May 2024

Aid effectiveness in Uganda: Social protection in focus

Case study report

Contents

Key terms and acronyms

Key terms

Term	Use
Development partners	This term has been used interchangeably with ‘donors’ throughout this paper.
External finance	This refers to funding or resources that flow into Uganda from sources outside its borders, including grants, loans and other private sector flows.
Foreign aid	Foreign aid refers to financial, technical or material assistance provided to Uganda by other nations, international organisations or non-governmental organisations. We use aid and ODA interchangeably in this report.
Other social infrastructure	This a category of ODA that covers efforts to develop the human resource potential and ameliorate living conditions in aid recipient countries. In this paper it covers allocations to culture and recreation, employment creation, labour rights, low-cost housing, social dialogue, social protection and statistical capacity building.
Social protection sector	Refers to sector-wide interventions; ‘social assistance’ is a component of that sector, encompassing programmes and projects like ESP, SAGE and SCG.

Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
CSO	Civil society organisation
CRS	Creditor Reporting System
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRDIP	Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project
ESP	Expanding Social Protection programme
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK)
FY	Financial year

ICT	Information and communication technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NDP III	National Development Plan III
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIRA	National Identification and Registration Authority
NSPP	National Social Protection Policy
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SAGE	Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment
SCG	Senior Citizens' Grant
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPWG	Social Protection Working Group
UGX	Ugandan shilling
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WFP	UN World Food Programme

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Overview

Recent challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic and conflicts around the world, have negatively impacted Uganda's domestic revenue collection, and changed donor countries' aid policies, widening Uganda's budget deficit. Moreover, official development assistance (ODA) now faces enormous pressures from growing, competing demands, including humanitarian and crisis response, national development priorities and investment in global public goods. Development Initiatives (DI) seeks to highlight the value of ODA in programmes that are national priorities to recipient countries. Additionally, DI aims to enhance the understanding of enabling factors that contribute to improving aid impact.

Led by national demand for international finance data and evidence on its most appropriate use, DI embarked on producing a series of country case study reports to consider how aid has been effective in specific development sectors in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda, including trends, the factors that unlock the value of aid, and the challenges that lie ahead.

This country report for Uganda provides evidence on the role and contribution ODA in the delivery of social assistance programmes. It first provides a background and overview of ODA disbursements to Uganda – both generally and specifically to the social protection sector. Then, drawing on secondary data obtained from various impact evaluation studies and key informant interviews, the report highlights how ODA and other factors have enabled the establishment and implementation of Uganda's flagship Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme.

The report finds that between 2012 and 2021, just 2% of ODA disbursed to Uganda went to the social protection sector. Total ODA to social protection in Uganda has grown rapidly: in 2015, with the onset of the implementation of the second phase of the ESP programme, it reached US$24.6 million; by 2020 it had peaked at US$84.2 million due to an increase in disbursements to support the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The growth in ODA disbursements to social protection from 2015 to 2021 was coupled with increasing government commitment to financing the expansion of social protection and increasing coverage of the ESP programme, from the initial 15 pilot districts to the entire country. Disbursements sharply declined to US$23.8 in 2021 as funding for ESP ended.

Our review of impact evaluation reports shows that ODA played a significant catalytic role in the development of critical social protection systems and structures in Uganda. This paved way for the eventual rollout and expansion of the ESP programmes studied. The ESP programme improved the welfare of beneficiary households who were able to use cash transfers to invest in productive assets, education and health. Factors beyond ODA that enabled this success include government ownership and commitment, alignment of donor priorities to government development aims, and multistakeholder partnerships. Read our executive summary for more detailed findings and lessons for the effective investment of ODA in social assistance programmes and other donor funded initiatives.

Important note about the aid data used in this report

This report uses aid data from the OECD DAC which is complete and verified and thus presents an important and detailed picture of trends. OECD DAC data is, however, published at least a year in arrears, meaning that the latest detailed data available is up to 2021. The analysis therefore covers the period between 2012 and 2021 and uses gross disbursements.

In this report, the term ‘aid’ encompasses development assistance but excludes all humanitarian aid. Aid here includes ODA (as defined by the OECD DAC) and equity investments reported by official actors to the OECD.

Executive summary

Due to Uganda's limited capacity to mobilise domestic resources, the country has needed to rely on official development assistance (ODA). Recent challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine, have negatively impacted domestic revenue collection and changed donor countries' aid policies, widening Uganda's budget deficit.

This report presents key trends in ODA between 2012 and 2021 and assesses its effectiveness in Uganda using a case study on ODA financing for the Expanding Social Protection (ESP programme). The ESP targets social protection to people experiencing the most extreme poverty. It started in 2010, with the aim of putting in place a national social protection system aligned with Uganda's National Social Protection Policy (NSPP). The programme started with donor support for the implementation of a pilot phase of the senior citizens grant in 15 districts that ran until 2015 (phase one). During phase two of the programme (2015 to 2021), the coverage was subsequently scaled up to cover the entire country following the government's 2018 decision to roll out the grants to all districts. ESP is now rolled out as a key pillar of the social protection approach in Uganda.

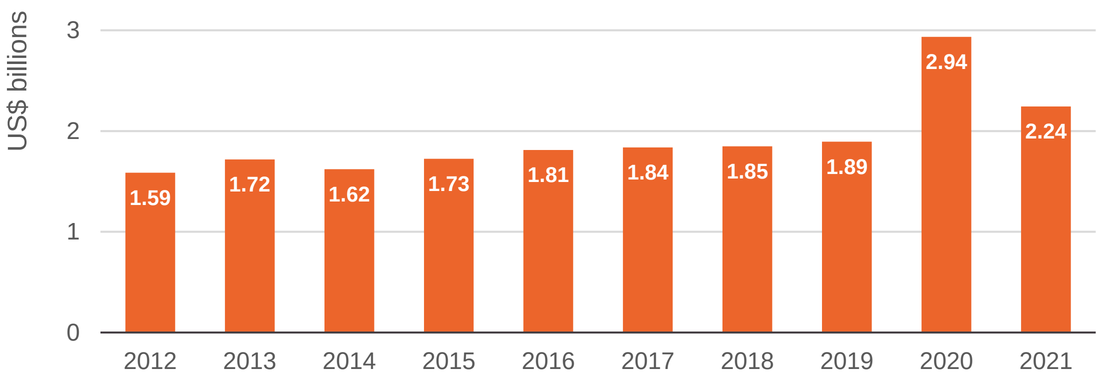
As well as key findings, we provide lessons and recommendations for improving the effectiveness of ODA, especially government and donor staff who plan and fund programmes.

Key findings

Key finding 1: Total ODA to Uganda grew marginally from 2012 to 2021, except for a sharp rise in 2020 due to the Covid-19 response

ODA disbursements to Uganda marginally grew from US$1.6 billion in 2013, peaking at US$2.9 billion in 2020 before falling sharply to US$2.2 billion in 2021.

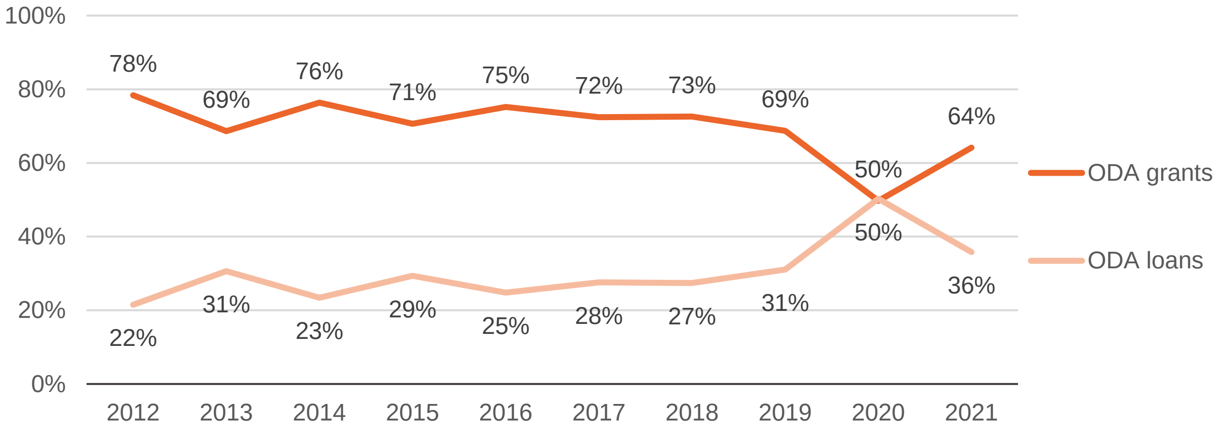
ODA disbursements to Uganda (constant figures in US$ billions) 2012–2021



Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD DAC.

Key finding 2: Uganda has seen an overall decline in the share of grants as a proportion of ODA disbursements

ODA concessional loans and grants (% of total disbursement), 2012–2021



Source: Development Initiatives based data from OECD-DAC.

