



CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme

## Empowering Ugandan Citizens to Access Information, Engaging the Youth in Policy Making and Promoting Entrepreneurship

*Phionah Kanyorobe*



**Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa with the world's youngest population, with approximately 78% of its population of over 45 million being below the age of 30 (the youth).**

Meanwhile, approximately 60% of the electorate is comprised of the youth, yet they are usually left out of decision-making processes concerning developmental issues. Notwithstanding that Uganda is one of the few African countries with a national access to information law, most Ugandan citizens lack access to government-held information that directly impacts them, despite this being a fundamental and cross-cutting human right. Meanwhile the country faces the burden of hosting thousands of refugees which presents a challenge but also an opportunity to improve socio-economic policies to promote economic growth and improve livelihoods. At the forefront of planning and implementing of innovative initiatives to address these impediments to socio-economic prosperity in Uganda is Phionah, a 2016 Commonwealth Scholar who studied for a Master's degree in Development Management at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She has been instrumental in leading initiatives such as Youth4Policy Fellowship Programme that

promotes the engagement of the youth in policymaking, and the Responsive Citizens of Uganda for Effective Governance project aimed at empowering Ugandan Citizens to exercise their rights to access information and improving government accountability. Phionah also led the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Initiative with the focus to improve entrepreneurship in Uganda and boost the economy.



Open Law Ghana workshop in February 2016.

**Phionah Kanyorobe** from Uganda was awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship to study for a Master's degree in Development Management at London School of Economics and Political Science in 2016. Since completing her studies, she has been instrumental in accelerating the implementation of Access To Information (ATI) Act of 2005 and its regulations of 2011 as prescribed in the Constitution of Uganda. She led the Responsive Citizens of Uganda for Effective Governance project-which has reached 30 districts in Uganda- to train and empower citizens of Uganda to exercise their rights to access and request for information from public officials. As a Programme Manager at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Phionah led the Youth4Policy Fellowship Programme that promoted youth leaders to research and analyse specific policy questions and influence policy change. She also contributed to the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Initiative which influenced better planning for investment and entrepreneurship growth in the country. Phionah is an active member of the LSE Programme for African Leadership (Pal) and of the Commonwealth Alumni Network and is a Fellow of President Obama's Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI).

## Becoming a Development Practitioner

Prior to taking up a Commonwealth Scholarship to study for a Master's degree in Development Management at London School of Economics and Political Science in 2016, Phionah had a clear sense of what she wanted to achieve, and how it would benefit her home country of Uganda.

**'A degree in Development Management from LSE will equip me with knowledge and skills in development planning, policy design and analysis, monitoring and evaluation which I intend to use to contribute towards Uganda's efforts to achieve SDGs like ending poverty and creating employment opportunities. Furthermore, joining the prestigious network of Commonwealth Scholars will enable me to share experiences and propel my ability to foster social and economic transformation through policy analysis and innovation.'**

Upon returning home following the Scholarship, the Commonwealth Alumnus, Phionah worked as a consultant for Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS). As part of her work, she conducted a research study to investigate the economic impact of hosting refugees in Uganda. The evidence on the economic value of refugees was used to streamline Uganda's open-door policy in the Department of Refugees in the Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda.

Shortly after, she joined the Centre for Development Alternatives. Founded by three alumni from the London School of Economics and Political Science who studied the same course as Phionah under the London School of Economics Programme for African Leadership Scholarship (PfAL), the Centre for Development Alternatives works with public and private stakeholders to support innovative initiatives for sustainable and inclusive transformation of African economies.

**'I was able to get this position because of the connections I made while on Scholarship and having gone through the same school [LSE] with the co-founders, and them needing someone to serve as an associate worked in my favour.'**

As a Research Associate, Phionah led the Youth4Policy Fellowship Programme, an initiative that serves as a capacity development lab for youth leaders with a motivation to research and analyse specific policy questions to influence policy change. She also supported the implementation of the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Initiative - a two-phase initiative aimed at designing and implementing a strategy to boost entrepreneurship in two districts of Uganda, Kampala and Gulu.

In 2019, Phionah joined the Hub for Investigative Media where she managed a Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) funded project that supported the acceleration of the implementation of the Access To Information (ATI) Act

of 2005, embedded in Article 41 of the Constitution of Uganda. In line with the provisions of this law, the project aimed at empowering citizens of Uganda to exercise their rights to access information using the Access to Information Law.

**'My work ethics and productivity have greatly been improving over the last two years, having had an international exposure with high level professionalism in the UK. My time management has improved and my world view has changed too. I have tackled development challenges in my field differently.'**

She currently works as a Financial Advisor on life insurance policies at Prudential Assurance Uganda Limited where she leads training and supports clients for life insurance policies.

## Investigating the Economic Impact of Hosting Refugees in Uganda

Uganda is a hub for thousands of refugees mainly from sub-Saharan Africa. The United Nations Refugee Agency reported that Uganda was hosting over 1.5 million refugees and asylum-seekers in 2021 alone, most of whom originated from Burundi, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The question that has remained unanswered for a long time is: are refugees an economic burden or an investment for Uganda?

