that the closeness arising from membership of VSLAs contributed to the revival and strengthening of the bereavement tradition. Locally known as *otamundekyera* (literally meaning, do not abandon or leave me alone with the dead person), the funeral wakes are a long-standing practice of self-help characterized by clear division of labour between men and women. This practice has been strengthened by members' putting money aside to buy items such as tents, kitchenware and plastic chairs, which are then used for group functions but also hired out to generate income. A woman participant who admitted to initial pessimism about joining VSLAs described the learning she had acquired from participation:

> The truth is for me I used to be an aloof traditional woman. I used to keep in the kitchen, and despised women associations as fake and exploitative … but since joining COVOID-supported saving groups, I have learnt to do many things…. Through regular interaction I have, alongside other members, learned to work, to save, to educate children, to start a poultry project.

One of the learning avenues is inherent to the VSLAs' method of operations: all activities are conducted in an open way to ensure the inclusive participation of every member. First, membership is self-selected and leadership is elected by all members through secret ballot. Members and leaders are (s)elected based on qualities that are generally agreed to reflect 'good' and responsible standing in the community (see CARE, 2011). Second, VSLA meetings are conducted in a scripted and structured manner, but with flexibility that allows members to exchange ideas and make decisions about group affairs. Third, VSLAs maintain a special social and welfare fund popularly known as *ez'ebizibu* (emergency fund), drawn from members' compulsory weekly payment ranging from 200 to 500 Uganda shillings (UGX) (approx. €0.05–0.125), which is used to cater for members' unforeseeable emergency expenses. Members with emergency cash needs, including those who do not have money for the weekly saving, borrow from this fund at no interest for a period of two weeks.

The openness of VSLAs is demonstrated in the practice of members sitting in a semi-circular form around the metallic lockbox with a clear view of all transactions. Leaders loudly announce the number of shares purchased by each member, the amount each borrower wants, those repaying the loans and, sometimes, members who may be in need of emergency cash. These processes are recorded in the respective member's passbook and meeting proceedings, in a counter book. All the money collected is announced and distributed according to members' loan requirement requests. As we show in the next sections, the open participation in these activities provides opportunities for learning different skills associated with personal development, public speaking and listening, tolerance, mutual (dis)agreement and many other critical personal growth skills and attitudes that collectively strengthen several facets of citizenship.

Learning as Non-formal Training and Awareness Creation

The crux of the VSLA methodology lies in the comprehensive training provided by NGOs to members of the saving group. Conducted in the community, the trainings involve fifteen field visits scattered over a period of nine months (CARE, 2011). Training content is organized into sessions focusing on themes such as VSLA concepts, group formation, record keeping, conflict resolution, the making of rules and regulations and loan management (ibid.). The sessions also integrate wide-ranging knowledge to address context-specific factors that may militate against the growth of a saving culture in the community. For example, conversations with NGO staff and VSLA members revealed that joint family budgeting, gender relations, entrepreneurship, frugality and household poverty form important components of the training in this community. This is done to create awareness and discourage practices that promote persistent poverty in the community. For example, participants revealed that the prevalent habit of consuming expensive fish, which had for long militated against the culture of saving in the community, was discouraged and slowly abandoned. There was unanimity during FGDs that COVOID training discouraged habits of *okuriira eryo* (spendthriftness) and domestic violence by emphasizing frugality and family harmony. As a widowed female VSLA member observed:

> I used to sell sweet potatoes and cassava in the local market and after buying books and pens for the children, spend all the remaining money

buying fish and second-hand clothes. Upon joining this saving group, COVOID trained us about the importance of saving and frugality. Gradually, I stopped spending on fish and learned to work hard in order to get money to save every week. Since joining the VSLA, I no longer worry about school fees because I can always easily get money from the saving groups to which I belong and clear the school fees.

From this quote, it is evident that in addition to teaching habits of saving and frugality, VSLAs provided the quickest access to affordable money to solve immediate problems. The NGO also used community-based participatory training techniques involving village agents and model couples and arranging field visits outside the communities. 'Model couples' was a strategy in which 'successful' married couples shared their 'success' experience of jointly planning and making family decisions and how they have addressed poverty and disagreements. Village agents provided continuous support for the saving group's day-to-day operations to ensure sustained momentum of the groups, especially during the formative stages. As a participant observed:

They (COVOID) came into the village mobilizing women to start saving associations, mobilized us into groups, trained us on how to save, borrow and pay back in three months so that the other members can also borrow. After training … we started this group, they sold us the lockbox at the cost of 30,000 UGX (approx. € 8) and we started saving.

Several stories were told of the important roles played by model couples and village agents in creating awareness about the importance of forming and belonging to saving groups, joint planning and decision making and diversifying income sources. Women reported regularly calling upon their respective village agents for support and training whenever they realized a skills and/or knowledge gap.

Peer Learning, Imitation and Positive Competition

The study also established that women learn by engaging in mutual imitation and competition among themselves as peers involved in a shared struggle for self-development within the context of poverty and its related constraining effects.

First, young and novice women reported that they picked up valuable life skills and practical lessons through association with experienced

women mentors. For example, a story was told of a hardworking and selfless woman in the 1990s, who challenged women not to be lazy and dependent on their husbands. She was reported to have inspired many women in the community to join self-help groups, engage in petty informal trade to supplement their incomes and have stable marriages.

> [S]he was a hardworking and committed woman. She would tell you, 'Come let us go and garden' ... 'Why should we accept dying of poverty as women?' She was always the first to harvest and sell fresh beans in the market. She was always the first one to plant, whether sweet potatoes or beans, in any season ... she is the one who taught us the practice of growing sweet potatoes. (Female participant, VSLA)

Similarly, women who had joined the saving groups much earlier and registered visible progress inspired others to learn from them. Cases of women joining saving groups after listening to and witnessing successes achieved by their peers, neighbours and friends were common. A COVOID staff member involved in the training of community members in VSLA methodology argued that when women save and share out relatively big amounts of money, they get excited and motivated to continue saving. Some women, he said, would earn in the region of one million shillings (1,000,000 UGX) (approx. €250) at the end of a saving cycle. Naturally, such a financial achievement would spread across the community and subsequently act as motivation for other women to join at the start of the next cycle. Moreover, such luminaries also made visible improvements in their lives, such as acquisition of household assets and moving children from 'low' standard public schools to 'high' standard private schools, among other changes. At the same time, women also reported that observing other women juggle different responsibilities helped challenge and replace prevailing laziness and lethargy with conviction that they too could multitask and fight against household poverty.

Second, it was reported that VSLAs produced positive and healthy intra- and inter-community competition. Locally, this feeling is known as *ihato*, which directly translates as positive, progressive or healthy jealousy and is considered one of the characteristics of a good and development-oriented citizen in the community. Closer observations and interactions within the two villages revealed communities and households in a positive competitive and convivial mood. The two communities were a hub of

activity as households ran different infrastructural and income-generating projects. There was, for example, a visible trend of new and more permanent houses being built or recently completed, with some of them connected to solar power and digital television panels. Further, atypical of many communities in rural Uganda, we did not find any school-age children stranded at home (due to lack of school fees) during this study. A female participant observed, 'When a member of my saving group builds a permanent house or educates their children, I not only admire them but I push myself to work harder to see that I also do the same or even better'.

