

IN SEARCH OF THE 'BETTER LIFE'

THE POSITION OF TVET, EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND MIGRATION IN THE
LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES OF YOUTH IN GULU, LIRA AND NWOYA DISTRICT,
NORTHERN UGANDA



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Photo on the front page was made during field research at Homa Farm, Gulu, Uganda, June 2018.

Abstract

There is much discussion on the relation between migration, education and employment possibilities in developing countries. What is this relation? And how should organizations and institutions that work on improving the livelihood of the youth in developing countries relate to the political agenda of mitigating (international) migration? This research adds an empirical case study to this puzzle by focusing on the position of TVET, employment opportunities and migration in the livelihood strategies of youth in Gulu, Lira and Nwoya District, northern Uganda. By means of identifying why some youth migrate, and some stay put, this research contributes to a better understanding of how TVET and employment opportunities affect livelihood strategies of youth and drive migration. Information is gathered through semi-structured interviewing, focus group discussions and informal conversations during three months of field research. The main findings show that following TVET, or finding a job, does not stop youth from migrating elsewhere. It also reveals the important role of perceptions in a decision of youth – how they are generally looking for a ‘better life’. The findings are not only of societal relevance, but hold academic relevance as they highlight the relevant decision to take youth as a unit of analysis.

Key words: Youth, livelihood strategy, migration, TVET, employment, northern Uganda.

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List of abbreviations

AU	African Union
CoP	Community of Practice
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GoU	Government of Uganda
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LC	Local Council
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NELM	New Economics of Labor Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRM	National Resistance Movement
NPA	National Planning Authority
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
RoC	Rest of the Country
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
YLP	Youth Livelihood Program

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1 INTRODUCTION

Migration is a much discussed topic. It is a central feature of the world in which we now live. Some people even argue that we find ourselves in ‘the age of migration’ (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2013). International and internal migration, economic migrants and refugees, these are examples of concepts that you may think of. In public and political debates, this topic is discussed from different perspectives. One of them is the motivation for migration.

For organizations and institutions that work with youth in developing countries, this involves a difficult puzzle. What is the relation between migration, education and youth employment? And how should organizations and institutions that work on improving the livelihood of the youth in developing countries relate to the political agenda of mitigating (international) migration? These are examples of difficult questions that may arise.

This puzzle is also relevant for Edukans. This development organization works in the field of education for children and youth in developing countries. They also work in Uganda. In this country they aim for ‘1) sustainable livelihoods and active citizenship through development of knowledge, skills and attitudes of marginalized children and youth and 2) an improved economic situation of marginalized young people through structurally improved match between demand and supply of labor (Edukans, 2018)’.

These goals are achieved by focusing on Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)². This form of education focuses on the development of different skills. Think of skills in tailoring, agriculture and mechanics. Youth are trained for a job that matches the labor market. This is particularly relevant in a country that has the status of the ‘youngest in the world’, where 78% of the population is below the age of 30 (United Nations [UN], 2018). Youth unemployment and underemployment pose a major problem in Uganda. The youth unemployment rate is 37.8% according to the Uganda National Planning Authority (NPA) (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2017b).

Youth unemployment is even a bigger problem in northern Uganda. This part of the country has made a steady progress since 2006, pointing to the end of decades of devastating civil conflict. But the presence of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has left the region behind in terms of development compared to the Rest of the Country (RoC) (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2015). In this context, the Government of Uganda (GoU), but also other international, national, and local organizations and institutions, work to tackle different development challenges, thereby focusing on the youth population in Uganda. Examples are the Youth Livelihood Program (YLP) and the Skilling

² From here I will refer to TVET, vocational education and skills development trainings.

Uganda Strategic Plan 2012-2022. They all focus on the potential of this part of the country (UNDP, 2015; UN, 2018).

Edukans works, among other things, on the potential in the agricultural sector. In this sector the focus is on skills training and creating employment in agriculture for youth. This organization wants to increase their knowledge about the puzzle concerning the relationship between migration, vocational education and youth employment in Uganda. As a research intern with this organization, I conducted research to add information to this puzzle.

I have carried out three months of field research in Uganda (April – July 2018). This offered a unique opportunity to learn more about the livelihood of the youth in this country. It all started with informal conversations in Kampala and ended with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in Gulu, Lira and Nwoya District. I have spoken with many different people and I tried to learn and hear from different perspectives. From conversations in daily life to conversations in office spaces. It resulted in a research developed from the views and perceptions of those who in one way or another associate with the research topic.

1.1 OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research is about the experiences and perceptions of the participants. It is about livelihood strategies of youth and the position of TVET, employment and migration in this in Gulu, Lira and Nwoya District, northern Uganda. Following the introduction, the objective in this research is to gain insight into the motivations of youth to migrate. This is researched by means of the livelihood strategies of youth. In order to fine tune the analysis, I focus on the role of TVET, employment and migration in these strategies. To approach this objective, the following research question is formulated:

What are the livelihood strategies of youth in Gulu, Lira and Nwoya District, northern Uganda, and what is the role of migration, TVET and employment in this?

To answer this research question, this study looks at four sub-questions. These are all geographically bound to Gulu, Lira and Nwoya District in northern Uganda and include both descriptive and analytical questions. The first question provides an overview of the livelihood strategies of youth. The second and third sub-questions look at the perception of the youth about TVET, employment and migration. It also analyzes how these perceptions are found in their livelihood strategies and what motivations for migration can be identified. The fourth question examines how migration, TVET and employment interact and what is decisive for a decision to migrate.

1. What livelihood strategies of youth can be identified?
2. What are the perceptions of youth about TVET and employment, and how are these reflected in their livelihood strategies?
3. What are the perceptions of youth about migration as a livelihood strategy, and what motivations to migrate can be identified?
4. How do perceptions interact and what is decisive for a decision to migrate?

In general, this research hopes to add complexity with an empirical study; to widen the knowledge about livelihood strategies of youth in northern Uganda; the different experiences and perceptions that have a role in decisions for certain activities; and thereby adding aspects to a discussion on migration and development that has both societal and academic relevance. This last point is what we will focus on now.

1.2 RELEVANCES

This research has societal relevance. The research theme and the location of field research are initiated by Edukans. This organization works on education in development countries – something I discussed earlier in this chapter – and is interested in the motivations for migration, especially in relation to TVET and employment possibilities. As a research intern at Edukans, I want to deepen the knowledge of this organization. By means of identifying why some young people migrate, and some stay put, this research can contribute to a better understanding of how TVET and employment opportunities affect livelihood strategies of youth and drive migration. Findings of this research can therefore be taken into consideration in current and future projects that focus on the topics that are dealt with in this study. This is done by formulating recommendations (section 5.4.2.). It can also lay the foundations for further research into certain parts of this study.

But this research is not only relevant to Edukans. It can also be informative for organizations and institutions that work in similar fields. This includes experts and representatives of relevant organizations, local government and schools in northern Uganda. These people are also interviewed during field research. Feedback on results can deepen the knowledge on the livelihood strategies of the youth they work with, and the way in which TVET, employment opportunities and other activities drive migration.

This research is also of scientific relevance. It is a contribution of empirical research into studies on livelihood strategies and migration. In conducting qualitative case-study research, I aim to extend the frame of reference about what make youth decide for certain activities in their livelihood. It is therefore conducted on the micro-scale. This enables to identify what is important to individuals and elaborate on what they perceive as relevant in their livelihoods. But research into livelihood strategies often takes the

household as the unit of analysis (Bezu and Holden, 2014; Ellis, 2003; Stines, Burns and Akabwai, 2014; White, 2009). This decision, however, can lead to ignoring key implications, such as personal aspirations. These are deeply embedded in peoples' views on their livelihoods (De Haas, 2010; Rigg, 2006). This research thus analyzes individual livelihood strategies, providing space to underlying motivations of respondents. It is therefore of scientific relevance to research a case study on livelihood strategies of youth in northern Uganda, and take the individual as the unit of analysis. I will further elaborate on the unit of analysis in section 3.3.

All in all, if empirical research is done on this research theme, we might achieve a broader and deeper insight of the role of different factors on the livelihood strategies of youth in Uganda.

1.3 OVERVIEW

This research is structured as follows. It begins with the theoretical framework that is relevant to the research questions in Chapter 2. An overview of migration theories and an explanation of the approach in this research is followed by an introduction to the analytical tool: livelihood strategy. The theoretical framework concludes with the operationalization that serves as a guidance throughout the research.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the research process. The methodology, methods, ethics and the journey of data collection in Uganda are all introduced in these sections.

This chapter is followed by the presentation of the findings. This Chapter 4 is divided into four parts. These parts represent the sub-questions of this research. Beginning with an overview of the livelihood strategies of youth, it is then followed with the perception about TVET and employment and how these are reflected in their livelihood strategies. The next step follows the perception about migration and the motivations that can be identified. The final part analyzes the interactions between TVET, employment and migration and tries to find out how these are found in a decision of migration as a livelihood strategy.

Chapter 5 summarizes the main findings of this research and answers the research questions. In this final part I conclude with a discussion that contextualizes these main findings – a link to the theoretical framework and relevance of this research. It also contains a final reflection on the research and recommendations.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The starting point in this research are the perspectives of individuals. This means that this research is focused on the micro-level. Yet migration is embedded into broader processes of e.g. development and globalization. Without an understanding of these broader processes, there is a danger of overlooking the complexities at work (Castles, 2012, p. 16) and that are necessary in understanding motivations for migration in Uganda. Castles, de Haas & Miller (2013) underline the importance of considering the macro-structures in micro-level migration research: ‘It would also be naïve to assume that migration continues irrespective of changes in macro-level conditions such as political transformation, economic growth or labor market dynamics (Castles et al., 2013, p. 51).’

The theoretical framework is structured as follows. The first section gives a critical discussion of migration theories. This provides the context and explanation of the approach in this research. Following this, the decision to work with the livelihood approach will be explained, as well as the analytical tool that is used in the research: livelihood strategy. The last part looks at the operationalization of this theoretical framework. How to conduct research into livelihood strategies of youth in Uganda?

2.1 MIGRATION THEORIES

There is a basic distinction in migration theories between the causes of migration processes and the impacts of migration for sending and receiving communities and societies (Castles et al., 2013, p. 26). De Haas (2008) describes how the tendency to study these bodies of theory separately is a weakness of migration and development research (p. 1). Castles et al. (2013) explain, in addition, how it is important to link theories on causes and impacts of migration ‘in order to develop an understanding of migration as a dynamic process which is in constant interaction with broader change processes in destination and origin societies (p. 27).’ Migration in this sense is, as I explained in the introduction of this theoretical framework, ‘an intrinsic part of broader processes of development, globalization and social transformation (Castles, 2012, p. 14; Castles et al., 2013, p. 26, p. 81)’.

Following these writers on migration, the next section acts as a broader discussion in which this research is embedded. This section, but also the sections that follow, show that both bodies of theory (causes and impacts of migration) come together in a decision to migrate. This does not mean that I combine both bodies of theory into one theoretical perspective, but rather that I am aware of the division and that I will reflect on both migration studies³.

³ Following Castles et al. (2013), this term (migration studies) is used to refer to both theories on causes and impacts of migration (p. 27).

2.1.1 CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Now that the discussion is shifting to migration theories, it is first to mention how research on migration is interdisciplinary. Castles et al. (2013) explain how different disciplines, such as political science, sociology, geography, economics and law, are all relevant (p. 27). These authors point to the increased interest of recent years in migration research and how this has led to proliferation and interaction of theoretical approaches (Castles et al., 2013, p. 27). In this section I will look at general developments in migration theories on the causes of migration and explain how a discussion of these theories determine the approach used in this research. In doing so, I will refer extensively to Castles et al. and their book *The Age of Migration* (2013). This book is a guide to finding a way through theories of migration, choosing the right approach in this research and informative about regional case studies⁴.

To begin with, two main paradigms can be distinguished in migration theories on the causes of migration, and form a general division in the social sciences: ‘functionalist’ and ‘historical-structural’ theories. Functionalist theories consider migration as something that is positive, that serves the interests of most people and is capable to improve equality within societies, as well as between them (Castles et al., 2013, p. 27). This paradigm includes ‘push-pull’ models and neoclassical theories. Push-pull models identify factors that push people out of places of origin and factors that pull people towards a destination. These factors are assumed to be economically, environmentally or demographically grounded (Castles et al., 2013, p. 28). But who are those people that move and why do they decide to leave, when others stay? These are examples of questions that cannot be explained with these models (McDowell & De Haan, 1997, p. 9).

Neoclassical theory explains migration at the macro-level by means of geographical differences in the supply and demand for labor. At the micro-level, migrants are viewed as individuals capable of cost-benefit calculations (Castles et al., 2013, pp. 29-30; De Haas, 2008, p. 5). These theories build on the notion of individuals as rational decision takers, that have the necessary knowledge about costs and benefits. The question is whether this is the case. McDowell & De Haan (1997) argue that individuals act with limited and often flawed knowledge (p. 9).

Historical-structuralists criticize neoclassical approaches. They argue how individuals do not have the ability to make free choices and instead argue how people are constrained by structural forces. In their view, traditional economic structures are being undermined, as they are incorporated into the global political-economic system (Castles et al., 2013, p. 32). The globalization theory and segmented labor market theory are grounded in this paradigm⁵. These theories, however, are being criticized for their

⁴ Castles, S., de Haas, H. & Miller, M.J. (2013). *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. Fifth Edition. The Guilford Press: London.

⁵ For a more detailed overview of these theories, see Castles et al., 2013.

deterministic views and their inability to grasp the diversity of migration, as people make deliberate choices in improving their livelihoods by migrating (Castles et al., 2013, p. 35).

Now following these criticisms on neoclassical and historical-structural approaches, there is another body of studies which emphasize the way in which migrants are able to overcome structural constraints. Theories in this perspective are mostly focused at micro- and meso-level studies, in which there is an interest in the motivations of people and social groups to migrate, but also how migrants are able to create social networks (Castles et al., 2013, p. 37). They include the new economics of labor migration (NELM) and livelihood approaches. These approaches, as well as theories that focus on migrant transnationalism, provide a more nuanced perspective and highlight the diversity of migration. This means that they combine agency and structural factors in researching the causes of migration – these theories do not portray human beings as passive in their decisions.

Broadly speaking, NELM sees migration as risk sharing behavior of families or households and as a strategy to provide resources for investment in economic activities (Castles et al., 2013, p. 38). The NELM has parallels with livelihood approaches. These livelihood approaches explain how people organize their livelihood in broader social contexts and, as research showed, explain how migration is often a deliberate decision to improve livelihoods and reduce income fluctuations. Following this, migration cannot adequately be explained with merely income differences (Castles et al., 2013, pp. 38-39; McDowell & De Haan, 1997, pp. 17-18). Livelihood approaches provide a guide when you are interested ‘into the way households live and shape their lives, and how these lives are practically embedded into a broader institutional context (De Haas, 2008, p. 38)’. These approaches, however, are considered less useful when the focus is on migration of high-skilled and the relatively affluent and are being criticized for not taking into account intra-household relations. Inequalities in household compositions and conflicts that relate to gender issues are important according to De Haas & Fokkema (2010). By arguing in this way, they emphasize the intra-household power struggle – decisions about migration can be made individually, without discussing or even notifying family members (De Haas & Fokkema, 2010, p. 543).