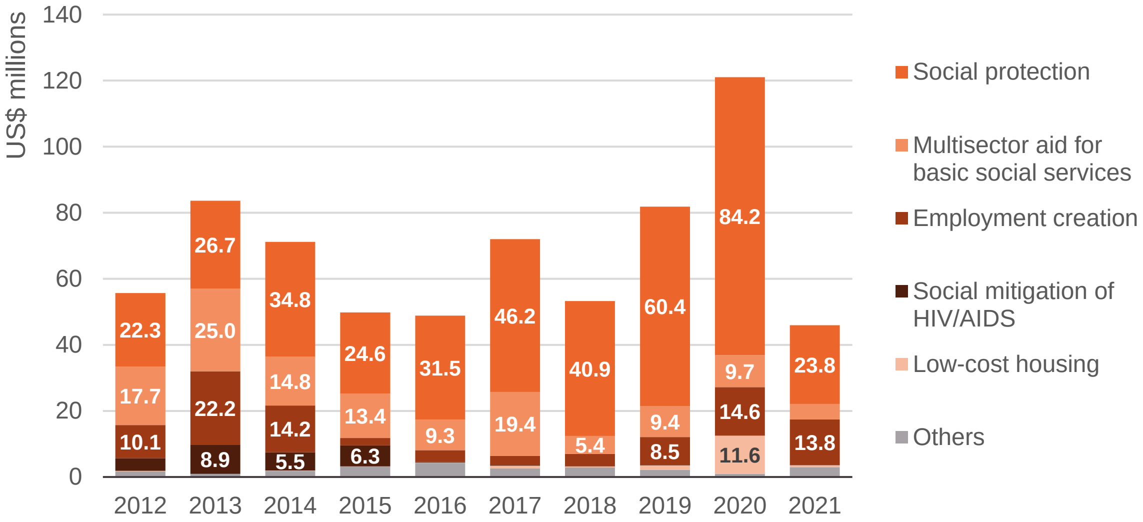
Note: The increase in ODA grants in 2021 is attributed to the Covid-19 response. Equity investments accounted for 1.4% of total ODA disbursements from 2012 to 2021 (0.1% in 2012, 0.8% in 2013, 0.2% in 2014 and 0.3% in 2019).

The overall growth in ODA from 2012 to 2021 was driven by the increasing share of concessional loans. Grants remain predominant but declined as an overall proportion of ODA over the same period. On average, the year-to-year growth in loans was 20% compared to 2% for grants.

Key finding 3: ODA disbursements to social protection accounted for much of the allocations under the 'other social infrastructure' sector between 2012 and 2021

At 2%, the share of ODA to social protection in Uganda is higher compared to another recipient country like Kenya (1.3%) for the same period. ODA for social protection has been instrumental in building capacity, providing technical assistance and financing the implementing social protection programmes. This funding has supported the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme, as well as the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) and the Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project (DRDIP), all of which are now key pillars for social protection in Uganda.

ODA disbursements for social infrastructure (constant figures in US$ millions), 2012–2021



Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD-DAC.

Notes: 'Others' includes culture and recreation, housing policy and administrative management, labour rights, social dialogue, and statistical capacity building activities and services.

Key finding 4: ODA has played a significant role in building and shaping Uganda's current social protection systems.

The pilot for the national ESP programme was 100% ODA funded, showcasing the impact of donors on social protection in Uganda. Some successes of the pilot programme included the completion and launch of Uganda's NSPP, the expanded coverage of direct cash transfers to more people facing vulnerability, and the scale-up of the direct cash transfer programme to all districts in Uganda.

Notable elements and success factors in implementing the ESP programme include:

- **Alignment with government plans:** Donor engagement and partnership with government from the outset ensured that the programme was issue driven: designed to address existing needs and gaps. This also helped in putting the programme on a clear sustainability path, including a transition away from donor funding.
- **Coordination and governance:** The ESP stands out as a best-practice example of good coordination and implementation of donor-funded activities. Coordination between government and donors, and partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs), have been evident in the implementation of the programme. The government has spearheaded the conceptualisation and implementation of social protection activities under the ESP, determining activities and their targeting.
- **Learning for impact:** Monitoring, evaluation and learning have been core components of the ESP. The lessons and experience from the pilot phase were critical for the development and implementation of the subsequent phases of the

programme. Donors were able to show impact and evidence the case for how investment in social protection could contribute to Uganda's development aspirations. It was easier to promote the programme to the Government of Uganda and other development partners after proving that it works.

- **Developing capacity for aid fund management:** Following the successful pilot, there was sustained funding and technical support for the scale-up in the second phase of the ESP programme, which ran from 2015 to 2021. While two of the funders that supported the pilot and second phase of the programme (the UK's Department for International Development (DFID)[1] and Irish Aid) exited at the end of ESP II in 2021,[2] the World Food Programme and UNICEF were still offering technical support at the time of writing.

Key finding 5: Sustainability remains an outstanding challenge.

While a few donors continue to support the ESP programme, low funding for social protection remains a major challenge for the government. This has limited the depth of coverage under the current phase of the programme in which the government has belatedly (in 2021) started to roll out coverage to the entire country. Only 20% of eligible beneficiaries have been actively reached so far.

Lessons and recommendations for donors

There are several important lessons about aid effectiveness to be drawn from the case study. These could maximise the impact of aid in heavily donor-funded development programmes.

- **Learning and adaptation are crucial for success:** These were key to implementing the donor-funded phase of the ESP programme, demonstrating that a learning agenda must be at the forefront. Moreover, learning needs to be applied continuously and implemented holistically, taking into consideration the dynamic context in which development happens.
- **Country buy-in and ownership is critical for success and impact:** It is important that donors learn to work with and not against or alongside recipient governments in the delivery of aid and implementation of donor-funded programmes. This case study revealed that having government taking a lead role in the conceptualisation of projects, based on its understanding of underlying problems and need, is an important and necessary first step in the implementation of donor-aided programmes. Moreover, alignment with existing policies and structures in recipient countries (even when the donor's development agency is playing a lead role in implementing donor-funded activities) is important.
- **Flexibility in funding disbursements is needed to accommodate changes and adaptation:** This chimes with a learning-oriented implementation of ODA-financed programmes. The ESP was among the many donor-funded programmes affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to delays in implementation. Donors should leave

room for adjustments in already-costed project workplans and strategies to accommodate unforeseen risks and challenges.

- **Partnership and collaboration with key stakeholders is crucial:** Starting by identifying the key stakeholders and involving the right partners and technical teams from the outset increases ownership and the potential for positive impact. Such partnerships require donors to have clear communication and coordination tools and a platform that attracts partners to share and combine ideas and resources to identify and solve challenges. Donors should consider, incorporate and track all partners' interests, priorities and resources. They can achieve this by ensuring the right people are involved in designing and implementing projects.
- **A harmonised approach built on a thorough understanding of the financing landscape using near-real time data is helpful:** This can minimise aid fragmentation and duplication and maximise synergies and improve mechanisms for aid effectiveness. It will also help donors to learn from, adapt to and work within existing government structures, improving the efficient and effective delivery of aid-funded programmes.
- **Building local technical capacity for implementing donor-funded projects is important:** This by can be achieved by working directly with local partners, especially the recipient government, in ensuring funded activities align with national development priorities and that the government is in position to continue implementation when donors exit. This case study showed that donors can significantly improve government's technical capacities for implementing donor-funded programmes, monitoring development finance impact and effectiveness, and ensuring sustainability.

Introduction

Uganda's ambitious development aspirations, set out in the Vision 2040[3] and the National Development Plan (NDP) III,[4] require a substantial volume of financing to implement key programmes while maintaining delivery of basic and essential services and goods to the population. However, the country's current level of domestic resource mobilisation falls far below requirements and has necessitated continued reliance on external financing, mostly in the form of ODA. Uganda's tax revenue as a share of GDP is 12.5%, which is above its income group average of 11.8%, lower than the regional average of 14.1%[5] and below 15%, which is the recommended level for economic growth and poverty reduction.

Uganda's 2020 development partnership review[6] revealed that external project financing amounted to 50% of government revenue and was channeled to support the government's non-current expenditure, with three-quarters of this financing coming from OECD DAC donors. It also showed that the general trend in aid volume and priorities from the DAC donors have remained largely unchanged, with marginal year-to-year increases in sector funding between 2011 and 2021. Despite the stagnation in ODA to Uganda over the last decade, external project financing remains a core source of funds.[7]

The contribution and impact of ODA to Uganda's development cannot be discounted: it has helped to address financing gaps, enabling the provision of basic services to citizens as well as funding for development projects with medium- to long-term benefits. For instance, the average share of external financing in the total education sector budget (for the period FY 2019/2020 to FY 2023/2024) was 4.6%.[8]

However, others see foreign aid in a different light, citing the potential for aid to drag countries with limited financial resources deep into debt.[9,10] It is, therefore, important to obtain a clear understanding of the effectiveness of foreign aid, based on evidence of how it works, where it has worked and what makes it work. One case study alone cannot offer firm conclusions on the effectiveness of aid in Uganda, but it can help identify best practice and make recommendations on how foreign aid could be best used to support development and have a positive impact.

