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**Living and Challenging Difference
on four Ugandan Campuses**

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Colophon

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Managing Diversity in African Universities

**Living and Challenging Difference on
four Ugandan Campuses**

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Caroline Suransky and Ute Seela

Editors of the *Pluralism Working Paper series*

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Editor's Preface

Over the years, one of the central foci of the Pluralism Knowledge Program in Uganda has been their emphasis on the youth, and more particularly, on how young people in Uganda are able and encouraged to engage with diversity and difference. Earlier research was conducted on the role and the relevance of the family and the school as environments where active pluralism can be created, valued and practiced. The research for the present paper was commissioned by the Cross Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) and carried out by Vusia Santa Izama. Further editorial work was done by CCFU and Kosmopolis staff.

The research of this interesting paper focusses on four universities and examines their policies and experiences with different forms of diversity. The authors believe that as “architects of knowledge’ and learning environments, universities play an important role in influencing ways in which pluralism is lived and promoted” and that “Ugandan universities increasingly engage with diversity through policies and practice, managing multicultural student bodies, as well as diverse academic and non-academic staff, and the theories and worldviews expounded by different faculties.” Empirical research was conducted at four public and private Ugandan universities, each characterized by different features such as its location (urban-rural, relatively peaceful or in a strife-torn region etc.), its world view foundations (secular or religious) and the diversity of the student body composition. The research questions focussed on (1) the perception, scope and experience of diversity by key actors at the university; (2) the universities’ practices, policies and codes of conduct; (3) the ways in which they relate to the policies and principles of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) of Uganda and their perceptions and experiences of diversity management and the particular challenges they face.

The paper starts with a brief introduction on the general context in which Ugandan universities are currently anchored as institutes for Higher Education in Africa and in Uganda in particular. Then the paper presents its main research findings and concludes that a number of cross-cutting realities have emerged. These realities and challenges, are thematically reviewed and highlight issues of ethnicity and language, religious affiliation, gender and economic status. The paper is full of quotes from those who were interviewed. These quotes interestingly illustrate the ways in which students and staff in the four universities understand and deal with diversity opportunities and challenges, both from individual – as well as from institutional perspectives. Each of the four universities is more elaborately described in separate vignettes which appear throughout the paper. These descriptions of students and staff personal perceptions and the more general institutional – and contextual circumstances of each university, give the reader much insight into how they deal with the challenges of diversity and pluralism.

At the end of the paper, the authors suggest several areas where improvement may be possible. They identify five categories for which they have recommendations. The first category addresses ‘policy frameworks and policy implementation’, the second one deals with the realm of ‘curriculum and extra-curricular activities’, followed by the need to actively develop appropriate ‘skills and attitudes’ of students and staff to deal with differences and the enhancement of ‘internal practices’ in which both staff and students engage with each other in constructive ways. Finally, they see possibilities to improve ‘inter-university dialogue’ about pluralism on campus and ways to monitor developments across universities.

Caroline Suransky

Chief editor of the *Pluralism Working Paper series* for the Pluralism Knowledge Programme

Managing Diversity in African Universities

Living and Challenging Difference on four Ugandan Campuses

Vusia Santa Izama K

Introduction

1.1 The Pluralism Knowledge Programme in Uganda

Across the African continent, the intricacy of managing complex polities with diverse ethnic and religious identities, varied socio-economic profiles and political affiliations, is evident. Conflicts, whose roots can so often be traced to the failure of managing this diversity, constantly hit the headlines. Uganda is no exception: it provides a good example of an artificial colonial creation, a country that has struggled since independence to accommodate and engage very diverse ethnic, cultural, religious and political communities, at times with a measure of success, at others with much bloodshed.

It is in this national context that the Pluralism Knowledge Programme (PKP) has been active since 2010. Bringing together several organisations¹, the Programme reflects a desire by academics and civil society-based actors to comprehend divergent experiences and views on diversity and pluralism. In particular, the PKP aims at generating new knowledge; intensifying linkages between development practitioners and academic researchers; and translating acquired knowledge into strategies for promoting pluralism in practice.

The Programme's appreciation of pluralism is premised on Diana Eck's definition, which emphasises that pluralism is not the existence of diversity or tolerance per se, but *the energetic engagement* with this diversity and *the encounter of commitments* to reveal both common understandings and real differences (Eck, 2006). The PKP in Uganda chose to use this definition as a point of departure, given its fit both with the intricacy of the country's ethnic, religious and political make-up, as well as with its recent turbulent history, which has amply shown that engagement across difference introduces a relevant and necessary emphasis on managing this complexity, and takes the discourse on pluralism to a practical and potentially productive level for national co-existence².

Naturally, such engagement needs to rest to a great extent on the values and skills of the country's youth and the PKP has therefore placed some emphasis on examining the relevance of the family and of the school environment in nurturing the value of pluralism in Uganda.³ This report, based on research carried out at four universities and examining their experiences in managing diversity, complements these efforts.

¹ The programme works in India, Uganda, Indonesia, and the Netherlands. In Uganda, the PKP partners are Kampala International University, the Uganda Women's Network, the Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies at the University of Gulu, the National NGO Forum, DENIVA, the Inter-religious Council of Uganda, the Human Rights Network (HURINET), the Islamic University in Uganda, Nkumba University, the Human Rights and Peace Centre at Makerere University (HURIPEC) and the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU).

² The programme has promoted an examination of diversity management through research and policy influencing work, for instance through co-organising a National Convention on Democratic Governance in Uganda, holding symposia on pluralism in Universities and offering contributions to the draft national policy on the Family.

³ See "The family: At the Heart of Managing Cultural Diversity", PKP Pluralism Working Paper no 8, 2011 and DENIVA, "The Element of Pluralism in Schools, its management and how it affects schooling", mimeo 2010.

1.2. Research rationale, objectives and methods

As 'architects of knowledge' and learning environments, universities play an important role in influencing ways in which pluralism is lived and promoted. They shape the thought processes of young generations who come from different backgrounds, while being influenced by the policy, academic, social and political space that surrounds them. Ugandan universities increasingly engage with diversity through policies and practice, managing multicultural student bodies, as well as diverse academic and non-academic staff, and the theories and worldviews expounded by different faculties. They accommodate growing numbers of students from Uganda itself, from Eastern Africa and beyond. The scope of the curricula has also expanded, with new course units frequently introduced. In brief, universities in Uganda and elsewhere provide important, changing mirrors of the complex diversities and intricacies experienced and engaged with at institutional and individual level, within and between sub-groups inside and outside their walls. They act as the cauldron in which social change is conceived, nurtured and presented. These can at times provide explosive spaces, as different perspectives interact, occasionally violently, while giving to the student the previously unexplored freedom of public expression and formulation of new identities in a 'free' environment.

If African universities are faced with the challenge and opportunity to guide the 'new generation' towards managing an increasingly diverse national reality, relevant issues have not been much researched, despite the fact that these institutions are acquiring increasingly diverse student and staff populations themselves. These concerns include examining how different categories of students, academic and non-academic staff interact with each other; how their different identities and experiences impact on their university experience and the kind of values they take with them into the world of work. Also open to examination is the management of diversity and the ways in which it affects the learning experience and life of university institutions, the policies and principles guiding them and any deliberate effort to change or maintain the status quo by different communities within these institutions.

The research presented here focuses on the challenges and practices of 4 public and private Ugandan universities in managing diversity. These were selected to reflect different situations: Kampala International University (KIU) is a private institution near the capital city, which has attracted large numbers of students from neighbouring countries; Gulu University is a newly established public institution located in a marginalised and, until recently, strife-torn part of the country; Nkumba University is also recently established but close to the capital city and has appealed mostly to the dominant ethnic group in the country; and the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) has been created to further Islamic-inspired values and education, while welcoming students from other faiths.

The research set out to explore how, being increasingly exposed to multicultural conditions, these four universities are confronted with and managing a diverse range of students, academic and non-academic staff in their midst. While the research focused on an examination of current challenges and practices, it was also meant to provide an opportunity for the four universities to enhance their understanding of the relevance of pluralism as a concept and to influence their course of action. A number of activities designed to better manage diversity – though not the subject of this paper – are thus currently implemented through an action plan undertaken by each University.

Research questions covered the following main areas:

- The perception, scope and experience of diversity at the university by individuals and groups; students' values, perceptions of 'others' and their influence on choices - such as participation in clubs and associations - and their interaction in formal and informal spaces. The manifestation of these perceptions and attitudes in the university culture and sub-cultures, and in any tension and experience of conflict that might arise.
- University practices, policies, codes of conduct, their effect on the management of diversity; ways in which university students and staff experience and engage with these. The extent of university support, if any, for students to engage with difference and their provision, if any, of conflict resolution mechanisms.
- Policies and principles governing the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in the management of diversity in universities and mechanisms available to the Council to support and monitor the management of diversity in universities.
- Universities' and NCHE perceptions and experiences of the management of diversity and relevant actions, if any, envisaged for the future, as well as any challenges faced in translating perceptions of diversity into strategies for promoting pluralism and any lessons to be learnt in this respect.

The methodology used included a review of national and university level documents, as well as interactions with a range of students, academic personnel and non-academic staff at the four selected

universities. Comments were also gathered from two subsequent learning events involving some of the respondents and the PKP Steering Committee in Uganda.

