

A Market Survey Report on Handicraft Products in Gulu District - Uganda

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Abstract

The two-decade civil war in northern Uganda, which lasted from 1986 until 2006, Gulu district experienced violence that wrecked the rest of Acholiland. After the war, Gulu District witnessed rapid growth in slums where social conditions have worsened. There is a new population that is mostly young and extremely poor. Many of them are the new landless, unable to leave town and move back to rural areas, and thus without the hope of return that had sustained many of the wartime displaced, but also without hope of employment in town. A handful of these vulnerable groups have been engaged in handicraft production, unfortunately, in Uganda training in handicraft production has often been given little attention. Largely training in handicraft production is purely informal, often results into a skills mismatch between trainee and the world of work and lack of serious quality control standards. Umbrella of Hope Initiative (UHOPI) a local NGO operating in Gulu came up with the intervention of training these vulnerable groups in handicraft production with the aim that beneficiaries would be able to be self-reliant after acquiring the skills. The trainees were expected to venture into handicraft business with the hope that this would be a source of their livelihood. In order to ensure that handicraft business would bring sustainable development to the vulnerable groups, UHOPI commissioned a market survey in handicraft products in Gulu City. Questionnaires and interview guides were the tools that was used to collect the data. The Respondents indicated their views on; basic information on handicrafts, market for handicraft products, profitability of handicraft products and obtaining trainers in handicraft production. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. Qualitative responses were coded into themes and their frequencies obtained and triangulated in the aspects under study. The findings revealed that handicraft shoes and bags are the most demanded items in Uganda and particularly in Gulu city which is highly correlated with the handicraft items being trained in the region. It further revealed that there is ready market for these products within Gulu city and the country at large and most raw materials can easily be acquired locally.

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Also, handicraft items are very profitable especially door mats, bags and shoes. The survey recommended that UHOPI should: (i) train more youth in handicraft bags and shoes making since they create jobs for the youth and the markets are easily available; (ii) compare the raw materials got from Kampala and those locally made to produce bags, and identify the best raw materials that would make quality bags; (iii) engage more market vendors to come up with the actual start-up capital for making bags and shoes.

Keywords: Handicraft; Items; Skills; Products.

1. Introduction

For most of northern Uganda's two-decade civil war, which lasted from 1986 until 2006, Gulu district experienced violence that wrecked the rest of Acholiland. A study [1] revealed that tens of thousands were killed, tens of thousands abducted and waves of humanitarian crises left perhaps over 100,000 civilians dead due to the war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels and government forces. Over 700,000 Ugandan citizens were displaced as a result of the Ugandan government's conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army [2]. Today, the slums have continued to grow as a result of the war as well as the current rural urban migration thus worsening the living conditions in those resettlements. The new population is mostly of young people who form majority of urban poor. Many of these are landless, unable to return to their original homes in the rural areas. While they stay in town they are unable to fend for themselves. They lack the necessary education and employable skills in town. They find themselves exceedingly desperate and frustrated and are always disproportionately marginalized and excluded from modern economy. As the economy expands so is the disparity between the rich and the poor [1]. Umbrella of Hope Initiative (UHOPI) is a not-for profit local NGO in Gulu with over ten 15 years of community-based humanitarian and skills projects to support the less privileged. Recently, UHOPI received funding form the Spotlight Initiative through UN Women, and aims at improving the livelihoods of vulnerable groups of women, girls and youth in Gulu district in Northern Uganda through increased knowledge on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) and Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG), economic empowerment, acquisition of employable skills and GBV related services. One of UHOPI's specific intervention is training the vulnerable groups in handicraft production. Handicraft production is a major form of employment in many developing countries and often a significant part of the export economy. Northern Uganda has a wide array of handicraft products including basketry, mats, ceramics, beads, pottery, hand textiles and woven products, toys, jewelry, bags, ornaments, leather products, batiks and wood craft among others. The production of handicraft has a history in Acholi cultural practice. These items are produced in almost all the parts of Gulu district using locally available raw materials. Handicrafts production in Uganda is cultural, traditional and predominantly a cottage industry, engaged in by rural youth of both gender but largely by women folk, to supplement household income. Some of the distinct advantages offered by handicraft production are: minimal start-up capital, flexible work hours, the ability to work at home, and freedom to manage one's own business, handicrafts provide an ideal avenue for creative, independent Entrepreneurs and seasonal employment [3]. In Northern Uganda, like any other part of the country, training in handicraft production has often been given little attention. Largely training in handicraft production is purely informal. The tradition has been to hand over craftsmanship and skills from generation to generation by the skilled artisans. This tradition has waned considerably over time. Even though master