5   Impacts of Learning within VSLAs on Women's Economic Citizenship and Beyond

In this section, we reflect on what the identified ways of learning economic skills portend for women's economic citizenship in traditional rural contexts. We argue that when women learn together in a supportive manner, they achieve reasonable financial means and attendant social recognition. Taken together, these achievements can gradually challenge unequal power dynamics and significantly change women's status and rights in the community.

Intricacies of Negotiating Women's Citizen Rights

Research on citizenship in most parts of Africa shows that it is historically gendered (Seely et al., 2013; Tamale, 2004) and ingrained in deep-seated traditions of patriarchy (Ndidde et al., 2020). Against this background, the findings of this study suggest that the economic competence acquired through membership in VSLAs gives women renewed hope, confidence and belief in their abilities to change their own lives and that of their communities. This confidence was manifested in women's increased activeness and enhanced capacities to meet immediate and, progressively, strategic needs. Inadvertently, women's increased capacity to own property, and contribute to breadwinning, decision making and children's education (Kwarteng & Sarfo-Mensah, 2019; Muganga, 2020), and assume leadership roles, among other skills, challenge age old gendered stereotypes and biases. It also subjects such norms to continuous scrutiny and ultimately, may lead to their modification and/or abandonment in the long term.

Analysis of women's seven-day activity diaries showed that, first, women are involved in a plethora of economic livelihood strategies and, on average, belong to at least two VSLAs. Second, women were more involved than men in community activities, such as visiting the sick, attending burial wakes, participating in group farming and community work, as well membership of different groups of local churches. Third, on a typical day, women rested for only six hours, waking as early as 6 am and retiring to bed at 12.00 am. Comparably, men woke at 9 am and retired to bed at 10 pm and had more leisure time in between. Fourth, during FGDs there was consensus that women did more work than men, a trend that was also observable in several community activities in which the first author participated. It was clear, therefore, that women are still disproportionately affected by an unequal division of labour. There were also scattered voices claiming that some men contribute little or nothing to support their families. A woman participant in Busonga village, for example, claimed that 'my husband is not bothered or interested in working', while it was also emphasized that there were still some cases of men in the area who 'spend most of their time in bars' (Fig. 1).
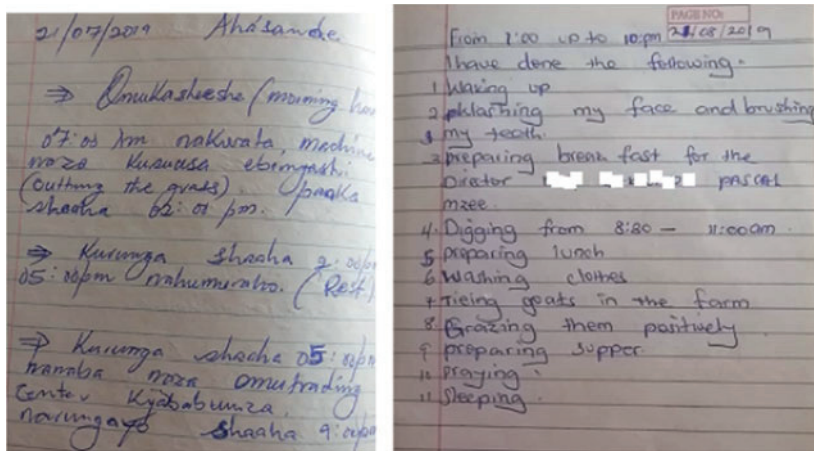

Fig. 1   A sample comparison of a woman's (*right*) and man's (*left*) schedule of daily activities

The woman's daily activity diary shows the typical 'heavy' workload involved vis-à-vis the man's 'light' workload that includes rest and popular leisure pastimes at the trading centre – usually for an evening drink. Photo by the first author.

These cases notwithstanding, evidence of changing and negotiated gender relations and mindsets abounded. Men and women argued that COVOID had taught them the importance of joint planning and helping one another in the performance of some domestic chores. A male participant claimed, 'When my wife is breastfeeding, I assist her [with] some cooking because helping one another is the easiest way to chase household poverty'. During an exercise in which community members offered rotational agricultural labour, women told the first author that they agree to 'share' work with their husbands who are involved in doing more mobile work, mainly as *boda boda* motorcycle riders in the urban centres. In turn, the husbands contribute money, which is saved in the VSLAs groups as the couple's joint shares. For instance, there was a couple who ran a mobile restaurant together in the weekly market every Wednesday. In another case, a couple reported that they share responsibilities, with the husband rising early to buy fish from the distant lake shores and the wife selling it in the market. While such practices of gender interdependence (see Lister, 1997) were not widespread, they point to the fact that with increased learning and economic competence, significant changes and negotiations in gender relations began to manifest in the communities.

Contextualized Women Citizenship and Empowerment Experiences

Feminist scholars argue that an overhaul and transformation of oppressive power structures and systems are required for women's equality and emancipation to be fully realized (Acker, 1987; Thompson, 2017). However, several studies draw attention to the gradual empowering and transformative potential of even modest knowledge and changes attained under VSLAs on the lives and experiences of women in marginalized contexts (Ahimbisibwe et al., 2020; Burlando & Canidio, 2017; Kwarteng & Sarfo-Mensah, 2019; Muganga, 2020). This view and our study findings remind us of a rather complex question an undergraduate student asked the first author during a lecture on practical and strategic gender needs: '*How can a "naked" woman be empowered?*' The student's

argument was that, in the context of marginalization and poverty, talking of legalistic empowerment to a poor, hungry and destitute woman is, to all intents, an exercise in futility. Rather, any attempt to realize meaningful empowerment of women as equal citizens must, of necessity, focus on enabling poor women first to fulfil their subsistence and practical needs.

Our findings seem to concur with the student's argument. For example, the VSLA methodology was pivotal in enabling women to save and borrow affordably to meet several needs. It also became a space for self-mobilization and self-organizing and provided a training and grooming arena for confidence building, awareness, leadership, joint learning of useful economic citizenship skills and gaining experience. Crucially, the weekly meetings re-energized practices of community responsibility and promoted 'subtle ideals of citizenship' (Karlan et al., 2017) such as consensus-building, solidarity, learning, trust, participation and reciprocity in the community. Responding to practically felt needs of women increased their income and, therefore, provided an entry point to identifying and addressing their long-term strategic interests related to property acquisition, improved power and decision-making relations. Contextually, this manifested in women having, sharing and actualizing broader aspirations such as working with husbands to construct permanent houses and funding 'quality' education, of girl children in particular.

Subsequently, as VSLA membership strengthened women's position as economic actors, and reduced their dependence while promoting interdependence, transformative changes began to occur with regard to women's access to and control over productive resources. At the end of each saving cycle, women reported that they, sometimes with their husbands, had invested in tangible assets such as goats, pigs and *boda* motorcycles, while others had bought pieces of land and diversified into other activities, especially petty, informal trade. These and other assets are the 'banks' of women because they are easily saleable when the need for cash arises.

