

Many youth across the country continue to hold onto some little hope that maybe one day, they will have scores or goals to earn them a fortune. However, sports betting is keeping many in a cycle of addiction.

BY MONITOR TEAM

As many Ugandans continue to grapple with unemployment, some have turned to sports betting as their only source of livelihood. Sports betting is a form of gambling where one predicts the outcome of a sports event and places a wager (money) on it. The bettor may win or lose depending on the accuracy of their prediction.

Sports betting has become a widespread form of entertainment and income-generating activity in Uganda, particularly among the youth.

Football is the most popular sport for betting. However, bettors also place bets on horse-racing, dog-racing and boxing.

Many young people see betting as their only source of survival after failing to secure employment.

Mr Innocent Mugisha, 27, a resident of Kakooba in Mbarara City South Division, says after failing to secure a job, he turned to betting.

"I live with my brother, but I cannot ask him to buy me clothes or airtime. I survive by betting. I have to bet whether online or in person, to earn something for myself. Sometimes I win, other times I lose, but that is the reality. I hope that one day I can hit a jackpot and start a small business," he says.

Like Mugisha, Gerald Asiimwe, a student at one of the universities in Mbarara City, finds sports betting convenient since betting companies have gone online.

"I rarely have time to go to town to place bets. They say betting is bad, but I do it to get some money to help me survive. University life is expensive. There are times when I win, other times I lose. But I don't mind. I bet as a hobby and it has helped me survive," he says.

Mr Charles Agaba, 30, a resident of Kiswahili cell in Mbarara City South Division started sports betting in 2012, when online betting was not popular in Uganda. However, he has earned a living from it.

"I was at university in 2012 when I started betting. I staked Shs1,000 and won Shs240,000, which I used to buy my first television set," he recounts.

He adds: "Recently, I had staked Shs10,000 on eight games with an expected win of Shs10m. When one team was still playing, I asked for a payout and they gave me Shs2m, which I withdrew immediately and invested in a small business that is now giving me some profits."

In 2024, Mr Ali Juma, a boda boda rider based in Nebbi Town, staked Shs10,000 on 20 matches with a payout of Shs12m and things worked out in his favour.

He crossed to Mahagi in DR Congo and bought two brand new motorcycles. "I have been betting for more than three years. It requires a strong heart because if you are losing, you quit the game, you keep betting until you secure a win," he says.

Although one of his motorcycles was impounded by the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA), he can still provide for his

Youth put hopes in sports betting as joblessness bites



Men check a notice board at a sports betting centre. Betting is a form of gambling which is usually marketed by highlighting the stories of previous winners.

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children. One of his children will be joining Senior One next year.

He adds that he would buy the *Ennyanda* paper, a Uganda sports newspaper under Nation Media Group Uganda, every week to get betting tips and game predictions. This, he says, helped him win consistently.

In Arua City, Mr Alfred Onzima, says he has won some bets, but warns parents against giving school fees money to their children.

"Betting is both bitter and sweet. Some have ended up betting their school fees and lost everything. Two years ago, I won Shs340,000 after staking Shs1,000 on 13 games. This money helped me offset some fees for a brother," he says.

He adds: "So, it was my luck. I have also lost some money because these are unpredictable games. Sometimes it is one game that makes you lose."

Mr Bashir Kamis, a resident of Kabale Town, who has been betting for the last 18 years, says betting is a good game, especially when one has money to invest daily.

Kamis recently received Shs5m from sports betting after staking Shs2,000 on 18 fixtures. He says he has never staked more than Shs2,000 because he understands the risks.

"Shs5m is the highest amount I have ever won since I started sports betting 18-years ago," he says.

He adds: "Two weeks ago, I made a list of 17 games and staked Shs2,000. I was able to win Shs1.6m. The cash I win helps me cater for household needs of my family," he says.

Mr Mahad Luswata, a resident of Police Zone in Mpigi Town Council, says betting is giving them little hope for survival.