This paper provides a case study focused on how ODA has been leveraged to set up and strengthen social protection mechanisms in Uganda, and how donor-financed social assistance programmes have delivered impact. A mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis is used – drawing insights from impact evaluations, key informant interviews and focus group discussions – to assess the impact and value that have accrued from donor aid to social protection programmes. The paper also benefitted from feedback and contributions from participants at a validation workshop. This was co-organised by the East Africa Philanthropy Network with support from the Ford Foundation, held in October 2023, and attended by:

- Representatives of government, including the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
- Donors, including FDCO
- CSOs, including CivSource Africa and Prospera International Network of Women's Funds
- Local NGOs,
- Representatives from the Uganda Social Protection Working Group (SPWG)
- Other stakeholders such as independent researchers and journalists who were part of the study.

This case study evaluates one ODA-funded programme, the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme. We find evidence of a successful donor-supported intervention with positive impacts, leading to the programme's adoption by the government and its subsequent national scale-up.

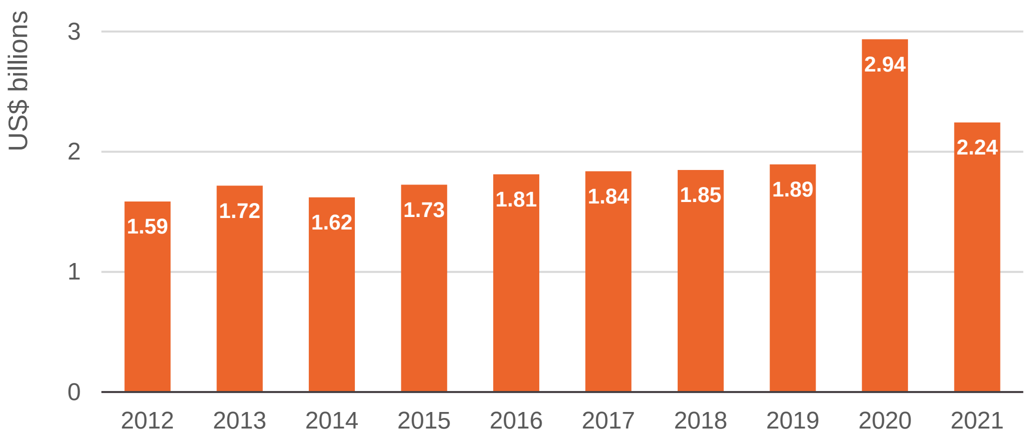
Our focus on social protection was informed by consultation with stakeholders, including donors and government representatives, who recommended social assistance as a lens for investigating the effectiveness and impact of donor aid to Uganda. Additionally, various stakeholders thought it would be easier to ascertain the impact of ODA to social protection from a specific donor-funded programme (compared with other sectors like education or health, where poor outcomes on key indicators are difficult to attribute to either donors or government).

The report then presents the overall trend of ODA disbursements to Uganda, including sections on major donors, channels and target sectors. This is followed by a section assessing financing to social protection, including ODA flows, financing gaps and challenges that need to be addressed to maximise the impacts of social assistance. Finally, it presents the ESP programme as a case study; identifying lessons, challenges and best practices alongside recommendations for strengthening the development impact of donor-funded programmes in Uganda. The choice of the case study was informed by the vital role of the ESP programme, a flagship social protection programme that relied entirely on ODA funding for its pilot (phase one) and substantial technical and financial support for its second phase (phase two).

Trends in ODA flows to Uganda

The trend of ODA disbursements to Uganda from 2012 to 2021 shows 38% growth, with marginal year-to-year increases and a spike in 2020 when disbursements rose by 55% (Figure 1). The average yearly ODA disbursement for the study period was US$1.9 billion. This spike is associated with increased aid disbursements from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)[11] and World Bank. Between January and June 2021, they disbursed a total of US$399.4 million in loans of which more than half was from the IMF's US$1 billion extended credit facility to Uganda for the period June 2021 to 2024,[12] provided as part of the Covid-19 response and recovery process.

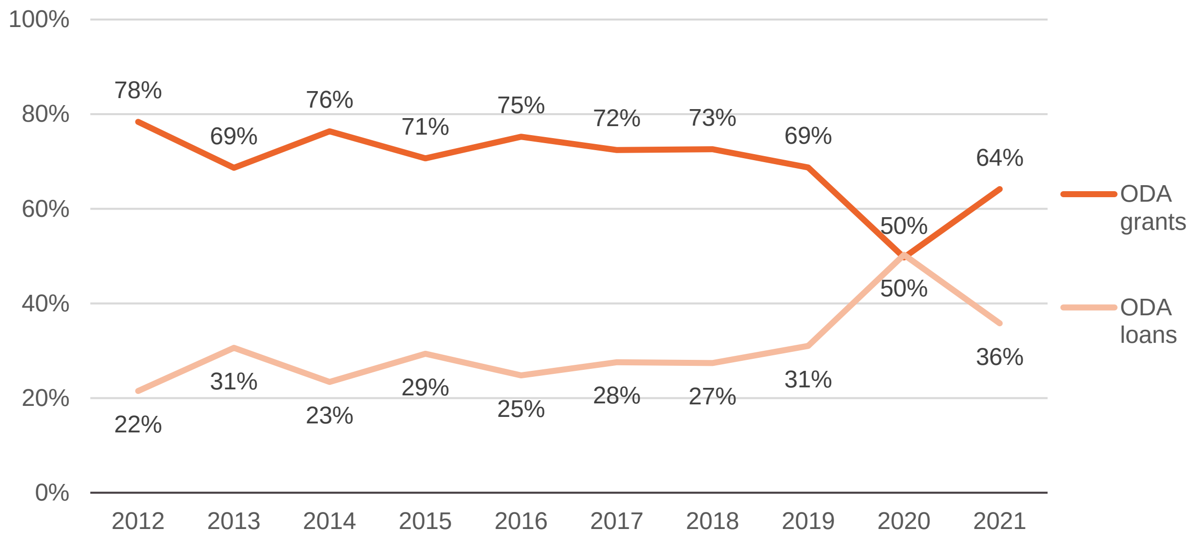
Figure 1: Total ODA disbursements to Uganda, 2012–2021 (constant figures in US$ billions)



Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD DAC.

The growth in ODA to Uganda from 2012 to 2021 was driven by the increasing share of loans, as the share of ODA grants declined over the same period. Most of the disbursements to Uganda have been in the form of grants, which constituted an average of 73% of ODA for the period from 2012 to 2019 (Figure 2). Loans amounted to an average of 27% of total ODA between 2012 to 2019. In 2020, the share of loans increased to 50% before falling back to the pre-pandemic trajectory of 36% in 2021.

Figure 2: ODA concessional loans and grants (% of total disbursement) 2012–2021)



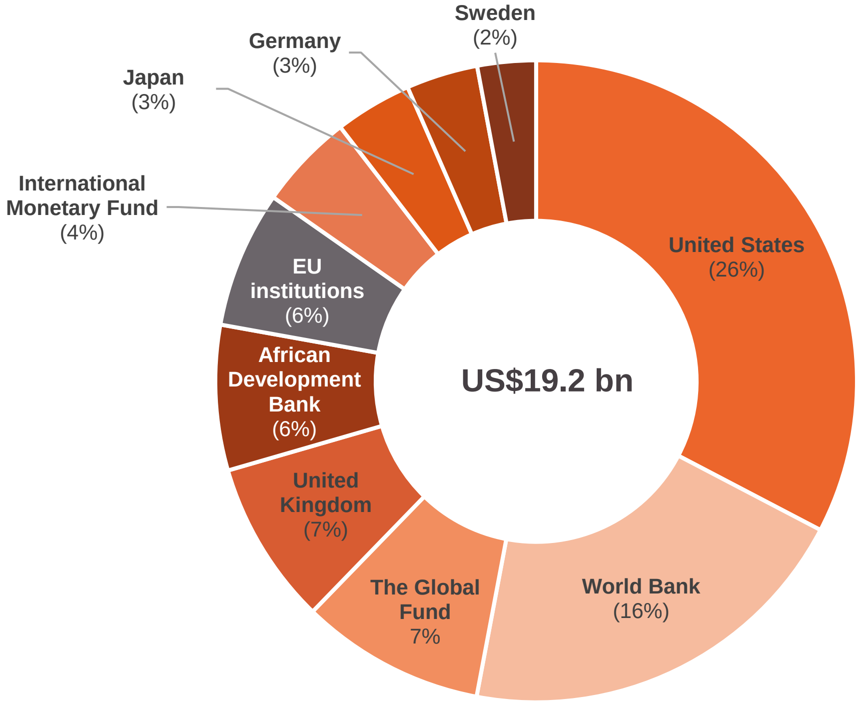
Source: Development Initiatives based data from OECD-DAC.