craftsmen can still be found, their numbers have diminished considerably. One of the weakness with this approach is that there is a skills mismatch between trainee and the world of work. Furthermore there is lack quality standards. To avert the risks, UHOPI intervened by training the vulnerable groups of women and youth (girls and boys) in handicraft production. In order to be sure of the type of handicraft business to venture in UHOPI instituted a market survey to determine the feasibility of handicraft production as a business in Gulu. The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. To establish the most common handicraft products in Gulu;
- ii. To ascertain the market for the handicraft products.
- iii. To determine the level of profitability of the handicraft products.
- iv. To establish the level of ease of getting competent trainers in handicraft production

2. Related work

A study to identify the existing art and craft products, to assess the level and pattern of consumption of the art and craft products in the Buganda Road African village and to examine the different factors influencing consumer choice of art and craft products was conducted [4]. It was established that a number of art and craft products are sold at Buganda Road African Village include textile, wood and paper craft, ceramics, leather, jewelry and ornament. It was found out that visitors are influenced by a number of factors to buy products from African village including good quality products, affordable prices, and good value of money, souvenir to remember Uganda, usefulness of the product not being bulky and attractiveness of the product. The study in [5] examined challenges faced by handicraft businesses in implementing product promotion strategies. The findings revealed that personal selling is the effective strategy and the other promotion strategies like newspapers, radio, billboards, television, magazine, public relations, email and internet use, personal selling and trade fairs are not commonly applicable. The authors in [6] investigated the challenges faced by Ugandan Art/Craft Women in International Markets. The study established that the main challenge that Ugandan art/craft women face is identifying and accessing support from the government. A study in [7] was conducted to establish whether handicraft production in Botswana is as important as other non-farm, small-scale industries. This study showed that the handicraft industry had an overall positive impact on individuals working in the sector, their families and communities, particularly rural dwellers, those with little or no formal education and other marginalized people. Benefits for individual producers and enterprises in rural areas are greater than in urban areas. Producers having access to consistent purchasing by formal craft organizations or by tourists benefit the most.

3. Methodology

The Trainees responded to a questionnaire, while the Trainers and key respondents participated in a guided interview. Respondents indicated their views on; basic information on handicrafts, market for handicraft products, profitability of handicraft products and obtaining trainers in handicraft production. A few trainers in sanitary pads making also gave their opinions. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. Qualitative responses were coded into themes and their frequencies obtained and triangulated in the aspects under study.

3.1. Structure of the sample

Participants in the survey included; trainees from four community organizations, key informants who comprised of trainers, district and organizations’ administrators and market vendors. Table 1 shows the distribution of the market survey respondents.

Table 1: Category of respondents and organization of placement.

S/N	Category		Key informants	
1	Community Organisations	Trainees	Trainers	Key Respondents
	War Victims	57	03	04
	South Sudanese	26	00	00
	Lacan Pecan	23	04	05
	Generation in Action	10	01	00
2	Market Vendors			10
3	Community leaders			05
	Total	116 (78.4%)	08 (5.4%)	24 (16.2%)

Table 1 shows that over seven in ten (78%) of the respondents in the survey were trainees.

3.2. The Education Level of trainee

The education level of the trainees is as shown in Figure 1. Majority of the respondents achieved P7 as their highest level of education. This is 54.5% of all the respondents.

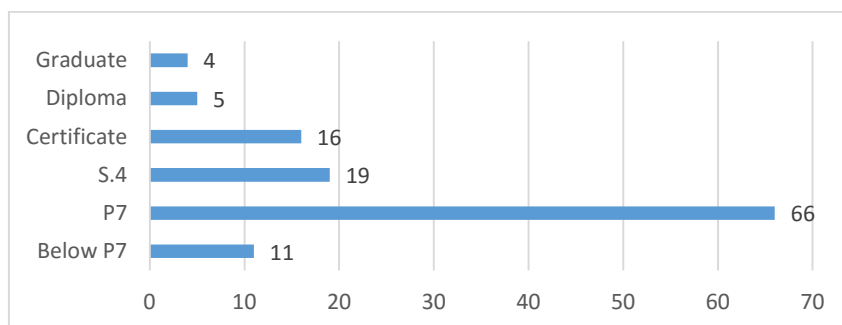


Figure 1: Education Level of Trainees.

