

The State of Career Services in Uganda

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An Overview of Career Services in Uganda

Uganda is a country located in East Africa with a population of 40 million people. Uganda is an agricultural country with 80% of the population working in agriculture and living in the rural areas. The country boasts bountiful supplies of natural resources such as fertile soil, coffee, and minerals, as well as untapped oil reserves. It is well known for its mountain gorilla population, mild weather, and is the host of the source of the River Nile. Uganda is one of the world's youngest countries in terms of age of population, with 55% of the population below the age of 15 and 78% of the population below 30 years old. The unemployment rate is 83% for graduates with a post-secondary degree (Government of Uganda, 2017).

The status quo indicates an urgent need for career services: the country is rich in resources but lacks available jobs for post-secondary graduates (International Youth Foundation, 2011). While career guidance services have been established in the USA for over 100 years, there is no formalized training of service providers and no system of providing services at different stages of an individual's growth or level of study in Uganda and many other African countries. There is demand among stakeholders regarding the need for career services, from the country President to the entire population, but there have not yet been significant steps taken in establishing systems to educate service providers and ensure that the population receives effective career services.

Settings

In 2008, the Uganda Ministry of Education established the Department of Guidance and Counseling (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017). The department mandate is to provide strategic and technical leadership, guidance, advice and strategies in all matters of guidance and counseling, which includes HIV/AIDS mitigation, psychosocial concerns, and support services within the entire education and training sector, in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017). According to Ministry of Education and Sports (2017), the objectives of the department are to:

- Promote, support, and ensure the provision of quality guidance and counseling including psychosocial services in the entire education sector;
- Sensitize all stakeholders and advocate for policies and strategies to effectively address issues of guidance and counseling, HIV/AIDS and other psychosocial

- concerns in the entire education sector;
- Develop and maintain an up-to-date National Data Bank and information system on the issues/status of career guidance, counseling, placement of school leavers, HIV/AIDS and other psychosocial trends and services in schools/institutions so as to guide decision making and advice to stakeholders; and
- Initiate and coordinate the provision of guidance and counseling in schools/institutions. (“Objectives,” para. 1)

The department has a number of key functions namely (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017):

- Develop policies, strategies, plans and guidelines for the implementation and provision of guidance and counseling services;
- Carry out advocacy, sensitization and information dissemination programs to raise awareness of the needs and magnitude of issues regarding career guidance services and counseling/psychosocial services in educational institutions;
- Ensure training and retraining/refresher programs for teachers, counselors, and other stakeholders in both government and private educational institutions to develop their capacity to ensure that guidance and counseling is effectively provided in schools in collaboration with teacher education, National Curriculum Development Centre, training institutions, district, and Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development;
- Advise on and ensure provision of appropriate materials in respect to guidance and counseling service provision;
- Initiate and conduct workshops, seminars for in-service teachers/tutors and other practicing personnel;
- Guide and support any initiative for promoting guidance and counseling services;
- Provide linkages with organizations and other bodies in the region and internationally;
- Establish an information/data bank on psychosocial and career information;
- Conduct research and studies on career guidance, counseling services, psychosocial difficulties/challenges, and deviant behaviors to establish the extent of the problems and propose how to manage them;
- Coordinate placement of students with various levels of education;
- Organize national annual career fairs and expos to ensure schools and regional organizations hold career days/events;
- Initiate programs and coordinate strategies for HIV prevention, care and support within the sector;
- Initiate and ensure implementation of programs and interventions to address deviant behavior, trauma and stress management in school and the entire sector;
- Initiative programs to address concerns that cut across programs, such as Safe Schools Initiatives, Peace -initiatives/Education, Gender, Environment, Human Rights and Culture, etc.;
- Monitor, evaluate and offer supportive supervision on policies and implementation of programs;
- Provide guidelines on referral services for the entire sector; and

- Develop job-shadow program and other initiatives to strengthen career explorations and monitor their implementation. (“Key functions,” para. 1)

In spite of the mandates of the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, the department provides little direction or oversight on the provision of career services in general, with some confusion regarding which staff provides counseling services (Masereje, 2016). As such, this article is somewhat limited in information given that the concept of career services in Uganda is relatively new.

K-12 (in-school youth)

Career services in Uganda generally start in high school, with a few services in some higher education institutions. The focus of this manuscript is on these two levels. There are some informal career services provided by teachers, parents, and family. Generally, students are only exposed to certain jobs, so youth do not fully know their occupational options. Family obligations impact the ability to go to college and many do not go far with education, instead staying at home to work on the family property. In addition, many young people in rural areas lack access to higher education.

Each school picks a teacher or two to be in charge of career guidance; however, the teacher is not provided any form of training (Odyek, 2009). This means that any teacher could be charged with responsibility for career services in a school. As a result of the lack of standardization of services and oversight from the Ministry of Education, there are also many “self-styled” career coaches. These career coaches serve as career experts without any formal training in providing career services. Much of what such people provide are “talks.” The majority of career services provided in Ugandan schools are speaker-based, where a school invites someone, perhaps a professional in a given field, to speak to the students about a particular career. In this sense, career services are provided as an event and not a process.