The document review covered national plans, policies and legislative instruments, policy review papers and other reports. At University level, documentation included curricula, codes of conduct, students' handbooks, and other rules and regulations governing academic and social life.

The main study interaction was through key informant interviews, focus group discussions and paired interviews, in addition to observation. Interactions were held with as wide a range of students and staff as possible, to reflect the diversity present at the different campuses in terms of ethnicity, nationality, gender, occupation, academic pursuit and position at the university (students, administrative personnel or academic staff), rural or urban origin, and students with or without government sponsorship. Respondents were identified using purposive sampling with a random element. Students selected for group discussions were placed into single sex and mixed group discussions where their background information was checked including ethnicity, religion, age, and type of school attended. Staff and lecturers were selected randomly (those available at the time of the research) while checking their backgrounds and other relevant criteria.

Although the number of interviewees (147)⁴ did not in all cases cover all possible categories at each university, and although the findings cannot claim to be wholly representative of all universities in the country, the study nevertheless provides insights into the practical challenges and realities of managing diversity in a complex and changing African tertiary education environment, as well as on the kinds of opportunities, mechanisms and spaces that exist for managing this diversity. It is hoped that these findings will be of interest to university administrators and policy makers and that they may influence Universities' practices and their interaction with other institutions, as well as the ways in which they themselves engage with diversity.

Having introduced the research in this Section, Section 2 outlines the context relevant to managing diversity in university institutions, both internationally and in Uganda. Section 3 focuses on the lived reality of diversity, its challenges and its various dimensions at the four campuses. Section 4 examines policy implementation in relation to diversity issues at the universities, the response by individuals to such issues, opportunities for collective engagement and areas where diversity is not or is poorly managed. Section 5 sets out conclusions and recommendations.

⁴The number of interviewees at IUIU was 35 (14 female; 21 male), Gulu 39 (15 female; 24 male), Nkumba 35 (14 female; 21 males) and KIU 38 (17 female; 21 male).

The context

2.1 From affirmative action to managing diversity in tertiary education

The management of diversity – both in terms of admittance to tertiary education institutions and with regard to equal treatment within these institutions - has been an issue of concern for some decades across several continents. Equal employment opportunities and anti-discrimination legislation was introduced in a number of European countries from the 1960s. In the USA, discussions centred on affirmative action subsequent to the demands of the civil rights movement to tackle injustices and press for equal opportunities between black and white communities. This contributed to calls for affirmative action to access university education and within the institutions themselves, to encourage or force gender parity, racial equity, and affirmative action in relation to disability issues (Vermeulen, 2000).

Over the years, the agenda has broadened from affirmative action and equal opportunities to 'diversity management', including several dimensions of diversity and concerns that go beyond admission policies to staff orientation, 'campus climate', infrastructure and course contents. It has been suggested that diversity management also *"reflects an emphasis on a positive perspective on (...) differences versus the negative perspective of disadvantage"* (Maxwell et al, in Strachan, ca. 2005). In Britain, the equal opportunities agenda has thus been branded as *"formal and minimalist – organisations need only reach set required targets or outcomes; it is externally driven, based on legal or moral arguments (and uses) a white, male, full-time, heterosexual norm and fits other groups into this norm"* (Wilson and Iles, in Strachan, op.cit.). Embracing diversity management in the 1990's has also mirrored an emphasis on organisational effectiveness: one witnesses *"a policy shift (to) managerialist driven social programmes (where) the main process (...) is through human resource management policies that link employment diversity to organisational objectives (...) the stimulus for managing diversity will be the continuing search for organisational effectiveness, a clearly different motivation to affirmative action"* (Kramar, in Strachan, op.cit).

This evolution is reflected in university settings, both in terms of rationale and method. Thus, increasingly, in the USA, *"colleges and universities affirm the role that diversity plays in enhancing teaching and learning in higher education. (...) In various ways, both student affairs professionals and faculty have responsibilities to shape campus environments that work to insure equity of access as well as social and academic success"* (ElonDancy, 2010). This reflects the recognition that, *"in the 21st century the focus of schools and corporations needs to be on "living diversity" [including] the diversity of thinking systems, from the value systems of which emerge the intolerance toward others"* (Rosado, 2006). A US university advertises its competence thus: *"More so than ever before, it is clear that technical competence alone is insufficient for today's graduate. Michigan Tech must prepare its students to live and work in a diverse society (...) In order to graduate students who will create the future, the University must complete its transformation to a multicultural institution"* (Michigan Tech, www.mtu.edu/diversity).

On the African continent, the South African experience stands out and mirrors the evolution summarised above, even if rationale and context differ. Norris thus noted in 2000: *"Redressing historical imbalances relating to staff appointments and student access is an imperative for South African higher education institutions. (...) One of the strategies that must be applied to accelerate that change process is affirmative action, yet affirmative action on its own is not the whole answer. It is essential that the diversity created by affirmative action be effectively managed, by using a strategic management approach. Norris thus proposes the application of a "diversity framework (that) will ensure that all aspects of the affirmative action and diversity processes within South African institutions of higher education are addressed. He quotes: "Experiencing diversity is a common component of a quality educational experience; to achieve excellence it is also imperative to achieve diversity"* (Loomis and Sharpe, in Norris, 2000).

Notwithstanding the above, when comparing diversity management in higher education in South Africa and Germany, Vermeulen (2000) notes the key role played by the state in the former, at the expense of academic autonomy: *"The formulation of higher education policy after the Apartheid era has been rapid and sometimes tumultuous and greatly affected the autonomy of the higher education institutions. The Government argued that such interventions were necessary to correct the inequalities of the past and steering mechanisms had to be introduced. The rapid change in the racial diversity profile of the South African student population over the past 15 years is probably unprecedented in the world. This change*

did not happen without the intervention by the state". In Uganda, to whose experience we now turn, Government played a less activist role.

2.2 Managing diversity in Ugandan universities – the national context

In Uganda, the recognition of the need to manage diversity within tertiary institutions, if relatively new, has primarily focused on two issues: how to ensure access to university education for poorer students or those originating from distant, rural areas and how to reach a better gender balance, in an environment long dominated by men⁵.

Debates around these concerns have been taking place at a time of rapid change in tertiary education. The single university at independence, Makerere University, was drawing students from across the region and had established a wide reputation for academic excellence, coupled with a privileged environment for its students. Reflecting on its nature as an 'academic island' and on the fact that all expenses were covered by a generous state, one alumnus recently wrote, *"It was as though one had walked through a golden-edged door to a detribalised and depoliticised world, whose citizens were joined at the navel by a common goal"* (Mulera, 2012).

Since then, university education facilities have quickly expanded, both in terms of admittances and in terms of the proliferation of universities - now numbering 30, many being private establishments. From around 3,000 students at the time of independence, the number of students in the country's universities had exploded to 174,000 in 2010 (Businge, 2012).

With such growth accompanied by the phasing out of state subsidies in the 1980s and 1990s, new challenges emerged. The first efforts at affirmative action date back to 1990 when entry requirements were lowered for girls applying to join public universities, the so-called '1.5 points scheme'. At Makerere University, the number of female students increased from 25% of the total in 1990 to 50% in 2009 (Gender Mainstreaming Division, Makerere University, www.gender.mak.ac.ug). In spite of this success, one of the architects of the scheme noted in 2009 that this is *"a blanket policy for it treats all girls as having the same education standards. It ignores the fact that these students go to well and poorly facilitated schools. Those from good schools stand to benefit better than their counterparts from bad schools with or without the affirmative action"* (Kwesiga, 2009). A recent study similarly noted that *'those students who do well on the (secondary school leaving) exam usually come from wealthier families who can afford to pay for elite, university preparatory level public and private education, or who live in urban areas with better quality primary and secondary schools'*. The report went on to indicate that students from the highest income group, that represented less than 1% of the total population, took 42% of the places at Makerere that year (Xiaoyang Liang, 2004).

At the time of independence and for a few years thereafter, students had been admitted on the basis of a more egalitarian secondary school system than subsequently became the case. As university entrance became the prerogative of students emerging from well-endowed, often private fee-paying secondary schools, many of which are situated in the central region of the country, affirmative action took the form of "district quotas" first introduced in 2005 to enable approximately 900 disadvantaged students from distant, rural secondary schools to enlist yearly at public universities with a government scholarship. In July 2012, a new system was introduced to replace the flat number of students sponsored per district to a number that better reflects district population numbers⁶. Given the small numbers of State-sponsored students, however (compared to universal free university education at independence), those coveted spaces continue to go to the products of the best schools in the districts. For a time, the Presidency has also bestowed "State House Scholarships" to university students, a measure mired in political controversy. 4,516 such students existed in 2012⁷.

The rationale for these measures reflect the country's 1995 Constitution that defines education as an entitlement for *all categories* of Ugandans, recognises diversity in the form of ethnicities, minorities, and vulnerable groups and prohibits discrimination on these grounds. The 1992 Government White Paper "Education for National Integration and Development" and the 2001 Universities and Other Tertiary

⁵ While at lower education levels some effort has been expended on improving access for persons with a disability, there has been somewhat less focus on this at university level.

⁶ This still concerns few 'slots' (from 6 in 19 smaller districts to 23 in Kampala district) - New Vision, 5/6/2012. Some scholarships are also available to people with a disability.

