

Structural Challenges and Limitations in the Implementation of African Union Interventions in Uganda

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Abstract: This study examined the structural challenges and limitations that constrain the implementation of African Union (AU) interventions in Uganda, addressing the third objective of a wider inquiry into AU diplomatic engagement and peacekeeping as instruments for advancing Pan-African ideals. The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from 158 respondents, comprising AU officials, government diplomats, regional organizational staff, civil society actors, and policy experts, using structured questionnaires supplemented by key informant interviews. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula, and the reliability of the research instrument was confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.831 to 0.874, with the challenges subscale returning the highest coefficient of the three (0.862). Descriptive statistics, one sample t-tests, and Pearson correlation analysis were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that respondents most strongly agreed that AU interventions in Uganda faced significant structural constraints, recording the highest grand mean (4.01) among the three thematic areas assessed in the wider study. The most strongly endorsed challenge was the AU's dependence on external funding (mean=4.15), followed by the tension between respect for state sovereignty and decisive diplomatic action (mean=4.05), weak enforcement mechanisms (mean=3.98), logistical limitations (mean=3.96), and coordination deficits with local institutions (mean=3.89). All five items were statistically significant above the neutral midpoint at $p < .001$, and challenges correlated positively with both diplomatic engagements ($r=0.487$) and peacekeeping roles ($r=0.534$). The study concluded that addressing these structural barriers, particularly financial dependency, was essential to strengthening the AU's operational autonomy in Uganda, and recommended a phased transition toward self-financing mechanisms and stronger institutional coordination frameworks.

Keywords: African Union, structural challenges, financial dependency, sovereignty, enforcement mechanisms, institutional reform, Uganda

1.0 Introduction

The contemporary African security landscape is defined by a structural turning point in which, as Wane (2026) argues, the erosion of global multilateralism has transformed Pan-Africanism from a political aspiration into a functional security imperative. African nations have increasingly recognized that they can no longer rely on external pillars for stability, a reality that has necessitated a re-invigoration of the African Union's agency and its capacity to mount interventions that are both principled in intent and effective in execution. The concept of non-indifference, codified in Article 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act, serves as the legal and moral foundation for these interventions, granting the Union the right to intervene in a member state in respect of grave circumstances such as war crimes, genocide, and threats to legitimate order (African Union, 2002).

However, the efficacy of the AU's diplomatic and peacekeeping tools is perpetually challenged by a persistent mismatch between aspirational normative commitments and pragmatic implementation. The AU's agency is often constrained by donor dependent financing, limited enforcement capacity, and a lack of rapid reaction capability. In the case of Uganda, a country whose government has become a major regional security provider and whose border regions absorb significant cross-border displacement pressures (Ocan, 2024a), this dynamic creates significant leverage that can dilute the Union's ability to address internal democratic and institutional shortcomings. This manuscript reports the findings of the third objective of a broader study into AU interventions in Uganda, namely the identification of the structural challenges and limitations that constrain the implementation of these interventions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The fundamental problem addressed by this study is the structural paradox between the African Union's normative mandate of non-indifference and its pragmatic reliance on member states, such as Uganda, as primary security partners. While the AU has articulated an ambitious agenda for financial self-sufficiency, AU Commission Chairperson Youssouf (2026) has publicly acknowledged that the Union's peace support operations, including its mission in Somalia, continue to depend heavily on unpredictable external funding rather than dependable, African-led financing. This financial and strategic dependency risks placing

the AU in a position where it must moderate its diplomatic assertiveness to preserve the cooperation of financially and militarily significant member states.

Consequently, there is a widening gap between the AU's aspirational Pan-African ideals and the practical limitations of its operational capacity. The tension between the AU's non-indifference doctrine and the inherited Westphalian norm of state sovereignty (Kioko, 2003) further complicates the Union's ability to act decisively, while weak enforcement mechanisms, logistical constraints, and coordination deficits with domestic institutions compound the problem. Without a clearer understanding of the specific nature and relative weight of these structural challenges, efforts to reform and strengthen AU interventions in Uganda and comparable contexts risk being poorly targeted. This study therefore sought to empirically identify and assess the challenges and limitations that constrain the implementation of AU interventions in Uganda.