Besides the NELM and livelihood approaches, theories that focus on network, transnationalism and migration systems theories analyze how migrants can create social, economic and cultural structures at the micro- and meso-levels and explain how this tends to perpetuate migration processes. This enables migrants to challenge structural constraints, such as poverty and governmental restrictions (Castles et al., 2013, p. 39). Within this body of studies are the migration network theory, transnational and diaspora theories and migration systems theory and cumulative causation. And although these theories are helpful in understanding the role of migrants in creating meso-level structures and in making migration a self-sustained process, weaknesses can be found if there is interest in why some migrants take a profound position in creating networks, and others don’t (Castles et al., 2013, p. 45).

Migration transition theories, as a final body of studies, point to a danger when focusing on meso-level studies in neglecting macro-level factors. These theories argue that development is, in some way, able to direct migration. In addition, they argue how developed countries generally experience higher levels of internal and international mobility. Criticism of these theories has to do with development. Would people migrate more with increasing development? Migration transition theories are less strong in explaining this development factor of migration (Castles et al., 2013, p. 50).

This discussion of migration theories could be explored in more detail, but already points to three conclusions that determine the approach that is used in this research. First, when reviewing functionalist and historical structuralist theories it becomes apparent to conceptualize migration as an intrinsic part of broader processes of development. Secondly, at the meso-level, migration processes develop their own internal dynamics, as social networks. And, thirdly, based on transition theories, it should be taken into account that a focus on the migrant should not forget about the general constraints that individuals face (Castles et al., 2013, p. 51).

Then, also taken into account the focus of this research at the micro-level in Uganda, make me decide to choose the livelihood approach in this research. This approach is part of the trend towards more pluralist approaches and is able to deal with the heterogeneity in migration-development interactions. It allows me to focus on both agency and structural constraints to development, or, perhaps better said, enables me to reconcile agency and structure approaches. This argument reflects the importance of reconsidering the macro-structures in micro-level research, as I explained in the introduction of this chapter. Now before further elaborating on this approach, the next section deals with migration theory on the impacts of migration.

2.1.2 IMPACTS OF MIGRATION

Does migration contribute to development? Or does it hinder such development? I will briefly discuss these rather simplified questions that are central to the debate on migration policy (De Haas, 2012, p. 10), and that I want to link to the findings of this research. In this section, I will discuss in more detail migration theories on the impacts of migration. This is done by examining migration and development and the views expressed in this debate and will ultimately help reflect on the societal relevance in this research. But before we continue with this debate: what is development? By answering this question, I will follow the definition by Sen (1999).

A distinction can be made between the micro- and macro-level of development. The micro-level concept of development points to individual progress and can be defined as ‘the process of expanding the substantive freedoms that people enjoy (Sen, 1999)’. He extends this definition by using the concept of

‘human capability’: the ‘ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the substantive choices they have (Sen, 1999)’.

On the macro-level, development can be explained with the concept of ‘social transformation’. This concept explains a ‘fundamental change in the way society is organized, such as through the industrial revolution, colonialism, warfare, revolutions, and globalization (Castles et al., 2013, p. 70)’. Such a change can be unequal. It can bring positive development to certain people or regions, but at the same time deprive others and is, therefore, always socially and geographically differentiated. This being the case, development can create new forms of inequality (Castles et al., 2013, p. 70).

Taken these definitions of development into account, in academic literature that discuss migration and development two opposing views can be identified: ‘migration optimists’ and ‘migration pessimists’ (De Haas, 2010; 2012). These views promote debates such as: ‘negative versus positive’, ‘brain drain versus brain gain’ and ‘consumption versus investment’ (De Haas, 2012, p. 12). On the one hand, migration pessimists argue that migration undermines development in countries, as it deprives them from financial and human resources – also known as ‘brain drain’, which points to a decline of professional resources in poor countries, and unequal distribution and use of remittances (Castles et al., 2013, p. 71). And besides considering migration as an undermining factor to the economies of underdeveloped countries, pessimists point to migration as one of the causes of underdevelopment (De Haas, 2012, p. 13).

Migration optimists, on the other hand, explain migration as beneficial to development. They underline the contributing factor of returning migrants as changemakers, as people who bring innovation, the stimulating role of remittances and the ability to reduce poverty (Ellis, 2003; de Haas, 2010). With these arguments they counter the negative attitude of migration pessimists towards ‘brain drain’⁶ and remittances (Castles et al., 2013, p. 69; De Haas, 2010; 2012).

However, these views on migration and development represent rather extremes views, in which, following Castles et al. (2013), the reality more often can be found in the middle⁷. They explain how empirical studies point to the diversity of migration impacts (Castles et al., 2013, p. 75). De Haas (2012) adds to this by emphasizing the context-dependency factor. He explains how at the micro- and meso-level migration is generally acknowledged as beneficial for sustaining and improving livelihoods of the families and communities involved. But the role of migration on social, economic and political development, thus the macro-level, depends on general development conditions and policy contexts in

⁶ This can be accompanied by ‘brain gain’: the prospect of moving abroad motivates those staying behind to continue education and this, in turn, can result in a positive net effect of emigration on education levels (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2013, p. 77).

⁷ For a more detailed overview of migration and development, see De Haas 2010 and 2012.

which migration occurs (De Haas, 2012, p. 19). In this context he prefers the term ‘development potential’, when talking about migration. De Haas explains this as follows:

If migration enhances the human capabilities of individuals and families, which it often does to a smaller or larger extent, it gives them the freedom and power to invest as much as to disengage from origin countries! This is a key observation. If states fail to implement reform, migration and remittances are unlikely to fuel national development – and can even sustain situations of dependency, underdevelopment and authoritarianism (2012, p. 19)’.

Taken this into account, it can be said that there is a challenge in finding an approach that meets these nuances. This sub-section concludes that there is a need for a theoretical framework that combines micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of analysis. This confirms the conclusion in the previous section in which it was decided to work with the livelihood approach.

2.1.3 LIVELIHOOD APPROACH

Livelihood approaches are introduced by geographers, anthropologists, and sociologists who have carried out micro-research in developing countries. This approach, broadly defined, states that the poor cannot only be seen as passive victims of broader structures, but instead try to actively improve their livelihoods within the conditions they live in (De Haas, 2008, p. 36). A livelihood, to begin with, and following Serrat (2017) in his definition, can be explained as follows:

’A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. It is deemed sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities, assets, and activities both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (p. 21)’.

A livelihood approach then aims to improve understanding of different livelihoods. It is a way of thinking about development activities, and how different factors that constrain or enhance livelihoods can relate (De Haas, 2008; Ellis, 2003; McDowell & De Haan, 1997). In trying to understand livelihoods, the interest relies not only in what people do in order to make a living, but also the recourses that provide people with the capability to build a living, the risk factors that are to be considered, and the policy and institutional context that can hinder or help in this (Ellis, 2003, p. 3). In other words, the capital assets, vulnerability context and policies and institutions (Serrat, 2017).

To begin with, households have different access to livelihood assets. Serrat (2017) identifies the following assets: human capital (e.g. health, education, knowledge and skills), social capital (e.g.

network and connections, shared values and behaviors, relations of trust and mutual understand and support), natural capital (e.g. land and produce and environmental services), physical capital (e.g. infrastructure, tools and technology) and financial capital (e.g. savings, remittances and wages)⁸.

The vulnerability context refers to insecurity in well-being. This is weighed against the external environments. It captures the processes of change, as Serrat (2017) explains how people move in and out of poverty (p. 23). The vulnerability context includes: shocks (e.g. conflict, floods and droughts), seasonality's (e.g. employment opportunities) and critical trends (e.g. economic and demographic trends) (Serrat, 2017, p. 23).

Finally, livelihoods also relate to the environment of structures and processes: policies and institutions. Public and private sector organizations that set policy and legislation determine the way in which structures operate (e.g. NGOs). These are important in understanding people's livelihoods, as they can be found in different aspects of livelihoods. Where they can create incentives and stimulate a certain choice, they can also grant or refuse access to assets of individuals, families, or even communities (Serrat, 2017, p. 24).

Thus, a livelihood approach links individuals and broader contexts, as this can influence the outcome of livelihood strategies. A livelihood strategy can be defined as a strategic or deliberate decision of a combination of activities to maintain, secure, and improve a livelihood, based on the availability of assets, perceptions, but also the aspirations that one can have (De Haas, 2008, p. 36). Migration can be part of a strategy. It is part of the livelihoods of the majority of households in low income countries (Ellis, 2003). Migration can diversify, secure, or, for some time improve, rural households. This is often combined with other strategies, such as agricultural activities and work in town (De Haas, 2008, p. 36).

2.2 ANALYTICAL TOOL – LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

In this research are livelihood strategies the analytical tool. This allows for an analysis that deviates from defined activities, such as agriculture and small-scale enterprise, and sees migration as one of the livelihood strategies. In following McDowell and De Haan (1997), improving livelihoods can implicate intensification of agriculture, diversification, and migration (p. 20). Instead of isolating migration events, it is acknowledged how combinations between strategies are possible and also how different activities are likely to affect each other. For methodological and analytical considerations on the impact of migration theories, this indicates that migration as a livelihood strategy cannot be analyzed outside of its wider social and economic context, that is, relationships with other strategies or activities (De

⁸ Serrat (2017) explains how financial capital, as a livelihood asset, tends to be the least available. As this asset is often lacking in poor people's livelihoods, the other types of capital become more important (Serrat, 2017, p. 23).

Haas, 2010, p. 244; McDowell & De Haan, 1997; Scoones, 2009). If done so, the relation with broader transformation or development processes cannot be evaluated (De Haas, 2008, p. 37).

Therefore, choosing livelihood strategies as a lens in this research enables to recognize a mindset and strategy in decisions to secure, maintain or improve a livelihood. It can help in examining the availability of assets, risk considerations and the context of policies and institutions as inherent to the lives of individuals. Using livelihood strategies allows to fine-tune the analysis of the livelihoods of youth.

2.3 OPERATIONALIZATION

How to conduct research into livelihood strategies of youth in Uganda? I asked this question in the introduction of this chapter. This last part takes a first step in the operationalization of the theory before we turn to the research process. To begin with, the perspective in this study. In this theoretical framework I discussed impacts of migration, in which I asked the question whether migration contributes to development, or whether it hinders such development. I also discussed development on the micro- and macro-level. Now, to add to this debate, I will work from the perspective of individuals and will then reflect on this debate from the individual perspectives on migration and development. This means that I will study development on the micro-level (see Figure 1, ‘individual livelihood (1)’ and ‘with effects on (4)’).

Examining the livelihood strategies from this perspective of individuals is done by means of three factors: availability of assets, perceptions and aspirations. These are explained in the theory as the basis of a decision for a combination of activities (see Figure 1, ‘resulting in (2)’ and ‘composed of (3)’ (De Haas, 2008; Ellis, 2003). And since this research is interested in the position of TVET, employment and migration in individual livelihood strategies, I will ask my respondents questions that relate to this.

This is done as follows. In my interaction with respondents I will ask questions that focus on the availability of assets, such as: How do you pay for your school fees? I will also include questions to examine the perceptions of youth about TVET, employment and migration, such as: How do you feel about migration/TVET? And, finally, I will include questions to examine the aspirations of youth, such as: Where do you see yourself in five years? I will go further into the data collection methods and the questions I ask the respondents in section 3.5.

In short, and as can be seen in Figure 1, this research is focused on the individual livelihood in which capital assets, policies and institutions and the vulnerability context are taken into account in the individual livelihood. In these livelihoods are the availability of assets, perceptions and aspirations about TVET, employment and migration studied. These three factors (availability of assets, perceptions and aspirations) form the basis of individual livelihood strategies that compose different activities and affect the livelihood outcome. This final step (see Figure 1, ‘With effects on (4)’ enables to reflect on the

impact of migration (see section 2.1.2), because migration can be one of the activities that form a livelihood strategy.

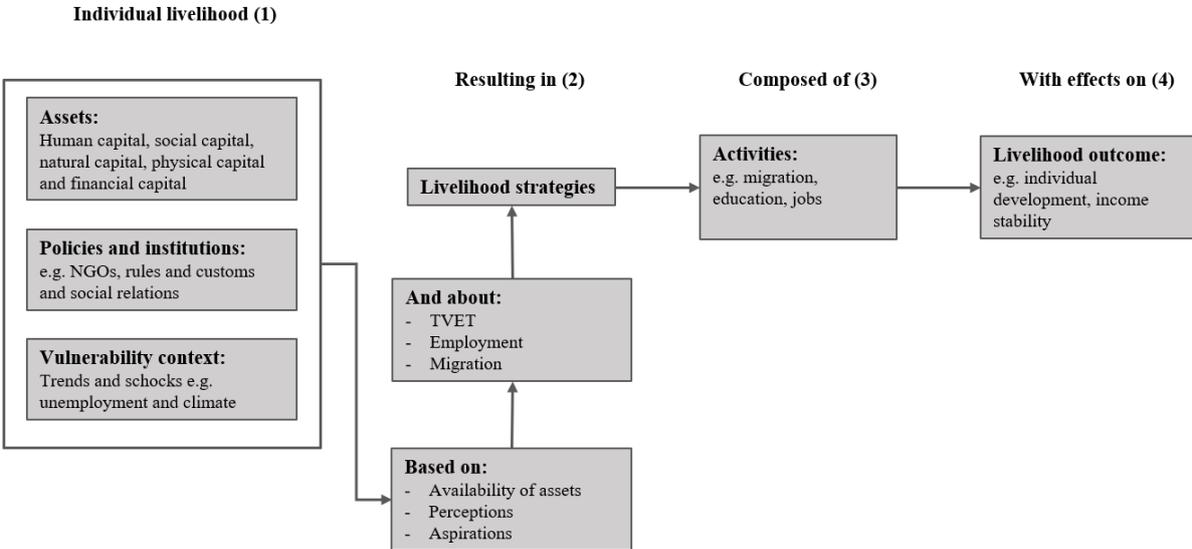


Figure 1: Operationalization of individual livelihood strategies. Based on Ellis (2000) but adapted to this study.

All in all, this chapter provided an overview of different theoretical approaches to migration and explained the decision for the livelihood approach. This research, therefore, is not a study of migration itself, but will rather look at individual livelihoods and the ways in which decisions for certain strategies in these livelihoods develop. The discussions in this chapter serve as a guide in the analysis of the data, as well as the interpretation of the results. So, after having discussed the theoretical framework this research draws on, I will now turn to the research process.

3 RESEARCH PROCESS

This chapter presents an overview of the research process. I explain decisions that shaped this research and were key in the process before, during and after data was collected in Uganda. I begin with a review of methodological considerations and discuss the process of data collection. I continue with discussing the methods and end with a reflection on ethical challenges and my positionality in this research – the ways this research was given its form, as you are reading it now, through the interaction between the researcher and the research participants.