6   Conclusions

In this chapter, we have demonstrated how an NGO-initiated and supported VSLA programme leverages the collectivist ethos inherent in rural communities to infuse the skills and knowledge of financial inclusion. We have identified the three main ways through which women learn and practice economic citizenship as everyday participation, non-formal

training and healthy peer imitation and competition. We have also empirically shown how, via these means, VSLAs reinforce women's economic citizenship as active involvement and improved gender relations in the community.

The nature of VSLA activities and procedures contributes to collaborative learning and action that permeate individual members and the broader community with a sense of hope, belief and belonging, critical elements for citizens living in contexts constrained by poverty and tradition. Because VSLA activities are largely participatory and constructed in a mutually supportive environment, they help women acquire different skills that increase their asset base, enable them assume leadership roles within and beyond the groups, and negotiate some of their rights at the local level. In our case, financial enhancement enabled women to meet diverse obligations and perform citizen responsibilities in society with a reduced burden. Therefore, understood in this context, economic citizenship entailed the ability of women to use the acquired financial wherewithal, first, to realize their potential and aspirations and generally contribute to socioeconomic transformations at both household and community levels; second, the ongoing learning and resultant developments created an environment of persistent negotiation of unequal power dynamics and modification, albeit subtly, of what is generally considered to be the 'unacceptable face of patriarchy' (Kabeer, 2012: 228) in the community.

Although VSLAs' activities are held in a participatory manner, some scholars have observed that weekly meetings are often conducted as a routinized and scripted ritual that is in contrast to the daily financial and social transactions of group members (e.g. Green, 2018). In the case of this study, however, while VSLAs ran on scripted rules and regulations, they were neither punitive nor manifestly alien to group members. Rather, the routinized rules are embedded in the methodology, consensually agreed upon and progressively learned as part of the norms of group behaviour. Crucially, the rules form part of the social bonding, trust and security which is the basis for the enactment of diverse practices of belonging and membership.

Yet the study findings have also shown that more work still needs to be done to close the gap between participatory learning and the practices of economic citizenship promoted by VSLAs. For example, while general improvements in the socioeconomic livelihoods of women have been realized, vestiges of unequal gender relations are still prevalent in different

aspects of the community. Some of the emerging improvements in gender interdependence discussed in this chapter remain largely sporadic, spontaneous and scattered from household to household. It would have great impact if NGOs purposely streamlined learning that consistently addressed the profound gender dynamics that limit women's full exercise of citizenship. This can be achieved by leveraging the feel-good effect created by VSLAs to propose mutually negotiated and participatory agreed initiatives such as village by-laws and sensitization efforts against some of the traditional norms related, for example, to control over resources and unequal division of labour. This would further strengthen VSLAs' niche as space where women's dependence slowly morphs into citizenship as gender interdependence.

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III

EXPLORING *OBUTYAMYE* AS MATERIAL CITIZENSHIP IN BUSOGA SUBREGION, UGANDA

by

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Exploring *Obutyamye* as Material Citizenship in Busoga Subregion, Uganda

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Abstract

This article explores how being a citizen is inexorably bound up with the resources individuals own and deploy to support livelihoods in the rural locations of postcolonial states. Drawing on the works of Kabeer (2006) and Baglioni (2016), the article zooms in on how citizenship is manifestly and inescapably material in the Busoga subregion of eastern Uganda. Data for the article were collected using qualitative methods among beneficiaries of antipoverty programmes implemented by Action for Development (ACFODE), a national non-governmental organization (NGO). Findings show that, locally, citizenship is understood as *obutyamye*, connoting an (un)equal experience of being *in, for* and *with* the community based on what one owns. ACFODE interventions that resonate with and address the material needs of the community have crucial implications for the localised practice of citizenship. What *obutyamye* portends for community belonging is discussed with a focus on how NGO antipoverty initiatives both challenge and reproduce local power asymmetries related to gender and resource ownership. In conclusion, the article highlights the crucial role NGOs' antipoverty efforts play in strengthening people's material well-being and, potentially, their citizenship status and agency at the small scale.

Keywords: Material citizenship, antipoverty, NGO, *obutyamye*, Busoga, Uganda

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Universalist notions of citizenship as equal status enjoyed by members of a nation-state have been challenged by emergent debates that emphasize the plurality of contexts in which citizenship occurs. This article provides an empirical examination of the notion of material citizenship in agrarian locations of East Africa. Scholarship on material citizenship has recently gained attention in sociology (Baglioni 2016; Lee and Bartlett 2021), studies of autochthony (Geschiere 2009; Lund 2011), and in gender and development studies (Kabeer 2006; Lister 1997). Whilst these studies draw from a wide range of contexts and theoretical approaches and are, therefore, inconclusive and contestable, they generally suggest that a strong link exists between citizenship and different kinds of resources, assets, possessions, and relations. For example, property such as land (Geschiere 2009; Lund 2011), objects like paperwork and documents (Carswell and De Neve 2020), and socioeconomic and cultural capital (Baglioni 2016) have been identified as central in the everyday exercise and actualization of citizenship.

Similarly, several scholars have defined and described citizenship to illuminate the idea that a tight connection exists between "what we have and who we are" (Lund 2011, 71). Bryan Turner (1993), for instance, argues that the notion of citizenship encompasses a set of practices, which define a person as a member of society and, as a result, determine which resources such persons and social groups receive. More emphasis on the material nature of citizenship has been made by scholars suggesting that "it is difficult to exercise political and civil rights to the full, if hungry or homeless" (Lister 2008, 13), "since seeking redress for the violation of even the most basic of civil rights entails unaffordable costs" (Kabeer 2006, 98).

These viewpoints are particularly relevant in development studies where the conceptualization of citizenship is increasingly broadened to incorporate "a form of personhood that links rights to agency" (Mukhopadhyay 2015, 613) of citizens to shape their destiny and respond to prevailing challenges (African Union Commission [AUC] 2015). Moreover, when studying citizenship in the context of developing countries, one is confronted with tales of how multiple dimensions of poverty and marginalization consign billions of people to a life of indignity (United Nations [UN] 2015; Harrison 2010), constraining their abilities to engage as citizens (Pettit 2016). Studies of gender in East Africa have, for example, noted that access to and control over resources, especially land, is at the heart of the unequal power distribution and citizenship experiences between and among men and women (Obika 2022; Bird and Espey 2010; Nyakato, Rwabukwali, and Cools 2020). In addition, a common saying in Uganda, *omwavu tasinga musango* (a poor person cannot win a [court] case) (Mbazira 2018; World Voices Uganda 2020), entrenches a popular perception that only the rich can get justice because they possess both the money to bribe and power to influence courts of law or any other place of arbitration.