1.2 Objective of the Study

To identify the challenges and limitations in the implementation of African Union interventions in Uganda.

1.3 Research Question

What are the challenges and limitations in the implementation of African Union interventions in Uganda?

2.0 Literature Review

The existing literature identifies several systemic challenges that hinder the effective implementation of AU interventions in Uganda, revolving primarily around funding, sovereignty, and institutional capacity. One of the most prominent limitations concerns the AU's heavy reliance on external partners, including the European Union and the United Nations, for the financing of its peace support operations. Youssouf (2026) has argued that dependable, African-led financing, rather than reliance on unpredictable external funding, is essential if the Union is to sustain its peace and security agenda, and has criticized the underutilization of African-owned instruments such as the African Standby Force as partly a function of this financing gap. This financial dependence compromises the African-led character of AU interventions and constrains the Union's ability to act independently in the face of local political crises.

Furthermore, the persistent tension between the AU's mandate for non-indifference and the traditional Westphalian concept of sovereignty remains a significant hurdle. Kioko (2003) observes that the transition from the Organization of African Unity's principle of non-interference to the AU's principle of non-indifference was intended to empower the Union to act in cases of grave concern, yet member state governments frequently perceive diplomatic interventions in domestic affairs as an infringement on national autonomy. This tension is compounded where a member state, such as Uganda, occupies the position of a regional anchor state whose peacekeeping contributions the AU is reluctant to jeopardize. The literature also points to a lack of robust enforcement mechanisms within the AU, noting that while the Union can issue declarations or deploy observer missions, it frequently lacks the political leverage to compel domestic policy change or ensure the full implementation of governance reforms at the national level.

These institutional constraints can also be read through the lens of Liberal Institutionalism, as articulated by Keohane (1984), which holds that international institutions add value by reducing transaction costs and providing a rules based pathway for collective action. Applied to the AU, this theoretical perspective suggests that the Union's institutional architecture is only as effective as the resources, enforcement authority, and coordination mechanisms placed at its disposal; where these are lacking, as the literature on funding, sovereignty, and enforcement suggests, the institution's capacity to translate normative commitment into operational outcomes is correspondingly constrained. Despite this body of literature, empirical evidence on how these structural challenges are perceived and weighted by the diverse stakeholders directly engaged with AU interventions in a specific national context such as Uganda remains limited, a gap this study sought to address.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design based on quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to examine relationships among a limited number of institutional variables across a sample of cases, taking into account the resources available and the size of the target population. The design further enabled the researcher to quantify social phenomena, particularly the institutional challenges prevalent in AU-Uganda relations, and to gather information capable of describing and enhancing understanding of the underlying realities. This design mirrors the approach the researcher applied in an earlier study of political participation in Uganda, which likewise combined descriptive quantitative analysis with qualitative key informant interviews to examine relationships among a small number of institutional variables (Ocan, 2024b).

The target population comprised key stakeholders involved in or affected by African Union interventions in Uganda, including AU officials, government representatives, security personnel, diplomats, and staff of regional organizations such as the East African

Community (EAC) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). It also included civil society actors, scholars, and policy experts with direct knowledge of or experience with AU diplomatic engagements and peacekeeping initiatives. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula, $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$, where n is the sample size, N is the total population, and e is the margin of error, set at 0.05. Applying this formula to a target population of 260 yielded a sample size of 158 respondents, proportionately distributed across the respondent categories shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Target Population and Determination of Sample Size

Category of Respondents	Sample size	Sampling technique
AU officials/representatives	24	Purposive Sampling
Government officials/diplomats	36	Purposive Sampling
Regional organizational staff	30	Purposive and Stratified Sampling
Civil society actors/NGOs	36	Stratified Sampling
Policy experts	32	Stratified Sampling
Total	158	