Upon returning home following the Scholarship, Commonwealth Alumnus Phionah conducted a research study to investigate the economic impact of hosting refugees in Uganda, as part of her consultancy work with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS).

**'During my Scholarship, I had consultancy as part of the course. To do this project, I drew from the experience that I got from the Scholarship on organising online interviews, presenting results and handling extensive consultancy which was key for this assignment.'**

Her research study revealed that a large proportion of the refugees in Uganda were involved in a range of economic activities including start-up businesses which have created employment for the Ugandans and contributes to improving the economy of the country.

**'In 2018, when I carried out a study on the economic impact of hosting refugees for the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, I made several references and reflections to the research methods we studied during my Master's course. The interviews I conducted were ethically done due to the research ethics I was introduced to in my research course at LSE. The research reports I write are of better quality than before. I attribute that to the Scholarship.'**

This study contributed to the evidence that contributed to the Open-Door conference held in Uganda in 2018. Moreover, the evidence was used to streamline Uganda's open-door policy in the department of refugees in the Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda.

## Inclusive Decision-Making: Empowering Youth to Influence Policy Changes

In collaboration with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Uganda and South Sudan [a political foundation that promotes democracy, the rule of law and a social market economy], the Centre for Development Alternatives offer a Youth4Policy Fellowship Programme with the aim to build capacity of talented youth leaders with a motivation to research and analyse specific policy questions from a youth perspective on areas such as the economy, education, environment, human rights and social development.

As part of this programme, Fellows undergo six months training on policy research and analysis, strategic communication and public advocacy. Moreover, while training the Fellows are allocated a mentor who is an expert in their subject area to guide and advise the Fellows on developing their independent policy research and evidence-based policy positions. This approach gives the youth a platform to engage with relevant stakeholders and empower them to shape and influence the public policy discourse and decision-making in Uganda.

**'While on my Scholarship, because I was doing development management, I learnt that people have the power to change things.'**

As a Programme Manager for Youth4Policy, Phionah supported 12 Fellows through training workshops and mentorship. She has supported the Fellows to research and develop policy papers on various pertinent policy issues in Uganda, these have been published and continue to contribute to the policy formulation process in Uganda.



Phionah conducting a policy development seminar for the Youth4Policy Programme.

Consequently, the Fellows have been invited to present their policy recommendations to different government meetings to contribute to policy. To effectively run workshops and train the youth for the Youth4Policy programme, Phionah constantly draws from the knowledge and skills honed on Scholarship.

**'When I was on Scholarship, we had class presentations that sharpened my presentation skills that I was able to use on this assignment. Also, being part of the Programme for African Leadership at LSE, I participated in debates and dialogues and this boosted my confidence.'**

Giving an example of a Fellow who received trained under the Youth4Policy, Phionah demonstrated the impact of the Fellowship programme as follows:

**'The policy research conducted by one of the Fellows focused on Youth Livelihood Programme which is one of the biggest government programmes on youth poverty eradication which brings youth together in groups and they're given funds to implement projects. The Fellow identified important areas of improvement. One of them was that the groups were not working properly because of lack of a common interest. I organised a meeting with some of the stakeholders from the Ministry of Agriculture and Finance to which the Fellow presented her findings. Her findings were taken up and have contributed to better management of the Youth Livelihood Programme.'**



Training of Journalists on how to use the ATI Law in their work.

Phionah added that in collaboration with the Media Challenge Initiative - a youth-driven organisation that trains journalists in Africa through mentorship and experiential peer-to-peer learning- she spearheaded the production of 'Spotlight,' a podcast that features the Fellows' policy research to create awareness on policy issues and to demonstrate how the youth are influencing policies to address pressing societal problems.



## Promoting Economic Growth in Uganda: Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Initiative

While at the Centre for Development Alternatives, Phionah also participated in the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Initiative (EEI) phase 1 with the focus to improve entrepreneurship in Uganda. Commissioned by Koltai and Company Limited and Aspen Network of Developing Entrepreneurs, the project investigated how current entrepreneurs were operating, including identifying challenges faced by entrepreneurs as well as some best practices.

Surveys were conducted with 168 high-growth Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and 80 key stakeholders were interviewed to understand their experiences with the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Phionah's team also conducted workshops which brought together 200 stakeholders involved in supporting businesses. As part of this project, current policies, programmes, and organisations supporting high-growth SMEs were mapped and assessed and a comprehensive diagnosis on constraints to firm growth was carried out. Phionah and colleagues then designed a detailed multi-stakeholder strategy to lift these constraints.

**'I wrote my first thesis while on the Scholarship, the whole package has come in handy for me and this enabled me to do better research. The confidence that I gained while on the Scholarship is incredible.'**

The report was used by the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE) to implement phase II of the Uganda Entrepreneurial ecosystem that started in 2019. The findings were also incorporated by the Private Sector Foundation Uganda and other actors to promote entrepreneurship growth in the country.