College and university students

The Counseling and Guidance Centre at Makerere University was established in 1989. The center’s main objective is to provide general counseling and career services as one of the services to the 40,000 undergraduate and graduate students (Makerere University Counseling and Guidance Centre, 2017). There is not yet much that has been done to develop career services in the higher education sector. Makerere University is the only university that has set up career services, but even then, the services are lacking due to budget constraints and shortage of trained professionals. To overcome these challenges, the Counseling and Guidance Center has established partnerships with other universities and organizations outside Uganda. There is still much that could be done. For example, academic majors are mostly chosen based on academic performance and not interests or skills, leaving many college students doing something they are good at but are not interested in.

Partnerships are critical in the work of the Counseling and Guidance Center. When university and country resources are lacking, partnerships have helped the Counseling and Guidance Center continue its services and grow in some areas. The Counseling and Guidance Center has built several partnerships with other organizations, including the National Career

Development Association (NCDA), the Florida State University Career Center, and the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX). The first author joined NCDA in 2015 and has sought active collaboration with various committees and other members. Between January – March 2015, the first author was a scholar-in-residence at the Florida State University Career Center in order to learn about career services in the United States with the intention of adopting or adapting those services in Uganda. This opportunity was a scholarship by IREX-UASP through funding from the Carnegie Foundation. Faculty from the FSU Career Center continue to be very supportive in providing consultation regarding skills, materials, advice on building career services and in jointly applying for grants. In July 2016, FSU PhD student Julia Kronholz worked with the Counseling and Guidance Center where she helped the center in training 30 Makerere University faculty and staff in providing career guidance. She also conducted an employer survey that produced outstanding results that have been shared with staff, university administration, and employers. This exchange was made possible through a grant from the Florida State University College of Education.

In addition, the Counseling and Guidance Centre has received grants to initiate career services. For example, in May 2015, the Centre won a competitive \$5,000 USD IREX grant to initiate career services to prospective Makerere University students. Then, in October 2016, the Centre established a partnership with IREX and the Education Design Lab based in Washington, D.C. The Counseling and Guidance Centre is leading in developing the oral communications digital badge. This content will be free to any university across the world that wants to build oral communication skills among its students, with the goal of enhancing transferable skills of the global higher education graduates. Finally, the Counseling and Guidance Centre has also partnered with other local organizations aiming at improving chances of employment and creating enterprises, for example, the Readytowork campaign sponsored by Barclays Bank. As evidenced, partnerships are a critical ingredient in developing career services in Uganda.

Employed adults, unemployed adults, and other groups

In Uganda, career services are believed to be services needed by youth and college students, particularly those in secondary schools and institutions of higher education. However, when considering Uganda's unemployment rates, this service is critical for the entire population. Career services would benefit adults who are working, retiring, or unemployed. Career services would also benefit veterans, people with disabilities, people with little formal education, and so on. Uganda's national president, Yoweri Museveni, continually talks about the need for career services, but even acknowledging the need for services, there is no formalized system to provide career services. The government has not taken serious steps to ensure there are trained people to provide career services in schools or set up structures to provide and monitor the services. Thus, even for those schools or organizations that offer career services, each school does so in its own format with no formal system. There is also no follow up to determine the effectiveness of the service by the service providers.

Nsubuga (2011) wrote an article in one of Uganda's leading daily news outlets, *The Daily Monitor*, posing a question on whether the current mode of career services in Uganda are relevant to the service recipients and country as a whole. This same question can still be asked and there is no current indication that current career services are effective. There is almost no

research done in the career services field within a Ugandan context. In 2005, when the first author completed a study on career indecision, self-efficacy, and sex among senior secondary school students, there was hardly any relevant, country-specific research to reference. The literature that exists is focused on secondary schools with a few studies on higher education, but there is a lack of literature on other populations within the Ugandan or East African context. This greatly limits the ability to develop well-informed service-delivery models in Uganda.

Challenges in Providing Career Services in Uganda

Lack of career information is an immense barrier to the youth and college population. A 2012 report found that among high school graduates joining institutions of higher education, the major cause of career indecision was lack of career information (Action Aid, 2012). As a country, Uganda still does not have easy access to information due to a lack of infrastructure and technological advances (e.g., internet access). For some students, access to information is made more difficult because of where they live. In most of the rural areas there is no access to computers and electricity; therefore online materials cannot be easily accessed. Additionally, there is an absence of any printed materials to distribute to the general population. The Uganda Ministry of Education's Department of Guidance and Counseling developed one guiding material, the Career Guidance Handbook, but it is not comprehensive enough. Moreover, each high school received too few copies and as a result, are often traced to head teachers' offices gathering dust. Many of those books have not been put to use and there is no follow up on the reasons the books are not being used. Currently, it is the only standardized written material available for Ugandans.