3.3. Gender Distribution

Females were majority in the survey and represented 74% of trainees depicting a ratio of 3:1 (female: male) as shown in Figure 2.

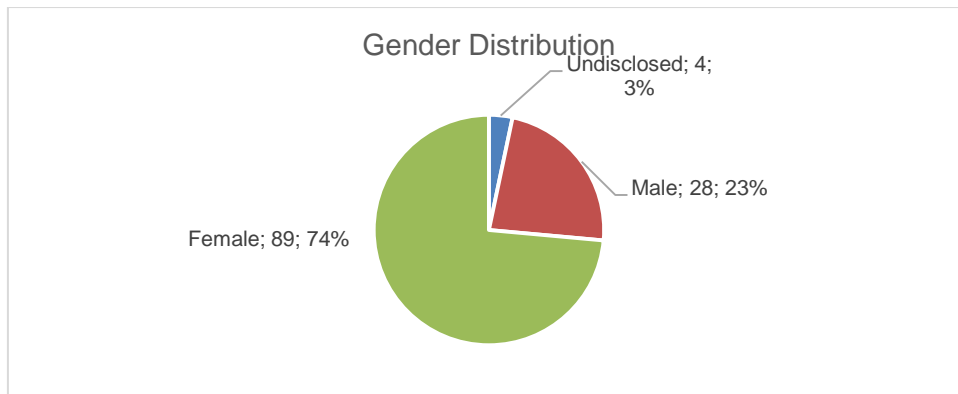


Figure 2: Gender Distribution.

4. Findings

The findings of the survey are based on: basic information on handicrafts, market for handicraft products, profitability of handicraft products and trainers in handicraft production.

4.1. Basic Information on handicrafts Production in Gulu city

The Trainers indicated the commonly used household crafts in Gulu as shown in Figure 3. Figure 3 shows that, 72 (43%) of the responses indicated that Craft shoes are the most commonly used Crafts in Gulu followed by Bags with 66 responses (40%), and Baskets (28) are the least commonly used crafts in Gulu representing 17% of the responses. The trainees also mentioned the crafts they are trained to make, results are shown in Table 2.

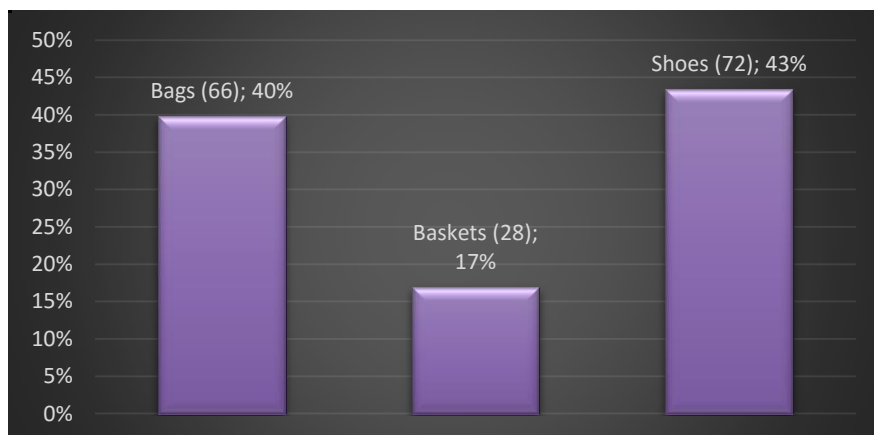


Figure 3: Crafts commonly used by Households in Gulu, Crafts commonly used by Households in Gulu

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Table 2: Craft items trained by community organizations in Gulu

Organization	Frequency/ Percentage	Craft item trained to make				Total
		Undisclosed	Bags	Baskets	Shoes	
Generation in Action	Frequency	4	0	6	0	10
	Percentage	40%	0%	60%	0%	
Lacan Pecan	Frequency	0	0	22	0	22
	Percentage		0%	100%	0%	
South Sudanese	Frequency	0	17	0	9	26
	Percentage		65%	0%	35%	
War Victims	Frequency	5	20	0	37	63
	Percentage	8%	32%	0%	59%	
Total		9	37	28	47	121