That said, there are emerging empirical and longitudinal studies that seem to disagree with the narrative of the perpetual stagnation and inertia of agrarian economies, material life, and productivity in rural Africa. These studies claim that local people's livelihoods and wellbeing are experiencing changes and transformation as a result of incremental learning, local organization, increased productivity, and asset accumulation (for details see Brockington and Noe 2021; Holma and Kontinen 2020c). At the heart of these modest changes are lived experiences of grassroots organization and mobilization around commonly felt problems and needs. Village-based groups, local churches, women's associations, and ethnic groups have been identified as playing crucial roles in

this largely state-absent rural modification and reconfiguration (Jones 2009). Moreover, informal spaces, particularly village-based self-help groups, have recently gained traction as conduits for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to implement antipoverty interventions (Mercer 2002; Banks, Hulme, and Edwards 2015). According to Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015, 713), going through "a less formalized grassroots-driven process of 'associationalization'" is one of the various strategies adopted by NGOs in restrictive contexts to position themselves as partners – and not adversaries – of the state in development.

While much of the classic West-centric debate on citizenship has focused on conceptualizations of citizenship as equal membership and belonging to a nation state (eg., Kartal 2002; Ron 2014), in this article, I draw, instead, from scholarship that stresses a broadened understanding of citizenship as taking place in "heterogeneous sites and settings" (Clarke et al. 2014, 133) within and beyond the state as a legal and political entity. Accordingly, these studies suggest that citizenship can be perceived as a multi-layered (Yuval-Davis 1999), localized (Holma and Kontinen 2020b), flexible (Frey 2003) and gendered (Mukhopadhyay 2015) experience underpinned by a variety of meanings and interpretations. Based on these conceptualisations, the article adopts the notion of material citizenship to conceptualise the kinds of citizenship experiences described by community members partaking in an NGO's antipoverty interventions in rural Uganda. The notion of material citizenship is used in this article to refer to the idea that people's everyday experiences of being a citizen are anchored and expressed in their capacities to own, expand, utilize, and draw on diverse resources to improve personal wellbeing and fulfil the obligations and responsibilities that define a citizen in a locale. The concept of resources is used broadly to encompass all things, including material assets and property, relations, and the knowledge and skills around, with, and through which rural people strengthen their capabilities to meet their livelihood needs and express themselves as citizens at the local level.

The relevance of the notion of material citizenship became apparent in a study of localized citizenship in Namutumba District in the Busoga subregion of eastern Uganda. In this particular location, participants seemed to value, and enthusiastically talked about, the modest material changes experienced in their lives resulting from the livelihood training in improved farming and food security offered by Action for Development (ACFODE), a national non-governmental organization (NGO). As I explain later, participants' viewpoints emphasised how partaking in recent livelihood trainings conducted in the community by ACFODE broadly strengthened their diverse capacities to meet material needs and perform different roles expected of them as citizens at the level. On the basis of conversations with the participants, observations of everyday life and reflections on the notion of multiple conceptualizations of citizenship, it became apparent that the kinds of reported change in material conditions at the local level needed empirical exploration.

This article makes two contributions to contemporary debates in the field of citizenship and development studies. First, it introduces the notion of *obutyamye* to illustrate an inherently material view of citizenship in the Busoga subregion of Uganda. Second, it shows that by strengthening the material well-being of participants, NGO antipoverty interventions contribute to the local perception and practice of citizenship, to which (in)equality is central. As I will show, *obutyamye* relates to a sense of being rooted in the community by way of resource ownership, which leads some community members to share a sense of equal belonging and identity. Yet, because resources within the community are not evenly possessed, *obutyamye* can also refer to the inequality of the

community's poorest members, particularly women and men without property. By conceptualising material citizenship in this way, this article, then, argues that the notion of citizenship as *obutyamye* is inherently embedded with inequalities along lines of gender and resource ownership. To explore these issues, I investigate the role played by diverse (material) resources in local understanding of citizenship and how ACFODE's antipoverty interventions impact on the understanding and practice of everyday experience of citizenship in Busoga subregion, Uganda.

The next section develops a theoretical conceptualization of material citizenship, which is followed by an introduction of the research context, highlighting the state of citizenship in Uganda and the Busoga subregion, and the research methods used. The article then presents research findings which show that resources are central in the understanding and practice of citizenship and the ways in which ACFODE interventions reinforce and challenge this understanding. This is followed by a discussion on the implications of material resources for local understanding and practice of citizenship. The article concludes with a suggestion for reconsideration of the role of the state in addressing systemic inequalities that constrain citizenship and are beyond the limited capacity of NGOs.

Towards a conceptualization of material citizenship in a post-colony

In this section I develop my approach to material citizenship by drawing on the work of two scholars: Kabeer's (2006) analysis of citizenship as embedded in material relations in postcolonial societies, and Baglioni's (2016) sociological analysis of material citizenship in the European context. I then use these ideas to reflect on the ability of NGOs' antipoverty initiatives both to strengthen and challenge prevailing citizenship practices in an agrarian setting.

Kabeer (2006) draws extensively on the evolution of Western liberal citizenship to illustrate how material resources have always been at the centre of exclusion in the theory and practice of citizenship. From the ancient city-state of Athens where the concept of citizenship first emerged, it implied "a highly bounded community" in which "only those men with the material means, personal breeding and leisure to perform their civic duties counted as citizens" (Kabeer 2006, 91–92). This understanding endured through changing cultural and historical eras as women, slaves, serfs, and other low-caste human beings were not treated as citizens on the basis of their relations with property. Kabeer further argues that a catalogue of episodic reforms and revolutions progressively challenged this exclusivist conception of citizenship around the world. In particular, the Enlightenment era, the Industrial and French Revolutions, colonialism, (neoliberal) capitalism, and constitutional democracy led to the universalization of different levels of rights for citizens across the globe. In Europe, for example, the universalist conception of liberal citizenship emerged

> (…) in the context of a series of major material and ideological upheavals (…) the decline of feudal property relations, the rise of capitalist markets and the modern state, the growing individuation of ideas of personhood, the real and ideological separation of the different spheres of society, encapsulated in the separation of the 'public' sphere of market, state and civil society and the 'private' sphere of family, kinship and community. (Kabeer 2006, 96)

She further argues that this citizenship model of "an individual as citizen, a sovereign human being, equal to all others, subject only to the laws of the land and the forces of the marketplace" (2006, 95) was transferred and bequeathed to post-colonial states without the corresponding socio-cultural systems and statecraft to enforce it. Moreover, the post-colonies were under traditional precapitalist systems where "claims to resources were generally grounded in variations of the 'moral economy'" (2006, 97). In Uganda, like most sub-Saharan Africa countries, the 'moral economy' was characterized by hierarchical socio-political relations (Babikwa 2004), although the communal way of life encapsulated in "the extended notion of family gave a wide range of kinfolk, neighbours and villagers, some degree of economic responsibility for each other" (Kabeer 2006, 95). The result of this transfer was "a fragmented notion of citizenship that reproduced, rather than disrupt, the socially ascribed statuses of kinship, religion, ethnicity, race, caste and gender" (2006, 97).