3.1 CASE STUDY

This research is a case study of the livelihood strategies of youth between 18-30 years in Gulu, Lira and Nwoya District, in northern Uganda, and the position of migration, vocational education and work in a decision for certain livelihood strategies. This methodology allows researching the ‘how’ and ‘why’ behind migration of youth in Uganda (Yin, 2002, p. 6; Taylor, 2016, p. 581). With this decision, as in case study work, issues of generalization, rigor and bounding the case need to be addressed (Taylor, 2016). To begin, generalizations to particular issues are explained carefully, as ‘case studies can be linked with issues or circumstances outside their own bounds, but the case study researcher has to be very careful to construct and to maintain consistent thinking on generalization (Taylor, 2016, p. 587)’. Secondly, in order to preserve quality, this research used triangulation of data with three methods of data collection (Taylor, 2016, p. 586). These methods are described in more detail in section 3.5.

Thirdly, choosing and bounding the case study needed significant thought prior, during and after conducting field research. During my stay in Uganda I worked from Gulu, the economic and administrative center of Gulu District. This location was most determinative in choosing and bounding the case. From this town I planned and visited other places.

Because of the time available, logistics of transport and my network, I decided to demarcate the case study in three districts in which, as this research focuses on internal migration, the presence of urban and rural areas has been considered. Research participants were approached in the following districts: Gulu, Lira and Nwoya. These districts have in common that they are located in the Northern Region of Uganda. And although they cover predominantly rural areas, Gulu Municipality and Lira Municipality belong to the 20 largest urban centers in Uganda (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS], 2016, p. 11).

3.2 QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The nature of the research questions supports an open and flexible approach. Qualitative research methods, in this respect, can enable to put the individual perspective in the center of this research in which we allow ‘the voice of the informants to be heard (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie, French & Valentine,

2016, p. 6)'. Since the purpose of this research is to collect data that helps deepen our understanding of people's perceptions, motivations and experiences, instead of measurements of frequency, a qualitative approach underlies this study (Castles, 2012, p. 25).

3.3 YOUTH AS UNIT OF ANALYSIS

As I just mentioned, this research is focused on the perceptions of youth in Uganda. Individuals who belong to this group are the major unit of analysis. This age group can be defined in different ways and societies provide their own definitions. The United Nations (UN)⁹, African Union (AU)¹⁰ and the Government of Uganda define youth differently, with the most important differences in the age scale.

Within Uganda it is emphasized how there is no 'one size fits all' definition. This is due to the various definitions of youth that exist in Ugandan society (Youth Policy Briefs, 2015, p. 14). The government of Uganda defines youth between the age of 18-30 years (UBOS, 2017, p. 2). For the purpose of this research I will follow this age scale and approach individuals in Uganda who are considered youth in their society.

Youth are the major unit of analysis for two more reasons: 1) migration might be a way where individuals disengage from a household and where new connections not necessarily qualify as a household and 2) I aim to collect data and identify perceptions that might not be forthcoming in a household setting, such as individual aspirations (Castles et al., 2013, p. 39; De Haas & Fokkema, 2010, p. 542; Stites, Burns and Akabwai, 2014, p. 11). This does not mean that I assume that youth necessarily organize their livelihoods individually or that I neglect the wider social context in which they find themselves – such as information on household members, e.g. school enrollment for children, family members living in town or rural areas. Rather that I included questions during interviews that relate to this.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

3.4.1 ENTERING THE FIELD

At the internship organization in Uganda I was guided through the initial stages of my research – creating a network, finding ways to approach potential research participants and logistics concerning transportation. All key when entering the field.

Together with my colleagues from Advance Afrika, we made a list potential research participants. This list was a combination of contacts I received from Edukans and Advance Afrika and was the starting

⁹ 'The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States (United Nations [UN], 2013)'.

¹⁰ '(...) youth or young people shall refer to every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years (African Union Commission, 2006)'.

point from where I created my own network. To include research participants outside of this network, I approached other individuals and organizations and invited them to participate or asked them for contacts.

Participants were selected based on their profile, experience or affinity with the research topic – recruitment that is also known as ‘purposive sampling’ (Longhurst, 2016, p. 148). Potential participants were individually assessed about the best way to approach them (calling, emailing or visiting). In this research the aim was not to be representative, but rather to explore how individuals experience and make sense of their own lives (Longhurst, 2016, p. 148).

Later on, as my network expanded, participants would be recruited through different contacts. This form of recruitment, ‘snowballing’, was also used to find participants for the focus groups (Longhurst, 2016, p. 149). I was brought into contact with two people who helped in mobilizing the participants, and, also after the focus group, helped me in finding other research participants.

There would have been other options to recruit participants. I did consider approaching youth in a day-to-day setting, as I spoke to them informally. This would have possibly improved, or widened, the perspective of this research. For example, I went to the local market in Gulu every day. It would have been possible to approach youth for semi-structured interviews from this place. I did, however, had informal conversations with youth who were working there. During one of those conversations someone explained to me how she was struggling with paying for her tuition fees. She worked on the market until she had enough money to go back to school.

There is one reason why I decided not to approach potential participants on the Gulu main market. I decided to approach youth through a ‘middleman’ – a person with whom the participants would be familiar or knew in some way or another. I was explained that this would make the communication easier and, also for the researcher, would ease the interview.

The location of the interviews varied. Apart from four interviews that took place at the office of Advance Afrika in Gulu, all the interviews took place at a school, organization, company or in a respondent’s office. When the distance was too far to walk or to use a *boda boda*¹¹, I could make use of a car. In that case, I was always accompanied by someone from Advance Afrika.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

I chose three different methods to collect data: semi-structured interviews, focus groups and informal conversations. For this research, I documented, in total, 14 semi-structured interviews with key

¹¹ A *boda boda* is a motorcycle taxi commonly used for transport in Uganda.

stakeholders (experts and representatives of relevant organizations, local government and schools), 18 semi-structured interviews with youth (eight female and 10 male), and two focus groups with youth.

3.5.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The main data collection method is semi-structured interviewing. This method allowed better interaction with research participants and an exploration in the ways research topics were addressed (Longhurst, 2016, p. 145). I usually started interviews with an opening question that was ‘easy-to-answer’ (Hay, 2006, p. 108), which helped research participants speak freely from the beginning. I continued with introducing themes and questions loosely based on a predetermined interview guide¹² (Hay, 2006, p. 104). Four categories of research participants are defined: 1) experts and representatives of relevant organizations; 2) school leaders; 3) local government representatives and 4) youth.

In order to improve my knowledge on the research topic and issues that closely relate to it, I conducted the first interviews with participants from the first three categories. The content of these interviews was focused on more broader topics of interest and how participants, from different angles, describe the context in which youth find themselves. After a number of interviews, research participants from the first three categories were alternated with those of youth. This, later on, gave the possibility to reflect during interviews with the first three categories on topics I discussed with youth, and vice versa.

Semi-structured interviews with youth were organized to improve the understanding of their livelihood strategies and their experiences with the research theme. Both migrants and non-migrants are interviewed. This decision is in line with White (2009) who argues that in order to understand why people migrate, it is useful to consider alternative livelihood strategies. She argues how this can help in understanding why non-migrants ‘choose to stay put’ (p. 556). McDowell and De Haan (1997) explain how remaining behind might be an indicator of immobility that results from socio-cultural factors, such as gender, religion or economic factors (p. 8). Following this, De Haas (2008) argues how the tendency to focus solely on migrants and migration is a weakness of many studies on causes and effects of migration. He therefore argues to include non-migrants, as well as e.g. regional and local contexts (p. 22). These arguments made me decide to interview both migrants and non-migrants.

The interview guides were similar for both groups. However, during interviews with migrants, the focus would be more on the decision to migrate and the experiences of migration where, during interviews with someone who did not migrate, the interview focused more on alternative livelihood strategies – whether someone has ever considered migrating and under what conditions someone would decide to go. In this way, interviewing both groups complemented each other.

¹² The interview guides can be found in the Appendix (7.1).

During interviews with youth, after asking some introductory questions and questions that relate to livelihood activities, I would continue to the topic of migration. This topic sometimes needed more introduction than initially thought. I provided an example of migration, e.g. how I decided to migrate to follow education elsewhere, or the translator would elaborate on the topic. The first question would then be what would come to their mind when they thought about migration in Uganda. I always ended the interview by asking where they would see themselves in five years, what their dreams are or what they are hoping for in the future. The first reaction to these questions was often one of discomfort. But after a little laugh these questions often proved very insightful.

All in all, semi-structured interviewing was an iterative process. After the first round of interviews, I reformulated questions and changed the order in which they would be asked. This continued to happen until the last interview had taken place. With this in mind, and because it was sometimes necessary to work with a translator, I transcribed the interviews soon after they had taken place and used field notes as a form of back-up information. Constant reflection resulted in improving my interview skills and in implementing changes to the interview guides.

3.5.2 FOCUS GROUPS

The following method is a focus group. This method implies a group of people who meet in an informal setting and talk about particular topics that the researcher decides upon (Longhurst, 2016, p. 145). I decided to use this method for three reasons. To begin, by organizing focus groups I was able to discuss more broader topics and overarching themes of interest (e.g. the position of youth in Uganda) and, secondly, listen to the opinions and ideas of more people for comparatively little time and expense¹³ (Longhurst, 2016, p. 146). Thirdly, with his method I was able to focus on interaction between youth and into the way they discussed (or did not discuss) certain topics (Longhurst, 2016, p. 146; Short, 2006, p. 104).

This method also provided other information in comparison with the semi-structured interviews. In addition to discussing more broader topics and overarching themes of interest, the group discussions had a different focus. During these sessions the focus was more on the perceptions and ideas of youth about certain topics, but also the way in which the participants would relate different factors and discuss certain topics, such as characterizations of youth and the position of TVET in Uganda. The semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, were more focused on personal encounters with the research topic. For example, if someone migrated, a follow-up question focused on how someone looked back at their decision to move somewhere else. And so I would ask the participants to give examples from their own experiences during their interviews.

¹³ The content and set-up of the focus groups can be found in the Appendix (7.2).

The focus groups were held at different locations. Both locations were discussed with one participant from each focus group, with the aim of creating an informal setting that was easily accessible and where the respondents would feel comfortable. The first focus group took place at a cultural center and the second at the office of Advance Afrika. When participants were invited it was explained how there was no possibility to reimburse transport costs.

While both focus groups were different in their discussions, participants of the focus groups had, at least, one common feature (Longhurst, 2016, p. 149). They were all youth – employed or following education. In addition to this common feature, my aim was to include male and female participants in both focus groups. As some participants didn't show the day of the session, one group consisted of only men. On the one hand, this could be considered a disadvantage and is therefore taken into consideration in the reflection. But, on the other hand, the setting was small, some participants already knew each other and the group discussion, for these reasons, proved to be very interactive and insightful. The focus group with men was – although they were a bit shy for the topic – not any less or more concerned about the topics of gender and migration. What could have influenced the discussion is the fact that I was the only woman in the group. This could have caused some discomfort and made some participants less straightforward in discussing certain topics. Perhaps, if this would have been different, certain topics would have been more extensively discussed.

The focus groups took place halfway through my field research. This was helpful because I already had some knowledge of the interviews that had taken place. I worked out themes and questions to ask the participants and discussed the content and overall set-up of the focus group with a colleague from Advance Afrika. This improved my knowledge on how to actively engage youth and how to keep them focused during the session. The approach and activities that were planned to guide the discussion changed during the sessions, as I learned to adjust the questions to the audience and I left some predetermined activities and questions untouched.

It would also have been an option to organize focus groups more at the beginning of the field research, before semi-structured interviews were held. This would possibly have resulted in more focused interview guides and including other areas of interest for questions. However, the chosen sequence in this research – focus group discussions halfway through my field research – resulted in a varied and wide range of topics that could be discussed, about which I was able to provide examples from earlier interviews.

After a word of welcome and providing an overview of the research, I would explain why the participants were approached to join the focus group. I would give some guidelines – how there are no right or wrong answers but rather different viewpoints and how they should feel free in sharing their opinions, even if it differs from what others are saying. The focus groups would begin by introducing

the topic of youth in Uganda, as this is a common feature of all and they were likely to discuss this comfortably (Longhurst, 2016, p. 147). And as it could take some time for the participants to ‘warm up’ and to feel comfortable speaking, I offered some drinks and food (Longhurst, 2016, pp. 147-150).

Themes and questions were discussed by means of a flip chart on which we would list relevant concepts and comments. We would discuss what needed to be written down and in what way, ensuring that priority was given to what they consider first, in their own words. With regard to the documentation of this research and in addition to the audio recording of the sessions, I would write down notes, moments of interaction and emerging thoughts.

3.5.3 INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS

Informal conversations were used to collect additional information to the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. I talked with colleagues from Advance Afrika, but also with people I encountered during field visits or people in my day-to-day life in Uganda. Conversing with them about personal experiences or cultural perspectives gave new insights and sometimes resulted in adjusting or sharpening my focus to certain topics. These encounters ranged from a phone conversation, a conversation on the local market to a short moment of reflection with a professor from Gulu University.

Information conversations, even if it was very short and not related to the research, improved my understanding of socio-cultural factors in Uganda. Knowledge that I could not obtain with the other methods. They helped in finding direction in this research during the initial weeks of field research and, in addition, helped in answering questions that would remain unanswered from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

And, important to point out, while the above described methods seem to be clearly-cut, this was not always the case in reality. Lines between the different methods are sometimes blurred. With this I refer to the semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. Planning interviews sometimes proved difficult and busy schedules of potential research participants resulted in a setting and conversation that can be better described as an informal conversation.

3.5.3.1 ABOUT THE CAR TRIPS

About the car trips. For the purpose of this research, I visited technical and vocational schools, but also farms and NGOs. These visits were often, but not always, in another sub-county or district. The car trips that took place as a result of this enabled moments of reflection about the context in which the research participants found themselves or the content of the interviews that had taken place. I will discuss this further as an illustration of the informal conversations.

Not only was I able to enjoy the vast green views during field visits, I was, also, almost always accompanied by someone from Advance Afrika. This proved valuable for three reasons. To begin, I was explained how arranging interviews, but also conducting interviews, accompanied with someone from Advance Afrika would improve public trust (Hay, 2016, p. 32). I would be introduced to an organization or school leader, so people would feel more comfortable with my visit and were willing to cooperate. In this context, and of doing independent research, I always explained my participants how findings would help in finalizing a master thesis, or a 'small research', depending on the audience.

Secondly, when necessary, a colleague would help with translation during interviews and, thirdly, I could always ask my questions and discuss feedback. They taught me about what is, or could be, important to people, as well as rules and norms of interaction. This applies to all three methods of data collection. They helped me to gain a better understanding of the unfamiliar environment to me in Uganda.

During one of those car trips, as an example, a colleague asked why I was interested in the families of youth and sometimes omitted the role of the community. My colleague explained the often-prevailing role of communities in situations of my interest, compared to the role of a family. This moment of reflection was valuable and therefore implemented in the interview guides.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

There are several approaches that can help in organizing and analyzing qualitative data. This research applied the process of coding as a method for data analysis. Coding, broadly defined, is an analytical practice that can help in evaluating and organizing data with the aim to identify and understand meanings (Cope & Kurtz, 2016, p. 650). For this research I used the data analysis program Atlas.ti.