Notes: Equity investments accounted for 1.4% of total ODA disbursements from 2012 to 2021 (0.1% in 2012, 0.8% in 2013, 0.2% in 2014 and 0.3% in 2019)

Major providers of ODA to Uganda

The US and World Bank were Uganda's biggest donors from 2012 to 2021, together accounting for over 40% of total ODA disbursements (Figure 3). The top ten donors together contributed 80% of the total disbursements (US$19.2bn): the US with US$5 billion (26%), the World Bank US$3.1 billion (16%), The Global Fund US$1.4 billion (7%), the UK $1.3 billion (7%), and the African Development Bank US$1.1 billion (6%).

Figure 3: Top 10 donors' share of total ODA disbursements to Uganda, 2012−2021(constant figures in US$ billions)

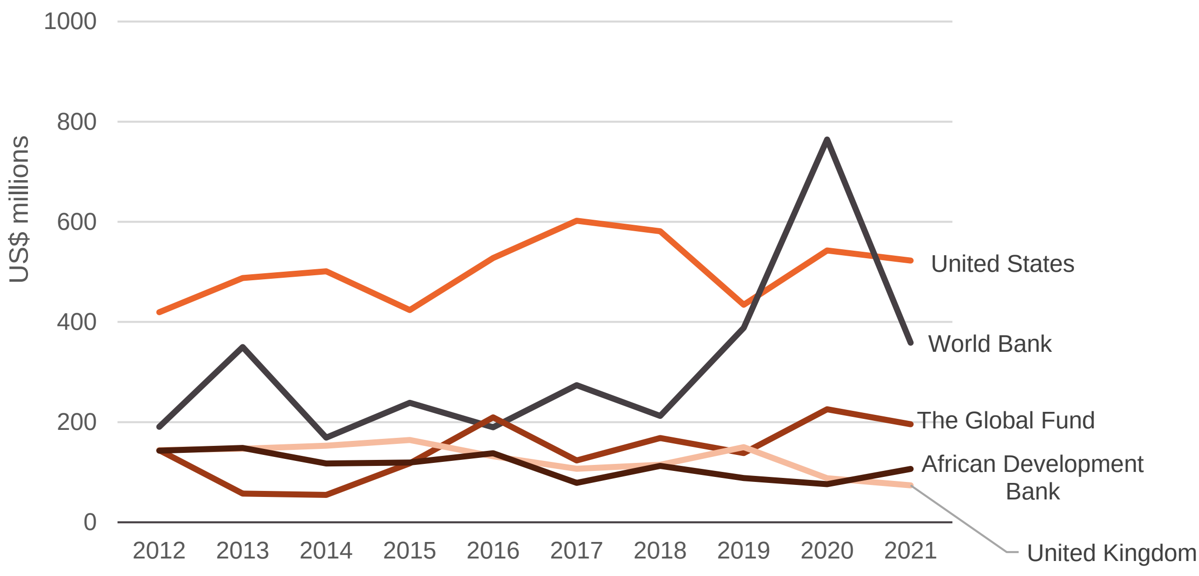


Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD-DAC.

Note: Aside from the top 10 donors, other donors to Uganda over the 2012–2021 period disbursed a total of US$3.78 billion and included 62 bilateral and multilateral agencies.

There was a significant jump in disbursements from the World Bank, the US and The Global Fund in 2020, reflecting an alignment with the increased need for financing Uganda's Covid-19 response and recovery (Figure 4).

Figure 4: ODA disbursements trends from the top five donors to Uganda, 2012–2021(constant figures in US$ millions)



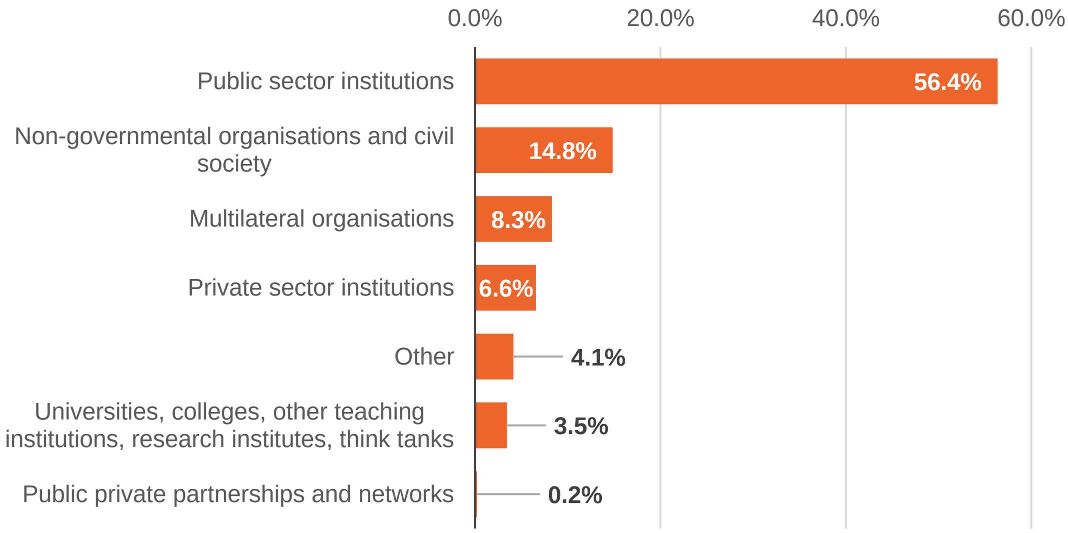
Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD-DAC.

The US$733 million in loans from the World Bank in 2020 accounted for 26% of total disbursements to Uganda that year. Much of the increase in aid from the World Bank in targeted Covid-19 response and recovery efforts and was mostly allocated to two sectors: governance and security, and agriculture and food security. Together, these sectors accounted for nearly half (47.9%) of total World Bank aid disbursements to Uganda for the year.

Delivery channels for ODA in Uganda

Public sector institutions were the predominant channel for ODA disbursements to Uganda from 2012 to 2021, receiving more than half (56%) of all disbursements (Figure 5). The other channels include non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and CSOs (15%), multilateral organisations (8%) and private sector institutions 7%. All other channels combined accounted for the remaining 14% of total ODA disbursements.

Figure 5: ODA disbursements to Uganda by channels, 2012–2021



Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD.

Note: ‘Other’ includes disbursements for which the channel is not specified in the CRS database.

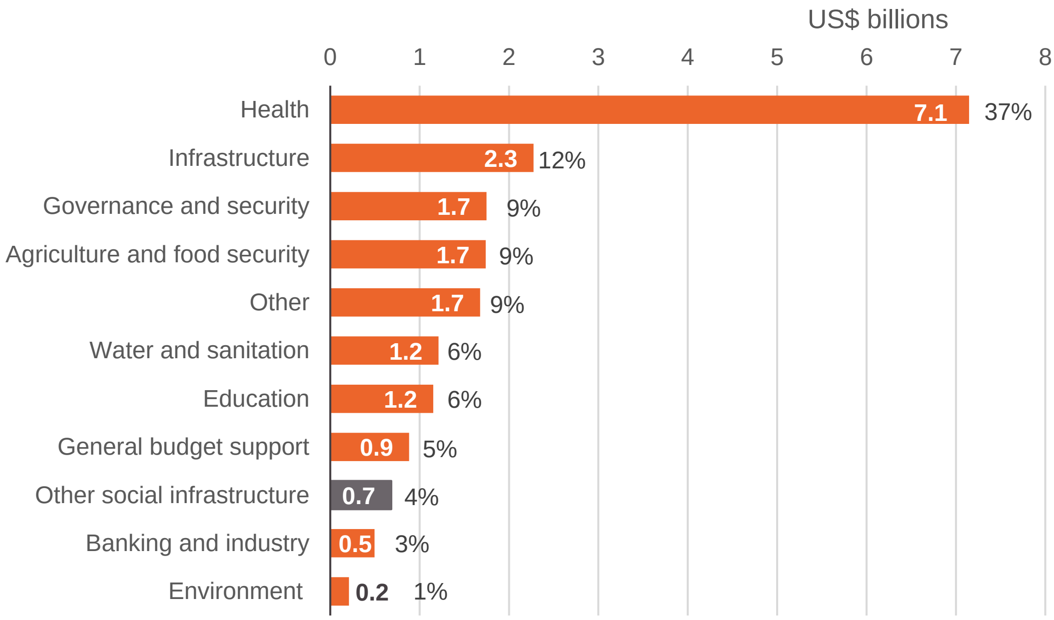
To which sectors is ODA targeted?

Health was the highest-funded sector between 2012 and 2021, receiving more than one-third of ODA disbursements (Figure 6). Infrastructure came next, with 12%, followed by governance and security, agriculture and food security, and 'other', all three of which accounted for an average of 9%.[13]

Social protection falls under the 'other social infrastructure' sector, which received 4% of total ODA aid disbursements from 2012 to 2021. While social protection accounts for more than half (56%) of the allocations to 'other social infrastructure' sector, the share of social protection in overall ODA is just 2%.