Baglioni's (2016, 72) material approach to citizenship is shaped by a European liberal individualist context. His approach aims "to show what someone can do starting from his/her own resources (the capitals) and from those provided by national and local institutions (the rights)". Using a sociological lens, Baglioni argues that a conceptualization of citizenship as juridical status in a society that is increasingly tilting towards government cuts and the shrinkage of welfare states is inadequate. To this end, he suggests a material approach to analyse how, in the era of a "spread of precariousness" (2016, 70), people use state-granted status and rights together with personal capabilities to live meaningfully and practically in society. Baglioni defines material citizenship as the "individual capability of a citizen or a group of people who share the same social condition to put into practice citizenship status in the areas of property, work, health and education, consumption and information" (2016, 71).

Central to Baglioni's material approach to citizenship is the notion of capitals, which he describes as "socially enabling resources that help to define persons, allowing them to determine kinds of action, of reflection or of status, to a degree that varies according to what is available to the individual" (2016, 76). Drawing on Bourdieu (1986), he categorizes capitals into four types. *Economic* capital is based on personal ownership of economic resources that are easily translated into monetary terms. *Cultural* capital embodies the cognitive resources that qualify a person's cultural level, such as educational qualifications, linguistic ability, cultural interests, aesthetic preferences, acquired knowledge and skills. *Social* capital entails the relations that a person enters into or can mobilize, such as friendships, contacts, influences, social favours, and duties. Finally, *symbolic* capital is a person's social recognition, which is derived from combining a person's ability to enter into mutual relations with people who possess similar capitals (Baglioni 2016). Therefore, Baglioni's treatment of capitals as the crux of an individual's mode of living in any society resonates with Kabeer's (2006) notion of 'moral economy' on which rural communities rely to support livelihoods in postcolonial states like Uganda. For example, capitals are presented as the incentive that encourages individuals to "put their own 'being in society' into practice" (Baglioni 2016, 79) beyond the institutional rights.

In summary, the conceptualization of material citizenship applied here combines the perspective of the historical evolution of citizenship wherein property has played diverse roles (Kabeer 2006) and sociological analysis of capitals (Baglioni 2016). This guides analysis of the notions of citizenship emerging from people's descriptions of what citizenship entails, and how NGOs' anti-poverty interventions strengthen notions of citizenship in such settings in rural Uganda. The conceptual framework, thus, alludes to

citizenship as tied up with both the historical and material realities from which it emerges, on the one hand, and the ability to mobilize, expand, and rely on diverse capitals, which is necessary for recognition as a member of the community, on the other. This conceptualization becomes particularly relevant when analysing citizenship in fragile postcolonial states like Uganda.

Research context: Citizenship in Uganda, Busoga and ACFODE interventions

In this section, I illustrate how citizenship in Uganda has historically evolved in communal and material terms and show how this manifests in present day Busoga subregion. I also give a brief explanation of ACFODE and its interventions to strengthen local citizens' capacity to meet material needs.

Prior to the introduction of the liberal model of citizenship during colonialism, Ugandan society was organized as constellations of state and stateless communities (Babikwa 2004). During colonialism, these differentially governed constellations were (forcefully) merged and reconfigured into a republic with attendant ideas of constitutional democracy and citizenship rights. However, the colonial reforms did not turn Uganda into a pure Western satellite state, as traditional practices continued to grow alongside western capitalist ideals. This gave birth to a contemporary state and citizenship regime that "represents an amalgam of elements of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial mind-sets" (Babikwa 2004, 41).

For example, while the 1995 Constitution of Uganda is clear on the political-legal status of citizenship and, in theory, guarantees a host of equal rights, including property rights (see Const. of Republic of Uganda [RoU], Ch. 3), the practice of citizenship remains saliently different. Firstly, traditional norms and practices that treat women unequally (Tamale 2020) and agrarian poverty, with over 75% of the population mired in subsistence agriculture (National Planning Authority [NPA] 2020), have persisted. Secondly, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime under Museveni has adopted a "neoliberal narrative that challenges citizens to take responsibility [for] developing themselves and families out of poverty" (Ahimbisibwe and Kontinen 2021, 37), rather than looking to the state for solutions. Thirdly, the Ugandan state has, over time, adopted multiple tactics to manage, control, confuse, and suppress different forms of citizen dissent (see Tapscott 2021; Curtice and Behlendorf 2021).

These circumstances mean that the idea of citizenship in Uganda is focused more on localized obligations and less on (legal political) rights ((Ndidde, Ahimbisibwe and Kontinen 2020). Subsequently, Alava et al. (2020, 57) have suggested that in contemporary Uganda, citizenship "manifests on one hand, in the upfront contestation and mobilization of visible opposition figures with increased popular support and, on the other, continuously in mundane everyday life where problems are solved and shared issues are addressed together" in line with histories and contexts of ethnicity, gender, and other issues. For instance, a typical citizen in a rural area is defined not by the rights they enjoy but by their hours of hard work: toiling in the fields, caring for the sick, collecting water, and entering into mutual networks with neighbours and co-villagers to expand opportunities for survival. In this context, spaces of affiliation and communal identity – and, over the last four decades, NGOs – continue to be critical elements in how poor people organize themselves to survive and fulfil their obligations and responsibilities in Uganda (see Holma and Kontinen 2020c).

Busoga in eastern Uganda bears the characteristics of citizenship described in the foregoing discussion. According to official government reports, the region is one of the poorest in the country, with poverty standing at 42% compared to the national level of 21.4% (NPA 2020, 7). The region is also home to cultural beliefs and practices (RoU 2020) that differentially treat men and women. Moreover, a 2016 report by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) profiles Namutumba District, the location of this study, as highly vulnerable to socioeconomic factors such as "power relationships and institutions or cultural aspects of a social system" (RoU 2016, 31) that, among other features, frame female children as sources of wealth (New Vision 2011). According to local media reports, this mindset, exacerbated by poverty and soaring population growth, has led to high drop-out rates from school, especially among girls, leading to teenage pregnancies, early marriages and gender-based violence (see for example, New Vision 2011; Daily Monitor 2020; Chimpreports 2021). It is against this background that NGOs like ACFODE implement development interventions that aim to improve the material wellbeing and household incomes of poor citizens in a bid to fight poverty and its attendant consequences in the community.

ACFODE is a national gender advocacy NGO with a long history of implementing interventions that empower communities. It has been at the forefront of championing the gender agenda in line with its vision of 'a just society where gender equality is a reality' (ACFODE 2015). Established in 1986, donor-funded ACFODE is one of the largest NGOs operating in the four regions of the country, implementing interventions in thematic areas of governance and citizen participation, women's economic empowerment, gender-based violence, and community livelihoods (ACFODE 2015). In an attempt to promote citizen agency in Uganda's restrictive and volatile politics, ACFODE has, over time, adopted an approach that seeks a delicate balance between national level advocacy on good governance and community development programmes (Kontinen and Ndidde 2020).

For example, while intent on transforming unequal gender structures, ACFODE realized the importance of strategically engaging and integrating men and cultural and religious leaders into training sessions and other activities in order to respond to existing social power patterns in communities (Kontinen and Ndidde 2020). In Namutumba District, ACFODE implemented a three-year (2012-2014) livelihood programme that strengthened farmers' knowledge and skills, in order to achieve, improve, and maintain food security, production, storage, value addition, and marketing (ACFODE 2015). Using existing village-based self-help groups, the NGO trained participants to diversify household income and address malnutrition. Trained members were supplied with simple farm implements such as "groundnut shellers, cassava chippers, spray pumps to enhance their food production, fetch better prices and improve livelihoods" (ACFODE 2015, 41).