I started organizing data while transcribing the interviews – an already interpretative practice in which one decides what to include or leave out (Cope & Kurtz, 2016, p. 649). I wrote down funny moments and moments of interruption to guide myself through the text when I would read it again. I transcribed all interviews and with regard to the focus groups, listed the concepts and comments as they were written on the flip charts during the sessions. These lists were supplemented with notes after listening to the audio recordings.

After I returned from the field, data analysis had a more linear form. This meant organizing raw data, such as interviews and field notes for further analysis, doing a read through of all materials and making additional notes. For coding of the interviews, I followed Strauss (1987) in combining three approaches to coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. To organize my codes, I used the factors of availability of assets, perceptions and aspirations (Serrat, 2017), as they are explained in the operationalization, section 2.3.

I coded the focus group notes manually and compared them with the interviews. Verification was done using both focus groups and reflective moments during interviews and informal conversations. Data from the different methods were constantly compared and similarities and differences were reconsidered.

3.7 REFLECTIONS

3.7.1 ETHICAL REFLECTIONS

There are various guidelines in geographical research on being ethical. This section discusses ethical reflections that are encountered during field research and, also, later on during the writing process. This includes the question of informed consent, communication of findings with participants and do no harm (Hay, 2016).

To begin, before doing an interview or when I would introduce the first question in a focus group, I always ensured consent (Hay, 2016, p. 34). This included providing information, an introduction of myself, the research and its goals. I decided to ask for verbal consent rather than written consent as this additional formality would perhaps have intimidated research participants. I also explained that I would make notes, but that I possibly would not be able to keep track of the comments and, therefore, I asked permission to audio record the interviews and focus groups¹⁴.

At the end of an interview or when I concluded the focus group discussion, I always asked if there were any questions about the research, the questions that were asked, or if they wanted to add something to the discussion. In response to these questions, some participants were interested in the next steps of this research, were once more interested in the goals of this research or asked if I, in any way, could help to improve their situation. Subsequently, another consideration is that of the communication of findings with participants. At the end of some interviews with research participants from the first three categories¹⁵ I was asked to communicate results. This was then agreed with the research participant.

The final ethical reflection is that of doing harm. Potential psychological, cultural or social harmful effects of this study or its results need to be taken into account. This means a critical reflection on raising potentially upsetting issues during interviews (Hay, 2016, p. 35). As an example, when youth were interviewed, I was careful about introducing topics related to their family members. I noticed during the first interviews that this topic could be sensitive. For this reason, I always first asked if they were willing to talk about their family and, if not, that it would be no problem and would not affect the interview.

¹⁴ One research participant did not give permission to audio record the interview. Because I wanted to respect this decision, I did not extensively ask for the reason.

¹⁵ Referring to section 3.5.1. Research participants from the first three categories are experts and representatives of relevant organizations, school leaders and local government representatives.

Following this reflection of doing harm, there is a final topic to be discussed in this section. The focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews also proved interesting and insightful for the research participants. Two examples illustrate this. First, internal migration is not a day-today topic of discussion. During focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, enthusiasm for this topic was expressed. Research participants of the focus groups would take notes during the discussions and take pictures of the flip charts. They would explain how they are aware that youth migrate, but that this is not often discussed. They would explain how it is important that youth discuss migration among each other and that youth are aware of its potentials and pitfalls. All in all, internal migration was considered an interesting and very important topic of discussion. Participants showed interest in learning more about this topic.

Second, semi-structured interviews not only provided information for the benefit of this research but was also beneficial for the participants themselves. An interview with a school leader illustrates this. During this interview, a discussion about who was paying the tuition fees – youth themselves, parents, or other actors – turned out to be interesting to the participant with regard to the level of drop outs of this school. The participant indicated that in future admission procedures it would be important to know, and document, who pays the tuition fees. She explained that it was good that this topic was discussed during the interview.

3.7.2 POSITIONALITY

This section reflects on the interaction between the researcher and research participants. The concept of critical reflexivity (Hay, 2010) helps in doing so. It means ‘acknowledging rather than denying your own social position and asking how your research interactions and the information you collect are socially conditioned (Hay, 2010, p. 37)’. In other words, analyzing my situation in Uganda as if it is something I am studying. This does not necessarily result in changes of the research design, but rather in reflecting on the research process and in making changes if it is appropriate.

In doing so, I need to be aware of my position in Uganda as a *mzungu*¹⁶. Some youth had expectations that I was in one way or another able to improve their situation. This made me reflect more on my position in the regional and local context in which I was conducting field research and how I was perceived by my research participants. They would sometimes emphasize their difficulties, as they link

¹⁶ *Mzungu* generally refers to white people in Uganda. This notation is commonly used by Ugandans when talking about or addressing white people, as I also experienced myself during my stay in this country. It was anything but an exception to be called *mzungu* several times as I walked through the streets of Gulu town.

my presence with donors¹⁷. Although I explained that there was no possibility to provide any form of support or reimburse transport costs, it is still possible that research participants thought that they would benefit from the situation. In other cases, participants were willing to explain their story and considered it a broadening of their network.

Other participants were more critical about my intentions as a researcher, but also about the results of this research. When this was the case, I explained my intentions to communicate my results and listen to their criticism (see also 3.7.1). Some would refer to other researchers who had conducted research in Uganda, or would be skeptical about the value of the results in Uganda:

Many times, researchers do their research and don't bring back their thesis. We don't read them, I don't know why (Int. 2/5/18)¹⁸.

So how can this research contribute to the growth in Uganda? (...) How possible is it that the government will have this evidence. (Int. 7/5/18c).

Another point of reflection is the underlying relation between research and research participants. When I reconsider my field research and my position in this, there are two more things that come to my mind. First of all, in order to conduct field research, I travelled between The Netherlands and Uganda. Some participants explained it as their aspiration to travel to other places, often Western countries, but were also aware that this was not any of their options. Secondly, by living in a stable environment I can express my interest in issues that are far removed from this. This creates a hierarchical relation between researcher and research participant. These relations were noticed, and therefore came to my attention, by several people I met during my stay in Uganda. It was most powerfully explained by one of the research participants:

Going to Europe or the US has become so hard for the Ugandans. (...) Of course, we received a lot of visitors who have been working here. And they also came from abroad. So, if they (international bodies) can bring balance in making it also easier for a Ugandan to travel somewhere. (...) I know a friend that got rejected to go to the US. After paying for his flight and everything. And they didn't give him the visa. So, it is super hard. Even a person like me, who would be just interested in going somewhere (...) It is not easy. Even if I don't have any plans of staying. (Int. 10/5/18).

¹⁷ With this I refer to the post-conflict situation in northern Uganda. The coming and going of NGOs since the war ended left its legacy in these areas. This was explained during an interview with a stakeholder. The NGO Bureau of the Ugandan Ministry of Internal affairs writes that there are currently 13000 registered NGOs (see <http://www.mia.go.ug/content/ngo-bureau>) (NGO Bureau, 2018).

¹⁸ Some quotes in this research document are edited for clarification or length purposes.

In conclusion, there are no simple, straightforward ways to cope with the issues that are explained in this section. They are therefore also known as dilemmas. And as a master student I must be aware of my inexperience in coping with these issues. Yet I have dealt with this in my best ability. The chosen methodological approach and methods, as they are explained in this chapter, placed the participants central in this research. Constant reflections have questioned prior knowledge and ideas and, moreover, highlighted how this research process was iterative from beginning to end.

4 PRESENTATION OF DATA

In this chapter I will take a closer look at the conversations and discussions that took place in Uganda. This is organized into four parts. Each part covers one sub-question of this research. I will start in each part with a brief explanation of how the relevant topic was introduced during field research.

The first part gives an overview of the livelihoods of youth. It focuses on youth as a group in Uganda and the different livelihood strategies they pursue. This is followed by the second part in which I will discuss the perceptions about TVET and employment and how these are reflected in the livelihood strategies of youth. Part three describes perceptions about migration and deals with migration as a livelihood strategy. The last part tries to connect the different topics. An analysis of the decision of a livelihood strategy and the position of TVET, employment and migration in this is the final step before the conclusion of this research in Chapter 5.

4.1 PART ONE – YOUTH IN UGANDA

The first topic in my interaction with research participants was the youth itself. We discussed individual livelihoods, but also the more general position of youth in Uganda. Choosing this as the first topic in discussions was a deliberate choice. It is a topic that participants can relate to and helps to define the group we are talking about. How would you describe youth in Uganda? The participants of the focus groups went beyond describing characteristics of this group. They shared their thoughts, explained how e.g. youth are sometimes seen as a burden to society, but also discussed what is needed to facilitate this group more in Uganda. This led to lively interaction during the focus group discussions, as participants did not always agree with each other on certain topics.

Discussing youth in Uganda is important when answering the first sub-question that is mentioned in the introduction: What livelihood strategies of youth can be identified? This section will start with characteristics of youth and the position of this group in Ugandan society. This is followed by an analysis of what youth need for a living. Finally, the livelihood strategies that they pursue are discussed.

4.1.1 WHO ARE THE YOUTH?

As stated in section 3.3, the government of Uganda defines youth as those persons between the age of 18-30 years (UBOS, 2017, p. 2). This group is the largest age group in Uganda. Now we can talk about definitions and what is said about this age group in different documents, but what did respondents explain to me when I asked them: who are the youth? Before we analyze the livelihood of this age group, I will consider what is mentioned by the youth and key stakeholders. That is the focus of this section.

The youth themselves, but also e.g. school leaders and local government representatives explained how youth, as the largest age group in Uganda, face both opportunities and challenges. First of all the perspective of youth. How do they define themselves? A group full of energy, known as being determinative in decisions, big dreamers and potential leaders – these are recurring ways in defining youth. But discussions during the focus group sessions also point to more challenging characteristics of youth. It is explained that youth are easily influenced by their peers. One participant described this as ‘easily taken by the wind’ (FG, 30/5/18). Of course, being influenced by peers can be something good. However, the respondents emphasized the negative aspects more often, such as how youth are easily persuaded to participate in criminal activities.

The youth I spoke with are also very well aware and understand that this large age group has potential, but that it needs a lot more to meet this potential and overcome the different challenges. Youth are a group with a lot of energy and this can benefit the workforce of Uganda. However, at the same time, it is explained how this energy is not put to use – this also relates to the perceptions of youth about agriculture, white collar jobs, as well as their employment mentality. We will come back to this later.

Youth also explained that this energy is not put to use because they are expected to be an asset to their family. During the second focus group it was discussed that youth are important to the security of their families, but also to Uganda as a country.

Talking with school leaders, local government and organizational representatives shed light on a different angle. They explained the potential of the large numbers of youth in Ugandan society, but they also explained how youth are sometimes seen as part of a vulnerable group. People belonging to this group need more support in their activities in order to live sustainably, both in terms of mental support (e.g. teaching life skills) and also material support (e.g. providing start-up kits and money to start a business). The following quote illustrates this.

First and foremost, we consider youth to be part of the vulnerable, you know, part of the vulnerable members of a community. We have women, we have persons with disabilities, and we have children. We consider them to be in the vulnerable index (Int. 9/5/18).

Another issue that relates to discussing youth today is the recent history of the war. Especially during the interviews with key stakeholders, the history of the LRA in northern Uganda was raised¹⁹. The aftermath of this recent past is still felt and this can become clear in different aspects of life, such as youth who have not followed education because of the war. This being the case, they may be more

¹⁹ I did not ask questions about the war in northern Uganda and it was not part of the interview guide. The recent war history, however, was often raised by key stakeholders during interviews, but not often introduced by the youth during the interviews.

dependent in their livelihood on others, but as the following quote illustrates, youth can also feel more dependent because e.g. they were given humanitarian food.

In Uganda, looking back at the two decades of insurgency in the region, there is an effect or impact of such insurgency on people who are now seen not to be doing anything... they are not employed because they did not go far with studies, they dropped out of school. Even those who studied, given the background that they were born in camps and that they were faith on humanitarian food and that the World Food Program would give them food. So they probably grew up with a mentality that food should always be given (Int. 3/5/18a).

In general, youth have a position of attention in Ugandan society. When discussing this age group, there are conflicting features. Youth are at the same time characterized as full of energy, but also as lazy. To cope with this, there are different initiatives. This is also explained in Chapter 1, where government programs are discussed, such as the Youth Livelihood Program. Apart from government initiatives, there are also NGOs and vocational schools that try to cope with these conflicting features. Let's take a step back and look at what youth need for their livelihood.

4.1.2 WHAT DO YOUTH NEED FOR A LIVING?

There are different resources required for a means of living. These can be explained by means of the following assets: human, social, natural, physical and financial capital (Serrat, 2017). This section deals with what youth in northern Uganda need for their livelihood. To start with the first, the human capital. Youth need information. This means acquiring knowledge in school, but also being informed about (and being showed) how certain things must be done in day-to-day life. During the focus group discussions, this is explained as not only learning theory, but also acquiring practical skills, e.g. in the agricultural sector. One participant explained how youth are 'not only to be told, but also to be showed' (FG, 30/5/18). Practical engagement is a recurring way of explaining the needs of youth in Uganda. This relates to vocational education. Youth want to acquire skills that will help them to work as a self-employed person, to start their own business, or that meet the demands of the job market.

Youth in northern Uganda also need access to social capital. These are e.g. networks, connections, relations of trust and support (Serrat, 2017). Respondents emphasized that, in the first place, this age group should be motivated, advised and supported. This is particularly evident from the focus group discussions in which this is described as the 'moralization of youth'. This refers more generally to lessons about what is good and bad. The role of parents is important here. A neglect of the parents towards their children would have 'bad outcomes', such as involvement in criminal activities (FG, 1/6/18).

Another aspect of social capital in northern Uganda is having a network. Respondents explained that a broad social network can benefit you in finding employment. Schools and training centers are explained as a place where a network can be built and expanded. I spoke to someone who explained that connecting with your peers will not only help in exchanging knowledge, but might also give an opportunity for starting a business together.

Natural capital refers to land and environmental services (Serrat, 2017). To those involved in agriculture, or students who aim to work in the agricultural sector after they finish their education, a piece of land is necessary to apply your skills. After graduating, youth will most of the times work on the land of their families. However, youth often want to have their own piece of land on which they can grow. They plan to work on the land of their families until they have earned enough money to buy their own.

In order to apply their practical skills in the agricultural sector (or e.g. in the tailoring sector), there must also be access to physical capital (e.g. tools and technology). This is explained to be an important requirement for a means of living. After graduating, or completing a skills development course, youth struggle to apply their skills. This is because they lack the resources to do so. In order to start cultivating land, or to apply tailoring and mechanical skills and knowledge, youth need to have start-up kits, tools or money to buy their own equipment. A lack of physical capital makes the transition to a working life difficult. When you need to buy a sewing machine this is expensive, especially if you have not yet had the opportunity to make some money. I spoke to a woman who owns a small shop and at the same time teaches six girls her tailor's trade. She explained that it is difficult for the girls who leave her training and want to apply the skills, as they often do not have the resources to buy start-up kits.