While the share of ODA to social protection was much smaller than the other sectors for that period, it was higher in Uganda (2.0%) than in Kenya (1.3%). Social protection falls under 'other social infrastructure' which received 4% of total ODA aid disbursements from 2012 to 2021.

Figure 6: ODA disbursements to Uganda by sector, 2012–2021 (constant figures in US$ billions)



Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD-DAC.

Financing social protection in Uganda

Uganda's social protection interventions

Social protection has a key role in attaining Agenda 2030, and is embedded in 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with achievements under each of their indicators contributing towards increased social protection for the most vulnerable people.[14]

This section assesses ODA investments to social protection and the implementation of donor-funded social protection programmes in Uganda from 2012 to 2021. A case study of the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme is provided to assess how ODA supports aid effectiveness, the impacts of donor aid, and lessons and best practice for donor-funded programmes in Uganda.

Social protection is well enshrined in Uganda's legal and policy frameworks, including the NDP III, which aims to reduce vulnerability and gender inequality by expanding the scope and coverage of care, support and social protection services for the most vulnerable groups, and by establishing early warning systems for disaster preparedness.[15]

Uganda is also a party to Africa's Agenda 2063,[16] in which it committed to adopt minimum social protection policies covering several dimensions, including essential healthcare, social insurance, social welfare, employment guarantees and non-contributory cash-transfer schemes for children, informal workers, the unemployed, the elderly and persons with disabilities. As part of its commitment, the Government of Uganda promised to provide social protection for at least 30% of the vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities, the elderly and children.

The government recognises that a functional social protection mechanism is a critical prerequisite for achieving national development goals. It further acknowledges the need to guarantee social security to the population and to provide assistance to people who are vulnerable – either by age, social class, location, disability, gender, disaster or who do not earn any income – in order to promote equity.[17] To this end, the government has adopted the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) and integrated it into NDP III, the current national development plan, underscoring the importance of social protection in addressing risks and vulnerabilities.

NDP III specifically identifies increased access to social protection among the key development strategies the government will pursue for the plan's successful implementation. Furthermore, the government expects that development partners will align their financing support to social development frameworks and strategies to meet the aspirations and priorities of the NDP III and the NSPP as well as coordinating their actions, sharing information and providing technical assistance for social protection.[18]

Social protection interventions in Uganda

Setting aside government spending on social sectors like health and education, Uganda's social protection spending remains very low.[19] The budget allocations to national programmes like Universal Primary Education (which aims to provide free primary education to all children),[20] Universal Secondary Education (which aims to increase access to quality secondary education for economically vulnerable families), and sectors like health has increased over the years, from 0.1% of GDP in 2012 to 0.9 percent in 2019. The growth has been mostly driven by increases in the National Social Security Fund and Public Service Pension Scheme contributions, which together account for 84% of all social security spending in Uganda.

Uganda's spending on direct income support programmes remained static, below 0.07% of GDP from 2011 to 2016, and increased marginally to 0.9% by 2019. With no data/statistics on government social care spending, donor financing accounts for most of the reported funding for social care (Table 1).[21]

Some experts recommend that countries like Uganda can expand social security with additional financing from the expansion of fiscal space through re-allocation of public expenditure, increasing tax revenues, and expanding contributory revenues among others,[22] but in Uganda the trend in financing for social security paints a grim picture. The share of government social protection finance targeting the most vulnerable people has remained stagnant, while donor contributions have decreased in recent years.

Detailed analysis of government contributions to financing of the latter programme is presented in the next chapter under financing of the scale-up of the ESP programme.

Table 1: Social protection programme coverage in Uganda

Element of social protection	Number involved	Coverage %
Direct income support	329,000 people in 2018/19	1% of Ugandan population were direct recipients. This fell to 0.7% in 2020
		4% of population live in supported households
Contributory schemes		Around 12% of the working-age population

	Approximately 2.4 million (of a working-age population of 19 million)	5% of the working-age population contribute to mandatory or licenses schemes
Social care and support	Not known due to lack of data, but likely very limited compared to need	Estimated at 5% in 2020
Health insurance	138,000 people are members of active community-based health insurance schemes	7.5% of the population aged 15 years and over in 2020, based on a household survey (and up from 5% in 2016/17)
	700,000 people have private health insurance	1.5% of the population
Social insurance	1,243,000 (estimated)	7.5% of the population in 2020
Population with at least one social protection benefit	1,200,000 (estimated)	2.8% of the population in 2019

Sources: Social insurance: data from the Government of Uganda, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, and UNICEF; population with at least one social protection benefit: data from ILO; health insurance: data from ministry of health and UBOS. Other data: Household surveys.

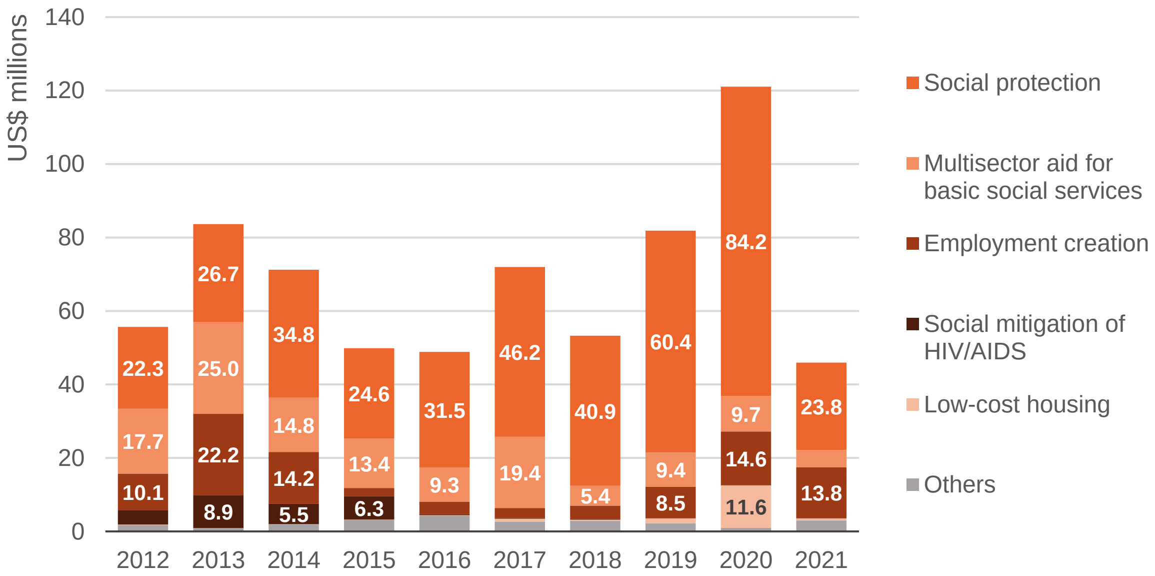
ODA to social protection

Donors have played an important role in the development of social protection in Uganda. This has included the provision of funding, building capacity and delivering technical assistance through various social protection programmes – the most important of which has been the ESP programme. The relatively higher share of total ODA disbursements to social protection in Uganda compared to other ODA-recipient countries like Kenya supports our choice to investigate social protection in order to study aid effectiveness in Uganda.

In assessing ODA disbursements for social protection, we focus on financing for programmes in the 'other social infrastructure' sector. Between 2012 and 2021, over 600 different activities under 10 programmes are reported to have received ODA disbursements, amounting to US$683.4 million.

Social protection was the main focus of aid to 'other social infrastructure' programmes, accounting for 58% (US$395 million) of disbursements between 2012 and 2021. It was followed by multisector aid for basic social services (US$129 million, 19%), employment creation (US$96 million, 14%), social mitigation of HIV/Aids (US$25 million, 4%) while all the other programmes received a combined disbursement of US$38 million or 6%. The spike in disbursements for social protection in 2020 was due to the Covid-19 response (Figure 7).

Figure 7: ODA disbursements to programmes under the 'other social infrastructure' sector, 2012–2021 (constant figures in US$ millions)



Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD.