Methods

This article is based on data collected for the larger project *Growth into Citizenship* (GROW) (2017-2019) that was 'interested in local definitions of "citizenship" and what role, if any, NGOs played in the everyday life of the community members' (Holma and Kontinen 2020a, 7). I collected the data together with my co-researcher, Alice, in May 2017 in three rural villages in Namutumba District. As in most agrarian communities in Uganda, community members own and live on their own (small) pieces of land on which they practise subsistence farming as their main livelihood activity. Thirty-two (4 males, 28 females) community members participated in this study and were purposively selected

based on the criteria of having been active in implementing ACFODE knowledge and skills. The study was guided by open-ended and conversational themes that addressed local understandings of citizenship and practices and spaces of belonging, participation, and identity. The main intention was to observe, capture, and illustrate stories of what being a citizen entailed in everyday life of the community that had benefited from a three-year livelihoods project implemented by ACFODE between 2012-2014.

The study conducted interviews and participant observation in informal and spontaneous activities in which we found the participants engaged, and in touring projects around participants' homesteads. This interaction was useful for creating and strengthening the atmosphere of honesty, mutuality, and conviviality vital to the successful implementation of participatory research (Genat 2009). The interactive interviews, conducted in the local language (Lusoga[1]), lasted 45-60 minutes and were audio-recorded and later transcribed and translated into English. Ethically, we were guided by the principles of participatory research and had a fair knowledge of the culture and language of the participants, which assisted us in our interactions. For example, to avoid appearing 'elitist and privileged' we walked through the village guided by local leaders, spoke the local language, and were cautious not to enter 'culturally sensitive' sections of the homesteads.

A thematic approach was used for data analysis (Vaismoradi et al. 2016; Braun and Clarke 2006). Tentative themes on the prominence of resources and the NGO's contribution to increasing household resources emerged already from participants' narratives and illustrations during fieldwork. At the end of each day in the field, reflections on the day's fieldwork crystallized these themes into something tangible that could be discerned in the way that participants enthusiastically talked about how they had benefitted from ACFODE's livelihood interventions. Later, following steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), iterative movement between data led to the emergence of two broad themes: *obutyamye* as (in)equality of citizenship, and the impact of ACFODE's antipoverty efforts as both strengthening and reproducing *obutyamye* as an (un)equal experience.

Findings

This section presents the findings that local understanding of citizenship is based on and intertwined with what people have. It also explores how ACFODE uses context-sensitive methods and content to enhance peoples' abilities to own resources that, at the local level, are crucial in fulfilling both individual and community obligations and expectations.

The notion of *obutyamye*: Citizenship *in*, *for*, and *with* community

In Lusoga, the local word for 'citizen' is *omutyamye* (pl. *abatyamye)*. The word comes from the verb *okutyama* which means to be ensconced or to sit firmly (on land/soil). Citizenship is translated as *obutyamye* which literally means the act or practice of being *seated* or entrenched in the community. Listening to and later reading through participants' explanations, it became evident that the notion of *obutyamye* expressed a broader idea of citizenship as an experience that connects everyday living with material resources and relations. To present these ideas, I use three prepositions – *in*, *for,* and *with*

– to categorize and explain participants' descriptions of *obutyamye* as an experience of being a citizen *in*, *for*, and *with* the community.

First, the notion of *obutyamye* as an experience of being a citizen *in* the community emphasized the person-material relationship. Central to this relationship is land, the main source of livelihoods and power distribution in agrarian communities. Land was critical in defining personhood since it guarantees physicalness and permanence of residence, collateral security, and claims of belonging and identity. There was unanimity in describing a citizen as "a person who has material assets, especially land on which they are consistently and permanently settled for a period of time [ranging from five months to several years]". Other descriptions of a citizen emphasized "being born and known by everyone in this village" and "being registered in the community book". These descriptions equated citizenship with permanence of settlement (on land) which, in community understanding, guarded against infiltration of the community by the wrong people.

Second, *obutyamye* expressed the idea of being a citizen *for* the community. This emphasizes the idea of belonging expressed in the ability and willingness of the individual not only to provide for the needs of his/her family but also to maintain mutual and reciprocal relations with others. Thus, while possession of land is critical, it is, nonetheless, not enough to define one's community membership. In addition, the *omutyamye* ought to "have built a house, married a wife, produced children, and be engaged in some economic activities for the survival and sustenance of the family". Moreover, participants also argued that a citizen ought to behave and act in a manner considered by the community to constitute good and responsible membership. A male participant suggested that when a community member behaves and acts contrary to community expectations and norms, "you can be asked to account for why you do so, and if you don't reform, you [will] be reprimanded".

Third, *obutyamye* expressed the idea of being a citizen *with* the community. This connotes the ideals of (active) participation in community affairs. In most rural areas, the tradition of communal life obliges every member to participate in dealing with issues that promote the wellbeing of the entire community. As such, issues such as funeral wakes, sickness, security emergencies, wedding ceremonies, religious functions, and communal work carry marks of 'obligatory' citizenship duties. Moreover, following increased NGO involvement in grassroots development, membership in one of the self-help groups through which most training programmes and interventions are implemented was also mentioned as mark of good citizenship. As a male participant suggested, *obutyamye*

> requires that when community meetings are called, you must attend. Or let's say during times of need, one must be involved with others. Because someone can be residing in the community but when there is a funeral, they don't attend. When there is a problem, they don't participate in finding solution. There you cannot be a good citizen.

Obutyamye: Gendered and resource inequality?

From the foregoing discussion, it can be argued that the understanding and practice of *obutyamye,* as "a citizenship regime based on property ownership" (Wittman 2009, 120), has strong connotations of local power asymmetries based on resource ownership and gender. Firstly, embedded in the notion of *obutyamye* is the idea that landless and propertyless members, who are often the poorest of the poor, are not considered (good)

citizens in the community. A landless person, for example, is referred to as *omusenze* (pl. *abasenze*), which means a squatter or a person sitting on the periphery of the community. In daily community experience, people such as squatters, casual labourers, and generally the poorest of those without land (usually mostly women) depend on those with wealth for survival. On account of being propertyless and therefore unsettled, people in these categories face various forms of exclusion in the exercise of *obutyamye*. While it was not within the scope of this study to explore these categories of people, that they could be discriminated against was evident in participants' descriptions of localized citizenship.