⁷ See 'The Monitor' and 'The New Vision' newspapers, Kampala, 8/8/2012

Institutions Act provide the main legislative instruments governing universities⁸. The White Paper aims at “*promoting citizenship; moral, ethical and spiritual values*”, while the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act established the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) for quality assurance at all tertiary institutions.⁹ Among other measures, the NCHE requires new universities to have facilities for the disabled, a gender policy, a strategic plan and specific proportions of staff with stipulated qualifications¹⁰. These also provide aspirational values for already established universities.

Such measures also reflect a policy effort for both private and public institutions to ensure equal access to quality and affordable education to all, in order to meet the objectives of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan¹¹, to achieve Education for All (EFA) and to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. These policies put emphasis on expanding the functional capacity of educational structures and reducing inequalities of access to education between sexes, geographical areas, and social classes in Uganda.¹² They therefore emphasise, in keeping with Uganda’s Constitution, equality of opportunity in a context of differing socio-economic, attitudinal, physical and other barriers in accessing resources and services, including education. They define principles and recommend actions that provide a guide to living in a pluralistic society, principles that provide the ideals that should underpin universities’ practices.

2.3 A managerial challenge

Reflecting the realisation that institutions need to go beyond numbers or structural diversity to proactive means of increasing the benefits of diversity, a frequent approach, in a variety of contexts, has entailed the introduction of a ‘diversity management framework’. In the USA, for instance, Michigan Tech, has developed a framework which entails, “*developing a shared and inclusive understanding of diversity; creating a welcoming campus climate; recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce and student body; diversifying University leadership and coordinating organizational change to support diversity goals*” (Michigan Tech, www.mtu.edu/diversity).

In South Africa, Norris proposes a Diversity Management Framework “*that should form part of the strategic management process for institutions of higher education in South Africa*”, including a revised organisational culture; ability to change as an organisation; total quality management to improve standards; participative management; resource development and strategic planning, thus stressing that “*for diversity to succeed, it must form part of an institution’s strategic management process (and) have the support of the highest ranking official on an institution*” (Norris, 2000).

Thus, the strategic document “Creating and Managing Diversity at the University of the Free State” (www.ufs.ac.za) while mentioning the “*the legislative imperatives*”, sets out “*the challenges of reconciling equity with excellence*”, which it proposed to tackle through a variety of measures, including “*attracting and supporting talented academics from designated groups to help raise the level of scholarship and research at the institution*”; creating employment opportunities ‘*for all South African groups*’ (...) improving attitudes, ‘*especially of the leadership; improving campus climate and symbols*’; staff orientation and training ‘*to improve awareness of multicultural issues*’; an Advocacy (Diversity) Office; effective mentoring programmes; the review of employment strategies; and the creation of a special fund to put these measures into play.

To what extent does this resonate in the Ugandan context? We can now turn to a description of the different dimensions of diversity and associated challenges among the 4 surveyed universities.

⁸ Other policies which deal with aspects of diversity include the Uganda Gender Policy, the National Policy on Disabilities and the National HIV/AIDS Policy. The National Disability Policy requires all public and private institutions to have facilities and services that are accessible to persons with disabilities and the Gender Policy propounds equal opportunities and equitable provision of services without discrimination on the basis of sex. An Equal Opportunities Commission, established in 2007, has barely started work.

⁹ Uganda Tertiary Education Sector Report, 2004

¹⁰ It also requires 10% and 40% staff to have PhD and Masters’ degrees respectively, infrastructure corresponding to 4 students per square metre, 1 computer per 30 students, ability to raise 70% of the budget, with tuition as source of income equivalent to 50% of the budget, 1 lecturer for every 40 arts students and 26 science students respectively.

¹¹ Now the National Development Plan

¹² Education Sector Policy Overview Paper, 2006

Living diversity and its challenges in four Ugandan universities

All four surveyed universities hosted diverse populations of students, academic and administrative staff. This variously affected individuals and groups, in terms of experiences, opportunities and challenges. Students tended to interact with each other not only as students, but as members of different groups of people with varying identities, individually and collectively, expressed in the form of a dominant or important characteristic. The experience of diversity and tensions surrounding difference at the university were also found to mirror those of the wider society to a large extent, and there were both negative and positive perceptions surrounding different aspects of diversity. Whereas some of the students witnessed instances of difference in the treatment of diverse categories of students, others in the same community did not, as one student interviewee observed: *"I see an integrated community at KIU, I have not seen the [different] classes ... everybody associates with each other because they have a common goal"*.

Nevertheless, each university faced challenges and these often depended on its status as a public or private institution, as being secular or with a faith-based foundation; as being a well endowed university or a 'poor' one; and in terms of its location, history and culture. For instance, at the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), a major distinction amongst the students and staff was religion. At Nkumba and Gulu universities, issues of ethnicity were more pronounced, while at KIU issues of difference often coalesced around nationality and disposable income. Nevertheless cross-cutting realities emerged.¹³ We review these in turn in this section, with a particular focus on challenges experienced, in terms of ethnicity and language, religious affiliation, gender and level of disposable income.

3.1 Ethnicity and language

Ethnicity was found to be an important aspect of difference at all four universities. There were many diverse ethnic groups, from within Uganda (both dominant and minority groups), from several nations in Eastern Africa and from further afield in Africa (Nigeria, Lesotho, Ghana, Mali, the Comoros), Europe and America¹⁴. Students and staff alike valued their ethnic origin and many times used this as an important yardstick to determine their interactions with each other. Often these relationships were influenced by pre conceived notions about ethnicity and these frequently elicited responses focusing on problematic aspects, while positive interactions were not described in terms of cross-ethnic engagement.

It was also observed that students from some ethnic groups often tended to keep to themselves or to socialise mainly with each other, because of similarity of culture, practices and taboos, some of which led to their isolation by other students. Cultural associations often played a role here, as in Gulu, where a student said that *'Associations [...] bring about cooperation between those in the same cultural groups. During orientation, some people helped me so much because they could see I was a Muganda and so they found a Muganda guild official to help me settle down and identify a hostel'*. At KIU, segregation amongst Ugandans on the basis of ethnicity was commented upon by several international and Ugandan students. They noted that it was common to find students in their ethnic groups most of the time: *'Yes [...] within the fellow Ugandans, they 'discriminate themselves' according to tribes and are not friendly. It is not directed at foreigners but at other Ugandans. This is shown in the way they interact and talk amongst themselves, which is different from the way they talk to foreigners. I think it has deep roots from where they came from'*.

Stereotypes and myths about different ethnic groups were found to be common amongst the students and these caused tension, misunderstanding, even exclusion, mainly through careless comments. Some international students carried with them the ethnic tensions existing in their countries. This was mentioned in IUIU and KIU in relation to Somali students and in Gulu and Nkumba about Sudanese students. In Gulu, we were told that experiences between ethnic groups at the national level also drew

¹³The following section examines key areas of difference. Others emerged, including age, course being pursued and disability.

¹⁴ Among the sampled interviewees alone, the following ethnic groups/nationalities were represented: Acholi; Alur; Aringa; Atesot; Congolese; Kakwa; Karamojong; Kenyan (various ethnicities); Kenyan Somali; Lango; Lesotho; Lugbara; Madi; Malawian; Malian; Bafumbira; Baganda; Baganda / Nubian; Bagisu; Bagwere; Bahima; Bakiga; Banyankole; Banyarwanda; Banyoro; Basoga; Batooro; Nigerian (mixed ethnicity); Rwandan; Sabiny; Samia; Sudanese; Tanzanian.

personalised conflict, exclusion or confrontation and that this could fuel perceptions of favouritism along these lines, and could for example influence voting patterns for the students' guild council.

Nkumba University – cultural values and managing ethnic diversity

Nkumba University is a private, secular university situated near Kampala that aims to provide practical training, particularly in the business education field. While richly endowed with a diversity of students, it retains a perceived association with the central region and its ethnic group, the Baganda. The university has a code of ethics and conduct for staff, which emphasises freedom and responsibilities, in recognition of the diverse university community, mentioning at the outset diversity in terms of sex, ethnic groups, national origin, religion, political convictions, abilities and disabilities. An important policy element at Nkumba University is the respect for and promotion of cultural values.

The university thus supports cultural activities, as evidenced in the way the campus provides spaces in which the 'parliaments' of different cultural associations, to which various ethnic groups and nations belong, can sit, complete with permanent garden chairs. These associations focus on the ways of life of the different groups and view themselves as distinct from other clubs at the university, such as course-based clubs. They provide a hub of engagement and showcase cultural diversity. Several students met appreciated the opportunity to associate with their ethnic group, an opportunity provided by these associations and the cultural gala they participate in every year.

An area of tension however remains the perception that one cultural association receives more resources than others from the administration, leading to many students' resentment. Another centred on some students' perception that the cultural associations engender exclusion and tribalism. Nkumba University is located in Buganda and an unwritten but verbalised practice is the promotion of Luganda as a local language. This is meant to promote engagement through the use of language, but has attendant challenges, with language often becoming an instrument of separation, emphasising difference and alienation. There was thus emphasis on students making an effort to learn the language, but no concerted effort to popularise it amongst non-Baganda students, who resented being spoken to in Luganda even in official spaces, where 'ignorance of the language' was ill-considered. Paradoxically, this has therefore led to the opposite effect from what the university was attempting to achieve. Students who did not understand Luganda, for instance, saw discrimination when some lecturers 'slip into' Luganda in their lectures despite the host of students who do not understand it and the fact that lecturers are provided with orientation to be conscious of the university's multicultural and international nature.