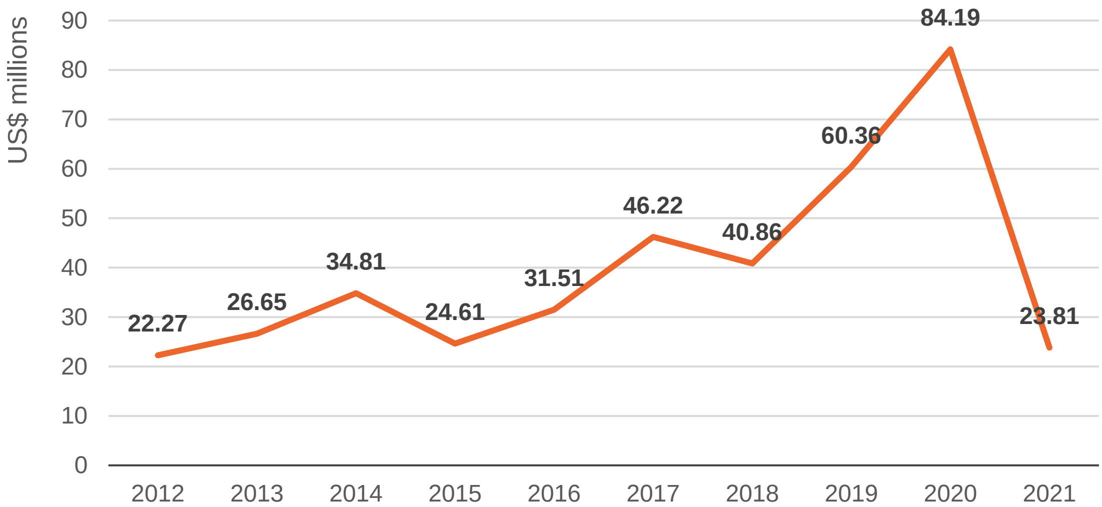
Note: 'Others' includes: housing policy and administrative management, social dialogue, labour rights, culture and recreation, and statistical capacity building.

ODA to Uganda's social protection programmes experienced gradual growth from 2012, with some fluctuation, peaking in 2020 at US$84.2 million, nearly four times the volume disbursed in 2012 (Figure 8). The gradual increase in ODA disbursements is due to the ESP programme, which received a yearly average of US$14.8 million. The funding increase for the ESP from 2012 to 2016 was aimed at strengthening the institutional frameworks for implementing the programme. This was in preparation for the expansion of coverage by the government in the subsequent phase two, which aimed to cover more districts.

The Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF 3) project also received an increase in disbursements, growing from US$8.5 million in 2016 to US$36.5 million in 2019.

The spike in 2020 was largely due the increase in ODA disbursements to support the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic which involved disbursements of US$51.7 million.

Figure 8: ODA disbursements to social protection, 2012−2021(constant figures in US$ millions)

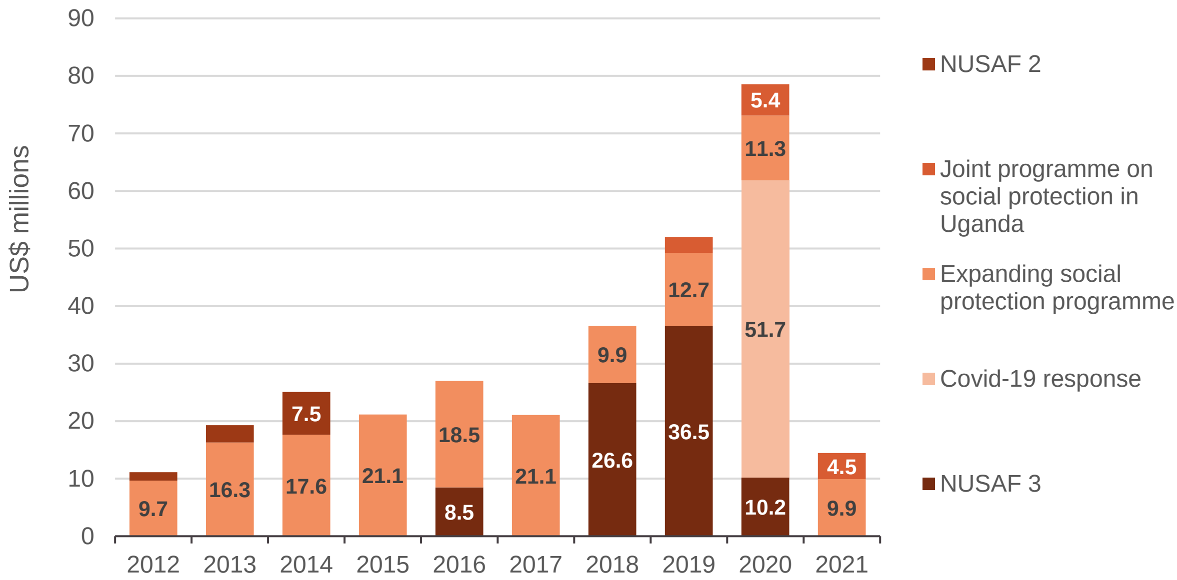


Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD.

In total, between 2012 and 2021, there were over 260 different social protection projects/initiatives, receiving a total of US$395 million. The very large number of social protection activities reported as receiving ODA disbursements points to the fragmentation of donor financing to the sector. The top five funded activities accounted for 78% of ODA disbursements (Figure 9) and included:

- Phases 1 and 2 of the ESP programme (US$148 million, 37% of total disbursements)
- The NUSAF 3 project (US$81.8 million, 21%)
- Covid-19 response (US$51.7 million, 13%)
- Joint UN Programme on Social Protection (US$12.7 million, 3%)
- The NUSAF 2 project (US$11.9 million, 3%).

Figure 9: ODA disbursements to the top five funded social protection programmes, 2012–2021 (constant figures in US$ millions)



Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD.

Notes: Covid-19 response = Uganda Covid-19 Economic Crisis and Recovery Development Policy Financing (2020); NUSAF 2/3 = Second Northern Uganda Social Action Fund Project (2012–14 and 2016–2021); Joint Programme on Social Protection in Uganda = WFP-UNICEF Joint Programme on Social Protection in Uganda 2019–24.

Case study: The Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme

Of Uganda's numerous social protection programmes, the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme received the most donor funding between 2012 and 2021.

The implementation of the ESP started with a pilot phase in 2011 (ESP I), following an initiative from the UK's DFID to build a comprehensive national social protection system to reduce chronic poverty and income insecurity in Uganda.[23] DFID was joined by Irish Aid and UNICEF in financing the pilot phase. The strategic goal for this part of the programme was to put in place a national social protection system, aligned to the NSPP, that would benefit the poorest and most vulnerable Ugandans.[24,25]

The first phase of the project entailed the development of a national social protection policy and the implementation of a cash transfer pilot called Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE), which piloted two forms of direct income support – the Senior Citizens' Grant (SCG) and a Vulnerable Families Grant. The pilot phase of the ESP ended with the approval of the NSPP in 2015. This policy now provides the framework for implementing social protection in Uganda.

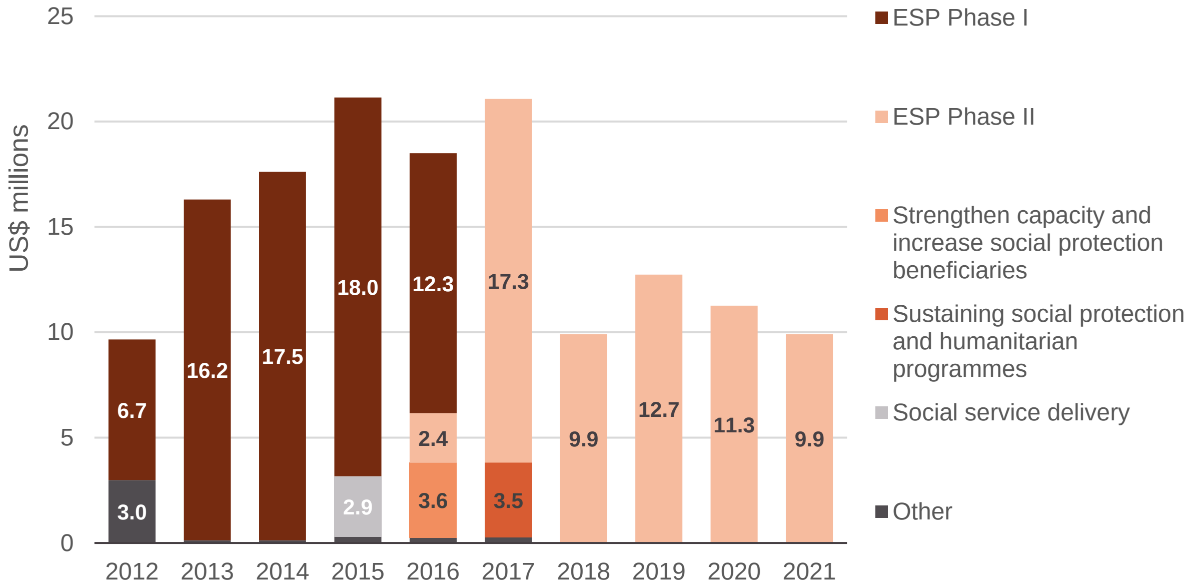
In 2015, after the successful pilot phase, the government took over the ESP programme with the scale-up of the SCG to an additional 40 districts over five years, starting with 20 in FY 2015/16, thereafter to five additional districts every year until 2019/20.[26] The scale-up of the SCG started with a government funding contribution to the ESP programme of UGX 49.8 billion in FY 2015/17, reaching a peak of UGX 107 billion in FY 2018/19 before declining to UGX 77 billion in FY 2020/21.[27]

In 2019, with funding from DFID, Irish Aid and the Government of Uganda, ESP phase two also delivered the SCG in 61 of Uganda's 135 districts, providing a monthly payment of UGX25,000 to those aged 80 and over. In November 2018, Uganda's parliament and cabinet committed to roll out the grant in all districts of Uganda by 2021.[28] The government made some changes in the course of national expansion of the programme, including the enrolment of only the 100 oldest beneficiaries in each sub-county in each district (as opposed to all eligible beneficiaries 65 year and above – 60+ for the case of Karamoga region – in all sub-counties in the 15 pilot districts in phase one). ESP phase two also excluded older persons benefiting from government-funded pensions from the SCG.[29,30]

ODA financing for the ESP programme

A total of US$148 million of ODA was disbursed to the ESP programme between 2012 and 2021, financing a range of activities that are shown in Figure 10. Most (48%) of the disbursed aid went to financing the first phase of the ESP programme, which was allocated US$70.7 million; the second phase was allocated US$63.4 million (43%). The rest of the allocations (US$14 million) went to activities with ESP in their description but not specified as either phase one or two.