> A person who has no land or property cannot be considered an *omutyamye* because he or she will be renting with nothing to keep him permanently settled [in a locatable place]. Today he is here, next month he is somewhere [else]. He is always on the move. It is the same thing with casual labourers who are always searching for their next work anywhere. (Female participant)

It was against this background that during the study we encountered some arguments that challenged the citizenship status of women (see Ndidde, Ahimbisibwe, and Kontinen 2020). The arguments revolved around cultural practices related to women, marriage and property ownership. Like most communities in Uganda, Busoga culture upholds patriarchal ideas, beliefs, and customs, reinforced by, among other institutions, patrilocal marriage arrangements and practices that present woman as part of a 'man's property'. Encapsulating this notion is the popular local adage: *omwami kyakoba zena kyenkoba* (a man's/husband's word is final and undisputable in the home). In practice, when women get married, they shift from their father's village and adopt all the 'citizenship' practices of the husband's community but, even in their marital life, they remain 'citizens' only for as long as the marriage lasts. This dilemma is captured by the following voice:

> For me, a citizen is a person who is resident in the community. This excludes us women who just come to marry. Like me now as a woman, I left my parents' home and got married here. So, I cannot claim citizenship at my father's village. I will spend the rest of my life here as long as I am still married here. If I divorce, I assume the residence of my new husband. (Female participant)

This view corroborates what studies have concluded about women's citizenship in many postcolonial contexts where the dominant communal way of life has not transformed at the same pace as that endorsed by the state (Kabeer 2006). Because "citizenship had been drawn according to a quintessentially male template" (Lister 2008, 5–6), customs and traditions continue to govern the spectrum of what one can do, own, access, and control at family and community levels on the basis of the gender. This disproportionately affects women, making them more vulnerable to material poverty. Thus, land ownership is critical in local perceptions of citizenship, which has major implications for women who, traditionally, do not own land. In essence, this perception makes women's citizenship temporary, as belonging neither in their father's village nor their husband's community.

ACFODE's contribution to strengthening the notion of *obutyamye*

In this section I explore how ACFODE's antipoverty initiatives contribute to localized understandings that bind citizenship to material resources. I show that by adopting a grassroots methodology and content, the NGO both reinforced and challenged existing

notions of citizenship by enhancing members' capacities to fulfil individual and collective responsibilities.

ACFODE's livelihood content: Addressing material poverty

ACFODE's antipoverty interventions focused on improving livelihood knowledge and skills in the areas of smallholder farming and income diversification. According to participants, livelihood training in improved farming practices 'did not leave us the same', as they learnt about the entire farming chain from the preparation of seedbeds to post-harvest handling, value addition, and sale. During this study, participants showed us how, after training, they shifted from the traditional practice of sowing by broadcasting mixed seeds, to line and
spaced sowing of one variety of cereal. This, they argued, resulted in high quality and marketable yields. A female participant summarized the training content in this way:

> The training addressed the whole chain of farming from sowing to selling. The main emphasis was on growing enough food using improved farming methods of line and spaced planting. We also learnt value addition – for example, by drying harvested maize on mats or tarpaulins so we can sell it at a high price. They trained us to add value to cassava to get several products such as food, chips, cassava bread, and pancakes. Then soya bean can be fried and sold to get money, or mixed with maize grains and milled to make porridge for children. We were also trained to make juice out of avocados, mangoes, oranges, and passion fruits.

In an agrarian community, this kind of training resonated with the material realities and practical needs of the people and did not attempt to introduce innovations alien to existing agricultural practices and norms. A participant couple argued that "this farming knowledge is easy for us because we have land and can easily get seeds to sow". Another male participant claimed that they found the training sustainable because, even when ACFODE left, "[knowledge] will never be taken away as we can practically pass it on to our children and grandchildren". Observation in the villages identified the application of the acquired knowledge and skills: for example, several homesteads had backyard vegetable gardens and plots of land with cereals planted in spaced lines, while others had improved post-harvest handling and storage facilities. In another case, a female participant we interviewed made snacks that were sold along the village path near her home. Each of the thirty-two households visited for this study maintained a well-kept and kempt living room with modest furniture, reared some livestock (chicken, goats, cows) and owned well-tended gardens of crops planted in lines.

Methodology of self-help groups: Building citizen capabilities

To implement its livelihood trainings, ACFODE used the methodology of village membership-based groups, which this study found to play an important role in challenging poverty and reinforcing the members' agency to improve their own material wellbeing.

First, self-help groups epitomize the citizenship ideals encapsulated in the notion of *obutyamye*. Built on communalist ideals, they are hubs of citizenship activities, as membership and participation are determined by physical residence, moral obligation, and social identification with the community. Self-help groups were key in building

strong social bonding, resilience, and incremental progress, and members often clung onto them when setbacks occurred. A female participant narrated how her group survived several project failures and found alternatives.

> In our group we started with saving little money. But the way we were saving, we started buying household items, such as plates, saucepans, cups, and bedding materials. This helped to improve our homes. When every member was covered, we changed and started contributing money to members in rounds. Members used this pooled money to do different things such as starting small income-generating projects, paying school fees, buying pieces of land, and so on.

She continued,

> When we were done with that, we started a piggery project. Unfortunately, we were cheated by the person who was in charge. We lost that money. Then we tried poultry, which was wiped out by an epidemic outbreak. We became frustrated but refused to give up. So, we decided to buy tents and chairs which we hire out during functions. This has improved our income as a group.

Second, self-help groups offered a platform for members, especially women, to acquire and draw on various resources with which to address material poverty. Collective and peer learning provided by the platforms of self-help groups enabled the poor to pool resources and build multiple livelihood options. In turn, women gained the capacity to contribute to material wellbeing, challenging the traditional idea of male breadwinning because, according to a female participant, "women stopped depending on husbands for everything". Thus, local groups were used as avenues for training and supporting members to diversify incomes to live a better life. As one female participant claimed,

> Right now, the knowledge ACFODE gave us is what we use. The way they found us is not the way we are right now…women in this village cook/prepare different snacks which they sell in the trading centre. Some people joined the business of buying and selling silver fish. As for me, I have bought goats which you can see over there [pointing to half a dozen goats tethered in the nearby bush].

Another female participant observed,

> Before ACFODE came, children were seated at home and often wandered around the village stealing fruits from neighbours' gardens, looking for what to eat. Household heads, especially men, shouldered the burden of buying food. Now ACFODE [has] trained us in better farming methods. We have enough food and incomes have increased so children are in school.

In a conversation with a female participant, she explained how she had saved money to the tune of 2,000,000 UgX (two million Uganda shillings, approx. €500) through self-help groups, and bought a plot of land in the trading centre on which she was beginning to construct a commercial building. It can thus be argued that self-help groups were instrumental in promoting material citizenship. From the modest goals of acquiring basic household items, such as cutlery, seats, and bedding, to buying pieces of land and

establishing group businesses, self-help groups changed gender relations and gradually built the capacities in members to achieve modest material improvements and meet various obligations at individual and community levels.

Discussion

This section discusses two issues. First, it looks at what the notion of *obutyamye* portends for local power dynamics in the exercise of citizenship. Second, it reflects on how and why NGO anti-poverty interventions improve the resources of the poor and, thereby, their material citizenship.