Table 2 shows that six trainees from Generation in Action were trained to make baskets. While all the 22 trainees from Lacan Pecan were trained to make baskets. 17 Trainees from South Sudan group were trained to make bags representing 65%, while 9 were trained to make shoes representing 35% of the total 26 respondents from the South Sudan group. 37 Trainees from the War Victims’ group were trained to make shoes, representing 59%, and 20 respondents were trained to make bags, represented by 32% of the total 63 from War Victims. Overall, 47 trainees were trained to make shoes, 37 to make bags, 28 to make baskets, and 9 didn’t disclose what they were trained to make. Trainees further indicated the crafts they would like to make and the results are in Table 3

Table 3: Rate of Trainees Interest in craft items.

Organization	What craft would you make?				Total
	Bags	Baskets	Shoes	Undisclosed	
Generation in Action	0	5	0	5	10
Lacan Pecan	1	16	2	3	22
South Sudanese	16	0	9	1	26
War Victims	17	0	36	10	63
Total	34	21	47	19	121

According to the Table 3 respondents from Generation in Action would make baskets. Majority of respondents from Lacan could make Baskets too, while 16 respondents from the South Sudan group would make Bags than other items. Lastly, 36 respondents out of 63 respondents from War Victims would make shoes compared to other items. Majority of the trainees would prefer to make shoes (47) followed by bags (34) and these are the commonly used craft items in Gulu city as well as the items they are trained in. Key informants in the study

indicated craft items with high demand in Uganda. More market vendors (5) and community leaders (4) mentioned shoes followed by bags. While community organization leaders indicated bags (6) closely followed by shoes (5). Information from market vendors align with other key informants, trainees and community organization trainers. The information attained reveal the fact that craft shoes are the most demanded items in Gulu city and in Uganda as a whole.

4.2. Market for the handicraft Products in Gulu city

Trainees gave information on their expectations from hand craft training. The responses are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Trainees expectations from handicraft training.

How will training in handicraft making Help you	organization				
	Generation in Action	Lacan	South Sudanese	War Victims	Overall
Acquiring Skills	67%	11%	8%	16%	15%
Attract donors once they see the products	0%	3%	0%	0%	1%
Earn a living	0%	0%	4%	0%	1%
Empowerment	0%	3%	0%	2%	2%
Income generation	0%	26%	73%	54%	47%
Knowledge	17%	11%	8%	7%	9%
Poverty eradication	0%	20%	0%	0%	6%
Self-Employment	17%	26%	8%	21%	20%

Table 4 shows that, majority (67%) of respondents from Generation in Action expect to acquire skills in crafts making. Respondents from LACAN indicated Income generation and Self-employment (both 26%), as the outcome expected from training in making crafts. Majority (73% and 54% respectively) of the respondents from the South Sudan group and War Victims said that income generation is the help they expect from the craft making training. Lastly, majority of the respondents overall (across all the organizations) expect income generation as the help they would get from training in crafts making. The expected source of raw materials is as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Source of raw materials for handicraft items

Source of raw materials	Handicraft item trained to make			
	Bags	Baskets	Shoes	Overall
Don't Know	8%	14%	15%	13%
Gulu Market	0%	18%	57%	28%
Kampala	16%	36%	22%	23%
Markets	49%	18%	4%	23%
Ntungamo	0%	11%	0%	3%
Organization (War Victim)	19%	0%	0%	6%
Shops	3%	0%	0%	1%
Umbrella of Hope Initiative	5%	4%	2%	4%

49% of respondents noted that they could get materials for making bags from the market. 36% of the respondents noted that they would get material for making baskets from Kampala. 57% of the respondents noted that they would get material for making shoes from Gulu Market.