Data were collected through structured questionnaires, which provided the quantitative data reported in this manuscript, and key informant interviews, which offered more detailed qualitative insight into the aspects of institutional challenge that numerical data alone could not fully capture. The reliability of the research instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with the generally accepted threshold for reliability set at $\alpha \geq 0.70$. As shown in Table 2, the subscale measuring AU challenges and limitations returned a coefficient of 0.862, classified as good, while the overall 15 item instrument returned an alpha of 0.874.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients

Scale / Sub-Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
AU Diplomatic Engagements (Section B)	5	0.847	Acceptable
AU Peacekeeping Roles (Section S)	5	0.831	Acceptable
AU Challenges and Limitations (Section E)	5	0.862	Good
Overall Scale	15	0.874	Good

4.0 Results

The third specific objective of the study sought to identify the challenges and limitations in the implementation of AU interventions in Uganda. Five items (E1 to E5), measured on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), were presented to respondents. Table 3 presents the detailed frequencies, means, and standard deviations.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Challenges and Limitations of AU Interventions in Uganda (n=158)

Item	SD f(%)	D f(%)	NS f(%)	A f(%)	SA f(%)	Mean	SD	Interp.
E1	4 (2.5%)	6 (3.8%)	10 (6.3%)	80 (50.6%)	58 (36.7%)	4.15	0.92	Agree
E2	5 (3.2%)	8 (5.1%)	12 (7.6%)	82 (51.9%)	51 (32.3%)	4.05	0.96	Agree
E3	6 (3.8%)	10 (6.3%)	15 (9.5%)	77 (48.7%)	50 (31.6%)	3.98	1.01	Agree
E4	5 (3.2%)	8 (5.1%)	18 (11.4%)	78 (49.4%)	49 (31.0%)	3.96	0.99	Agree
E5	7 (4.4%)	12 (7.6%)	20 (12.7%)	72 (45.6%)	47 (29.7%)	3.89	1.05	Agree

Item	SD f(%)	D f(%)	NS f(%)	A f(%)	SA f(%)	Mean	SD	Interp.
Grand Mean / Overall						4.01		Agree

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Not Sure, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.

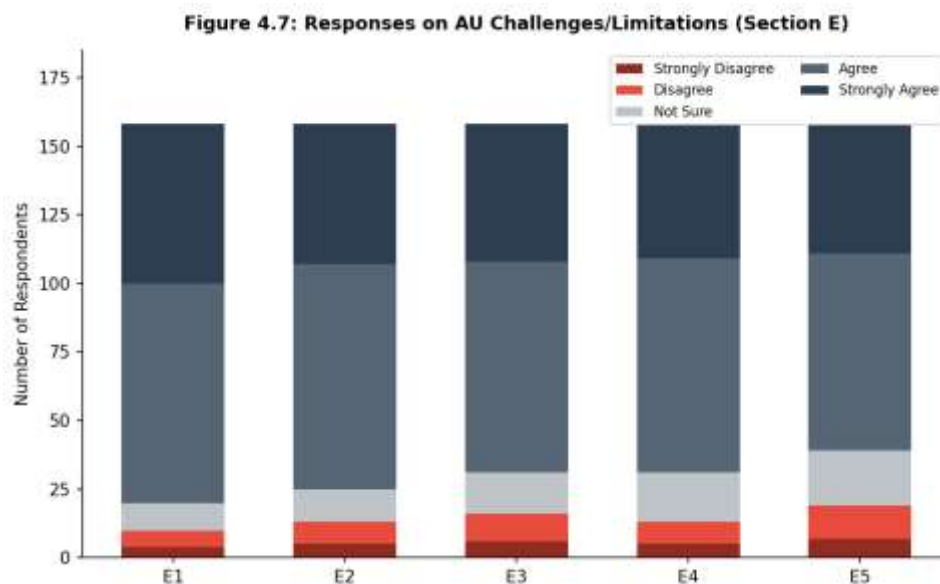


Figure 1: Stacked Bar Chart of Responses on AU Challenges and Limitations

The findings presented in Table 3 and Figure 1 revealed that the challenges and limitations section recorded the highest overall grand mean of 4.01 among the three thematic sections of the wider study, indicating that respondents most strongly agreed with the statements describing the structural constraints facing AU interventions in Uganda. This pattern of strong agreement was consistent across all five items and was particularly pronounced for items E1 and E2.