"I can't fail to get Shs20,000 for my family's lunch and I invest only Shs1,000 to

get that money. I can lose twice, but still, I can win more than five times a day," he says.

Mr Jimmy Kiwanuka, a resident of Kasuubo Zone, Kayabwe Town Council, says he stakes an amount of money he is not afraid of losing but wins more than he stakes.

"Many of us who bet invest money we are not afraid of losing. Fortunately, we end up winning, even though our chances are limited. I can use Shs500,000 a week without winning, but when it is my time to make an Indian cry, I can use Shs5,000 and win Shs2.5m the following week. It has helped me to pay bills at home, pay school fees for my daughter and feed my cattle," he said.

Mr Joseph Kintu, a resident of Jinja City, says sports betting has improved his livelihood and enabled him to live a better life.

Kintu says his current job mainly supports basic household needs, but through sports betting, he has been able to pay school fees for some of his children.

"There was a time when I was stuck and didn't know what to do. Then I got a call and my colleague told me the ticket we had staked on had won Shs1m. My child was still at home, but I quickly sent some money for him to start school," Mr Kintu says.

Mr Kintu used part of the money he

earned from sports betting to install tiles in his house.

He notes that the money invested in betting does not go to waste, as he views it as a form of saving that one can benefit from after a long period.

He places bets worth between Shs1,000 and Shs2,000 at least four times a week and says these bets can accumulate for four months to yield returns of not less than Shs1 million.

He discloses that since he does not spend money on alcohol, he chose to channel his funds into sports betting, where he enjoys watching matches while also hoping to earn money, if the bet turns out in his favour.

Mr Ali Mwagale, a resident of Bugembe ward, Jinja Southern Division in Jinja City, says he ventured in sports betting a few years ago after failing to meet his family's needs from his small retail business but it has become a game changer.

"I place small bets, usually between Shs1,000 and Shs3,000, a few times a week, focusing on leagues I follow closely. One time, I won Shs1.2m from a carefully selected ticket. At the time, I had accumulated rent arrears and school fees balances," he says. He adds that the win helped him clear urgent expenses.

Since then, he has continued to bet, which has enabled him to support his children's education and make improvements at home.

However, Mr Geoffrey Ranga, a resident of Starch Factory in Lira City, warns that few bettors win money but many others are in despair due to betting.

"This season alone, I have won Shs4m, but many other people lose their money while betting companies reap big profits," he says.

Mr Frank Mugabi, a mobile money agent in Soroti Town, says betting is just an addiction that comes with little gain.

"I have been betting for more than 10 years, but my bets have not earned me anything," he says.

Mr Mugabi says many people hold on to some little hope that maybe one day, they will have scores that earn them a fortune. However, it keeps them in a cycle of addiction.

What the regulator says

Ms Jackline Kamakune, a senior communications officer at the National Lotteries and Gaming Regulatory Board, the body that regulates gaming in Uganda, says sports betting is a game of chance and strictly a form of entertainment that should not be seen as a source of income or a money-making venture.

"The gaming sector continues to contribute to the economy with more than 20,000 jobs. Women account for nearly 85 percent of the workforce. More than Shs12 billion is contributed in rental income from gaming premises annually, but it should not be taken as a money-making venture," she says.

She adds: "Data for the Financial Year 2024/2025 shows that out of the Shs8.2 trillion that was staked, a total of Shs7.7 trillion payouts were made. However, gaming by nature is addictive and can potentially be harmful."

Ms Kamakune says betting is not for persons below the age of 25 years and urges players to prioritise their basic needs, save first before playing and play within their means.

"Players are encouraged to set limits on both time and money, recognise early warning signs such as chasing losses or borrowing to gamble and seek help when gaming feels problematic," she advises. In the FY2024/2025, we collected Shs323b in revenue from the sector alone.

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20,000
JOBS IN GAMING
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REGULATOR

Officials from National Lotteries and Gaming Regulatory Board, the body that regulates gaming in Uganda, say sports betting is a game of chance and strictly a form of entertainment that should not be seen as a source of income.