Table 6: Proposed markets for the handicraft products

Where would you sell these Products?	Handicraft item trained to make						Total	
	Bags		Baskets		Shoes			
Abroad	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Beyond Gulu	1	2%	5	12%	2	4%	8	6%
Don't Know	2	5%	3	7%	2	4%	7	5%
Gulu Community	30	73%	34	79%	47	90%	111	82%
Organizations	5	12%	1	2%	1	2%	7	5%
South Sudan	2	5%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%

According to Table 6, Majority of respondents making bags, baskets, and shoes noted that they would sell their products to Gulu community with 73%, 79% and 90% respectively. The expectations of trainees include attaining income generation and self-employment. The skills are in line with the objectives of UHOPI of improving the livelihood of vulnerable groups of girls and youth in the northern region of Uganda. The raw materials are readily available in Gulu as well as the market. *Key informants* indicated that the potential market for handicrafts was regarded very high: community leaders (3), market vendors (6) crafts. Six market vendors mentioned that shoes are sold in Gulu and four mentioned that bags are sold to tourists. In addition, more trainers (7) stated that they would buy raw materials beyond Gulu city, while six trainers would buy them from Gulu city. As regards raw materials, market vendors mentioned the following requirements for shoe making: rubber tyres, leather, nails and Glue. While bags need, sponge mattresses, beads, materials like Kitenge and door mats need thread, scissor, and papyrus. Respondents (market vendors-3, community leaders -3, trainers-7) further mentioned that raw materials for making craft shoes can be obtained from the local markets in Gulu, while others especially for bags and beads can be obtained from Kampala and Kenya (market vendors-5, community leaders-2, trainers-6). All key informants regarded the prospect of making craft as very high. One market vender mentioned that, “The demand for shoes is very high and the current stock does not meet the demand”. A community leader had this to say, “Handicraft business is employing majority of people after agriculture”. As far as trainers are concerned, six of them mentioned that the future of craft-making industry is in job creation. The market for handicraft products is very promising in Gulu city and Uganda at large as regarded by respondents. Raw materials are locally available and trainers in handicraft making are looking forward to acquire skill and get self-employment.

4.3. Profitability of handicraft Products in Gulu city

Respondents were asked to state the start-up capital, costs involved in operation and the level of profitability of craft items. The responses for the trainees, trainers, market vendors and other key respondents are presented in

that order.

4.3.1 Trainees

The average expected start-up capital required by Trainees is as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Start-up Capital required by Trainees to become self-employed

Handicraft item trained to make	How much start-up capital do you require to be self employed			
	Mean (UGX)	Median (UGX)	Minimum (UGX)	Maximum (UGX)
Bags	2,470,000	1,500,000	300,000	10,000,000
Baskets	3,956,522	3,000,000	500,000	10,000,000
Shoes	3,080,435	1,500,000	800,000	15,000,000

Table 8: Profitability of the different craft items per each organization

Organization	Items	Cost of making a single item (Average)	How much they would Sell (Average)	Profit/ Loss (UGX)	Explanation
Lacan Pecan	Baskets	50,000	19,000	-31,000	There is a possibility that a single basket costs a lot to make due to issues including transport, materials and others, but possibly profits are realized through production on a large scale
	Bags	38000	30000	-8000	According to the data, production of a single bag costs more than the selling value of the single bag. Profits are probably realized through selling many
	Shoes	45,000	15,000	-3,000	Once again, according to the data, production of a single shoe is more expensive than its selling value, due to the different costs involved like electricity, transport, material, etc. Profits are possibly realized through selling more shoes
South Sudanese	Bags	30,000	48,750	18,750	
	Shoes	13,000	20,000	7,000	
War Victims	Bags	35,000	50,000	15,000	
	Shoes	13,000	20,000	7,000	
Generation in Action					Didn't attach a value to the cost and sells

Table 7 shows that on average, trainees making baskets will require the highest amount of start-up capital which is 3,956,522 UGX followed by those making shoes and then bags. The table further shows the median, minimum and maximum capital required for the production of each item.

4.3.2 Market Vendors

Market vendors estimated the start-up capital for the craft item they trade in. The findings are reflected in Table 9.

Table 9: Start-up Capital for craft items suggested by market vendors

Handicraft items	Estimated start-up capital for each craft item		
	Mean (UGX)	Minimum (UGX)	Maximum (UGX)
Bags	1,300,000	800,000	3,000,000
Door mat	1,000,000	500,000	1,500,000
Shoes	1,212,500	150,000	3,500,000

According to market vendors, door mats have the lowest start-up capital, followed by shoes and bags as shown in Table 9. The level of profitability of craft items that market vendors deal in include:

- Door mat: 2 million per month
- Shoes: 5, 000ugx – 30,000 ugx per day
- Bags: At least 10,000 ugx per bag, 40,000 ugx per month and 1,200,000 ugx annually.