This is in a context where ethnic tensions are present and stereotypes abound. Some students for instance expressed hostility towards colleagues from Western Uganda, because they are associated with a dominant group in national politics, with people who have been embezzling government funds and who have been in power for long. One respondent asserted that students from other parts of the country think 'every Westerner is paid or favoured by the state' and that, for instance, they are in their large majority State-sponsored and will get jobs as soon as they finish their course, thus reflecting nationwide tensions. There were many analyses too on the all-important ethnic dimension of elections for the students' guild. The dominant Buganda group could be self-congratulatory ("people from Buganda are better than other regions in issues concerning manners and behaviour and associating with others").

There was visible anger or resignation amongst some of the students on matters of ethnicity. It was observed that students mapped onto others the very same prejudices that they held and expressed openly themselves. Many people were then caught up in comparing how the different tribes are treated. Dominance and privilege was perceived by students who are not from central Uganda to cause some of the tensions, with students from the central region said to be favoured in benefiting from facilities such as access to work contracts including cleaning the grounds, or being members of the university football team. "Since Nkumba University pays tuition for sports people ... right now the whole university team is made of (one tribe) to the point that 'most guys go to support the opposite team'.

The students met were nevertheless often found to be conversant with issues of diversity and interested in addressing them, particularly as they affect social justice and the rights of the different groups. The administration in Nkumba also showed interest and provides the support and leadership space for students to express their diversity and engage with each other. There is an active students' Guild, with leaders drawn from as many different categories of students as possible. The Guild

government 'always' tries to involve the leaders of the cultural association and every semester, there are two general assemblies where students are allowed to express themselves freely. The lecturers also provide a mechanism to manage diversity through advice and mentoring, but there are concerns about the extent to which they are equipped to deal with students from such diverse backgrounds, in spite of workshops organised by the academic registrar's office, which discusses how they should address matters of diversity. It was not clear that this facility was extended to the administrative staff, whose attitudes the students complained about much more. Public lectures are also organised, as for a recent lecture given to help students understand issues related to diversity on campus. Ethics is also taught in every school of study.

While this fosters much engagement across ethnic lines, mechanisms however are currently not adequately dealing with existing tensions and sometimes add to them, as with communication and information management inadequacies. There is, in particular, a conflict between the promotion of Luganda, particularly when used in official spaces, on the one hand and the national (and international) character of the university on the other.

The labelling of some ethnic groups as 'wealthy', 'the privileged', 'the rulers', and others as 'the poor', 'street kids', or 'aggressors' meant that belonging to any of these groups immediately tainted the student or staff. At Nkumba University, some of the students spoke with bitterness about the way they are referred to by fellow students; others went as far as saying they would never be involved personally with students from some particular ethnic groups. Ethnic stereotypes were not much about the culture, language or traditions of the groups concerned, but rather formed as a result of wider current socio-economic and political circumstances. There was thus a frequent perception that 'Westerners' (from Western Uganda, whence the current President originates) were rich, in the ruling class, and a group that did not mix with other students; Northerners were considered rude, poor and probably in the "political opposition"; the Baganda (from the central region of Uganda) were considered well-off, arrogant and discriminative; Somalis were also considered rich and did not mix with others; Kenyans were considered rude and loud. There were students who were very sensitive and took offence very quickly when their ethnic groups were mentioned but who were quick to condemn other students on the basis of their ethnicity when they behaved in an 'inappropriate' way.

It was also reported that ethnicity, especially in two universities, often influenced opportunities and decisions made. Examples were given of departments dominated by staff of the same ethnic group as that of the Faculty Head and where others felt left out or discriminated against. One respondent caustically commented that it seemed that all the 'clever' people who applied to a department in his university were from a single ethnic group. Some students also attributed a difficulty in accessing services (sports scholarships, students' associations' trips) to such discrimination.

Language tended to exaggerate differences because it actively excluded, even when there was physical proximity. A medley of languages was spoken by various ethnic groups in addition to the official languages of English, Arabic and Swahili. There were dominant ethnic or national groups whose languages tended to lead in each university, except for UIIU, where ethnic identity was masked by religion. Students observed language being used to 'gauge where they belonged' and stated that some administrative staff tended to be dismissive of those who did not know a dominant language. Students who did not speak such languages felt left out and discriminated against. As one observed, *'the Baganda tend to think [that] everyone is a Muganda, without realising [that Luganda] is not an international language. They speak their language to almost everybody'*. The lack of a comfortable medium of communication or its non-use could lead to immediate isolation. As one student commented, *'language is a factor in determining interactions [...] it may be used for exclusion when they do not want people to know what they are saying...'* Exclusion through language was keenly felt, as another student stated: *'it's painful when you are amongst a group of people and they start talking what you don't know, you feel an outcast, out of the group'*. Tensions also arose when local dominant languages were unapologetically spoken in official university spaces. Several examples were given in Nkumba, KIU and Gulu, where some students and lecturers used the dominant local language in such spaces. The use of local languages in lecture rooms often occurred while providing examples which were not interpreted into English and the excessive use of a local language limited the ease with which the official language was used by some students. The compulsory learning of Arabic in UIIU was also a source of tension among Christian respondents. The requirement to pass an Arabic exam was said to be difficult for many students, both Muslim and non-Muslim, but the non-Muslim students had the additional

disadvantage of attitudinal resistance to the language. Only a few non-Muslim students took this as an opportunity to learn a new international medium.

While ethnic stereotyping acted as barriers or diminished the quality of interaction amongst some students, on an individual basis, there was engagement. Many students were not affected by ethnic considerations and they made friends with all categories of colleagues. Exposure to diversity had helped in this respect: a student from Western Uganda, who had grown up in and interacted with Acholi students in a 'mixed' area for instance stated that he felt comfortable with all ethnic groups and did not have the same prejudices about the Acholi as some of his fellow ethnic group members. An Acholi student who had studied in the central region was equally comfortable in the company of students from central Uganda and, although aware of other students' negative perceptions and stereotypes about them, she responded to what she knew to be true about her friends instead of adhering to commonly held biases.

Language was also used and perceived as a unifying factor *within* a particular linguistic group, whose members tended to help each other. This was especially noted in Gulu, IUIU and Nkumba universities. In addition, students who learned languages other than their own were often able to interact freely with other language groups. For some students met at KIU, the value of learning a language to foster interaction was very clear, as indicated by the Ugandan student who undertook to learn both Swahili and Arabic from his Kenyan and Sudanese friends.

3.2 Religious affiliation

Different religious groups were represented in the 4 universities, but only one of these professed a religious foundation (IUIU) while another, though with an Islamic foundation (KIU), was considered a secular university, with space for different creed to be practiced on campus. Where religion was discussed, perceptions about the problematic aspects of religious beliefs and differences mostly emerged. There were several students who mentioned the positive aspects of religion but on the whole, challenges experienced as a result of religious differences tended to be amplified by the respondents, much more than any positive aspects.

Religious perceptions were influenced by the national or cultural origins of the students (and lecturers), for instance where some of the foreign students were of the view that Ugandans were not committed to their religion, particularly Islam, as several students at KIU stated, *'there are some core values that you would expect a Muslim to have but here it's a bit different, there is a lack of commitment and heart to do what's right'*.

B. The Islamic University in Uganda – managing religious diversity

IUIU was established by the Organisation of Islamic Countries and emphasises the provision of higher education for Muslims. While based on Islamic law and teachings, IUIU however recruits Muslims and non-Muslims, Ugandans and foreigners, hence sowing the seed for a pluralistic society. It professes values that promote diversity, tolerance and engagement, including *"freedom of thought and expression within the boundaries of Islam; and tolerance of contrary views and ideas"*.

Many respondents however stated that the application of Islamic law often resulted in differential treatment. Muslim students, for instance, are allowed to practice their religion on campus but others are not. Students from Islamic backgrounds found the University a positive and 'free' environment. A male Muslim student thus appreciated being kept *'two metres away from the opposite sex, no bad touches, no music, no dancing, no drinking alcohol and all other drugs'*. Others though found difficulty fitting into a mixed society where *'what was taboo to me was okay for them'*. They had to adjust, although some of the foreign students said Ugandans *'did not value'* their religious identity and obligations as they should and, with this judgement, found it difficult to make friends with them. Some Christians were impressed by the piety shown by the Muslim students, reflecting a distancing from *'them'*, a distant admiration. Some also said they came to IUIU *expecting* segregation on religious grounds, making them sensitive to instances where they were expected to conform to Islamic rules and regulations, which some found hard. There were also perceptions that Muslim students were *'favoured'* by some of the lecturers or *'the system'*, as when non-Muslims are not allowed to become guild president or vice-president, although they can be appointed as guild ministers. Similarly, IUIU promotes Arabic as an aspect of Islamic tradition. Thus Muslim students must learn Arabic and be able to recite Quran verses before they can pass their examinations, while other students must pass

an *Introduction to Arabic* module, which some Christian students saw as unfair as they had no prior exposure to the language. The teaching of Arabic as a compulsory subject was viewed both as a mechanism to address diversity and to impart knowledge, but also seen by many non-Muslim students as discriminatory.

