

Money decisions

MONEY
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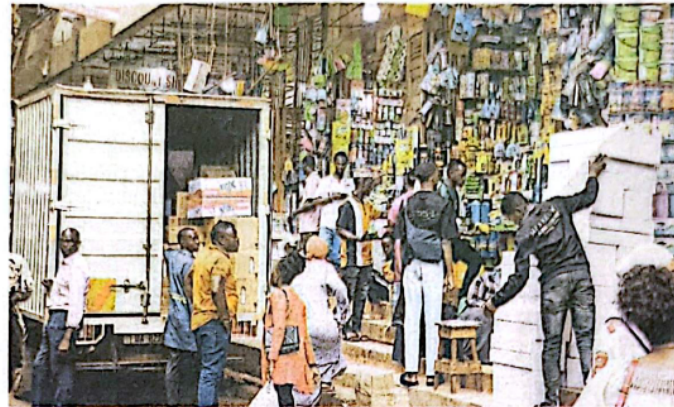
You're not bad with money but reactive

For long, the conversation around financial inclusion in Uganda has been focused on access, who has it, who does not, and how far the country has progressed in closing that gap. Yet currently, that challenge has largely been addressed, with recent FinScope findings indicating that about 81 percent of Ugandan adults are financially included, largely driven by the widespread adoption of mobile money, the continued relevance of SACCOs, and the resilience of informal financial systems that have brought millions into active participation within the financial ecosystem.

This level of inclusion, coupled with the reality that nearly 60 percent of Ugandans are saving in one form or another, whether through formal institutions or informal mechanisms, would ordinarily suggest a population that is steadily progressing toward financial stability and eventual wealth creation. But a more deliberate examination of how this participation translates into actual financial outcomes reveals a more complex picture. The issues in the fact that this participation is not supported by a clear structure that allows financial effort to accumulate, compound, and translate into long-term security, which creates a situation where activity is high but progress remains limited.

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Across Uganda, individuals and businesses alike are engaging with mon-



Traders attend to customers in down town. Without structure, money will continue to move but it won't create progress. PHOTO/MICHAEL KAKUMIRIZI

ey daily, earning income, transacting frequently, and setting aside portions of what they earn yet much of this activity is driven by immediate needs and short-term priorities, with limited alignment to long-term financial outcomes. While money is constantly in motion, it is not necessarily being directed in a way that builds stability or creates growth over time.

This dynamic is subtly reflected in the FinScope data itself, which shows that a significant proportion of those who save are primarily doing so to meet regular expenses rather than to build assets or long-term financial buffers, thereby highlighting the extent to which savings, although present,

are not always positioned as a tool for wealth creation but rather as a temporary holding mechanism within an ongoing cycle of income and expenditure.

As a result, financial decisions tend to be reactive rather than intentional, shaped more by urgency, obligation, and social pressure than by structured planning, which leads to patterns where income is quickly absorbed, savings are easily reversed, and investment decisions are made opportunistically rather than strategically. This reinforces a cycle in which individuals remain financially active but struggle to achieve meaningful financial advancement.

This challenge is not rooted in a lack of effort or awareness, because many

Ugandans demonstrate a high level of discipline in managing limited resources and navigating financial pressures.

But effort on its own, no matter how consistent, does not lead to accumulation unless it is supported by a system that organizes how money is earned, allocated, and grown.

Without such a system, money flows toward the most immediate demand, and given that present needs will almost always outweigh future considerations, the absence of structure prevents individuals from creating the conditions necessary for long-term financial progress, even when their income levels improve or their financial activity increases. This explains why individuals with stable incomes can remain financially vulnerable, consistent savers struggle to build meaningful reserves, and businesses generating revenue can experience stagnation. In each of these cases, the underlying issue is not access to money but the absence of a framework that ensures money is working toward clearly defined outcomes.

Financial inclusion, while essential, is only the starting point. True financial empowerment requires a shift from participation to intentionality, where individuals move beyond simply engaging with financial systems and begin actively structuring their financial behaviour in a way that aligns with long-term goals.

Such a shift requires rethinking

the role of money in everyday decision-making, moving from saving as a passive habit to saving with defined objectives, from earning income without direction to structuring income with clear priorities, and from spending based on immediate demands to allocating resources in a manner that balances present needs with future growth.

When this level of intentionality is introduced, the difference in outcomes becomes significant, as individuals operating within the same economic environment, earning similar incomes, and accessing the same financial tools can experience different financial trajectories over time, with those who apply structure gradually building stability, assets, and options, while those who do not remain within a cycle of constant financial pressure despite ongoing effort.

Uganda, therefore, finds itself at an important transition point, where the expansion of financial access has already been achieved to a large extent. But the next phase of progress depends on how that access is utilised, which places greater emphasis on financial behaviour, discipline, and the development of practical systems that guide how money is managed over time.

Without structure, money will continue to move as it already does, but it will do so without creating meaningful progress.

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