The Uganda National Council of Higher Education (NCHE) is mandated by law to ensure that career services are provided to students in higher institutions of learning. However, these laws and mandates are not enforced, especially in regards to providing career services. Problems with the career development process begin, for many students, during high school. The focus of most high schools is academics, specifically, grades and performances on standardized tests. If a student pursues university admission, most universities focus solely on students' academic scores and subjects from high school. As a result, students are assigned to academic majors that do not consider interests, values, or skills. There is no career counseling or assessment across different levels of schooling. This makes it difficult for young people to be prepared for the world of work as many students find themselves involved in subjects in which they have no interest.

Laws, regulations, or policies governing qualifications needed to provide career services

The Uganda Ministry of Education requires that each secondary school provides career services. However, there is nothing done to facilitate or monitor the process of providing the service, leaving each secondary school to do what the administration believes will work. Each school picks a teacher to be in charge of career guidance, but this teacher is not provided any form of training (H. Nsuguba, personal communication, November 2, 2016).

Although the Ministry of Education lacks oversight regarding career services, there is an indication that the Ugandan government is committed to improving the standards of service

providers. In 2010, the government secured a loan from the African Development Bank to provide a pilot training for career masters from 70 schools within Uganda in career counseling skills. The training of career masters was a short training and participants received certificates. The president of Uganda has expressed his interest in ensuring that career services are provided in an effective and efficient manner. Despite the challenges, the Ugandan population and government recognize the urgency of providing career services. Hopefully this will lead to additional training for services providers and establishing standards for the delivery of career services.

Credentials of Career Services Providers

In Uganda there are no credentialing institutions or associations of career service providers. The few professionals with credentials have credentials from other countries such as the Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) certification provided through the Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE). There are no established figures regarding the number of people who have credentials in providing career services in Uganda. Personal anecdotes seem to be the only way to determine if there are other career professionals in Uganda. The first author has not found any other professionals in Uganda with a career service provider qualification apart from himself.

Training Providers

There have been scattered training opportunities for people intending to gain expertise in providing career services. There are two short-term career services training opportunities that are known. The first was the 2010 training of career masters – a one-week course by the consultants hired by the Uganda Ministry of Education (2017). The second was the “Innovative Approaches to Career Development and Planning” course which ran from July to August 2015. This course was organized for career masters by the Counseling and Guidance Centre at Makerere University. Both trainings were short term and certificate courses. In total, there were 30 career masters trained during the two short-term career service training opportunities. There are also many counselors who provide career counseling services since career counseling is included in the counselor training curriculum as a course unit.

Two career-related courses are included in the training curriculum for the bachelor’s degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Makerere University: Occupational Counseling and Career Development, and Employment and Career Counseling and Development. The first course gives the student the basic foundations in career counseling, which enables students to understand and assess issues related to personal and career growth and development. The course is taught lecture-style, with specific topics covered, including theories of career development, career life planning, career guidance programs, career barriers, challenges in career management, job searching, and functional and transferable skills. The second course is taught in a seminar style and focuses on the organizational impact of career development. This includes worker characteristics, work/life balance, consultation, assessment in career counseling, employee counseling, global issues in career development, and ethical issues in workplace counseling.

Future Direction for Career Services in Uganda

With challenge comes opportunity. One opportunity for career services in Uganda is the formal development of career services established at Makerere University, the oldest and largest university in the East African community. Due to the need for career services in Uganda, the director of Makerere Career Services has taken an interest in training as a Career Development Facilitator through the National Career Development Association. Makerere University students now can access career services before joining the university, through matriculation, and upon graduation. The hope is that the creation of this office will bring about a multiplier effect in other universities. Staff from the Counseling and Guidance Center have visited and consulted with other universities in Uganda. In addition, efforts have been made to popularize career services across the country through writing articles, appearing on TV and radio talk shows and visiting schools to interest school administrators in the need for increased investment in providing career services.

The world is a global village and Uganda is part of the village. Career services - as provided in other countries and by professionally trained people - are needed now in Uganda. A needs assessment should be completed to understand what resources are available in Uganda, to assess the best modes of accessible service-delivery, understand the skills gaps of service providers, and assess the effectiveness of the career services that are being provided. There is need for credentialing to protect the population from being harmed by “quacks” who come on board as experts because they identify a need.

Conclusion

Career services in Uganda are greatly needed but there have not been serious efforts to develop the services. People across the lifespan struggle with career related issues without services whatsoever. Unfortunately, the limited services currently provided are not well streamlined. There is also very little research in career services within the Ugandan context. There are many opportunities for the growth of the service because there is a great need. The main challenge in forming well-established career services in Uganda is that many of the people at the decision-making levels do not have a comprehensive understanding of career services. The country has no qualified career services providers and there have not been serious steps taken to train people at a national level and set guidelines for providing career services at different educational levels. These challenges indicate there is much opportunity for growth. With continued partnership with NCDA, we believe this is possible. The whole country realizes there is need to provide career services. Every indicator shows the time is ripe to initiate career services in the country.

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