Item E1, which assessed whether the AU's dependence on external funding limited its autonomy in managing interventions in Uganda, returned the highest mean across the entire instrument at 4.15 (SD=0.92). A total of 138 respondents (87.3%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while only 10 (6.3%) expressed disagreement and 10 (6.3%) were neutral. The low standard deviation reflected remarkable consensus on this point, with respondents across all professional categories recognizing external financial dependency as the most fundamental structural challenge confronting AU operations in Uganda.

Item E2, which examined whether respect for state sovereignty often hindered the AU from taking decisive diplomatic action in Uganda, yielded a mean of 4.05 (SD=0.96), with 133 respondents (84.2%) in agreement. Item E3, addressing whether the AU lacked sufficient enforcement mechanisms to ensure Uganda complied with its peace mandates, registered a mean of 3.98 (SD=1.01), with 127 respondents (80.4%) in agreement. Item E4, which evaluated whether limited logistical capacity prevented the AU from sustaining long term peace support initiatives, returned a mean of 3.96 (SD=0.99), also with 127 respondents (80.4%) in agreement. Item E5, which assessed whether there was a lack of coordination between the AU and local Ugandan institutions in implementing Pan-African policies, recorded the lowest mean in the section at 3.89 (SD=1.05), with 119 respondents (75.3%) in agreement and the widest spread of ambivalence in the section.

To determine whether the mean responses for these items were statistically significantly different from the theoretical neutral point of 3.0, a one sample t-test was conducted for each item. The null hypothesis was that the population mean equals 3.0, while the alternative hypothesis was that the population mean is significantly greater than 3.0. Table 4 presents the results for items E1 through E5.

Table 4: One-Sample t-Test Results for Challenges and Limitations Items (Test Value = 3.0, alpha = 0.05)

Item	Mean	SD	SE	t-value	df	p-value	Sig.	Decision
E1	4.15	0.92	0.073	15.72	157	<.001	Yes	Sig. > 3.0

Item	Mean	SD	SE	t-value	df	p-value	Sig.	Decision
E2	4.05	0.96	0.076	13.77	157	<.001	Yes	Sig. > 3.0
E3	3.98	1.01	0.080	12.20	157	<.001	Yes	Sig. > 3.0
E4	3.96	0.99	0.079	12.19	157	<.001	Yes	Sig. > 3.0
E5	3.89	1.05	0.084	10.66	157	<.001	Yes	Sig. > 3.0

Note: SE = Standard Error; df = Degrees of Freedom; Sig. = Statistically Significant at $p < .05$.

As demonstrated in Table 4, all five challenge items yielded mean scores that were statistically significantly greater than the neutral midpoint of 3.0 at the 0.001 level, with t-values ranging from 10.66 (E5) to 15.72 (E1) at 157 degrees of freedom. Item E1 registered the highest t-value in the entire 15 item instrument, reflecting the extraordinary consensus and precision with which respondents identified financial dependency as the dominant structural challenge facing AU interventions in Uganda.

To examine the relationship between the challenges section and the other two thematic areas of the wider study, namely AU diplomatic engagements and AU peacekeeping roles, a Pearson product moment correlation analysis was conducted using composite section scores. Table 5 presents the correlation matrix.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Matrix of the Three Thematic Variables (n=158)

Variable	Diplomatic Engagements (B)	Peacekeeping Roles (S)	Challenges (E)
Diplomatic Engagements (B)	1.000	0.612**	0.487**
Peacekeeping Roles (S)	0.612**	1.000	0.534**
Challenges (E)	0.487**	0.534**	1.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

