

# THE ROLE OF DUTY BEARERS IN UGANDA IN RESPONDING TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT: KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

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## Introduction

- ❖ In Uganda, the Sexual Offences Bill (2024) and the Penal Code Act (2007) contain specific provisions against sexual harassment and charge state duty bearers such as the police, policy makers, and non-state duty bearers; local and community leaders with addressing sexual harassment.
- ❖ Little is known about duty bearer's understanding of sexual harassment and their role in addressing harassment or community members' expectations of them.

### Aim and Objective

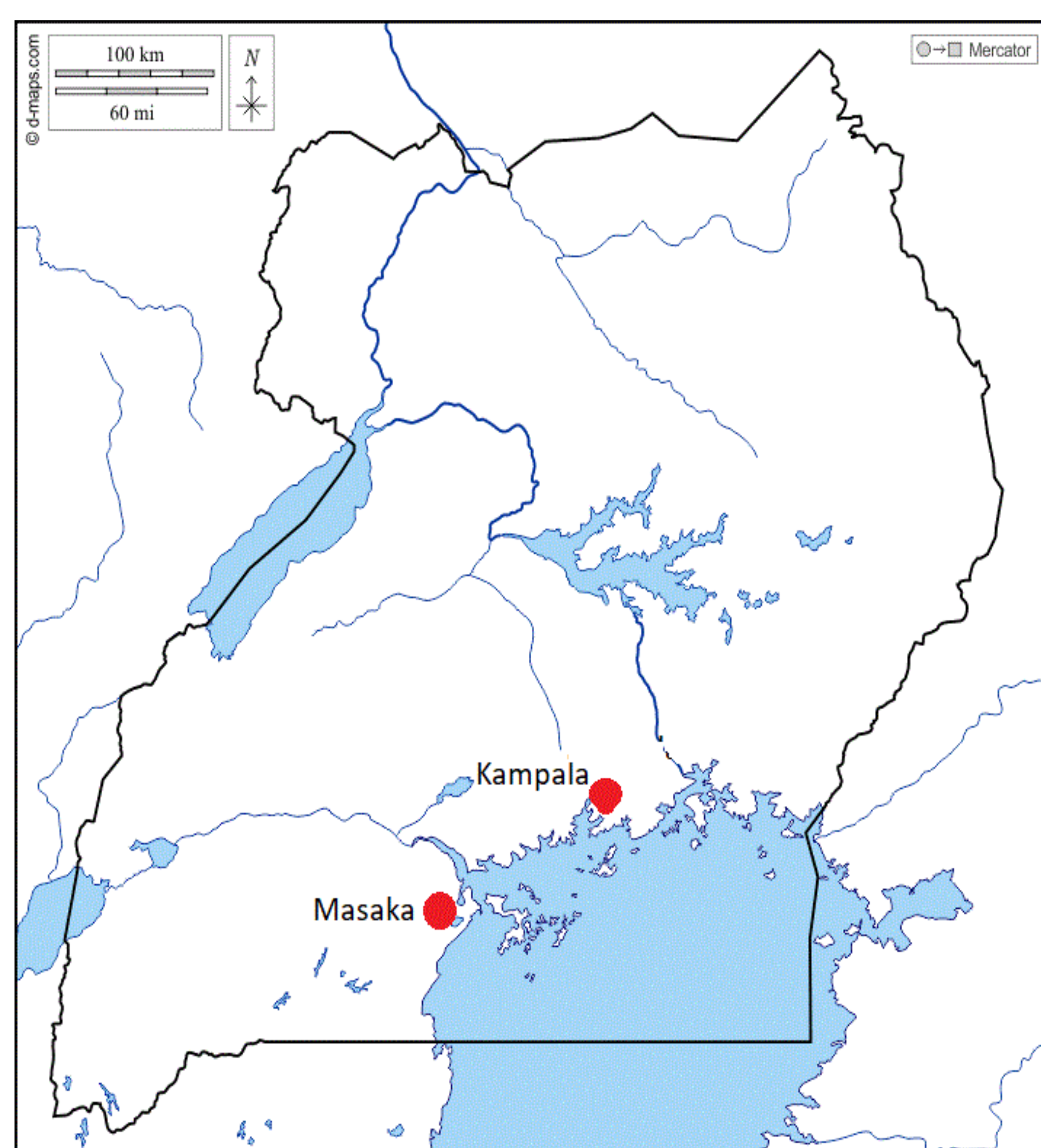
Explore duty bearers' understanding of sexual harassment, their role in addressing harassment and community members' experiences of reporting sexual harassment to duty bearers.

## Methods

In 2023, we conducted:

- ❖ **60 IDIs and 8 FGDs** amongst youth 14-24 boys and girls and adult men and women aged 25+ years.
- ❖ **9 Kils** with state and non state leaders.
- ❖ We sampled from markets (**Kampala**) and hospitality settings (**Masaka**).
- ❖ **Ethics:** informed consent and assent was obtained from participants.
- ❖ Institute of Social Transformation acted as the study referral partner.
- ❖ Interviews were conducted using semi-structured topic guides, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic content analysis.

### Map of Uganda showing study sites.



Source: d-maps.com

## Results

### ❖ Finding 1: Duty bearers are unaware of Sexual Offences Bill.

*"Frankly speaking, the communities don't know about the Sexual Offences Bill nor its provisions. Even these so-called police officers don't know about it, they only know about defilement and rape cases (Penal Code Act), nothing else. How will such people be efficient when **they don't know what they are supposed to tackle and how best to do it.**" Female, 52 years, Policy marker*

### ❖ Finding 2: Poor and frustrating responses from duty bearers.

*"When you report to the Chairman that a man has insulted you (vulgar insults) or has touched your private parts like the vagina, **he asks for money to open up a case against him...**After [you have given the money] he tells you that this is a **very small issue and you should let it go because he didn't rape you.**" Female 27, Juice vendor*



### ❖ Finding 3: Enforcers of the law were reported as perpetrators of sexual harassment.

*"... the **police officers** are equally disrespectful to women; they **touch and insult the women just like the boda boda men**". Female, 25 years, juice vendor*

*"...the police officer was interested in me sexually and I refused. He told me that, do you think that for us we ask or even request, we do not request, **I can do anything that I want because I am the law.**" Female, 27 years, roadside roasted plantain vendor*

### ❖ Finding 4: Effective by-law enforcement by non-state leaders.

*"...They are **suspended for a period of two weeks** from the market for continuing with their bad behaviours." Female, 18 years, Food vendor.*

*"If [a man] says **vulgar words** [to a woman]... we **fine him 50,000/=** for the day...." Male, 47years, Local leader .*

## Discussion

- ❖ Findings reveal a **critical gap in awareness and understanding** among state and non-state duty bearers of sexual harassment, and their role in addressing it, making them **less competent to handle cases appropriately**.
- ❖ **Poor responses** and further **victimization** by duty bearers negatively affected survivors' willingness to report sexual harassment and, confidence in law enforcers, thus further exacerbating sexual harassment.
- ❖ **Community members prefer reporting to non-state duty bearers and local leaders** because of their effective and timely responses in addressing sexual harassment through community by-laws.

## Recommendations

1. Teach state and non-state duty bearers about sexual harassment, the legal provisions to prevent it, and their role and mandate in addressing it.
2. Promote communal responsibility and accountability in preventing and addressing sexual harassment.
3. Strengthen and build on the ability of local structures to address and manage cases of sexual harassment.
4. Capacity-building and development of the state duty bearers to operationalise and enforce the laws against sexual harassment.



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