However, it is not only the youth themselves who sometimes lack the resources to apply their skills. There are also schools and small training centers that have insufficient resources to teach their curriculum. This can lead to youth wanting to acquire better skills elsewhere, at another school.

Finally, in order to make a living youth need to earn money. This is financial capital and explained by Serrat (2017) as e.g. savings, remittances and wages. There is only little mention of savings in my conversations with respondents, most of the information is focused on wages. During focus group discussions and the semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, it was explained how youth need to 'pursue work not jobs' (FG, 30/5/18). This relates to the way of thinking about employment. When I asked in the first focus group what youth need for their livelihood, the very first discussion was about a change of mindset. The participants explained how there is a way of thinking among the youth in Uganda that in order to earn money one must be employed. In contrast, they stressed that striving for independent entrepreneurship and job creation is a better mentality.

4.1.3 THE STRATEGIES THEY PURSUE

Youth pursue different strategies to maintain, secure or improve their livelihood. This is based on the availability of assets, perceptions and aspirations of an individual (De Haas, 2008, p. 36). In this section, I will discuss the strategies that youth generally strive for. The following sections – 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 – work from this basis and further explore the strategies of youth.

In this research two main activities in the strategies of youth can be identified. There are youth who follow education and those who are working. The reason why they decide to choose a particular activity differs, as does the way in which they combine their activity with other activities. For instance, there are youth who work, but at the same time follow part-time education. This is therefore part of their strategy to build a sustainable livelihood, in which they can maintain or improve their capabilities, assets and activities. By doing so, they do not only look at their current situation but also towards the future (Serrat, 2017, p. 21): e.g. the pursuit of having a large farm one day.

The division between youth who follow education and those who work is not always a clear one. There can be several activities that together make a livelihood and it can be difficult to discover the strategy that is most commonly pursued by an individual.

By learning from conversations with youth and key stakeholders, there are three main reasons for youth to follow vocational education: 1) it is their first choice of education, 2) it is a cheaper option compared to other forms of education or 3) youth are financially supported by an NGO to follow vocational education. To start with the first one. It may be a decision to follow this form of education as part of a larger strategy. As such, vocational education can be a step between secondary education and the university. Youth may aim to pursue studying after vocational education. However, youth can also be motivated by being able to quickly learn skills and can therefore start working immediately after they are finished. Following this, education is expensive. Skills development trainings are often a cheaper option. It is also for this reason that youth can decide to follow this form of education. In line with this, youth can be approached by NGOs who aim to support them financially in following education. World Vision International is an example of an organization that supported some of the youth I spoke with.

Youth who follow vocational education often have no time for other activities, such as a side job. This may also relate to the distance between the school and where they live. As this form of education is often for a relatively short period and distance may be far, youth often live on school grounds.

Vocational education can be a family supported decision. I learned that sometimes, when that person finishes its education and returns to a family, it is e.g. expected to teach its siblings or other youth in the community the acquired skills. This person was the chosen one in a family and got the opportunity to

attend vocational education. He or she would return home with knowledge that would contribute the family. This can then be explained as being favorable for development (Ellis, 2003; de Haas, 2010).

However, it is not always the first choice of the individual to learn vocational skills. This was explained by youth who were learning agricultural skills. They wanted to follow a different course or learn another trade, such as teaching or tailoring. This is also what I learned from youth who were supported by an NGO and were acquiring skills in the agricultural sector. They sometimes did not know in advance what they were going to study or the skills they were about to learn.

Yet I also spoke with youth who were working. Youth need a stable income that is not vulnerable to any unexpected events. This is what their strategies are based on. Stability and sustainability were recurring concepts in conversations and discussions. Youth therefore have multiple jobs. Apart from having their own stable income, this can be motivated by a need to support their family. By doing so, youth may combine jobs in the village with jobs in town. Yet this is not something they essentially strive for. It is not their desire to have multiple jobs. In the end, they often aim to be self-employed or have their own business. The following two quotes illustrate this combination of activities.

I have a piggery farm, but I also have a number of cows and I am farming some crops as well. So that is basically what I am doing. But I also work part time with other organizations, like with Advance Afrika I am a business mentor (...) Then my full-time job would be working at the community center. It was formally a restaurant, but it has been transformed into a community base organization (...) (Int. 10/5/18).

I usually tell people that my good work, or best job, is the farming. I cannot retire from that. But currently I work with a few organizations for a short time and that I can easily leave (...) But the best work is farming, I do farming (Int. 8/6/18a).

As I stated earlier, you will also have youth who work and follow education at the same time. The youth I spoke with attend university alongside their jobs. Their main activity is working, and they will attend university to make their exams. This is an individual decision in which they see the benefits in acquiring additional knowledge to their working experience and are able to afford it.

4.1.4 CONCLUSION

In short, the youth in Uganda face both opportunities and challenges. In order to cope with this, youth pursue different strategies. This section elaborated on the livelihood strategies that can be identified at this stage of analysis. These strategies show how youth actively try to improve their livelihoods and take

into account the different conditions they live in. This is in line with the livelihood approach, in which people cannot only be seen as passive victims of broader structures (De Haas, 2008, p. 36).

In Uganda, the livelihoods of youth depend on the availability of resources. This part identified different resources that are required for a means of living (Serrat, 2017). The availability of assets is taken into account by youth when deciding upon a livelihood strategy. Youth who are not able to buy a sewing machine or do not have the tools to apply their skills after they are graduated, adapt their strategy. Families that do not have enough resources to send all their children to a vocational school, will allow one of them to attend, so that this person can teach the other children the acquired knowledge afterwards. This being the case, a decision may be part of larger household livelihood strategy.

But there are more things to keep in mind when deciding on a combination of activities, such as the perception about vocational education, as well as the aspirations youth have for the future. We will now deal with the second part, in which TVET and employment are discussed in more depth, and so also the perceptions that exist and aspirations youth pursue with regard to this.

4.2 PART TWO – TVET AND EMPLOYMENT

During field research I spoke with respondents with different backgrounds. They were either enrolled in vocational education, had already followed it, or worked in a field that in some way can be linked to this form of education. It is precisely this mix of backgrounds that made the focus group discussions lively and insightful. I asked the participants to think about the pros and cons of TVET and to write this on the flip chart. There were quite some contradictions during these sessions. An advantage of TVET is that you quickly learn a skill. Yet it is said at the same time that training sessions are short and that not everyone is a fast learner. This is then seen as a disadvantage. What pros and cons do youth then take into consideration for a livelihood strategy? And what do they think of TVET in the first place?

This part is aimed at answering the second sub-question: What are the perceptions of youth about TVET and employment, and how are these reflected in their livelihood strategies? This part is twofold. I will first look at TVET more broadly – motivations to follow (or not follow) this form of education and the perceptions that exist. And secondly, I will discuss the employment opportunities.

4.2.1 TVET

We emphasize vocational education especially for children who have dropped out of school, because we have a big number of youth who dropped out of schools. (...) Actually, in Uganda here, especially in northern Uganda, people value secondary education more than vocational education (Int. 7/5/18c).

Youth drop out of school because of poverty and there is a culture if a girl gets pregnant, that is the end of education (Int. 7/5/18c).

There is a certain group of people who follow TVET. We have already briefly discussed this in the previous sections, just as we have reflected on the skills that can be learned in vocational education in Chapter 1. But what can be said about the profile of youth who learn skills to become a tailor, mechanic, farmer, and so on. When I spoke to the director of a vocational school, or to the principal of a youth development center, there are a number of things that are mentioned. As the quotes above indicate, there are youth who drop out of school during primary or secondary education because of poverty. This is a big challenge in Uganda. Vocational education is then a last resort and a way to quickly learn skills. These quotes also indicate that youth at the edges of society take part in this form of education.

But there are other considerations when following TVET. I will start by discussing a number of perceptions as to why youth may decide to follow this form of education as part of their livelihood strategy. First of all, it will give them the skills to start their own business or to employ themselves. This

is regarded an advantage of TVET. This also relates to exposure to practical learning, as youth consider it beneficial to be practically engaged. Also, youth learn to think ‘out of the box’, to be creative. This was discussed in both focus groups. Practical skills make it possible to know where to find opportunities and how to deal with them. Another reason to choose this form of education as part of a livelihood strategy is to build your social network. If you have a social network, it helps to find work opportunities, as this often goes through a contact. And, as I mentioned before, it can also open up opportunities to start a business with your peers.

TVET is also a quick way to obtain reliable knowledge. Yet this is at the same time explained to be a disadvantage. During the first focus group it was discussed how the ‘context can be shallow’. This means that you often only learn the basics or obtain raw information. In addition to this, it is explained that vocational education is useless if you do not have money. If this is the case, it is difficult to apply your skills – e.g. when you are not able to buy a sewing machine, you will not be able to work on your own.

There are two more disadvantages identified. The first refers to the composition of classes. Youth who are following this form of education explained how students have different educational backgrounds, large age differences and how there may be fast or slow learners in the same class. This is of course the case in many different schools. However, not taking into account students individual backgrounds can disadvantage the learning outcomes of a program. One vocational schools pointed out that they now focus on compiling groups of students with e.g. similar educational backgrounds and the same age, to prevent students from not keeping up with the tempo.

As a second disadvantage, there is the issue of white-collar jobs. Youth often want to work in an office, more than that jobs are available. A bad perception about vocational education relates to this. There is a general feeling that someone must go to university in order to succeed. Vocational education is considered education at a lower level and intended for people who failed in other forms of education, or for the people who cannot afford something else. It is therefore more often seen as a last resort, when no other options are available anymore.

Apart from this, I also learned something else when I spoke with youth who have skills in agriculture, are working in the agricultural sector, or teach these skills. There is a general idea that youth do not want to make their hands dirty and that agriculture is too labor intensive. They therefore do not want to work in this sector. And so agriculture has a bad perception. Youth prefer to look for work elsewhere, even though there are opportunities to work in this sector. This makes it more difficult to involve youth in agriculture and to make them interested in participating in skills trainings in this sector.

I spoke with someone from the local government in Lira. We discussed this perception about agriculture and he reflected on his own experiences, from when he was still in primary school. He explained the following.

Now when we were in primary school, when you came late to school, you were given a hole to dig in the school garden as a punishment. (...) So for me, I grew up knowing farming is a punishment. Not a job (Int. 7/5/18c).

This shows how there is a negative attitude towards the agricultural sector and how this is deeply rooted in Ugandan society. Yet this attitude is not shared by everyone, just as there is not always a negative perception of vocational education. When youth learn about the different skills and they see how you can easily apply these skills, their perception often changes. Also, when students start with their education, teachers will first spend time changing the mindset – e.g. showing how easily you can apply your skills after finishing education. I learned from respondents that this makes youth enthusiastic for obtaining vocational skills. They see how the benefits outweigh the negatives. The following quote illustrates this.

I can say that the youth who come here, their attitude towards farming has changed. And also, they are acting as good ambassadors outside of the center, because people are seeing how they are prospering and then they become interested in agriculture as well (Int. 3/5/18a).

Following this, and as I already mentioned earlier, it is a challenge to approach the youth and to make them interested in learning vocational skills, and therefore also to get them involved in agriculture. This is something that vocational schools and organizations that work with youth think about. As the above quote illustrates, graduates are good ambassadors. But there are more ways to involve youth. One person I spoke with explained how they are considering to approach youth by means of radio talk shows. She said how most of the youth in the communities listen to the radio and thus will hear their message.

For example, someone who is deep in the village wants to attend [a vocational school], wants to get a certificate, wants to get knowledge in these areas, but does not know how. That person is not aware that some of these services exist. So that is where we are already thinking ahead, to be able to use that strategy (Int. 4/5/18).

Another way to approach the youth is to contact the local leaders. This is emphasized by various key stakeholders. They can do so by explaining their approach and interest in mobilizing youth to the Local Council (LC)²⁰. These people share authority in the village, or at a larger municipal level.

4.2.2 EMPLOYMENT

There is a lot of unemployment in Uganda. From my conversations with the respondents there are two factors that can be linked to youth unemployment: perceptions towards agriculture and a gap between vocational education and the labor market.

Agriculture can absorb almost all of the people. Because in Uganda we have land and the weather conditions are not very bad (Int. 14/6/18a).

You know the agricultural sector is a big employer. However, it employs the majority of the people who call themselves unemployed (Int. 7/5/18c).

First of all, as these quotes illustrate, many job opportunities can be found in the agricultural sector. But even people who are working in this sector sometimes categorize themselves as unemployed. In the previous section (4.2.1) we have seen how the negative attitude towards this sector plays a role in this.

As a second factor that can be linked to youth unemployment, it is discussed during interviews and focus group discussions that youth cannot always apply the skills they have learned or are not able to find a market for their products. This means that someone has the skills to be a mechanic, but finds himself looking for cars in the village, as there are none to be repaired. This points to a gap between the skills youth are taught and the work that is available.

This is of course not so problematic in the agricultural sector. However, there may be problems in starting a business and to distance oneself from subsistence farming. Some respondents explained how relying on agriculture can be dangerous. There are many things that can go wrong, such as a failed harvest and therefore no income. At the same time, they do not want to leave their family and are therefore in some way involved in farming.

One respondent explained how the issue of unemployment is more problematic in the northern Region of Uganda. This has to do with the recent war history and the aftermath that is still felt in some places. Because of the war many young people have not been able to go to school. Also, there is frustration

²⁰ There are different levels of local government in Uganda. There is LC1, LC2 and LC3. In this research I spoke with LC1 (village level) and LC3 (municipal level).

towards the government that they are not offering enough jobs. And so, when youth are not able to find any work, they look at other options. A popular example of a way in which many youth earn money is by driving the *boda boda*. This motorcycle taxi is used for transport and gives men (and only a few women) some income without needing skills. When I spoke to a local government representative, he explained that some youth are also involved in other activities that give them some income, but he would not consider these to be jobs – e.g. gambling and sports betting. The following quote illustrates this.

Many of them [youth] are wasting their lives, there is trauma and depression. So, the drinking rate is high, gambling is high. Many of them look for these bets in companies and sport betting. And they think it is a job, when it is not (Int. 2/5/18).

But unemployment not only affects the youth themselves, one respondent also points to other issues that can arise when youth do not have job.

There are quite a number of domestic violence issues that arise because somebody has nothing to engage themselves in. This affects youth as well as families. That is also why some organizations decide to focus on business skills (Int. 4/5/18).

4.2.3 CONCLUSION

In this part I discussed the perceptions of youth about TVET and employment and how these are reflected in their livelihood strategies. There are negative perceptions about vocational education and the jobs that one can do after they are finished with this form of education. These perceptions have a role in a decision to choose for a specific form of education. It can be said, however, that once youth have followed vocational education and they are aware of the opportunities it has to offer them, their attitude is more positive, and they can become good advocates for the school or institution. These youth are then examples of individuals who transcend the negative perceptions and therefore have changed their aspirations for the future. This shows the importance of perceptions in livelihood strategies.

