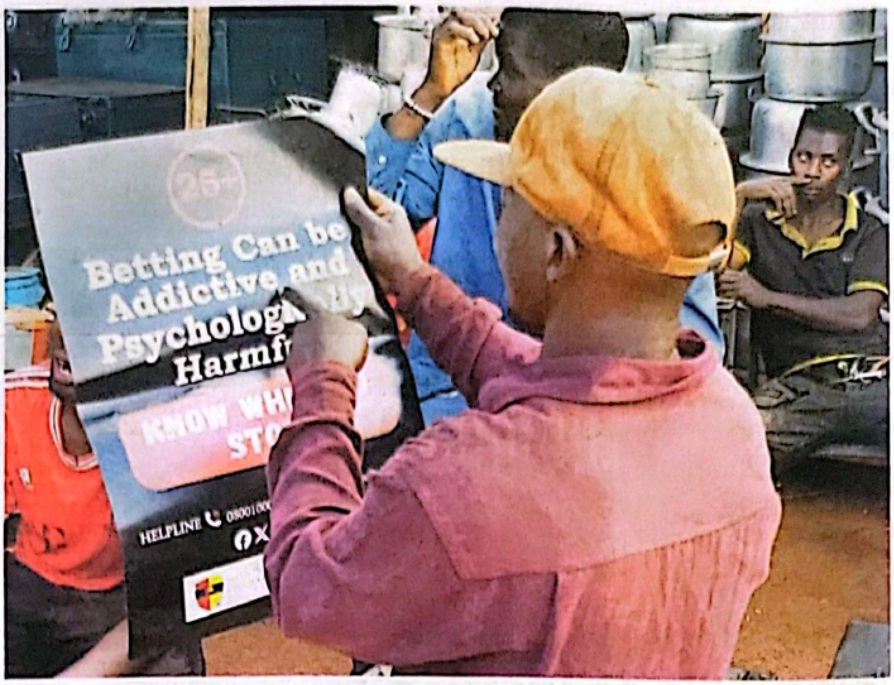
Growth in betting

BETTING

INTERVIEW
RACHEAL NABISUBI



A man reads a betting poster. Gaming is entertainment, not a livelihood. PHOTO/RACHEL NABISUBI

Gaming 'Betting is not a guarantee to money'

Uganda's gaming and lotteries sector is one of the fastest-growing industries. Tax collections have skyrocketed from Shs45 billion in 2021 to Shs323 billion in the 2024/25 financial year. Denis Mudene Ngabirano, the chief executive officer of the National Lotteries and Gaming Regulatory Board, explains what has shaped this growth and the future of this sector.

What is the status of the gaming and lotteries sector?

The industry is dynamic and sometimes volatile, but we have seen significant progress in compliance and revenue mobilisation. For instance, when I took charge in 2021, tax collections stood at Shs45 billion. As of the last financial year, 2024-2025, that number had risen to Shs323 billion. This growth has been achieved through collaboration with key stakeholders like the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA)

The board's staff has decreased from 97 to about 80, though we have established three regional offices in Mbale, Gulu, and Mbarara. With gaming activities spreading across the country, we need more staff. While strides have been made in regulation, our primary goal remains protecting the public from the adverse effects of gaming.

What are the board's top strategic priorities for the next 12 to 24 months?

Improving the regulatory environment through digital transformation is our main priority. The gaming sector is ICT-driven, so we plan to automate all business processes to address revenue leakage and strengthen systems that protect the public. Transparency and accountability will be central to ensuring sustainable growth.

Which business unit drives the most sustainable growth?

The Gaming Board does not operate in silos. Each unit contributes to the overall market, and collaboration is essential. Growth is driven by teamwork and a shared focus on our mandate.

Are there any risks associated with the gaming industry?

One major risk is illegal gambling, particularly from offshore companies operating [illegible]. ment systems, some of these services are now accessible locally. Fortunately, we work closely with partners such as MTN, Airtel, Mobile Money platforms, and the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) to combat illegal online gaming.

Another concern is cross-border advertising. For example, betting companies in South Africa and Nigeria advertise on DSTV during the English Premier League, but some fail to include responsible gaming messages. This is dangerous because gaming should be seen purely as entertainment, not as a money-making venture.

How is the board leveraging technology to remain competitive?

Our focus is automation. Licensing is now fully automated and integrated with government systems such as URA, enabling direct payments. We have also established a national central electronic monitoring system to track both financial and non-financial transactions within operator systems. This has helped increase revenue collections from Shs45 billion to Shs323 billion.

What key metrics do you use to track business performance?

We rely heavily on technology. Licensed operators use systems to deliver services, and we monitor these systems fectiveness, and most importantly how well the public is being protected from gaming's adverse effects.

What investments are suitable for future growth in the sector? Technology is key. This sector is dominated by foreigners, not just in Uganda but across Africa, because we have been consumers rather than innovators. Investment in technology and capacity building especially skilling our young, tech-hungry youth—will drive growth. Operators rely on technology to deliver entertainment, so Ugandans must invest in this space.

What gaps could slow down strategy execution?

Staffing and funding. Even with 80 staff, we are stretched thin. Operators are ahead of us technologically, and we need significant investment to match them. Without addressing these gaps, regulation will lag.

How does Uganda's revenue compare to other countries?

We are part of international organizations like the Gaming Regulators African Forum (GRAF). After South Africa, Uganda ranks among the top five regulators in Africa. We were the second country, after South Africa, to establish a national central electronic monitoring system, and we have standardised processes to align with international standards.

What are your thoughts on the directives instituted last year, particularly the increase in fees?

The directives were designed to protect the public from gaming's adverse effects. Operators must implement tools that promote responsible gaming, and my compliance team is currently checking how well these tools are being integrated. Going forward, compliance with these directives will be a key factor when renewing licences or onboarding new operators.

How resilient is the gaming business to economic or regulatory changes?

Over the past four years, we have seen tremendous growth in the sector. With focused compliance and continued investment, this growth will be sustained. Operators are onboarding new systems and leveraging technologies like AI, which makes the outlook promising.

What is the biggest challenge around gaming?

The biggest challenge is the negative perception. Many people think gaming is illegal or something that should not exist. But gaming is a legal business in Uganda, regulated for individuals aged 25 and above. It has been part of society for ages, and technology has only made it more visible.

Our priority is to promote responsible gaming and create awareness so that Ugandans can see the opportunities in this ICT-led industry.

At what point should a player realise they are on the verge of a gambling problem?

There are warning signs. If you borrow money to gamble, spend all your time preoccupied with betting, or hide your gambling behaviour, then there is a serious problem.

We advise players to only bet what they can afford to lose, know when to stop, and use self-exclusion tools provided by operators. These tools allow players to set limits on spending, losses or even exclude themselves for a period

Borrow

'If you borrow money to gamble, spend all your time preoccupied with betting, or hide your gambling behaviour, there is a problem.'

CamScanner