Figure 10: Components of ODA disbursements to the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme, 2012–2021 (constant figures in US$ millions)



Source: Development Initiatives based on data from OECD.

Note: ‘Other’ includes: non-budget support; procurement of goods for implementing the ESP programme; research and monitoring of the ESP programme; and child sponsorship.

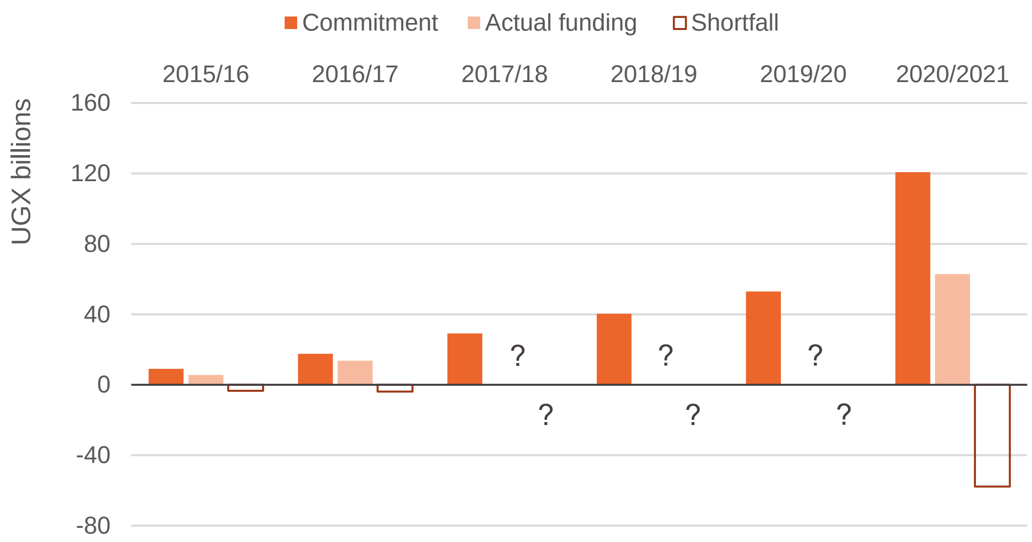
The dip in disbursements for the second phase of the ESP in 2018 followed a decision by the donors to defer approval of their funding disbursement. They cited failure by Uganda’s government to fulfil its commitment of providing counterpart funding for the scale-up of the programme.[31]

Financing the scale-up of the ESP programme

The government committed to providing UGX 149 billion in counterpart funding for the scale-up phase of the programme, from 2015 to 2020, against the donors’ GBP 67.8 million (UGX 329.7 billion) over the same period. The donor funding was earmarked for continuation of programme implementation in only the original 15 pilot districts, while the government’s funding would gradually increase as the programme was scaled to new districts in the national rollout of the programme.[32]

However, the scale-up of the ESP programme under government financing did not happen as anticipated. Data on the actual funding approved and disbursed by the government is incomplete, but it is clear that the government failed to budget for or provide the funding it committed to for the period FY 2015/16 to FY 2020/21. For example, in FY 2015/16 only UGX 5.6 billion out of a UGX 9 billion commitment was provided, leaving a shortfall of UGX 3.4 billion. Another shortfall was registered in FY 2016/17. No data is available for the period from FY 2017/18 to FY 2019/20, and in FY 2020/21 the shortfall was UGX 57 billion (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Government of Uganda's financing for Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) FY 2015/16 to 2020/21: annual commitments, disbursements and shortfall (nominal figures in UGX billions)



Source: Development Initiatives based on data from the Government of Uganda.

Due to the government missing its disbursement targets from the onset of the second phase of the program, the donors deferred the approval of the dependant funding in 2017/2018, which worsened the overall shortfall. This had major ramifications for the programme's beneficiaries and sustainability. The shortfall in financing for the SCG is reported to have had a negative effect on the welfare of beneficiaries.[33] For example, as of 30 June 2021,[34] over 270,000 beneficiaries (elderly persons) had not received their monthly cash transfers. If the trend in underfinancing by government continues, the number of programme beneficiaries reached will be much lower than the NDP III's target of 1,008,000 persons aged over 75 years. Uganda's Initiative for Social and Economic Rights reports that the UGX 121 billion commitment for FY 2023/2024 will enable the programme to reach just one-third of its target.[35]

The decision by main donors to defer funding approval was reversed: the donors later returned and provided the balance of funds in a no-cost extension to the programme. Moreover, the ESP is now up and running across the country with government funding.

FCDO (the main donor to the ESP) said during our validation workshop that their funding had aimed to help support the establishment of social protection systems and structures and build the capacity of government to implement a social protection system. FCDO believes they achieved their financing objective, and that the government must now continue from where they left off.

Outcomes and impacts of the ESP programme

The implementation of the pilot phase of the ESP proved the case for social protection in terms of its value and practicalities of delivery and also paved the way for its scale-up and expansion nationwide. There is evidence that the investments made in the ESP programme have led to improvement in human capital, national development, and growth. Impact evaluation of SAGE, a key component of the programme, reveals that investments made by donors were cost effective. Besides the direct positive impacts on beneficiaries, the pilot's multiplier effects include a substantial increase in employment, an increase in primary and secondary school attendance, and a reduction in the proportion of households eating fewer than two meals per day. This positive impact of donor-funded components of the ESP serves as an example of the effectiveness of foreign aid in Uganda and may highlight effective approaches that donors should take.[36]

Ownership

On a broader scale, the most important outcome of the ESP programme has been the transition from the 100% donor financing and support of the pilot phase to the takeover and scale-up of components by government. Likewise, the contribution of ESP towards the establishment of a national social protection system can be counted as an important outcome. The NSPP that was approved in 2015 was the first step towards the creation of a comprehensive social protection service to support people who are at risk or vulnerable in Uganda.

Social and economic impact

Assessment of the impact of the SAGE components of the pilot of phase of the ESP programme by Oxford Policy Management revealed that beneficiaries mostly used cash transfers for food and basic needs, followed by investments in productive assets and expenditure on health and education. This has resulted in the increase in health expenditure for senior citizens and improved health outcomes for some households. Moreover, even the local economy may have benefitted from spillover effects in the form of enhanced participation in the local commodity markets as demand for labour and other local commodities increased.[37]

The SCG is also said to have enhanced food consumption, reduced vulnerability and helped reduce economic poverty among target groups.[38,39,40] According to key informant interviews, some of the most important and sustained outcomes from the implementation of the ESP are:

- It created the basis for the scale-up of the SCG. This leveraged the systems and structures created under the second phase of ESP to roll the programme out to cover all districts of Uganda.
- It developed the government's technical capacity to implement similar programmes. The government is now implementing the programme nationally with little donor support.

Challenges in implementing the scale-up of the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme in Uganda

Despite the positive outcomes and impact noted by multiple impact assessments, some concerns were raised by key informants regarding the implementation of the ESP. After a pilot phase (based on a donor-government design, co-implementation and 100% donor financing) the government took over the subsequent scale-up phase. One comment from a civil society representative we interviewed was that when funding from the major donor ended, programmes like the Vulnerable Family Support Grant had to close as government could no longer continue running all of them.

Another key informant observed that a proportion of the eligible target population are not receiving monthly cash transfers. For example, the SAGE programme's SCG is not reaching all the eligible elderly individuals in Oyam and Dokolo districts, where potential beneficiaries were disqualified from receiving their UGX 25,000. This was due to such issues such as a lack of national ID or errors in national ID.

A representative from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (the ministry in charge of SAGE's implementation) responded to these concerns. They said that the government's decision to shift away from all other forms of identification to the national ID requirement for enrolment to the programme in the scale-up phase has affected many eligible individuals, including those who lack national IDs and those with errors in the biometric data in the IDs.