4.3 PART THREE – MIGRATION

Dak pa bwulu. This means migration of youth in Acholi²¹. As we know, there are many different languages in Uganda. And so, I did interviews with the help of a translator. This is something I already discussed in Chapter 3. The point I want to make is different. Initially, in order to avoid confusion about the meaning of migration, I asked what would come to their mind when I would introduce the topic. This was not only useful to ensure that we were on the same page – about what it was we wanted to talk about in the first place – it also proved to be a very insightful question. It showed that respondents value the reason why people migrate, and that this is crucial in discussions about what someone thinks of migration.

Now that I focus on the topic of migration, I try to answer the third sub-question in this research: What are the perceptions of youth about migration as a livelihood strategy, and what motivations to migrate can be identified? I will do this as follows. In the first step, I will look at the ideas that come to mind when someone thinks about migration. Without mentioning further related topics: what are your first thoughts? This section also discusses how internal migration, and more specifically rural-urban migration, is most prevalent. Next, I will discuss the profile of youth that migrate and the motivations to decide for this strategy. What does someone hope for when he decides to migrate? In a final section the perception of this strategy is discussed in more detail.

4.3.1 FIRST THOUGHTS

In my interaction with respondents, the first question about migration always related to their first thoughts. About what would come to their mind. In this section I discuss these first thoughts about migration. This is relevant in identifying perceptions about migration as a livelihood strategy.

One of the first things mentioned was the reason for migrating. There must always be a reason when you decide to move. This was extensively discussed during the focus group discussions. It was then also decided that migration happens a lot today. Youth usually migrate to a place with a lot of jobs, because people are looking for a better life, for entertainment, or are curious about other places.

Apart from these factors, there were some more thoughts that would come to mind when respondents would think about migration. Respondents would explain push factors and give examples, such as not having a good relationship with your family. It was in the second focus group, and only sometimes during interviews, that there was mentioning of the war as an initial thought with migration. When migration was discussed in more depth, this was no longer extensively discussed.

²¹ Acholi dialect is spoken by the Acholi people in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader in northern Uganda.

With regard to the form of migration, respondents think of internal migration in Uganda. More specifically, they think of rural-urban migration – migration from villages to town. There is also migration between districts, such as between Pader and Gulu district. Other forms of migration, such as urban-rural and international migration were explained as not usual. There were two respondents who had the ambition of moving abroad to Israel. They had heard stories from people who had moved there and returned back after a successful period in which they made good money.

4.3.2 IN SEARCH OF THE ‘BETTER LIFE’

So, basically, they are looking for better life (Int. 8/6/18a).

Now why would youth want to migrate in the first place. Usually someone is looking for a better life. This means that, as I mentioned, youth are looking for economic opportunities in the urban centers. But there are more motivations. It is also a motivation to move towards better social services or facilities that lack in rural areas, such as schools, hospitals, water systems and electricity. This is linked to unequal regional development and distribution of these services. All this relates to observing a better life elsewhere.

Apart from these images, youth hear stories. They are told about easy life, quick money, and the excitement and entertainment in town (e.g. clubs and sports). The youth start to become adventurous. But those who move with these reasons, often do so because they live in poverty and they see no other way out. This can go two directions. There is the most common direction where people move towards urban areas. But this can also be the other way around, as people move away from urban areas because they experience expensive, or unaffordable standards of living.

Other examples that illustrate reasons to migrate are leaving the village to prevent arrests for criminal activities, moving away from conflict (e.g. land conflict and within a family, or to start a new life on its own), and climate (e.g. droughts and floods). There are of course also reasons to not migrate. To some extent these reasons reflect earlier motivations to migrate. Reasons for someone to not migrate are then peace and security, good weather and not having enough money to move somewhere else. However, there is also mention of youth who not move because they are expected to take care of their parents. There may be parents who want their children to stay in the village. This relates to the earlier explained characteristics of youth, where they are sometimes expected to be an asset to their family and they cannot be missed for their labor. This was more extensively discussed in the first focus group.

Then, who migrates? Two groups that can be identified from the interviews and focus group discussions. Youth who followed education and those who did not. The first group may have a clear goal – a job they will be doing, or an idea of where they can find opportunities. The second group, those who did not

follow education, is more complicated to define. This is also the group where youth can become entangled in criminal activity. On the one hand, there are youth who migrate to follow education. Many good schools can be found outside of rural areas and are located in larger urban areas. On the other hand, as was mentioned before, youth who did not follow education may come to town for the wrong reasons and face a harder life than they had previously thought.

The respondents explained that there must be a reason to migrate to start with. This is what I learned during the different conversations and discussions in Uganda. But there are a number of more things that someone needs to migrate. Of course, you need some money, as you will have to pay for your transport and a place to stay when you arrive. It is also important that you have information. What is the security situation of your destination? Respondents explained that people who are about to migrate must plan their journey and also have to inform themselves. When you live deep in the village you are not always able to know the situation elsewhere (and there can also be another language). This is also where your social network is relevant. Friends and relatives who live elsewhere, or have migrated before, can inform you about what to expect or help you in finding a place to live. It is explained that it is essential to have family members living in the place you are moving to. But even though friends and relatives are important in migration, it is often an individual decision to go. Youth sometimes do not inform their family or friends or do this right before they leave.

But migration does not always end up in a better life. People who migrate to a place where they do not know what they will find, or what they will be doing, can experience unexpected obstacles. Life is expensive in urban areas and it is difficult to find a job. Respondents explained that this age group is vulnerable in town. When youth do not find a job, or when they are negatively influenced by peers in town, they may become involved with criminal activities (e.g. drugs, trafficking or prostitution). One respondent explained that the number of brothels is increasing in the outskirts of Kampala, where young girls work as prostitutes.

But even if you have a job, and you are not involved in any criminal activities, you may have poor working conditions. Exploitation at work can be mentioned here. I spoke to someone who migrated from northern Uganda to Kampala and worked in the security sector. He ended up being badly treated and decided to return back home.

And youth are ashamed if they do not succeed in town. A decision to migrate is not always appreciated by the family members in the first place. This makes migrating back to their relatives or community more difficult, if not impossible. Involvement in criminal activities can then follow. How migration is looked at, depends on the way it has worked out.

4.3.3 BUT ... HOW ABOUT MIGRATION?

I actually feel bad because the youth are the more energetic people, who are supposed to be in farms. They are leaving their assets, the biggest factor of production, which is the land. They have the energy, you know, they are leaving and coming to town where they don't own land. Where they own nothing. So at the end of it all, the productivity levels are very low. And then farming is left for the old and uneducated who cannot improve it, they don't have any additional skills to add to the farming (Int. 7/5/18c).

As this quote shows, family or community members are not always happy with youth leaving the rural areas. This deprives them of the financial and human resources they need in their agricultural activities (Castles et al., 2013, p. 71). But also, as I mentioned, there is a negative perception of people who fail after they have left. This makes people who do not succeed decide to not return to where they came from. Finally, and more in general, the way people feel about migration depends on the reason for migration. Respondents explained how migration can be both good and bad.

4.3.4 CONCLUSION

This part showed that there are several reasons for migration. These reasons reflect the perceptions youth have about this livelihood strategy. Migration is seen as a way out of poverty, in search of a 'better life'. More reasons why people migrate include both push and pull factors. Yet the idea that life is better elsewhere, is a central theme in these various factors. Someone can decide to migrate to an urban area because of better health facilities or education.

Also, listening to stories from peers, or seeing someone 'doing better' elsewhere, influences the aspirations someone has. It can broaden their framework from what they imagine as their possibilities. However, migration as a strategy only succeeds if someone has a clear goal – or a plan on how to make it work, because migration does not always end up in in a better life.

4.4 PART FOUR – TVET, EMPLOYMENT AND MIGRATION

There were a number of final questions during interviews with youth. One of the questions was about ambitions for the future: Where do you see yourself in five years? The answers to this question were very diverse. Some youth had never really thought about it. Others were very creative and thought big about their future plans. There were also some respondents who were more aware of the current conditions in which they found themselves and were therefore more reserved in explaining their ambitions. Asking this question helped in finding out how the current activities were part of a larger strategy. It revealed how some activities were carefully planned and sometimes combined with other activities, but it also showed that the current activities were not always in line with future aspirations. Activities can also be an intermediate step before someone pursues their ambitions. Perceptions about certain activities play a role in this.

Now previous parts dealt with the first three sub-questions in this research. This final part focuses on the following sub-question: How do perceptions interact and what is decisive for a decision to migrate? This section deals with different links that were found in analyzing the data. I will discuss how youth pursue different activities and decide to migrate. Following this, I will show how there are different perceptions about activities and that this can influence a decision for a certain strategy. This includes a discussion of migration as a livelihood strategy, but also the potential of role models in the perceptions of youth in Uganda. Finally, I will include a broader context in the analysis.

4.4.1 DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES

We have seen that youth make strategic decisions in their activities. They may pursue one activity or several at the same time; and they can decide for themselves or involve their family or community. But these decisions are generally based on the availability of assets, perceptions and the aspirations that one has (De Haas, 2008, p. 36).

In addition to this, decisions may be part of a short-term strategy, in which the aim is to cope with shocks, such as a conflict in a family. But a decision can also be part of a larger strategy. If this is the case, youth may have a bigger aim to e.g. become successful in agriculture and have their own farm. In order to achieve this, they work to the point that they can earn a sustainable living with their farm.

4.4.2 MIGRATION AS PART OF A LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY

Migration can be part of a livelihood strategy. A decision to migrate is then combined with other activities. Taken into account TVET, employment and migration in livelihood strategies of youth, there are two ways in which migration is part of a strategy: 1) migration to follow (better) education and 2) migration in search for employment, or a market to sell your products.

To start with the first way in which migration is part of a livelihood strategy. Youth migrate to follow education. Many (good) schools can be found in the larger urban areas and so youth leave their home to live and study elsewhere. This is the case for all levels of education. But taken into account the preferences and perceptions about TVET and university shows how someone probably wants to move to a place where they can attend the latter.

There is also a sense of pride. Having a family member studying or working in the city is seen as something to be proud of. The following quote illustrate this.

Even those people who are staying in the village. Especially someone whose eyes has been enlightened. Such a person would do anything to ensure that her child comes to study in town. Not to study in the rural areas (Int. 7/5/18c).

But there is also the possibility of migration after someone has followed vocational education. This may be the case if someone has had a lack of resources at school and therefore does not have enough practical experience. This would mean that someone moves to a place and follows another vocational training where they have sufficient equipment. It is also possible that someone decides to go to university after completing a vocational education. As such, this form of education is seen as an intermediate step before someone goes to university or as an additional opportunity to acquire practical skills. I spoke with someone who strives to study law. Yet she is learning for a certificate in hotel management. It is her plan to go to university after completing her vocational education.

The availability of assets, aspirations and perceptions play a role in the first way in which migration is part of a strategy. We have also seen how youth take into account advantages, but also disadvantages of TVET. In addition to this, youth who are more familiar with vocational education or are actually following this, see its benefits. This may influence a future decision not to go to university, but instead develop vocational skills. I spoke with a mother who went to university and now works with an NGO. Through her work and personal experiences, she would make another choice if she had to decide again. I asked her what education she hoped for her son and she told me that vocational education is a good option.

Now there is another way in which migration can be part of a strategy. This would be migration looking for work or finding a market for your products. This can take place after someone has followed vocational education. We have previously seen how youth can acquire skills that they are not able to apply in the area where they live, or where they are unable to find a viable market for their products. One factor that is repeatedly explained in this is that youth are not always well informed about the work they will be able to do after they have acquired the skills, or where they will be able to find work. This

means that someone is migrating because that person is looking for employment opportunities. The following quotes illustrates this point.

We learned that skilling the youth can easily trigger migration, because they will be moving to get employment. And indeed, that opened employment opportunities for them (Int. 14/6/18a).

If it is driving, what driving can you do in a village? Nothing. You have to look for where there are vehicles, where there is a lot of truck movement, so that you can do that business. That is what we have learned (Int. 14/6/18a).

However, there are also youth who migrate without having followed vocational education and who have no prior knowledge on skills they can apply. Someone moves out of poverty, to town and looks for opportunities. A lack of resources to earn a living, and hearing stories from family or friends can get someone to move elsewhere.

4.4.3 THE POWER OF EXAMPLE

We have seen how perceptions are important in the livelihood strategies of youth, and how this can influence a decision for certain activities. We have also discussed that a perception about e.g. acquiring vocational skills can change over time. If this is the case, it can change the aspirations one has for their future livelihood. Role models are relevant in this – someone who is a successful example in doing certain work, or whose behavior inspires youth to continue their activities.

At the end of an interview, I asked whether that person had a role model. This was often the case. They would give a name of their teacher, a family member, or a person who was running a company or farm. There were recurring names of people who were known, or even famous in the area. There is one man who has a big, successful farm and is respected by many people – recurring factors that made someone a role model for a person. This man was mentioned a few times by students who were learning agricultural skills in Gulu district. These youth hoped one day to have a business or a farm that would look like his, hoping that they would be respected by many people and many students would learn their skills.

There were also representatives of organizations and schools who emphasized the potential of role models. Both for vocational education and for the agricultural sector, as there exists a negative attitude. In the case of agriculture, youth move away from the village and settle in towns so that they do not have to work in the field. There is a challenge to make youth interested in this sector and to get them involved. The youth are aware of options outside of agriculture that can help them earn a living and they hear

peers talking about life in town. A recurring notion to point out this issue is ‘sensitization’ – making people aware of the benefits of agriculture by e.g. showing business opportunities and teaching sustainable ways to grow their crops. The following quote illustrates this.

There is less involvement of youth in farming (...) How can we influence the youth to get to farming. That is now the challenge, that is why we have many projects (...) and most donors are looking at youth livelihood projects (Int. 14/6/18a).

4.4.4 INCLUDING THE BROADER CONTEXT

Including the broader context in the analysis is the final step in the presentation of data. In this section I explain that the micro-level perspective in this research is embedded in a broader context. The importance of including the broader context is discussed in the introduction of the theoretical framework (p. 5) but is also explained as part of the livelihood approach (2.1.3), in which livelihoods relate to the environment of structures and processes. It is said that a livelihood approach links individuals and broader contexts. This broader context is also important in the case of livelihood strategies in Uganda. I will illustrate this through the perspectives of youth, key stakeholders, and an example of how this broader context can influence the livelihoods of youth in Uganda.

To begin with, the perspectives of the youth. I have previously explained that the perception of youth is important in their decision for a livelihood strategy. I have also discussed that the search for the ‘better life’ has a role in this. This means looking for better schools, job opportunities, but also hospitals and entertainment (e.g. clubs). In other words, the better social services and facilities. Now because of the way in which public and private sectors locate different social services, people want to move towards those places. This means that there are differences in facilities between e.g. village and town.

In addition to this, there is also the feeling of being less well-off than friends or community members with regard to social services, facilities, or job opportunities. When you hear stories from people who migrated elsewhere, this can be a powerful incentive to migrate and find that specific dream job, or to gain that status of someone who is successful in town (Castles et al., 2013, p. 38).