Another area where the religious foundation of the University expressed itself was in its emphasis on the distinction between the sexes, affecting the dress code, participation in leadership, accommodation, freedom of movement and sports (the girls are not allowed to 'expose themselves' except at their hostels, although they are provided with the only 'protected' swimming pool on campus). Women are especially affected: they must dress modestly, while boys do not have to follow strict dress requirements, and nor do they need permission to go out of the University, unlike girls. Direct interaction between the sexes is forbidden. Some girls referred to the rules as relegating them to '*secondary school*'. An important issue for them was that of pregnancy, as any girl who falls pregnant is expelled if she is not married, as well as responsible boy, if identified. Girls also cannot campaign for elective office such as the students' guild posts. One female student lamented that '*the really bad thing is non-Muslim girls are not allowed to form their own association*' (there is however a female section of the campus, in which the women are free to hold any position; IUIU also has another, female-only campus). This is considered by the administration to be in the best interests of the girls: '*The girl child has a special place in our hearts in IUIU. That is why we try our best to keep her on a straight path, please do not take this as a punishment*'.

The students' fora were seen as important to manage diversity at the university. These included the students' guild, the 'Colloquium' (a regular space where matters of concern can be aired), student class coordinators and the Muslim student leadership, in addition to cultural associations. The latter provide an opportunity for the students to showcase different aspects of cultural expression, although only Islamic music is allowed. Muslim students saw the University Mosque and its activities as a mechanism for managing diversity too, because they were '*taught to treat people as brothers and sisters*'. However, there were discussions on what they termed 'controversial issues', such as pregnancies, expulsions, and others focussing on core Islam principles. As one pointed out, '*as Muslims, Islam is a way of life and everything concerning life is there*'. Interpretations however varied: according to another Muslim student, engagement was important as a tenet of the Islamic faith; for another, Sharia ensured that people do not conflict in the University because '*they fear Sharia law and the least punishment is one' dead year*'. *Sharia law prevents conflict, including strikes*'. One of the rules for Muslims is the attendance of 'Dawa' programmes after prayers, considered an important guidance mechanism, especially to guide girls and on the importance of prayer and religion. It is optional for Christians. The student 'Dawa' leaders were identified as the mechanism through which conformity was propagated; they have powers to identify those breaching rules and regulations, enforcing the Sharia law. The students were conscious of possible consequences, such as a 'dead year' for various offences, aggravated by the level of power entrusted in some of the staff and student leaders. The University, through a number of rules, thus appeared to put a lid on the expression of tensions felt by the students across a range of differences.

IUIU is a complex space where diverse groups of men and women come to learn, and where, for non-Muslim, they learn the useful lessons of engagement with the Islamic way of life, to appreciate its social teachings or at least to understand them. Muslim students also learn to live with students from other religious backgrounds, though this experience is limited by the fact that these other religions are unable to practice in their full view. The space provided for students and lecturers to express unique or different values is however mainly limited to cultural associations. Depending on circumstance, these may act both as the avenues through which difference is strengthened and intolerance nurtured, or as avenues for interaction across difference.

Religious tensions were experienced, particularly where there were distinct practices, such as differences in dress code and in the allocation or availability of spaces for worship. Stereotypes about different religious groups and their practices also led to tensions. 'Born again' students were for instance reputed to try to impose themselves on others, a sentiment expressed in Gulu, KIU and Nkumba universities. On the other hand, the expectation that 'born again' individuals did not or were not supposed to sin, put them under intense pressure when they *did* err. Such misgivings about 'born again Christians' could lead to their feeling '*out of place*' and to relate only to their fellow congregationists. Girls wearing the hijab were also viewed differently as expressed in Nkumba and Gulu universities. One of the respondents narrated how, when so dressed, she gets 'funny comments' such as '*have you been checked at the gate? Are we safe?*' She expressed her frustration, describing her attempts to conform or

to express her identity: *'I have conflicting emotions and pressure within, I try to change my dress, wearing long sleeves as a response and [at] other times I still feel I want to wear a hijab'*.

Any form of exclusion on the basis of religion was however limited in three of the four universities, but more perceptible at IUIU, where many decisions and life on campus were guided by Islamic law and religious considerations¹⁵. Muslim students were identified as distinct and as 'belonging'. The others felt they were not enabled to participate in leadership, or express their own beliefs. While they had an opportunity to discuss issues affecting them, they felt that the room for change was limited where these issues concerned Islamic principles. The interpretation of Sharia law affected some students' prospects, as when pregnancies led to expulsion.

With the exception of IUIU, students were provided freedom and spaces to worship within the university. In two universities, there was space for Christian students to worship together as part of a 'United Faith' combining students from other denominations, and therefore providing space to be together despite differences in affiliation, although some Christian students viewed this as bringing together the different Pentecostal churches rather than all Christians. KIU gave Muslim students time to pray at the specified times and at Nkumba University, all creed found the space to pray as they wished, although the university did not allocate spaces for worship but allowed students to identify these themselves, using the university infrastructure they found most suitable.

3.3 Gender

Respondents recognised gender as a source of distinction in all four universities. There were distinctions in the ways women and men were treated, to the extent of exclusion, particularly at IUIU where young women were not allowed to participate in some activities. A woman's identity provided the basis for differentiated treatment; they were expected to cover up to 'protect' themselves, restricting movement and participation in some activities, while simultaneously being encouraged to achieve excellence in academic pursuits, on par with men. The university is strict on conduct; some spaces are out of bound to female students, such as engagement in field sports outside the female students' wing, where spectators are also excluded. The application of the dress code to all female students (who had to dress in the Hijab and fully cover themselves at all times) was also often challenging to non-Muslim girls. The mental and social distance created between female and male students was accentuated by rules, such as the prohibition of shaking hands with the opposite sex and sitting or standing in mixed-sex pairs without a third party.

At Gulu University, respondents suggested that, with the recent end of the civil insurgency led by the Lord's Resistant Army (LRA) for over 20 years in northern Uganda, there had been little emphasis on the empowerment of women. The humanitarian situation in the region was grave and few development activities had taken place. Service delivery came to a virtual standstill and displaced communities lived in sprawling displaced people's camps. Education suffered, making barriers to girls' education was even greater than in normal circumstances. As a result, there were few women staff at the University. The region also missed out during this period on gender awareness and sensitisation activities on women's rights that took place in other parts of the country. Both students and some staff made allegations of sexual harassment and partly attributed this to limited empowerment and knowledge of rights amongst them. There appeared to be no mechanisms to address this issue, or at least a failure to use existing ones, leaving women 'on their own'. An initiative to carry out a gender study to inform the development of a gender policy had however started and the university had a focal person responsible for 'gender mainstreaming' as an added responsibility to that of assistant academic registrar.

Sexual harassment featured as a challenge affecting the university experience of female students in the other universities too, except in IUIU. In Nkumba, for instance, both the girls and boys interviewed referred to the sexual harassment of girls as an important subterranean issue, made worse by the attitudes and fears surrounding it, with a *'lack of mechanisms'* to address it, although the staff code of ethics and conduct specifies the vice-chancellor and 'any other person' as responsible to address this issue. Staff noted that, while there were cases of harassment that have been handled, sometimes students try to get out of tight spots by claiming that they are being harassed. In KIU, there was some experience of 'woman to woman' gender discrimination where female students felt victimised by some women lecturers, while some male students thought they were discriminated against by women lecturers too. Some male students also observed that in some male lecturers' courses, 'beautiful'

¹⁵Gulu University had a large Catholic community - students from other religious backgrounds and even some of the staff also felt there was dominance by and favouring of Catholics.

female students tended to pass very highly 'and the opposite is also true' (in relation to male students). Elsewhere, differences, such as of religious backgrounds, also affected their respective experiences. Some girls for example were prevented from interacting with students of other faiths (and ethnicity) by the male students with whom they shared these characteristics. Thus, an example was given of a female student pulled out of a mixed discussion group by male students with whom she shared a religious faith, to prevent her from 'getting spoilt' or being contaminated with 'foreign' ideas.

All four Universities had achieved more or less equal numbers of men and women among their student numbers. Nkumba University practices further affirmative action in favour of girls, and has more girls than boys. Actions to support girls included the provision of a hostel within the University campus and making Nkumba male students responsible to protect women, for instance when they return at night to their residence, if outside the campus. These actions can be interpreted in various ways. According to some students, being resident in the Nkumba girl's hostel means the girl comes from a humble or disciplinarian family. One of the male students emphatically stated that he did not want to be seen near the girl's hostel, talking to 'that group of girls'. It is also debatable to what extent the 'male responsibility' focuses on traditional perceptions of gender roles and how much in relation to affirmative action, empowerment and transformation of these roles. Concern was also expressed by both male and female students and staff, about the underperformance of girls and the apparent negative attitudes of some girls towards their own education, an aspect of their socialisation. Several pressures faced by the students had gender connotations, for instance, financial pressures on boys to 'maintain' girls, pressure to display an identity of affluence or to actively participate and finance social activities off campus.

The University guild is an important space for the engagement of both male and female students in managing difference. At Gulu University, women students were 'free' to participate in the guild, both male and female students were leaders, although girls tended not to occupy the higher positions, a situation ascribed by some respondents to the stereotype that women cannot lead – a female student ran for the guild office but some male students clearly stated they did not want to be led by a woman.

3.4 Income

Disparities in income were also identified in the surveyed universities as important sources of difference, particularly amongst students on self-sponsorship. The notion that some students were rich, as a result of social inequalities in the country, led to tensions and sometimes disengagement. It was noted by respondents that students on government sponsorship tended to be from well-off families who could afford good schools and therefore had a better chance of getting the grades needed for university entry.