In its localized conceptualization, the notion of *obutyamye* is laden with local power asymmetries that exclude and treat sections of the population as unequal citizens. The understanding of citizenship in terms of having wealth (*in*) as a basis of belonging (*for*) and participation in community (*with*) implies that a member who falls short in meeting these criteria for being a citizen faces differentiated treatment. Embedded in the notion of *obutyamye*, therefore, is the idea that the propertyless do not meet the criteria by which status and membership in the community is determined. This argument resonates with Baglioni's (2016, 69) observation that, 'if the status of citizen is seen principally as a collective-individual guarantee that aims at a tangential social equality and that postulates a tangential cultural uniformity, a growing proportion of people will remain excluded'.

Moreover, as Lister (1997) has argued, poverty remains one of the corrosive impediments to the practice of citizenship, and affects the ability of many to realize their potential and exercise their rights. For instance, a report by UNICEF (2020) shows that 47% of households in Uganda are trapped in multidimensional poverty and are therefore, unable to draw on different resources for basic survival. Thus, despite an avalanche of NGO grassroots-driven development efforts, there remains concern that these approaches "seldom work for the poorest who lack the agency to fully participate" (Hickey 2010, 1145) due to "problems of uneven development" (2010, 1149). As illustrated by findings, while most men are perceived as citizens due to land ownership, which gives them more 'permanence', women's citizenship hinges on their 'temporal' residence as either born in or married into the community. Similarly, propertyless men, who often occupy the lowest rungs of society, are not regarded as equal citizens in the community. Ultimately, both propertyless men and majority women face varied extents of differentiated treatment in everyday perception and practice of citizenship. It can be argued, therefore, that the ideals of equality embedded in *obutyamye* are not wholly inclusive and accommodative of "the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind" (UN 2015, 37) in agrarian societies like Busoga.

Nonetheless, based on the interaction with communities, it was apparent that *obutyamye* is premised more on the philosophy of fostering and strengthening practices of mutual belonging than on deliberately promoting segregation against the poorest in the community. The all-round communal idea behind *obutyamye* is that citizenship should primarily be concerned with jointly finding solutions to commonly felt problems and performing shared community obligations and expectations. Every citizen is, therefore, supposed to make a contribution towards the things that the community has identified and agreed upon as crucial for self-sustainability and co-existence. This is because in post-colonial states like Uganda, services that ameliorate the material conditions of people are rarely accessed through the institutional relationship between citizens and the state. Rather, everyday life is concerned with taking care of one's material survival, mainly

through informal associations, kith and kin, extended family, patronage networks (e.g. Pettit 2016) and, increasingly, development-oriented NGOs (Scherz 2014). For example, as the findings of this study have shown, ACFODE's training economically empowered women and improved their agency to meet family and community obligations. Similarly, a casual labourer or immigrant who works hard, acquires property, and actively and consistently participates in collective efforts, progressively integrates into the community as *omutyamye*. It follows that the *obutyamye* view, although embedded in unequal power and resource distribution, does not emphasize a citizenship experience in which less privileged members are rigidly and permanently excluded from being citizens *in*, *for*, and *with* the community.

This brings the discussion to the role of self-help groups in the practice of everyday material citizenship among the poor in sub-Saharan Africa. MacLean (2017) has argued that self-help groups predate the modern nation state in Africa and have historically acted as organized welfare provision at the grassroots level. A pillar of the communal way of life, self-help groups have withstood the seminal influences unleashed on "the grain of African social formations" by the notion of liberal citizenship such as "democracy, human rights, women's rights and good governance" (Kelsall 2011, 244). As such, everyday citizenship practices continue to take place within communal spaces that are premised on and espouse ideals of egalitarian association, reciprocity, neighbourliness, solidarity, collective identity, and belonging (Rodima-Taylor 2013; Benda 2012), hinged on one's residence within the community. It is therefore uncommon to find a community member who does not belong to any of the many local forms of association, be they religious, cultural, extended family, peer group, or, more importantly, self-help group.

Therefore, for NGOs like ACFODE intent on addressing material inequalities through socioeconomic empowerment programmes for the poor and vulnerable, 'going with the grain' (Kelsall 2011) of grassroots, informal associations seem to provide an appropriate route. These historically tried and tested practices offer more effective mechanisms for reaching the least privileged and increasing the agency of the rural poor to gain financial and material empowerment that positively impacts on gendered relations. When I asked a woman what her future entailed, she replied, 'God willing, I will continue using the knowledge received from all these [self-help and NGO] groups to keep bettering my family.' Moreover, while this study was conducted three years after the project had ended, participants constantly referred to the NGO as '*omuzaire waife*' (our caring parent) in apparent acknowledgement of the positive material changes it had introduced to their lives.

Conclusion

First, the article has introduced and conceptualized a localized notion of material citizenship, to add to the other forms of everyday citizenship in the "context of development interventions in sub-Saharan Africa" (Holma, Kontinen, and Blanken-Webb 2018, 228). Using the notion of *obutyamye,* I have illustrated how, in specific locations of Uganda, citizenship is broadly construed as being *in*, *for*, and *with* the community, based on the diverse material assets and forms of capital on which individuals draw to meet their family needs and communal obligations. This article has also shown how various resources such as land, household items, social relations, and knowledge and skills are crucial in defining and enhancing one's personhood and agency to act as a citizen, knitting the community into a web of networked, reciprocal, and mutual

belonging and participation. Moreover, the article has analysed the impact of NGOs in strengthening localized notions of citizenship in a setting where structural, national, and local hierarchies of power remain profound constraints on the practice of citizenship, especially among women and landless men.

Second, the article has highlighted the inescapable connection between local people's material wellbeing and their extant citizenship experiences. For instance, while post-colonial states like Uganda grant 'universalized' liberal rights to undifferentiated citizens, local communities often translate (and sometimes overrule) these rights to suit their existing material realities and circumstances. Thus, the notion of material citizenship articulated in this article is neither about advancing individual's self-interest nor promoting exclusive power of community. Rather, it is premised on an endless search for socioeconomic improvement and communal co-existence among people who share physical residency and take care of shared interests. This involves the (re-)negotiation of complex social structures and dynamics using the available material resources and social relations.

Last, material citizenship espoused by the idea of *obutyamye* contributes to a more contextual understanding of the dynamics of NGOs' attempts to strengthen citizenship in the constrained settings of postcolonial societies like Uganda. I have demonstrated that, rather than relying on statist rights, rural people depend on local mobilization and NGO antipoverty interventions to improve their status and agency to address individual and collective challenges. Self-help groups and NGOs' socioeconomic empowerment programmes are thus vital platforms and avenues for marginalized groups to acquire material assets and build social relations that change perceptions and strengthen practices of citizenship. Women, for example, gradually become citizens *in*, *for*, and *with* the community on account of their ability to acquire and own material assets and meet community expectations and responsibilities that society considers vital citizenship characteristics. Hence, the material improvements and agency ordinary citizens acquire from such NGO interventions, even though not overly transformative, should not be underestimated.

That said, the limited operational capacity of NGOs and self-help groups to reach the poorest sections of the community and address systemic problems that constrain their participation in community development programmes remains a challenge. Ultimately, more equitable development that leaves no citizen behind can only be realised through state intervention because it is the state that has the capacity and obligation to address such structural inequalities.

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