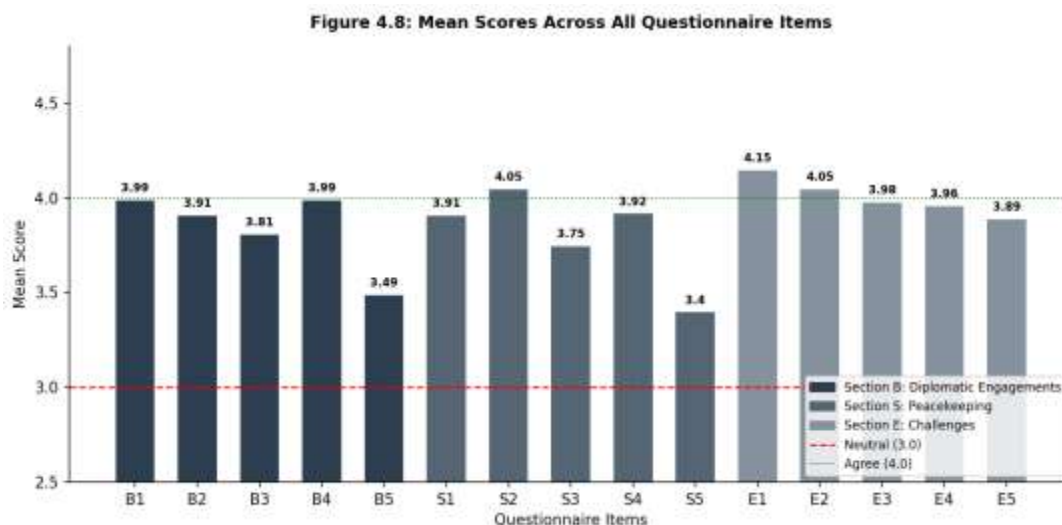


Figure 2: Mean Score Comparison Across All 15 Questionnaire Items

The Pearson correlation results revealed statistically significant positive relationships between the challenges section and both other thematic variables. The correlation between AU peacekeeping roles and challenges was moderate and positive ($r=0.534$, $p<.001$), while the correlation between diplomatic engagements and challenges was the weakest of the three pairwise relationships in the wider study, though still statistically significant ($r=0.487$, $p<.001$). These findings suggested that respondents who were most knowledgeable about and appreciative of AU diplomatic and peacekeeping contributions were simultaneously most acutely aware of the structural limitations constraining those contributions, reflecting a coherent expert assessment rather than a contradictory one. Figure 2 further illustrates that the challenges section recorded the most consistently elevated mean scores of the three sections,

underscoring the urgency with which respondents identified institutional reform as a prerequisite for deepening the effectiveness of AU interventions in Uganda.

5.0 Discussion

The finding that the challenges and limitations section recorded the highest grand mean (4.01) and the strongest individual t-value (E1, $t=15.72$) among all fifteen items in the wider study was both empirically compelling and theoretically significant. The overwhelming consensus regarding the AU's external financial dependency as its most fundamental structural constraint is consistent with Youssouf's (2026) own public assessment, as Chairperson of the AU Commission, that the Union's peace support operations remain reliant on unpredictable external funding rather than dependable, African-led financing. When external donors impose conditionalities or adjust funding levels, the AU's operational capacity is directly affected, raising legitimate questions about the sustainability and African-led character of its interventions. This is particularly salient in the Ugandan context, where Uganda's transition from a contributor to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to its successor missions has itself been shaped by the financing constraints that Youssouf (2026) has publicly acknowledged.

The tension between non-indifference and sovereignty (E2, mean=4.05) was identified by respondents as the second most critical structural challenge, confirming the theoretical paradox identified by Kioko (2003) between the AU's non-indifference principle and the inherited Westphalian norm of absolute state sovereignty. Uganda's status as a regional anchor state, providing a substantial contingent of troops to AU-mandated peace support operations and hosting key regional initiatives, creates a structural power asymmetry that can shield it from the fuller application of AU non-indifference mechanisms. This dynamic reflects the reasoning underlying Badmus's (2015) account of Uganda's foundational and sustained troop contributing role within the African Union Mission in Somalia, since a member state whose military cooperation the Union depends upon is, in practice, better positioned to moderate the diplomatic pressure applied to it. The identified lack of enforcement mechanisms (E3) and coordination deficits with local institutions (E5) further corroborate a characterization of the AU as a normative leader with operational limitations, capable of establishing frameworks for peace but constrained in its capacity to compel compliance or coordinate implementation with national institutions in a systematic and sustained manner.