Income and class differences were experienced at different levels. Differences in income translated into disparities in accommodation and general way of life. Students' hostels thus vary visibly in the standards they offer, but there are also marked differences in the capacity to meet course costs e.g. photocopying, printing, course work resources and other reference materials from lecturers.

Beyond this, in Gulu, social class amongst students was important for some and affected their interactions. Some students made little effort to know students from a 'different social class'. The students noted that those of 'high class' were discernible by their behaviour and appearance, for instance, by how fashionable they were. They tended to relate to others of 'their kind', as defined by the amount of money they had. These social class identities brought people of different ethnicities together in both platonic and romantic relationships.

At Nkumba, a distinction was made between 'rural' and 'urban' students, not only to depict location of origin and upbringing, but also character, and what was considered backward 'rural behaviour' and dress. Some of the students from rural schools had lower expectations and thought they could not compete or fit in with the other students. There was a culture of clubbing which bestowed a status of affluence, popularity and modernity. On weekends, 'students go to the beaches and those who do not have money are easily tempted to use money that they should have kept for [...] photocopying'. For girls, boys met said, "there is fashion, the latest things, which may force them to get sugar daddies, sex and diseases, in order to keep up with the others. The relationships are exploitative [...] and the boys accept that the girls will have relationships outside".

C. Gulu University – Marginalisation and the Management of Diversity

Gulu University, in northern Uganda, is located in an area that was beset by civil conflict for many years. Founded by the Government to promote science and technology and *'for transforming society'*, it set out to transform the lives of rural communities surrounding it and to *'serve as a launch pad for equitable knowledge in Uganda'*, reflecting its location in a marginalised area. Thus, it was reported that many students admitted to the University do not turn up, partly due to the perception and fear of insurgency in the area, and to a view that the university lacks prestige, compared to the allure of private universities that they can afford to attend.

The dominant group at the university were the local Acholi students, who formed about a third to a half of the student population and most of the administrative staff. Several instances of stereotypes and prejudices were mentioned, coloured by local experiences. There was a feeling that coming to Gulu, for the non-Acholi, should entail 'adaptation' to the local cultural environment. Thus, a member of the academic staff explained that a peaceful environment depends on *'adopting the core values of the Acholi.'*, underscoring the dominant position of the ethnic group in the area hosting the university.

The teaching staff, on the other hand, originated more frequently from the western and central regions, rather than from the North. This fuelled experiences and perceptions of favouritism along ethnic lines. Lecturers from other parts of the country were perceived as different in several ways. Sometimes they were viewed with suspicion, considered mercenary (there for the money, not for the development of the region) and uncommitted (a number of them did not have their families with them and moved back and forth for that reason). On the other hand, lecturers from other areas saw themselves as making sacrifices to work at the university, with much travel between Gulu and their family homes. There was mention of unfair employment practices, along lines of ethnicity, differences in salaries at the same or similar levels and qualifications, limited application of equal opportunity measures and some 'territorialism' in relation to newcomers. Some staff felt that they were not being appreciated and that the university did not provide support to lecturers who are working in difficult circumstances, including making policies more responsive to the needs of those who do not have families with them. This was said to affect women more, because *'it is difficult for women to move with their families'*. Women lecturers were indeed few in number. Other reasons included the insurgency and limited women empowerment in the region, resulting in few qualified female lecturers.

Cleavages were reinforced by economic considerations. The students sponsored by the government on merit, were often from outside the region, and often from well-off families (having attended good schools). These, according to some respondents, did not deserve state sponsorship meant to cover the poor and marginalised, especially students from the region who studied under difficult social circumstances as a consequence of the war and ended up with grades that did not qualify them for a government bursary and to struggle with paying for their tuition and other expenses.

These tensions were also highlighted in cultural associations. The cultural associations were by far the most active, involving students from all faculties and departments; they had a significant impact on the students' outlook and their perceptions of others in terms of engaging with diversity. There was however a perception of favouritism: as one student respondent felt, *'the Acholi cultural group must always win the trophy'*, a feeling underscored by one of the lecturers who argued that *"If the Baganda think they want to win cultural gala they should take it to Buganda pub not Acholi inn"*.

Diversity issues experienced by the different sub-groups within the university were not systematically tackled, despite being highlighted as 'silent' factors in discrimination. The university had established mechanisms for arbitration, for raising the voices of different groups and to foster engagement, but these were not necessarily directed at addressing the management of diversity. The office of the Dean of Students was mentioned in relation to issues faced individually by students, including trauma from events during the war. The students' guild had been very active in trying to create understanding and resolving issues that divide students and the administration, for instance on the matter of a cut-off point for school fees payments and on conflict around the cultural associations. The students appointed in the current cabinet were of diverse backgrounds and interests *'as a deliberate strategy'* and the guild constitution stipulates positions for a gender minister and a woman affairs minister, although issues of diversity are not explicit.

The University nevertheless has a unique opportunity to support the community around it, emerging from insurgency. The Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies has a community outreach programme centred on forgiveness and reconciliation and other students are also encouraged to work with projects that support neighbouring communities.

In KIU too, there was some concern about affording a 'lifestyle'. Indeed, in these two universities, affluence was a pronounced value amongst the students: many of those with resources considered themselves superior and set apart. There were also a number of other pressures for the use of money, including fines linked to academic performance.

A number of the students met linked delays in payment of their allowances to negative attitudes on the part of administrative staff. The sponsored students, including students with disabilities, had problems when their grant delayed and they had no other sources of funds because '*When your parents know you are government sponsored, that means they do not give you additional resources*'. Another consequence of privilege and unequal benefit at university (through government sponsorship) was a degree of exclusion of the better-off students and even some hostility or resentment towards them (particularly if they originated from the Western region). Differences in affluence were often perceived by some students and even by some administrative staffs stemming from an unequal balance of power in the country. Some students were thus said to be 'in government'¹⁶, while some regions had poorer students e.g. from the North of the country as opposed to the relatively well-off Central or Western parts of Uganda. The bulk of the students sponsored by government are from these regions, which was perceived as unjust. In such cases, inequalities and potential sources of tension were thus deepened by a faulty application of state resources, ostensibly meant to narrow differences.

Another source of 'class difference' was noted between Ugandan and foreign students. The latter find university education cheaper in Uganda than at home and are generally perceived to be more affluent than most local students and treated as such, although a number of them said they struggled with finances. This is partly because of the differentiated fees universities charge national and foreign students, with the latter unhappy about the premium they have to pay. This has resulted in tension and conflict between the university administration and the student body, including a recent student strike at KIU and the suspension of the guild by the university administration. The management of this issue also affected the students' cultural expression at KIU because, without a guild, the activities of the students' cultural associations were also compromised.

¹⁶Generally this means they are from the West; they may not even have parents or guardians 'in government'

Managing diversity – successes and challenges

At all four universities, communities dealt with theories and practice of diversity management in different professional fields, while handling this diverse group of people in continuous motion, interaction, conflict and tension, engagement and disengagement. The relationships were constantly evolving; views already formed from earlier experiences were being challenged, modified or entrenched as students and staff engaged with different processes and people. Several mechanisms for engagement were identified by the students and the lecturers met, although these were not necessarily directed at managing diversity *per se*. They included instruments for arbitration, for raising collective voices within the university, to foster engagement between individuals and groups and to support learning and influence.

4.1 Policy implementation

We have seen that until the early 1990s, access to tertiary education suffered from significant gender and social obstacles, with historical and cultural factors contributing to enrolment and other inclusion constraints. Thus, what would be a rich tapestry of cultural diversity often ended up being suppressed, restricting the space for pluralism and engagement. We have also seen that national policies currently recognise diversity and the principle of non-discrimination and provide some guidance on how to address or engage with some issues of difference. Principles are set out and actions recommended that should guide towards a pluralistic society.

All four universities acknowledged the centrality of diversity and the principle of non-discrimination. Values expected of the student and staff body included equal treatment and academic excellence. In IUIU, there was a specific mention of acceptance of diversity and engagement with 'people of diverse opinions' as part of the university values. At KIU, the university valued diversity and '*non-discrimination as a major policy*', diversity being mentioned as one of the reasons several students selected the university for their course of study. Such values also extended to faculty or school-based policies and are made operational through curricula and extra curricula activities.

National policies were however implemented to varying degrees, with occasional contradictions between stated policy and practice. Many rules and regulations focused on conformity, rather than engagement with difference. Policy implementation was vested in diverse organs - the university senate, the office of the academic registrar, the different schools and faculties, the office of the dean of students and the students' guild. Various codes of conduct, rules and regulations applied specifically to the student body, lecturers or university administration, although some were applicable to the entire university community.

Initiatives that enhanced diversity included scholarships that reached out to diverse categories of students, programmes to engage with community members and debates and learning events to improve information and skills. Sports policies and facilities were important, as well as counselling services and religious spaces in some universities. The curricula also addressed issues of diversity in a structured way.

With regard to gender, the NCHC has put in place regulations and defines minimum standards that a university should follow with regard to women and their well-being, including issues of sexual harassment and welfare. In the four universities, both written and unwritten policies and practices existed in this respect. Some effort had been made to address the discriminatory aspects of gender relations, including instances of sexual harassment and the low participation of young women in guild affairs (through quotas or the reservation of some positions for women). Nevertheless, equal opportunities policies were generally lacking and gender and diversity issues experienced by the different sub-groups were rarely systematically tackled. Further, the values, rules and structures set up by the university did not always rhyme with and were sometimes subverted by students' perceptions and actions.