Estimated start-up capital of all handicraft items stated by market vendors is much lower than what the trainees indicated. Shoes have a slightly lower start-up capital than bags. It’s also noted that market vendors deal in door mats which are not popular in handicraft training institutions. This suggests that trainees may not be aware of the actual market costs.

4.4. Trainers of handicraft Products in Gulu city

Key informants were asked to mention the persons who train handicraft making and to determine: where to find reliable trainers and the cost of hiring a trainer. Responses on the personnel who trains are reflected in Table 10.

Table 10: Nature of handicraft trainers

Category of trainers	Key Informants			
	Community	Market Vendors	Trainers	Total
Local craftsmanship	5	3	2	10
Obtained from Kampala	1	3		4
Organisations provide	2	2	9	13

More key informants indicated that most of trainers originate from non-profit organization groups especially umbrella of Hope Initiatives. Others are identified from the local community as shown in Table 10.

Table 11: Competence of a handicraft maker

Competence skills	Key Informants			
	Market vendors	Community	Trainers	Total
Creativity	2	2		4
Experience	3	1		4
Training skills	1	1	2	4
Communication skills		2	1	3

The main competence skills identified in Table 11 are, creativity, experience and communication skills. All these are synonymous with local craftsmanship and trained personnel normally used by organizations.

Table 12: Availability of reliable handicraft trainers

	Community	Market Vendors	Trainers	Total
Readily available	2	6		8
Organisations handles	1	-		1
Obtained outside Gulu	2	-		2
Not easy	-	3	10	13

Trainers of handicraft materials are not easy to find, as 10 trainers mentioned in Table 12. However market vendors and community leaders indicate that they are readily available. This implies that the community is mainly focusing on local trainers while the trainers could be focusing on formal training. As regards to the costs of hiring a trainer, the price ranges from 70,000 ugx to 500,000 ugx per day as mentioned by community leaders. While a few trainers indicated 150,000 ugx to 200,000 ugx per day. Others indicated that it is negotiable.

Most key informants (7), most of whom were market vendors indicated that training would take one month, while more trainers talked of 2 weeks. The discrepancy in the range may depend on the type of craft item in the making. Trainers further mentioned the challenges encountered in the handicraft industry to be: inability to access good raw materials (7) and limited markets (6) for some products.

Table 13: Duration for one to master skills in craft making

Duration to master skills	Community	Market Vendors	Trainers	Total
2 weeks	1	1	4	6
1 month	1	5	1	7
3 months	1	1	2	4
6 months	1	1		2
Total	4	8		18

4.5. Sanitary Pad Making in Gulu city

Overall, 16 trainees responded to items regarding sanitary pads making. Out of these, 10 responses came from trainees from War Victims, while 5 came from Generation in Action group. Trainees were asked about whether they trained in soft skills as well. Responses are shown in Figure 4.

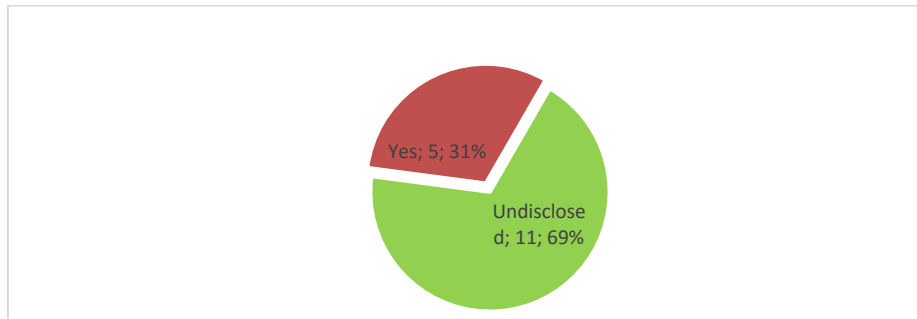


Figure 4: Participants trained in soft skills

Figure 4 shows that, 31% of the respondents agreed that they were trained in soft skills. While 69% of the respondents did not disclose their stand on this issue.