The positive correlation between peacekeeping roles and challenges ($r=0.534$) and between diplomatic engagements and challenges ($r=0.487$) is theoretically consistent with the institutionalist expectation that an institution's normative and operational functions are interdependent (Keohane, 1984): the same respondents who most closely engage with and value the AU's diplomatic and peacekeeping instruments are also best positioned to observe the structural constraints under which those instruments operate. This pattern echoes findings from the researcher's own prior work on institutional and governance accountability in Uganda, where similarly patterned constraints, including limited enforcement capacity and weak coordination across successive electoral cycles, were found to compound rather than offset one another (Ocan, 2026).

6.0 Conclusion

The implementation of AU interventions in Uganda is significantly constrained by a constellation of structural challenges, of which external financial dependency is the most pervasive and disabling. The sovereignty-indifference paradox, inadequate enforcement mechanisms, logistical deficiencies, and institutional coordination gaps collectively produce an operating environment in which the AU's capacity to translate its normative commitments into sustained operational outcomes remains fundamentally limited. These findings demonstrate that while the AU's Pan-African project in Uganda reflects meaningful institutional intent, deepening its effectiveness requires a comprehensive reform agenda that addresses the financial, political, juridical, and organizational barriers identified in this study simultaneously rather than in isolation.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations to the African Union

The African Union should accelerate the full operationalization of its self-financing mechanisms, including the 0.2% levy on eligible imports, to reduce dependence on external donors for peace support operations. The findings of this study, particularly the extraordinary consensus recorded for item E1, underscore the urgency of this agenda and align with Chairperson Youssouf's (2026) own call for dependable, African-led financing of the Union's peace and security priorities. The AU Commission should establish a dedicated Peace Fund with transparent governance structures, an independent auditing mechanism, and binding member state contribution obligations, with a phased transition away from donor budget support for peace missions planned over a five-year horizon.

The AU should also invest in strengthening its enforcement mechanisms under the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, including the establishment of a sanctions committee within the Peace and Security Council with the technical

capacity to impose graduated diplomatic and economic measures on member states that persistently fail to comply with democratic governance standards. This recommendation would help ensure that enforcement mechanisms keep pace with the AU's normative commitments across successive national election cycles, consistent with patterns of institutional accountability the researcher has examined elsewhere (Ocan, 2026).

7.2 Recommendations to the Government of Uganda

The Government of Uganda should formalize a structured coordination mechanism between the AU's country-level representatives and key Ugandan national institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Internal Security Organization, and the Uganda Human Rights Commission. The coordination deficit identified under item E5 indicates that the absence of systematic institutional linkages between AU programs and domestic implementation bodies is undermining the coherence and sustainability of AU-supported initiatives. A Uganda-AU Joint Implementation Framework, reviewed annually by both parties, would provide the institutional architecture for this coordination.

7.3 Recommendations to Civil Society Organizations and Regional Bodies

Civil society organizations operating in Uganda should leverage the AU's human rights and governance oversight mechanisms more strategically, submitting shadow reports to the AU Commission and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on institutional and coordination developments affecting AU interventions in Uganda. Regional bodies, including the East African Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, should develop formal complementary frameworks with the AU's Peace and Security Architecture to address the coordination gaps identified by respondents. Multilateral coordination protocols that clearly delineate mandates, information-sharing obligations, and joint operational procedures among these regional bodies and the AU would substantially improve the effectiveness of AU interventions in Uganda's security and governance environment.

8.0 Areas for Further Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, further research is warranted on the financing architecture of AU peace support operations, including the implementation status of the 0.2% import levy mechanism, to provide actionable intelligence for the AU's ongoing self-financing reform agenda. A comparative study examining how the sovereignty-indifference tension and enforcement gaps identified in this study manifest across other AU member states occupying similar anchor state positions, such as Kenya or Ethiopia, would also help establish whether the structural challenges identified here are specific to Uganda or reflective of a broader continental pattern.

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