Disability preparedness was mainly limited to the disability allowance provided by government and a few instances of university response to the individual needs of students with disabilities. National level policies and regulations are meant to guide action; all public buildings are for instance meant to be disability friendly (with ramps, sign language facilities, etc.) Persons with disabilities met in the four

universities, lecturers and administrators give evidence of a positive response to meet the needs of blind students by the university administrations, but this was as and when the need arose, rather than as part of a systematic drive. Not all the universities' environment was therefore conducive and disability was not an integral part of their preparedness for service delivery to the students. There was limited evidence according to some of the respondents that the university administration had a policy that integrates awareness on disability and promotes staff understanding and support to students with a disability. Only rarely were respondents aware of efforts to support such students, and to make the universities disability-friendly beyond individual cases.

4.2 Individual responses to diversity

Students and staff variously responded to difference, to discrimination and to opportunities for engagement. Some judged or were influenced most by ethnicity or class; some deliberately chose not to be unduly informed by such differences; for others difference was not an issue and they did not 'see' it; yet others viewed and engaged with difference as an opportunity to understand people or experiences different from their own.

There were thus instances where individuals deliberately chose to ignore 'their own' cultural associations, and opted to join those they did not 'naturally' belong to, either as a form of protest against discrimination or because they wanted to understand other groups. At Nkumba University and UIU, such examples were provided of students who belonged to cultural groups outside their own ethnic group, and of patrons to the associations who were not of the same ethnic group as the members. At Gulu University, an example was provided of a male lecturer whose individual response to gender discrimination, particularly sexual harassment, was to provide a 'hotline' for students, to which he would respond at any time.

If views about others were often the 'public generalised views' of 'other peoples' conduct', many students thus rose above these and made friends with people different from themselves, either deliberately or just as a matter of course. It was observed by some respondents that a student could belong anywhere, especially if multilingual and eager to learn and understand the culture of colleagues, illustrating how pluralism is fuelled by both positive attitudes and proactive steps in relation to others. This could undermine stereotypes. At KIU, for instance, one student shared his prejudice that '*the Karamojong were very poor people and wild but when he came in contact with them, there are those who are very friendly, they are very good, they dress better than us and they are better off and others are more educated*'. He had struck a friendship with a Karamojong and found something quite different from what he '*came knowing*'.

At the other end of the spectrum, the treatment of some students as 'different' elicited reactions such as a drive to fight for their space, pride in identity or a need to downplay it. The former for instance included a student who took up the case of a non-academic staff member who made deprecating remarks about his ethnic group. Some avoided the spaces where their different identities came out prominently and opted for engagements where their other 'non-problematic' identities were paramount, often in the academic field. Academic spaces however are not without difference: besides students considered 'clever', 'studious' or 'dull', other considerations included those willing to pay their way through the courses, the course work or for examinations through underhand methods and others who did not seem to care what brought them to the university in the first place¹⁷. Students were also categorised according to the courses they undertook.

4.3 Spaces for collective engagement

All four universities benefited from spaces where engagement took place. Some of these deliberately focused on identity, such as the cultural groups, others on academic pursuits or areas of interest and social responsibilities.

The different groups, such as academic or cultural associations, religious and issue-based clubs provided spaces where members could experience and engage with diversity within a collective

¹⁷ A staff member at Nkumba University observed that many young students were at the university because it was expected by their parents and society, rather than because they saw it as their route to progress. The mature entrant students were much more serious and committed although they had challenges managing education, work and family, with a more pronounced effect on women.

environment. The existence of these spaces provided an indicator of the breadth of issues bringing students (and staff) together. It also pointed to the fact that the atmosphere at the university was, or not, conducive to associate. In KIU, clubs often provided the hub of engagement. In Gulu, academic associations – although not much supported by the students’ guild or the university administration - provided important mechanisms for engagement across difference, and were considered by some students as important venues to support the building of long lasting relationships, unity and engagement with all students. At Nkumba University, the Guild government ‘*always*’ tried to involve the leaders of the cultural associations, as an important constituency for the governance of the student body, and rather less the academic associations and other interest clubs. The university guild was generally responsible for ensuring that associations ran smoothly.

D. Kampala International University: cosmopolitanism in action

A relatively young University, ‘*KIU has attracted and supported a diverse community and is proud of it. It values diversity and non-discrimination is a major policy*’. Every country that sends a student to the university earns a place for its flag at the front of the administration building. This courting of diversity was said to be one of the reasons students apply to study at KIU, for reasons ranging from working in international settings to fulfilling pan-African ideals. A number of students met referred to their stay at KIU as an opportunity to learn about others, and gave examples of stereotypes that had been debunked in the process. Some came to ‘*make friends from different countries and ethnicities, to learn other languages and to promote understanding ...*’ A student observed that there were more non-Ugandans than nationals at KIU, that many are refugees and stated: “*I see an integrated community at KIU [...] everybody associates with each other because they have a common goal*”.

KIU had put in place both formal and informal mechanisms that support the management of diversity, including a university-wide initiative to teach English to students emerging from non-English speaking countries. This was designed to avoid any stigmatisation, so it was open to other students as well. Some elements of the university curricula addressed diversity issues, as in sociology, culture and gender, and development studies. Programmes were designed to make them accessible to a wide range of students. The presence of some international staff was seen to bring different perspectives, experiences and skills, although there was limited opportunity for the KIU university fraternity from the different campuses in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania to come together and exchange information, experiences and interests, in the pursuit of pluralism. KIU also helped its students to understand the policy environment by holding discussions and public lectures on pertinent national and international issues, and by providing opportunities for students to question social phenomena in Uganda, Africa and elsewhere. Every Friday, students were also able to interact with policy makers and professionals in the academic and diplomatic world, on matters pertinent to the development of the country, international policy and other matters. Cultural, academic and issue-based associations also provided spaces in which students of different backgrounds interacted. The students were free to form associations on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, and academic interests. The University’s support to cultural expression included an annual cultural gala, in which students competed with each other. There was also a Pan-African club which provided a forum for all students.

In spite of these measures, tensions subsisted. The respondents, students, academic and non-academic staff alike, found that key differences that were challenging at KIU included nationality, language and access to resources, which were all linked. Some students from ‘exclusive ethnic groups’ did not mix easily, unless helped to interact with others from societies that were quite different from theirs. The university did not actively identify the barriers to engagement between categories of students except in as far as public debates spoke to these differences. In practical terms there were no effective mechanisms to identify unique or special student needs. The University had counselling services but these were insufficiently developed (with just one female counsellor). The Academic staff association was not very effective, according to interviewees, and opportunities to learn from each other on matters of diversity were not explored.

International students were seen as better-off and able to meet their tuition fees on time. KIU, being profit-making, thus gave them greater attention than to the Ugandan students, who often had problems paying their tuition fees on time: ‘*As the 10% having problems, the administration has limited sympathy*’. Money was an important consideration in the scheme of things, for the management, the staff and the students. International and national students had a different tuition fee schedule, which was a bone of contention; almost all the students mentioned this and the staff were aware that this was a sensitive issue. The fines and payments for retakes and for late fees were

especially viewed as discriminatory. Students also suspected corruption around issues of payments, retakes, course work and examinations. In addition, with most students being 'dollar students', we were told that *'life becomes expensive in the university...'*

The interests of the students and that of the administration often differed and one of the links between the two was the students' guild. It was also responsible for student related activities, such as the cultural galas, and for overseeing the formation and running of other students' clubs. The guild discussed issues of difference at the time of orientation but students tended to see this as orientation on how the university was run and what to expect, without giving them the chance to ask questions and to address issues arising out of a diverse community. At the time of the research, the students' guild in KIU had been suspended. The immediate reason was a students' strike, but some respondents stated that *'the leadership was student centred and the administration saw this as a threat'*, while others thought the suspension had something to do with the nationality of the guild president, who was Kenyan. Regardless of the reason, an important mechanism to support engagement between students and the university was no longer available.

The cultural associations and galas, which had often supported students individually to fit into the university community, were especially popular across the four universities. The competitive element however was frequently understood as elevating some cultures above others, rather than providing a forum for sharing a rich cultural diversity to enhance understanding and engagement.

Students' congresses, the 'colloquium' at UIIU, public lectures and other such spaces also provided opportunities for students to discuss issues affecting them. The practice of formally organised debates by the students' body or the university administrations also provided exposure to different points of view and an opportunity to engage on issues, including difference, diversity and response by different categories of students and staff.

Religious spaces also provided important locations where the university communities congregated not only to worship but also to interact with each other and guide their members on how to relate with others. Many students and some staff based their interest or engagement with others on the tenets of their religion, and a philosophy of love for all that they practised in fellowship with others. Thus, the mosque and activities around it at UIIU played an important role to provide opportunities for Muslim students to discuss issues surrounding differences in outlook, religious denomination and how to focus on engagement with other people. At KIU, flexibility was provided to enable Muslim students observe their prayers five times a day, and for Seventh Day Adventists to observe the Sabbath.