This unequal distribution of services is also mentioned by experts and representatives of relevant organizations and school leaders. Some of the respondents explained that the number of youth who migrate towards towns is growing and therefore should be regulated. One respondent explained that migration is a time bomb for Uganda and that the benefits of development should be distributed more equally with the country side:

My thinking is that this is a time bomb for Uganda. Something has got to be done to regulate migration from the rural areas to urban centers. Possibly one of the ways the government can do this is, is making sure that the benefits of development are also shared with the country side. Infrastructure should be built in the country side, better hospitals should be built in the country side, electricity should also be distributed in the country side. So, then it will attract a bit of development in the rural areas, where people can be able to stay and earn a living (Int. 25/6/18).

Now the role of the government is mentioned in the above quote. The unequal distribution of social services and facilities is accompanied by dissatisfaction with the government of Uganda. Interviews, focus group discussions, but also informal conversations in my day-to-day life in Uganda, shed light on this issue. I remember one of my first conversations in Uganda. It was with the driver who picked me up from the airport in Entebbe. He told me that it would be better for Uganda when President Yoweri Museveni resigned and referred to the age bill that was only signed a few months earlier²².

During the final week of my field research, when I stayed in Kampala, another event emphasized dissatisfaction of youth with the government. The Ugandan government introduced a new tax for the use of popular social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter, on July 1, 2018. This event caused dissatisfaction among many Ugandans. I spoke to Ugandans about this new law during day-to-day activities (e.g. informal conversations in a taxicab or Uber) and they were, nicely said, not amused. They would explain their views in a broader context of dissatisfaction with the government. The following quote illustrates this broader context, in which there is dissatisfaction about the government that does not offer jobs for the youth:

They [youth] feel that the government is not doing enough. The government is not providing them with employment. (...) When they see politicians passing around, they begin saying; we elected you people, but you are not giving us the jobs (Int. 3/5/18a).

A final quote illustrates how changes in the broader policy and institutional context can help individuals in their livelihoods (Ellis, 2003). It shows that public and private sectors can determine the available jobs for youth:

²² President Museveni, who has been the president since 1986, signed a bill into law that removes the presidential age limit of 75. This allows Museveni (now at the age of 73) to run for a sixth term in 2021. The Ugandan parliament passed the law on December 20, 2017 (Al Jazeera, 2018).

The population of Uganda grows fast and all the people in Uganda need clothes, but we import most of our clothes. You see that. So now if there was a way of increasing the production of materials for clothes and then many people are trained as tailors, they would now make many clothes and that would be a good employment for them (Int. 14/6/18a).

4.4.5 CONCLUSION

In this section I discussed the way in which TVET, employment and migration interact and how this is translated into a decision of migration. I discussed that migration can be part of a livelihood strategy in two ways: 1) migration to follow (better) education and 2) migration in search for employment, or a market to sell your products. I also discussed the power of example. In doing so, I explained the position of role models in the perceptions and aspirations of youth and that such a person can change the way individuals feel about certain activities, such as on agriculture. Finally, I discussed the broader context and the way in which the micro-level perspective of this research is embedded in environments of structures and processes. This broader context can create viable environments in which there is a better access to assets in their livelihoods, but also influence the perceptions and aspirations of youth about their own conditions, or surroundings they live in.

The availability of assets, perceptions and aspirations about TVET, education and migration are taken into account a decision for a certain livelihood strategy, and so also migration. This is done in different ways – e.g. youth compare themselves with their peers; look up to a role model; or see people do better elsewhere, in another village or town.

All in all, youth carefully take into account what assets are available to them, whether they are e.g. being supported by an NGO, or if they will receive support after they have completed their education (receive start-up kits or a small loan). This also shows that youth are no passive victims of broader structures, but instead try to actively improve the livelihoods within the certain conditions they live in (De Haas, 2008, p. 36).

5 THE MAIN FINDINGS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

After having presented the findings in this research, this final chapter tries to answer the research question posed in the introduction: What are the livelihood strategies of youth in Gulu, Lira and Nwoya District, northern Uganda, and what is the role of migration, TVET and employment in this?

To answer this question, this research examined four sub-questions, which I discussed in Chapter 4, the presentation of the data: What livelihood strategies of youth can be identified? What are the perceptions of youth about TVET and employment, and how are these reflected in their livelihood strategies? What are the perceptions of youth about migration as a livelihood strategy, and what motivations to migrate can be identified? How do perceptions interact and what is decisive for a decision to migrate?

These questions are answered by means of a case study research strategy. During three months of field research in Gulu, Lira and Nwoya District, northern Uganda, I gathered information through semi-structured interviewing, focus group discussions and informal conversations. This qualitative approach enabled me to learn from the perspectives of the different people with whom I spoke. All this brings me first to the summary of the main findings.

In this final chapter of this research I will also discuss these main findings. I will contextualize and link them to the broader context – the academic literature, objective and thoughts that triggered this research in the first place. In doing so, I will start with a discussion of findings, in which I will contextualize and link them with the theories and academic debate in Chapter 2. Following this, I will reflect on the societal and academic relevance of this research. Chapter 1 is hereby reconsidered. I will end with a number of reflections on this research, concluding thoughts and recommendations.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

The analysis in this study started with the youth in northern Uganda. This age group faces both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the agricultural sector offers employment opportunities. Vast green landscapes have potential for this largest age group in this country. But on the other hand, one can also find challenges. Not all the youth want to work in this sector; there are not that many other job opportunities; and the resources needed for a living are not always present. In all, this vulnerable age group lacks capital to meet their potential.

They therefore pursue different strategies to maintain, secure or improve their livelihood. These livelihoods depend on the availability of resources. In the analysis of this research are different activities in the livelihood strategies of youth identified. These are pursued separately, together, but often in combination with other activities.

These activities are education (e.g. TVET and university), work (e.g. tailoring), and migration (e.g. rural-urban). As we have seen, the livelihoods of youth are based on the availability of assets, perceptions, and aspirations. These result in the livelihood strategies of youth in this specific case study (see section 2.3, Figure 1). I will discuss the role of the activities in the livelihood strategies of youth and, in doing so, answer the research question.

The youth who follow TVET do this for various reasons. They can decide for themselves, make their decision with relatives, or this decision is taken by others for them. Yet it is often part of a larger strategy. Youth aim to be self-employed or quickly apply their skills. However, after completing their education, youth often lack equipment, cannot always apply the skills they have learned or they are not able to find a market for their products. This points to a lack of resources and a gap between the skills youth are taught and the work that is available. This can make youth decide to migrate.

Migration of youth is generally from rural to urban areas in northern Uganda. And, in addition to the aforementioned, people often migrate as a way out of poverty, in search of a 'better life'. A central idea is that life is better elsewhere. Youth may perceive differences between rural and urban areas, or hear them from others. In doing so, they take into account the broader context in which they find themselves.

A recurring theme in these livelihood strategies are the perceptions of youth about different activities. These perceptions have an important role in their decisions. I discussed the perception about TVET, employment (mainly about agriculture), and migration.

There is a negative perception about TVET. This form of education is seen as a last resort and for the poor. There is also a negative attitude towards the agricultural sector. Most youth do not want to farm. However, once youth have followed TVET, or see the benefits of working in the agricultural sector, and become aware of the opportunities it has to offer them, their attitude is more positive.

The perception about migration is something else. When youth find a job in town or achieve their intended goal, migration is something good. But when they do not succeed in their intended goal, or when they do not find that 'better life', migration is considered as a bad decision. These stories are therefore not often shared with a wider audience. And so the way migration is looked at, depends on the way it has worked out. This general perception about migration has a role in the decision of those who intend to migrate, or who migrated, meaning that they take into account the experiences of others.

Aspirations of youth also have a role in their decisions. In terms of migration, TVET, and work; youth strive for a 'better life', they strive for good education, and hope to find that specific job. They observe peers, relatives and others, and hear stories. This make youth decide to pursue certain activities.

And so there are different livelihood strategies of youth in Uganda. A decision to migrate, follow TVET or a specific job is part of a strategy to maintain, secure or improve a livelihood. This decision is based on the available assets, perceptions, and aspirations that youth have and which, in turn, also influence the activities they pursue. These activities influence individual development and income stability.

5.2 DISCUSSION

In this discussion of findings I contextualize and link the findings with the theories and academic debate. To begin with, the analysis in this research started with the livelihood approach. This approach states that people actively try to improve their livelihoods within the conditions they live in. In addition to this, it states that it is a way of thinking about development activities and how different factors that constrain or enhance livelihoods can relate (De Haas, 2008; Ellis, 2003; McDowell & De Haan, 1997). This approach is used as a framework in this research. It was chosen because it allows research into the causes and impacts of migration and incorporates macro-structures in research that is focused at the micro-level. All of this made it possible to analyze the individual livelihoods of youth in Uganda.

Livelihood strategies are the analytical tool in this research. This allowed an analysis in which combinations between strategies are possible and different activities are likely to affect each other. This was also the case in Uganda. We have seen how youth decide for certain activities, but also how these activities can be combined. Youth need a stable income that is not vulnerable to any unexpected events. They can therefore have multiple jobs, or combine jobs in the village with jobs in town.

And so, because youth pursue activities, sometimes separately and sometimes in combinations with other activities, the livelihood strategy is a good analytical tool for analyzing the livelihoods of youth in Uganda. Migration can also be part of a strategy. Youth decide to migrate to secure or improve their livelihood (De Haas, 2008).

Now the focus in this research is on the role of different activities in the livelihood strategies of youth: TVET, employment and migration. We have seen that the perception about these activities is a recurring theme in their decisions for their livelihood strategy. These perceptions also play a role in the way in which different activities affect each other (De Haas, 2010; McDowell & De Haan, 1997; Scoones, 2009). Thus, in this specific case study, perceptions are an important factor in the decisions of youth for certain activities.

The decisions can be taken individually without informing a relative, or in consultation with others. This confirms the remark made by De Haas & Fokkema (2010), in which they elaborate on this decision making process. They emphasized that decisions are not always taken in a household context and intra-household power struggles must be taken into account (De Haas & Fokkema, p. 10). This also points to

the importance of using a micro-level perspective, where youth are the unit of analysis. If this is not the case, individual considerations in the decision-making process may be overlooked.

We have seen that youth decide for different activities and how these decisions are made. But there are other factors that influence these decisions. And here the macro-structures in micro-level research are important. A decision for a certain strategy is part of a larger image. This means that there are broader contexts – governmental structures, or a position of an NGO in the livelihoods of youth. But this also means that the creation of ideas and perceptions that derive from experiences of others, in turn, influence the decision-making processes of youth who are about to make a decision.

This larger image would also imply that when there are more jobs available in the village, or when they have good education, they may still decide to migrate. Comparing yourself with others is a factor here. Seeing someone who is doing better elsewhere, or hearing stories about interesting places, might influence a decision. Incentives may then relate to differences in social services or facilities, but also about excitement in town. These differences between the village and town are large. But there are also differences between districts, and even between northern Uganda and the RoC. These differences in development can play a major role in the stimuli of youth, perhaps even more than this research can show.

Now, what are the consequences of the decisions of youth in northern Uganda. This is where we link the findings with the academic debate. In this research I worked from the perspective of the individual and I explained that this research would reflect from these individual perspectives on migration and development (De Haas, 2012). I argue that at an individual level migration often leads to development, but at a larger level migration can be a factor that can undermine development.

Based on the findings in this research, migration optimists can argue that migration contributes to the development of youth. But it can also contribute to the development of the places where they migrated from. Someone who migrated to learn agricultural skills returns with new knowledge and teaches siblings and other villagers. This can explain migration as beneficial to development. Thus, when migration works out well, it contributes to the development of youth in northern Uganda.

Migration pessimists, on the other hand, can argue that migration to town deprives villages from human resources (Castles et al., 2013), where the elderly stay behind to work on the land. They can also state that migration does not always end up in a ‘better life’ and point to the youth who eventually become involved in criminal activities and do not return home.

This shows how the reality in northern Uganda is not clearly-cut, but can be found in the middle. When you ask yourself the question whether migration leads to development, or whether it hinders such development, there should be more nuance in your approach. The results of the decisions of youth point

to the diversity of migration impacts in this specific case (Castles et al., 2013, p. 75): migration can have positive and negative outcomes for the individual. But can also diversify in the influence of its impact on members of the household, members of the community, or even on larger district or regional levels.

This diversity of migration impacts reveals one more thing. It shows how there should be a combination of different levels of analysis (micro, meso, and macro), in which you can reflect on the individual, but can also include contextual factors, such as the general development conditions (e.g. northern Uganda versus the RoC and rural versus urban) and policy contexts (e.g. the role for an NGO).

5.3 RELEVANCES

This section reflects on the relevance of this research as explained in section 1.2. First the societal relevance. In this part I explained that by means of identifying why some youth migrate, and some stay put, this research can contribute to a better understanding of how TVET and employment opportunities affect livelihood strategies of youth and drive migration. Findings in this research revealed different livelihood strategies of youth in Gulu, Lira and Nwoya District. It also showed the recurring role for perceptions and how they interact and affect each other. And so, these findings are relevant to organizations and institutions that work on issues that are dealt with in this study. There are three remarks that can be made here.

1) With regard to the relations between jobs, skilled youth and migration, this case study showed that following vocational education, or finding a job, does not stop youth from migrating elsewhere. 2) This research also reveals the role of perceptions in a decision of youth. Negative perceptions about TVET, seeing someone else doing better in town, geographical differences in available services, and the way in which the agricultural sector is sometimes viewed, are recurring examples that reflect on this issue. These considerations point to the agency of youth in their decision making. This can be taken into account in current and future projects of local, national, and international organizations and institutions that work with youth in northern Uganda.

3) Following this, and as I explained in section 1.2., this research is not only relevant to Edukans. It is also relevant for organizations and institutions that work in similar fields. Within this context, experts and representatives of relevant organizations, local government and schools I spoke with, explained their interest in feedback on results. They explained that this could contribute to their knowledge on the topic, and so would help them e.g. to improve the way they communicate with youth starting their school curriculum. This is something I also reflected on in section 3.7. In this part I explained that several respondents were interested in the communication of findings. Feedback of the main findings in this research hopefully gives them new information on certain aspects.

Taken this into account, this study offers an empirical case study to studies on livelihood strategies and migration and, in addition to this, some recommendations. The latter are given in the following section.

Now this research also has scientific relevance. As I explained in section 1.2., and later also in section 3.3, this research aims to add complexity by means of a case study research in which the individual is the unit of analysis. In contrast to taking the household as the unit of analysis, this decision appeared to be relevant. Findings in this research showed that youth often make their own decisions. These decisions might be a way in which youth disengage from a household and build their network from connections outside of this setting. This research also showed that certain livelihood strategies do not necessarily come from this setting, but leave room for individual aspirations. The aforementioned role of perceptions is also relevant here.

But there is still need for research on this theme. Deriving from the societal relevance, more research could focus on speaking with youth and representatives of different organizations and institutions in other districts in northern Uganda, such as in Pader and Dokolo, or in northwestern Uganda, in Arua District, including Arua town. Such research can elaborate on geographical differences and what is decisive for a decision to migrate in these areas. Future research could also build on this study by focusing on other forms of migration (e.g. international migration to neighboring countries or Europe) or levels of education (e.g. university). It may also include the shortcomings in this research, as I will discuss in the next section (5.4.1).

