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WENDA POLICY BRIEF: ENHANCING PLANNING AND BUDGETING IN WEST NILE REGION IN ALIGNMENT WITH NDP IV: THE ARUA CITY SUMMIT RESOLUTION 3RD OCTOBER 2025

Executive Summary

This policy brief examines the state of planning and budgeting in the West Nile region, aligned with Uganda's National Development Plan IV (NDP IV) for FY 2025/2026-2029/2030. Drawing from constitutional mandates and legal frameworks, it highlights the region's untapped potentials in agriculture, minerals, culture, and strategic location, while addressing critical challenges such as staffing shortages, inadequate financing, low citizen participation, and socio-economic disparities. West Nile, with 8.4% of Uganda's population, receives only 7.9% of the national local government budget, exacerbating issues like high subsistence economy reliance (53.5%) and low literacy rates (59.1%). Recommendations focus on evidence-based planning, public-private partnerships (PPPs), job creation, citizen engagement, resource efficiency, mineral exploitation, and risk management to drive sustainable industrialization, inclusive growth, and socio-economic transformation. Implementing these will position West Nile to contribute effectively to NDP IV's goal of higher household incomes and full economic monetization.

Background and Legal Framework

Uganda's planning and budgeting processes are grounded in a robust legal framework that emphasizes integrated, decentralized development. Article 125 of the 1995 Constitution establishes the National Planning Authority (NPA) to produce comprehensive national plans, including long-term visions and medium-term strategies, as reinforced by Act No. 15 of 2002. Decentralization is enshrined in Article 176(2b), promoting citizen participation and democratic decision-making across local government levels. Article 190 mandates District Councils to prepare integrated development plans incorporating lower local governments (LLGs) for submission to the NPA.

The Local Government Act (Cap 138, Section 35(1)) designates District Councils as planning authorities, with technical committees coordinating sectoral plans from LLGs (Section 36(2)). The NPA Act further supports this by mandating capacity building for local planning (Section 7(2)(d)), program design for decentralized planning (Section 7(2)(i)), and performance monitoring.

NDP IV, under the theme "Sustainable Industrialization for Inclusive Growth, Employment, and Wealth Creation," aims to achieve higher household incomes, full economic monetization, and employment. It targets double-digit growth through investments in competitiveness and science, technology, and innovation (STI) in key areas: full monetization, value addition and industrialization, agriculture, tourism, mineral-based industries, ICT, and finance. West Nile's

Local Government Development Plans (LGDPs) must align with these priorities to leverage regional opportunities for national transformation.

Potentials and Opportunities in West Nile

West Nile possesses significant assets that align with NDP IV's growth areas, positioning it for accelerated development:

- **Agriculture:** High potential due to fertile lands, River Nile, and other water bodies enabling irrigation and large-scale farming.
- **Minerals and Industrialization:** Abundant minerals to drive manufacturing and value addition.
- **Cultural and Ethnic Diversity:** Rich heritage supporting tourism development.
- **Refugee Population:** Offers a potential market for goods and services.
- **Strategic Location:** Borders international trade routes, facilitating exports and regional integration.
- **Water Resources:** Supports agro-processing, fisheries, and energy generation.

These opportunities can be harnessed to advance NDP IV objectives, such as mineral-based industries and agriculture, contributing to a 10-fold economic growth by 2040.

Key Challenges in Planning and Budgeting

Despite legal mandates and opportunities, West Nile faces systemic barriers in planning and budgeting, hindering alignment with NDP IV. These challenges span from human resources, financing, data, participation, and socio-economic indicators.

Human Resource Constraints

Most local governments (LGs) in West Nile suffer from severe staffing shortages in planning units:

- Only Adjumani (4 staff) and Obongi (3 staff) have multiple personnel; others like Moyo, Koboko (Municipal and District), Terego, Madi-Okollo, Nebbi (Municipal and District) have just one staff member.
- Maracha, Zombo, Pakwach, Arua, and Yumbe have two staff, but recent departures (e.g., to the Ministry of Health) reduce this to one.
- Except for Adjumani and Obongi, no Local Governments in the region has a substantive head of department (U1 for districts, U3 for municipalities). This limits capacity for mid-term reviews, plan implementation, and NPA coordination activities.