## Promoting Uganda Citizens to Exercise their Right of Access to Information

In her role as a project manager for Hub for Investigative Media, Phionah led the Responsive Citizens of Uganda for Effective Governance project. Funded by the Democratic Governance Facility, this project promotes the right of access to information for Uganda citizens, such as information on budgets and reports from cabinet meetings with the aim to improve government accountability. It has been implemented in 30 districts of Uganda with which a memorandum of understanding was signed for smooth implementation of the project. The Commonwealth Alumnus Phionah spoke proudly of how she often draws from the knowledge and skills honed on Scholarship to deliver her project tasks:

**'I have often used the knowledge I got from the NGOs and Social Policy course that I studied during my Scholarship. I refer to development theories and find a way to make them relevant to my work in governance. Also, having gone through development management under the Scholarship and getting to learn the importance of involving communities and being introduced to institutions and their development, that knowledge enabled me to effectively deliver on this multi-district project.'**



Training of local leaders on ATI Law in Rukungiri District.

As an innovative project manager, Phionah was very instrumental in facilitating knowledge sharing activities such as training district leaders to provide information in accordance with the law, and empowering citizens to exercise their right to access information by demanding this information from their leaders.



Training participants analysing the access to information brochure.

She also led public dialogues and radio talk shows to create awareness on Access To Information Law. District leaders and some of the citizens participated in the radio programme to discuss the provisions of this Law and how Ugandans can benefit from it.

‘To a big extent, my Commonwealth Scholarship has positively affected the way I interact with these groups, because the Scholarship provided me the opportunity to get exposed to different people from all over the world with whom I interacted and learnt from, which raised my self-confidence and improved my communication skills.’

Phionah revealed some of the successes of these activities on awareness raising on the citizen’s rights to information and the extent to which this advocacy work has reached the Ugandan communities.

Phionah spearheaded **12** public dialogues in **12** districts, where citizens got a platform to interact with their leaders on issues of accountability. She has been on the panel for **12** radio talk shows to explain to the public the provisions of the Access To Information Law and its regulations. The project has trained over **173** journalists on how to use the law in their journalistic work, **200** local government leaders, **360** citizen representatives and several marginalised groups on the use of the Law. In a period of **18** months, over **276** access to information request forms have been presented by citizens to their leaders to access public information especially district budgets and procurement records to increase government accountability.

At the end of the project, Phionah and colleagues evaluated the programme, and established that 70% of the people that were trained on their rights to access information had exercised their rights and requested information from public officials.

‘My confidence and public speaking skills improved. The confidence that I gained enabled me to strongly reach out to these leaders and other government officials to partner with us and be part of the project. When we realised there was a need to make some changes in the law, we had a meeting with the speaker of parliament and some of the areas in the law were amended.’

The work of Phionah and colleagues also led to the reduction of the fee that is charged to the citizens to access information.



Access to information team with musicians that sensitised the public on ATI Law through music.

## Securing the Future: Life Insurance Policies

Phionah currently works as a Financial Advisor at Prudential Assurance Uganda Limited where she identifies potential clients and leads presentations and training sessions on long-term saving and investment plans on life insurance.

‘People identify their future goals and I help them decide how much money they’ll be saving every month for them to reach their goal. I have helped 38 parents to start saving for their children’s education and I have made them aware of investment policies.’

Apart from the technical skills that Phionah learned while on Scholarship, the Commonwealth Alumnus used the opportunity to build connections and establish long-lasting networks that she shares knowledge and ideas with and are incredibly supportive to her developmental work.

‘I’m very proud to have been part of the Programme for African Leadership at LSE because I have kept in touch with all the amazing young African people that went through LSE. I am continuing to learn greatly from my colleagues that I met at the London School of Economics, we have discussions and share ideas on developmental issues. I have been part of the Commonwealth activities organised by the British Council here in Uganda. Because of the connections with the Commonwealth Alumni, I have a bigger potential market for the life assurance policies. I really like having social networks, it’s one of the greatest achievements from my Scholarship.’

In addition, Phionah is still actively involved in activities organised by her former university college-London School of Economics.

‘Together with other alumni, I am still in touch with the Africa Centre at LSE. We organise events in our respective countries, which the centre supports financially and in other ways. We meet and deliberate on different developmental issues. I feel a deep sense of belonging because of the Scholarship.’

Phionah also serves as the Deputy Treasurer for the Uganda Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Alumni Association (UCSFAA).

Moreover, outside her formal employment, Phionah enjoys farming beetroot and mushroom with the aim of improving peoples’ nutrition and health in general. Looking ahead, Phionah hopes to continue making a meaningful contribution to the development of her country - Uganda.

#### More about Phionah Kanyorobe’s work

<https://youth4policy.org/our-first-policy-development-seminar-highlights/>



Phionah presenting at the Commonwealth Alumni Association annual general meeting in Uganda.

#### Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK

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