The ministry went on to say that the government is currently conducting a pilot in eight districts to correct details, including errors in dates of birth on national IDs. The government has further initiated a comprehensive registration process across various districts with support from the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) to address discrepancies in dates of birth. Given that some eligible individuals even lack national IDs, the ministry is also collaborating with the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) to simplify registration. This process involves local leaders in verifying beneficiaries, who then swear an oath (for which they pay) and submit their information to NIRA for registration. The government is piloting this approach in three districts, with over 4,700 people already vetted and 3,000 IDs submitted for correction.

Outstanding gaps and challenges for social protection in Uganda

The Government of Uganda has fulfilled some of its fiscal and planning commitments with the development of the NSPP and the implementation of various social protection programmes. However, much still needs to be done to establish social protection systems and measures to achieve substantial coverage of populations experiencing poverty and vulnerability by 2030.

An estimated 20.3% of Ugandans are living in poverty.[41] Many lack regular basic incomes and are exposed to a range of vulnerabilities, including food and livelihood insecurity exacerbated by climate change, increased exposure to extreme weather events,[42,43] as well as disadvantages due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic.[44]

Uganda currently allocates 0.41% of GDP to social protection.[45] This low figure is compounded by wavering political commitment, manifested in shifting eligibility criteria for beneficiaries of social protection programmes (resulting in a reduced target population), as well as funding stagnation and chronic funding gaps that have left many vulnerable individuals, households and communities without any form of formal social protection. Although Uganda's total annual social assistance spending is above Kenya's (0.37%) and Tanzania's (0.15%), it is below Rwanda's (0.69%),[46] and Uganda still requires a substantial increase to about 1.5% of GDP[47] in investments in social protection interventions to meet its targets under NDP III.

The government hopes to increase citizens' access to social protection through such schemes as universal health insurance, social security and expansion of social protection to all vulnerable groups. However, in 2018, only 2% of Ugandans had access to health insurance and only 2% had social security. The government hopes to reach 50% of all those eligible for the various social assistance programmes by 2025; however in 2020 it had reached only 22% of this target group.

Table 2 shows Uganda's progress so far, and how much still needs to be done to reach current NDP III targets.

Table 2: Uganda's social protection: baselines and targets

Form of social protection	Baseline 2017/18	NDP II 2015–2020 (Actual data)	NDP III 2020–2025	Vision 2040 target
Health insurance	**2%**	**6%**	**25%**	**70%**
Social security	**2%**	N/A	**25%**	N/A

Social assistance to vulnerable groups	N/A	N/A	**50%**	N/A

Source: Government of Uganda, National Development Plan III

The government estimates of funding required for the expansion of social protection coverage in Uganda stood at UGX 440 billion for the period from FY 2015/16 to FY 2020/21. The government expected 34% (UGX 149 billion) of this investment to come from domestic sources including the private sector, with the remainder (UGX 291 billion) to be covered by development partners over the same period. Uganda's government committed to incrementally cover bigger proportions of the social protection budget from domestic revenue as it tries to encourage increased participation from the private sector and individuals i.e. philanthropy and direct giving, or volunteering in social protection.[48]

While there is some data on financing to social protection from government and ODA donors, there are data gaps on private and bilateral funding which are important contributors to social protection financing. Some key informants argued that it is important to centrally collect and manage financing data to help better understand the specific roles of bilateral donors and private funders in social protection. A key informant representing the government argued that many bilateral donors currently prefer to work with NGOs as opposed to working directly through government structures, making it difficult for the government to track such investments effectively.

Donors' preference to channel funding through programmes and projects outside direct governments control seems to stem from their perception that it is more effective and efficient to implement programmes through their own systems and processes, rather than working directly with the government.[49,50] However, this mode of operation potentially undercuts the value and effectiveness of aid as it compromises government ownership of the development programmes while posing additional issues, including the misalignment of ODA government priorities. Working outside government systems and processes also goes against the need to harmonise operational procedures and push for flexible and contextualised aid disbursements to reduce transaction costs and promote ownership by recipient countries.[51]

A key informant from the private sector underscored the importance of enabling private funders to access quality data to help them to engage and collaborate meaningfully with traditional donors. Such data would facilitate their understanding of financing trends, gaps, priorities, and areas where they can contribute and achieve the most impact.

Lessons and success factors from the Expanding Social Protection (ESP) programme implementation

- **Government ownership:** There was alignment of the programme to the government's medium- and long-term development priorities. The government and CSOs began the ESP programme's conceptualisation in 2008 as an initiative to share the burden of supporting Ugandans facing multiple vulnerabilities and poverty. This culminated in the launch of the pilot phase of the ESP in 2010. Donors' engagement and partnership with government from the onset ensured that the programme was problem driven; designed to address an existing need and gap. This also helped in putting the programme on a clear sustainability path.
- **Starting small, and learning and documenting lessons and impact before handing over to government for scale-up:** Monitoring, evaluation and learning have been core components of the ESP programme. The lessons and experience from the pilot phase were critical for the development and implementation of the subsequent phases. Donors were able to show impact and prove the case for investment in social protection as a viable contribution to Uganda's development aspirations. It was easier for donors to convince the government and other partners to scale up the program after proving that it works.
- **Coordination between government and donors, and partnerships with CSOs as key players in the implementation of the programme:** The ESP programme stands out as a best-practice example of coordination and implementation of donor-funded activities. The joint initiative by DFID (now FCDO), Irish Aid and UNICEF to fund the pilot phase showed that by working together, donors can effectively combine resources and channel them to an activity that addresses common interest. This avoids the fragmentation and duplication that would have happened if each had implemented separate social protection projects. There is also evidence of other donors like WFP joining to support the implementation of the government scale-up of the project which suggests that the project is well coordinated and implemented by government.
- **Sustained funding and technical support for scale-up following a successful pilot.** While several donor-funded initiatives have ended shortly after donors withdrew funding, continued funding by the government and technical support for the second phase of the ESP programme supported its sustainability.

- **Challenges often arise in the transition from donors to government in the financing, implementation and ownership of donor supported and funded programmes like the ESP**. In the case of the ESP, we note the government's
    - failure to stick to its financing commitment and
    - subsequent modifications in programme beneficiary eligibility criteria, enrolment, and registration requirements.

  These resulted in several adverse negative outcomes, including
    - beneficiaries missing their monthly cash transfer and
    - the exclusion of elderly and/or vulnerable persons who lack national ID or whose age was incorrectly recorded during enrolment by the national ID system.

Conclusion and recommendations for donors

These recommendations are drawn from our case study of the ESP programme, examining the effectiveness of a predominantly ODA-funded programme. They could be applied to maximise the value of aid in the context of similarly donor-dependent programmes.

- **Country buy-in and ownership are necessary and critical:** It is important that donors learn to work with and not against or alongside recipient governments in the delivery of aid and implementation of donor-funded programmes. The case study revealed the importance of the national government taking a lead role in the conceptualisation of projects based on their understanding of underlying problems and need. This is a vital first step in delivering ODA and donor support to developing countries. Even when the donor's development agency is playing a lead role in implementing donor-funded activities, alignment with existing policies and structures in recipient countries is important.
- **Learning and adaptation are crucial for success:** Learning and adaptation were an important part of the ESP, proving that investment in research and learning, including monitoring and evaluation, plays a vital supportive function for donor-funded project implementation.
- **Flexibility in funding disbursements is needed to accommodate changes and adaptation associated with a learning-orientated implementation of aid-financed programmes:** This often means allowing adjustments to already-costed project workplans and strategies, as occurred with the ESP programme during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Partnerships and collaboration with key stakeholders are indispensable:** Conceptualisation of the ESP programme started with identification of key stakeholders. Bringing in the right partners and technical teams from the outset of activity implementation helped to cement government ownership and the potential for positive impact. Functional partnerships require donors to have clear communication and coordination tools and a platform that attracts partners to share and combine ideas and resources to identify and solve challenges. They also require donors to take into account, incorporate and track all partners' interests, priorities and resources. This can be achieved by ensuring the right people are involved in designing and implementing projects. Well-managed

partnerships help to raise visibility of unmet needs, support coordination and provide platforms for working together.

- **Understanding the financing landscape is helpful for minimising aid fragmentation and duplication, maximising synergies and improving mechanisms for aid effectiveness:** The funding partners for the ESP programme had a good understanding of the financing landscape around social protection in Uganda, and this helped in targeting aid and directing the required resources towards improving the quality of service delivery.
- **Building local technical capacity for implementing donor-funded projects is important:** This can be achieved by working with local partners, including directly with government, even for donor funds disbursed through project-style activities. The case study proved that donors can significantly improve local technical capacities for implementing donor-funded programmes, enshrining sustainability and monitoring development-finance impact and effectiveness.
- **Donors should recognise the need for recipient countries' self-reliance when working out the sustainability of the development programmes they finance:** If well planned, this helps in reducing dependence on donors and enhancing programme effectiveness.

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