The office of the Dean of Students was mentioned several times in relation to issues faced by individual students. The dean was referred to as a counsellor, experienced in addressing issues troubling students: *"It's the area that can make or break issues of diversity..."* Lecturers were also seen to constitute an important mechanism to manage diversity amongst students. However, while a number of lecturers are also counsellors, concerns were expressed about the extent to which they were trained and equipped to deal with students from diverse backgrounds.

4.4 Gaps in managing diversity

While the universities had rules, regulations and practices directly or indirectly relevant to the management of diversity, some of these did not complement each other or were even contradictory. The space and will to address policy and programme harmonisation, to ensure that these rules, regulations, and curricula foster pluralism was also often insufficient, both at the level of the individual institution and at the overall level of harmonisation of higher education policy with university practices. The following are the main gaps identified; they also provide indicators of the issues that could be addressed.

Fragmented action: Efforts to engage with diversity or to promote a pluralistic environment were often ad-hoc, resulting in efforts reaching a few individuals, without affecting the outlook and practice of the universities as institutional entities. Efforts were also insufficient to comprehensively address the different challenges faced by members of the university fraternity in engaging with diversity. There was for instance little interfaculty or intra-university overview of the existence of the diverse communities within each university and how their different perspectives and interests merged (or not) with that of the institution, even though there were some positive initiatives in some faculties, such as an emphasis on

ethics or on varied external lecturers. Progress in addressing gender issues was still limited, including in terms of women's empowerment, and the rate at which opportunities are utilised by men and women is still skewed in favour of men, as with the low numbers of female lecturers.

Underutilisation of opportunities for engagement: There was a limited use of available opportunities to promote the understanding and appreciation of diversity, such as using cultural groups as a conduit to bring students together through joint or complementary programmes. These groups were mainly coming together for competitions, rather than fora for students, lecturers and other members of the university fraternity to learn about and appreciate difference, in addition to being entertained. Similarly, the universities had not made use of or comprehensively supported issue-based and academic associations, which by their nature encompass diverse groups of students and provide natural spaces for engagement.

Courses/curricula: Although different departments addressed topics such as ethics, within which issues of diversity may be discussed, there was no uniformly applied discussion and study of diversity and pluralism, pertinent to all aspects of the university learning and social environment. Whereas each university had some programmes, curricula, activities or practices that dealt with issues of diversity, none had identifiable programmes or course units that ran across the different faculties, schools and departments to ensure access to the concept of pluralism by all students. Generally, the use of curricula to articulate issues of diversity and to prepare students to live in and appreciate a pluralistic society was limited.

University staff limitations: As a body, academic and administrative staff did not have a 'considered perspective' on pluralism as an important viewpoint to engage with the multicultural context of the universities, in which diverse communities co-exist. They recognised the diverse backgrounds of students and lecturers as part of their reality, but did not necessarily use these different perspectives and experiences as positive ingredients for preparing students to engage with diversity. In addition, there were limited spaces and opportunities for the staff to develop skills and experience in the management of difference as an important aspect of their work with students and their interaction with other members of the university fraternity. The staff associations were similarly poorly equipped to provide or promote opportunities for skills development in the management of diversity. Lecturers did not generally receive any preparation on managing within a multicultural setting. Some viewed Uganda as a multicultural society where many people are '*already willing and able to work with each other*', hence precluding the need for added action.

Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The universities visited prided themselves on their multicultural outlook and recruited students and lecturers with diversity in mind. As macrocosms of the wider social context, however, the campuses both illustrated ethnic and other tensions amongst students and staff, as well as engagement and interaction by individuals across lines of divide.

If policies, rules and regulations are important standards by which actions by the different members of the university community could be guided or measured, this did not necessarily lead to understanding and engagement. Rules and regulations have to be buttressed by positive attitudes, interests and opportunity to have an impact on the uptake and appreciation of diversity and its management.

Students and lecturers who were genuinely interested took steps to engage with others. However, for many, stereotypes about their colleagues often stood in the way of positive and continuous engagement, limiting it to sharing the same space and activities set for them as members of the same university community. Nevertheless, the spaces created by university activities are also spaces where students learned to get along with, understand and debunk prejudices about different groups of people.

Each of the universities had dominant groups (either defined by religion, nationality or ethnicity) that had much influence on their outlook and activities. These, as well as the ways in which other students engage with them, provided important sources of identity for the universities concerned, as well as sources of conflict and opportunities for engagement.

While tension between groups was occasionally addressed by disengagement, this also provided opportunities for individual students to choose to engage with people different from themselves or with different worldviews, forcing them to come to terms with differences and to take a stand to use these as platforms for understanding, rather than isolation and disengagement. The study also illustrates how students used different identities at different times in their interaction with different groups. This was sometimes done without conscious intention, deliberately at other times. Identities, such as that of faculty member or scientist, social scientist or humanist, go hand in hand with expectations and ideas that go with them and that lead to the inclusion of some and exclusion of others. These same identities are discarded under other circumstances, when the students become for instance girls, westerners, northerners, Baganda, or Easterners. In some cases, students from 'privileged' ethnicities (usually the dominant tribe in the location of the campus, except for Mbale, where the dominant tribe was considered to be the Baganda) decided to leave their group or to join up with another group; where they were accepted.

Whereas pluralism and diversity are important values articulated in different ways by each of them, there was limited action to ensure that a genuinely pluralistic environment is created. Mechanisms to manage diversity rarely dealt with tensions adequately and sometimes added to them (as when the focus was on competition, rather than mutual understanding). There were also contradictions in policy and practice in this respect: internal policies were not harmonised to reflect equality of treatment and non-discriminatory rules and practices, and there were no extensive mechanisms to promote and monitor pluralism and the enjoyment of equal rights and treatment by the student and staff body. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) has difficulties in providing oversight to the universities to ensure that the standards listed in the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act are adhered to and to ensure that all the students receive adequate instruction and are not prevented from accessing and benefiting from learning by virtue of who they are.

Many of the tensions were caused by communication and information management inadequacies. The university environment provides an opportunity where tensions, stereotypes, misconceptions, challenges and empathies could all be managed realistically and systematically to improve the overall outlook on difference and diversity, in much more positive ways than was the case. There was at times an inordinate focus on the negative when it came to difference and distinction, sowing the seeds for intolerance, partly nurtured by Ugandans' personal experiences, the history of the country, and low expectations. While there were a few schools or departments that had established a deliberate agenda dealing with the issues and challenges surrounding diversity in the context of the disciplines taught, and whereas difference is sometimes discussed, university administrations still lacked actions and

programmes that adequately focus on the students' diversity and the opportunities that arise, as well as the challenges this represents in providing an education that supports co-existence, engagement with diversity and the development of well-rounded graduates able to function well in any circumstances.

5.2 Recommendations

Policy frameworks and policy implementation: The universities visited did not directly address the management of diversity and, where a policy framework existed (such as for equal opportunities or to address gender or HIV/AIDS-related issues), this was often incomplete and the necessary management mechanisms rarely functioned. Existing university systems, rules and structures at the very least need analysis with a 'pluralism lens.' It was apparent that the universities also needed help to adhere to national requirements, with guidance from the NCHE to harmonise their internal rules and policies and to provide a conducive environment for managing diversity amongst students and staff. The NCHE monitoring role and its engagement with universities also needs strengthening - through the provision of adequate funds and the development and implementation of guidelines, particularly to support universities to implement amendments to the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act that deal with diversity. In particular, it should support the development of policy and strategies at individual university level that address elements of difference, such as gender, disability, and ethnicity.

Curriculum and extra-curricular activities: These need to reflect diversity issues: pluralism has to be placed on the university agenda, across all faculties, as one way to ensure the future stability of the country and region. This could include topics on ethics and diversity, linking this to individual, national and regional development. Diversity and its management can also provide a regular topic for papers to be presented at annual university conferences, public lectures and student debates. Debates can also be organised on 'difference and life on campus. Cultural associations provide important avenues for the management of diversity, provided they are helped to move away from any form of particularism; their activities could complement cultural exhibitions and include talk-shows on pluralism and annual festivals or joint work on socio-cultural topics, emphasising distinct cultural practices as well as commonalities across ethnic lines.

Skills and attitudes: The students' and lecturers' awareness of the varied cultures, behaviour, and expectations of the different groups and sub-cultures on campus and how they interact with each other needs sharpening. Academic and non-academic staff must be better equipped than they presently are to manage such diversity. Universities could include opportunities for discussions on diversity and its challenges, to benefit both new and continuing lecturers, such as in the form of lecturers' 'roundtables' where they can discuss challenges related to the multicultural academic and social space at the university.

Internal practices: These could emphasise the creation of open and trusted mechanisms for students to freely interact with and influence the university staff and administration on issues of concern to them, as well as a system involving diverse second-year students in helping newcomers face matters of difference and engage with them. The contents of orientation weeks at the start of the academic year could also incorporate student sensitisation and the involvement of the academic staff in identifying and discussing how to live and engage with difference. Deliberate efforts could be made to regularly collect students' ideas and provide an opportunity for discussions on these issues, to ensure that staff and administration are well informed. The students' guild could actively participate in this respect and students' ideas and positive experience on diversity could inform these discussions every year.

Raising the profile of pluralism across university campuses: This could be achieved in several ways, including sustaining debates on issues of diversity and pluralism between universities, contributing to periodic inter-university communication channels to start a dialogue on their challenges and experiences in managing diversity, and implementing activities to support mutual monitoring and sharing of yearly 'commitments to pluralism'.

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