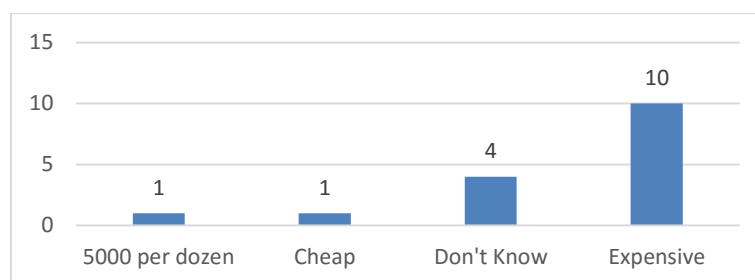


Figure 5: Cost of a re-usable sanitary pad

Figure 5 reflects that 10 trainees highlighted that the pads are expensive, without disclosing any amount of money. Only 1 respondent noted that they cost ugx 5000 per dozen.

Table 14: Benefits from Training in making reusable Sanitary Pads

How have you benefited from training in Reusable sanitary pads	Generation in Action	South Sudanese	War Victims
Acquired more skills	100%	0%	0%
New skills and Knowledge	0%	0%	40%
Not much	0%	0%	10%
Not much, training was not enough	0%	0%	50%

In Table 14, responses from Generation in Action group noted only acquiring more skills. The respondent from the South Sudanese group only noted that he benefited from the training without clarifying how they benefited. Lastly, Majority (50%) of respondents from War victims noted that they didn't benefit much because the training was not enough.

Table 15: Application of the Soft Skills

How have you applied the soft skills that you acquired?	Organization			Overall
	Generation in Action	South Sudanese	War Victims	
Making more pads	0%	0%	60%	38%
Making more pads and stitching cloth	100%	0%	0%	31%
Not yet	0%	100%	30%	25%
Teaching siblings and others in the community	0%	0%	10%	6%

Respondents from Generation in Action only noted that they have applied the soft skills by making more pads and stitching cloth. The respondent from South Sudanese group noted that she has not yet applied the soft skills learnt. Lastly, Majority (60%) of respondents from War Victims noted that they have applied the soft skills by making more pads. Overall, 38% of the respondents claimed that they have applied the soft skills by making more pads, plus 31% who make more pads and also stitch cloth.

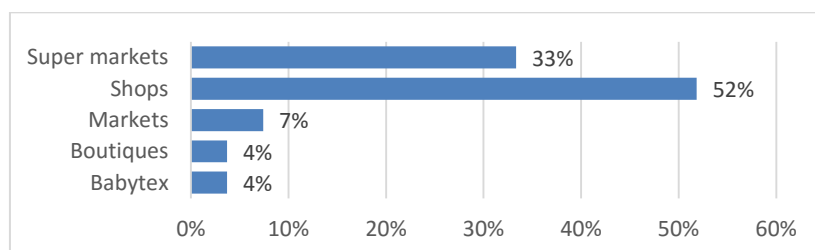


Figure 5: Selling Points (places) of reusable sanitary pads

Figure 5 shows that 52% of selling points of reusable sanitary pads are shops, followed by super markets at 33%. Trainees from most of the organizations are acquiring skills in sanitary pad making and already applying

them. However trainees from war victim organizations need more training in sanitary pads to be able to apply them effectively. On the other hand trainees should be enlightened on soft skills, majority do not seem to be able to define them.

5. Conclusions

Handicraft shoes and bags are the most demanded items in Uganda and particularly in Gulu city which is highly correlated with the handicraft items being trained in the region. The market for these products is very promising within Gulu city and the country at large, yet most raw materials can easily be acquired locally. Handicraft items are very profitable especially door mats, bags and shoes. Although trainers can be got locally in Gulu city, other may prefer the experienced ones from Kampala.

6. Recommendations and Future Work

The study made the following recommendations namely UHOPI should: (i) train more youth in handicraft bags and shoes making since they create jobs for the youth and the markets are easily available; (ii) compare the raw materials got from Kampala and those locally made to produce bags, and identify the best raw materials that would make quality bags; (iii) engage more market vendors to come up with a proper unit cost as a start - up capital for making bags and shoes. The study encountered shortcomings during data collection due to Ministry of Health Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures and guidelines that restricted the free interaction with large segments of the population. Therefore, in future work we recommend that a study be carried out that will address the following; commercial specifications or industry standards, customary business practices, commercial terms and conditions.

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