With regard to scientific relevance, future research could build on this study by taking the individual as the unit of analysis. More research could explore issues of current and future livelihood diversification with specific attention given to the role of perceptions in this.

5.4 REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

5.4.1 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Reflection on this research has been an ongoing process – during field research, the writing process in the Netherlands, but also when completing this research. This threefold dimension of the research process is also the basis of this section.

First, during field research I have always tried to know my own position. As a researcher, intern, but also as a *Mzungu*. While I think about my field research, I can say that working for a longer period of three months in Uganda has helped this research. By this I mean gathering additional information through informal conversations and building my network. This is also due to my supervisor on location, from Advance Afrika. She was very constructive, helped me to find the right contacts and linked me

with the people that she knew would be willing to help me in my research; contacts that I would otherwise never have had, if I had not worked in Uganda for a longer period of time.

Nevertheless, two important shortcomings relate to the selection of participants in this study. I explained that participants were selected based on their profile, experience or affinity with the research topic and, in addition to this, that the aim was not to be representative, but rather to explore how individuals experience and make sense of their own lives (see section 3.4.1.). This is still an important argument. But there is one shortcoming that can be identified in the development of this research. Because this research is a case study and the participants are not representative to the whole, one must be aware of dominant perspectives: e.g. one positive experience with migration or a negative association with TVET may overshadow the perception of a participant, or the analysis in this research. This possible bias must be taken into account, also in any further research on this topic.

A second shortcoming closely relates to this. I did not speak to youth who, after they had migrated, carried out criminal activities. Such activities were sometimes discussed as a way to generate an income if migration did not produce the desired result, such as finding a good job. There are three things that I should mention here. First, I think it would have been difficult to reach youth involved in criminal activities, as this can be off the beaten path and, secondly, I also wonder if it was possible in the time available, not to mention their willingness to participate in this study. Thirdly, it was mentioned during interviews with representatives of organizations that youth who migrate and do not find the desired result, find their way to Kampala and its suburbs. This would be both men and women. The fact that I spoke to youth in northern Uganda (this being the case study in this research) and therefore worked from Gulu, is a reason that I did not speak to these youth in Kampala. This may have influenced the data. It would have been of value to speak with youth who made the decision to migrate, but ended up involved in criminal activities. This would have meant that another perspective was included in the research, in order to hear more stories from individuals who did not find that ‘better life’ after they migrated. In a next research I would therefore aim to include these participants.

Now there are also some reflections on the writing process. During this process I had the opportunity to reflect on the findings with different people in the Netherlands, including presenting my preliminary results during a Community of Practice (CoP)²³ in Utrecht, the Netherlands. AgriProFocus facilitated this CoP around Youth in Agribusiness and food systems, entitled ‘Youth, employment and migration – understanding the relations between jobs, skilled youth and migration’. During this session there was

²³ ‘The aim of these CoP Meet-ups is to exchange knowledge, share experiences and jointly contribute to innovative solutions for young people to become successful in agri-food sectors and to have their voices heard among decision makers. By bringing various organizations working in this field together, synergy between programs is promoted and the knowledge agenda is further developed (AgriProFocus, 2018)’. For more information, see <https://agriprofocus.com/post/5ba4b89226b72a71f45d494d> and a published article ‘Rural youth empowerment to mitigate international migration’, see <https://knowledge4food.net/rural-youth-empowerment-to-mitigate-international-migration/>

discussion on the relation between youth employment, education in agriculture and migration. Feedback and input during this session on my preliminary results, as well as learning from discussions between professionals in the field and hearing their experiences with the issue, helped me in the writing process in this research. It made me reflect critically on what I presented during that session, but it also showed the importance of the issue: various organizations that work all over the world were present and showed interest and concern about this topic.

About the final stages of this research there is one remark that I can make. As I have mentioned before, this research was iterative from beginning to end. Throughout the process I have constantly reflected on different steps of the research – during field research, the CoP in the Netherlands and while writing these final pages of this research. And although this is something good and I am aware of my inexperience in coping with different issues when doing research as a master student (see section 3.7.2.), I have learned to believe that this is something that I will probably experience again when I do research abroad – that there will always be certain unexpected turns, regardless of my experience. This is a personal reflection that I will take into account in future research. In order to better prepare for a next research, I will make a list of several possible pitfalls that I may encounter and the possible ways to deal with them. This can enable me to deal with changes more quickly.

After all, the objective of this study was to gain deeper insight into the motivations of youth to migrate and the position of TVET and employment in this. And while there are some shortcomings in this research, I argue that the findings in this research are able to provide an overview of the livelihood strategies, and so also in a decision for migration of youth in Gulu, Lira and Nwoya District, northern Uganda.

5.4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

As a final part in this research, I formulate recommendations. Now these can be taken into account by Edukans, but also by other intervening institutions or organizations that work on issues that are dealt with in this study. I have identified four recommendations. The first three relate to the individual and the last one considers a broader context in which these individuals find themselves. These recommendations can be approached separately, but are also complementary to each other. They are all based on conversations and discussions that took place in Uganda.

1. Informing the youth about vocational education and migration

This research showed that youth are not always well informed. This applies to vocational education and migration. I have learned that youth may not be aware of the content of the course or program for which they are enrolled, or the different jobs that they can do after completion. This can lead to dropout or a mismatch between the skills taught and the labor market – youth have acquired skills that they cannot apply in the area where they live.

There is a role for the school to inform the youth, but also for the school to inform themselves. Who pays for the education? What are the ambitions of this person? And where does someone want to work if he has completed its education? If youth want to work in the village it may not be a good idea to start learning skills to become a mechanic. Informing the youth would mean informing them about the best way to bring their ambitions into line with the right education. And to do this before they start their education, to prevent a mismatch. An intake interview that addresses these questions or organizing open days come to mind.

This also applies to migration. Findings showed that youth are not always well informed about this livelihood strategy. Respondents pointed out that they are not well informed about migration and, as a result, are not good prepared to migrate. This may turn out bad for someone. When they are informed by their peers or family members, they often hear the more positive stories, because persons who do not reach their goals after migrating will share their story less often. Yet these stories of success are not representative. And so there can be a distorted perception of migration.

Taken this into account, informing youth about migration is important. This can be done during education or skills training, but youth can also be approached outside of school. Think e.g. of radio stations that make the subject more accessible and open to discussion by sharing it with a wider audience. In doing so, informing may focus on what you can expect from migration, what you need to migrate, and the challenges that you might face. All this by sharing success stories of people, but also stories in which someone decided to migrate back, or when they did not find what they had hoped for.

2. Creating better awareness of vocational education by sensitization the youth

This research showed that there is a general bad perception about vocational education, learning agricultural skills, and the agricultural sector in general. These perceptions ensure that youth do not want to follow this form of education, or do not want to engage in agriculture. This is despite the possibilities

of creating self-employment by learning different skills and what the agricultural sector has to offer to many youth.

Respondents stressed the importance of sensitization of the youth in this context, in which there is a need to pay attention to process and perception in addition to the projects and trainings. Where the first recommendation focuses on spreading information to youth about vocational education and migration, this point is to make them interested in the first. This means – contrary to the first recommendation – that the youth need to be showed the benefits of, and rewards from, vocational education and working in the agricultural sector. This can be done during education and skills training, but also outside of the schools. It may be done by graduates who act as good advocates for a vocational school or institution, or by communities (e.g. local leaders) and families. In addition to the youth, these groups (communities and families) also need to be made aware of vocational education and agriculture, because this can also influence the lives of youth.

3. Using the potential of role models

The third recommendation relates to the foregoing. Respondents explained the potential of role models in the life of youth – people whose behavior inspires youth to continue their activities or stimulate to follow vocational education or to engage in agriculture. These people can influence the aspirations of youth by showing and offering examples of success.

This means that the stories of people who are successful in e.g. farming are shared with a wider audience. These can be communicated during organized sessions in communities or by approaching families. Additional means for doing this can vary. I explained the example of radio stations earlier, but one can also think of including stories in the teaching material, or making podcasts in which different stories are being told. Here again taking into account the wide range of radio stations.

4. Being aware of the differences between urban and rural areas

This research showed that differences between rural areas and towns have a role in the decision for a livelihood strategy, and so also a decision to migrate. By this I mean geographical differences in terms of social services and facilities that are found in the city and are missing in the village, but also seeing someone else ‘doing better’ elsewhere, and the perceptions about the ‘better life’ that awaits them in town, or in the city – a place where you can find jobs and have a better standard of living. The youth living in the village (of course also in town) observe these differences, but they also hear it from the

stories of their peers and family members. These stories can create incentives to migrate elsewhere, which sometimes, but not always, will improve the lives of youth.

Therefore I recommend that these differences between rural areas and towns are a focus area to those intervening organizations and institutions that work on the issues that are dealt with in this study. This would mean responding to these differences by discussing them, informing youth about how to cope with these differences, but also to understand yourself why some youth decide to leave rural areas and move towards urban areas.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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7 APPENDIX

7.1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

This section gives an outline of the questions that I asked during the interviews and focus group discussions. The content of the interview guides changed during my stay in Uganda and I adjusted each interview to the profile of the respondent(s) (e.g. student or employed) – some questions were omitted, or respondents' input would lead to new questions.

In my interview guides I included more questions than I would ask during the interviews and focus groups. Therefore, the interview guides in this section provide a broad overview of the questions that are asked. With regard to the semi-structured interviews, I worked with two interview guides – youth and key stakeholders. I used the same introduction in both guides (3.5.1). In this introduction, I introduced myself; explained that I was an independent researcher; explained the focus of the research; how I aimed to contribute with this research; the topics that would be discussed during the interview; how information would be confidential; I asked if I could record the interview; and I asked for a verbal consent.

I had a slightly different introduction during the focus groups (3.5.2). In addition to the content of the introduction of the interviews, I would explain why they were selected to join this discussion and that I would also have/had a discussion with another group.

7.1.1 INTERVIEW GUIDE – YOUTH

Starting questions

- Can you tell me something about your job/education/project you are involved in?
- Where do you live? What is it like to live here? What do you like most/less about where you live?
- What are you doing for a living? If education: how do you pay for your school fees?
- What motivated you to work here/follow this education? How are you feeling about it?
- How much time do you spend on education/training/work?
- How does your day look like? Can you tell me what you do during the day? How would your ideal day look like?
- Can you tell me something about your family? Where do they come from? What are they doing for a living? How are your family and friend feeling about what you are doing? Similar pathways?

Migration

- If I ask you about migration of youth, what can you tell me about that?
- Why do you think that youth migrate? Forms of migration / motivation to move or stay / how do you feel about migration / decision / do you think it is an important topic to discuss? And why?
- Did you migrate?

If migrated:

- What motivated you? Can you tell me about your decision? Did you make it yourself?
- Did you go alone?
- Did you know people who migrated before you left? / Did you know people at the place you moved to?
- If you compare the life that you left, to where you went. Are there differences? If so, what are they? What is better about the place you went, or that you left?
- Do you sometimes go back? If so, can you tell me about your visits?
- How do you look back at your decision?

If not migrated:

- How do you feel about moving elsewhere, after you have finished education/other job?
- What would be a motivation to migrate? Have you ever thought about it?

TVET

- How do you feel about TVET? What are the advantages / disadvantages?
- When finishing vocational education, what will you do? If already finished, what did you do?
- How is TVET influencing your decision of moving somewhere else?

Work

- How do you feel about your work opportunities in Uganda?
- If following education: how do you think your future job will look like?
- Where do you think your future job will be?

Future

- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- How are you going to reach there?
- What/who will you need to reach there?
- If you could choose wherever you would want to live, where would that be?
- Is there someone you look up to?

Conclusion

- Is there anything that you would like to add / ask me?

7.1.2 INTERVIEW GUIDE – KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Starting questions

- General questions about the job / organization / institution the interviewee works at. Can you tell me something about your job?

Migration

- What do you know about migration of youth?
- What is the profile of youth who migrate? Who migrates?
- What motivations can you identify to migrate?
- What do you think are ambitions/expectations/dreams?
- Where do youth move to?
- Do they know people before they go? Go together?
- How do you feel about migration? How do you think that youth feel about a decision to migrate?
- Do you think that migration is an important topic to discuss? And why?

Youth

- What characterizes youth in Uganda?
- What is the position of youth in Uganda?
- What do youth do to make a living?
- Do they have role models?
- How do you reach them / how youth find out about project/school?

TVET

- How do you feel about TVET? (compared to other forms of education)
- What is the profile of youth who participate in this form of education?
- Where do youth end up after finishing TVET? Where do they find their employment?

Work

- How do you feel about employment possibilities for youth?
- What are the challenges youth face with finding work?
- How do you feel about the agricultural sector? / Involvement of youth?
- What can be done to make this sector more attractive? / Who should be involved?
- How is work influencing a decision to migrate?

Conclusion

- Is there anything you would like to add / ask me?

7.2 FOCUS GROUPS – CONTENT AND SET-UP

Guidelines

There are no right or wrong answers but rather differing points of view. I am interested in how you feel and think about certain topics. Please feel free to share your point of view even if differs from what others have said. I will take notes to make sure I don't miss anything, but as you see I will also record the discussion to make sure I don't miss any of your comments, as I cannot write fast enough to keep track.

Start of focus group discussion

Introduction of yourself to get to know each other a bit better. Name / age / where you are from / what you are doing. I start with myself.

Draw the seating arrangement.

1) Youth

What characterizes youth in Uganda? *Write answers on flip chart.*

What are young people doing for a living?

What do young people need to make a living? *Write answers on flip chart.*

2) Migration. I give an example of someone who migrated.

Where do you think about with the topic of migration? *Write answers on flip chart.*

What assets do you need to migrate? What do you need to migrate? *Write answers on flip chart.*

What motivations to migrate can you identify? *Write answers on flip chart.*

What motivations can you identify to not migrate? *Write answers on flip chart.*

Additional questions:

Where do young people move to? Do they go back? Do they keep connections?

Who could be involved in decision making? How does a decision look like?

Are there differences between boys and girls?

What influence does migration have on a person?

Do you think that the topic of migration is important?

Individual reflection

Does any of you feel like they can relate to any of these topics? Have you ever thought about migrating?

Did you migrate? Is there anyone who would like to share their story?

3) TVET

How do you feel about TVET?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of TVET? *Write answers on flip chart.*

What are motivations to follow vocational education or training?

Where do youth end up after they have finished TVET?

How is TVET influencing a decision to migrate? *Write answers on flip chart.*

4) Employment

What are the work opportunities for youth in northern Uganda? *Listing on flip chart.*

How are work opportunities influencing a decision to migrate?

Individual reflection

Does any of you feel like they can relate to any of these topics? Have you ever thought about migrating?

Did you migrate? Is there anyone who would like to share their story?

Conclusion

Of all the things we discussed, what do you think is the most important?

Reviewing the purpose of the study with the participants and then asking the participants: have we missed anything? And, is there anything you would like to share or add to this discussion?