Financial and Resource Limitations

- **Inadequate Central Government Funding:** In FY 2026/2027, West Nile's 15 LGs receive UGX 429.5 billion (7.9% of the national LG total of UGX 5.4 trillion), down from UGX 522.8 billion in FY 2023/2024. This is disproportionate to the region's 3,869,400 population (8.4% of Uganda's 45,905,417 population). Development grants total UGX 30.3 billion (8.2% of national UGX 370.3 billion).
- **-Low Local Revenue:** FY 2023/2024 local revenue was UGX 19.83 billion (3.9%), with discretionary grants at UGX 99.2 billion (19%).

- Off-Budget Financing Gaps: Limited information on development partner funding, especially in Nebbi Cluster (Zombo, Nebbi, Nebbi MC, Pakwach) and Maracha, due to absent partners and also given the fact that these are mainly not refugee hosting local Governments.
- Infrastructure Deficits: Poor roads, electricity (only 4.1% households on grid vs. national average of 25.3%), and poor telecommunications connectivity hinder economic activities.

Socio-Economic and Demographic Challenges: West Nile lags national averages in key indicators, impeding NDP IV's inclusive growth:

Indicator	West Nile	National Average	Notes
Household Size	5	4.2	Larger families strain resources.
Literacy Rate	59.10%	74.00%	Higher only than Karamoja (25.4%).
Mobile Phone Ownership	29.50%	43.30%	Limits digital inclusion and ICT uptake.
Under-5 Mortality	49/1,000	46/1,000	High health risks.
Maternal Mortality	68/100,000	Not specified	Elevated compared to national trends.
Employment-to-Population Ratio (14-64)	26.20%	37.50%	Madi sub-region at 19.9%.
Unemployment Rate (14-64)	19.90%	12.60%	Youth NEET (18-30): 60.6% vs. 50.9%.
Subsistence Economy Households	53.50%	33.10%	Second highest after Karamoja (70.8%).
Children (0-17) Proportion	54.50%	49.90%	High dependency ratio.
Orphans Proportion	18.30%	13.00%	Madi at 20.1%; second to Karamoja (19.3%).
Primary School-Age Out-of-School (6-12)	35.40%	26.00%	Second to Karamoja (74.5%).
Idle Children (14-17)	34.50%	27.00%	Second to Karamoja (51.0%).
Youth Literacy (18-30)	67.60%	81.60%	Second lowest after Karamoja (29.2%).
Population Growth Rate	3.90%	2.90%	Second to Karamoja (4.2%); total population 3,899,084 (third largest).
Day City Population	440,540	N/A	Second to Kampala (2,503,174).

Source UG Census Report 2024

Additional issues include low citizen participation, customary land tenure hindering urban planning, inadequate data for monitoring outcomes, negative community attitudes toward transformation, and high immigration (only 6.1%).

Policy Recommendations

To enhance planning and budgeting for LGDP IV (FY 2025/2026-2029/2030), the following recommendations are proposed, tailored to West Nile's context and NDP IV alignment:

1. **Evidence-Based Planning:** Develop comprehensive, data-driven issue papers for each NDP IV program (e.g., agriculture, minerals). Address data gaps by investing in local indicators and off-budget tracking.
2. **Economic Entity Transformation:** LG Councils should position jurisdictions as economic entities through PPPs, identifying private sector collaborations in agriculture, tourism, and minerals to drive industrialization and job creation.
3. **Job-Creating Interventions:** Prioritize programs with high employment potential, such as value addition in agriculture and mineral processing, targeting youth (60.6% NEET) and reducing subsistence reliance.
4. **Citizen Capacity Building:** Enhance community participation in planning cycles via education campaigns to shift mindsets, improve literacy, and boost engagement, aligning with decentralization principles.
5. **Resource Efficiency:** Adopt allocative mechanisms for optimal use of limited funds, including lobbying for equitable central transfers based on population and needs.
6. **Mineral and Petroleum Acceleration:** Expedite extractive industry development through streamlined regulations and investments, leveraging minerals for industrial growth.
7. **Risk Management Integration:** Dedicate resources to risk chapters in LGDPs, addressing population growth, infrastructure gaps, and health vulnerabilities for resilient planning.

Conclusion

To aligning West Nile's planning and budgeting with NDP IV requires urgent action to overcome challenges and capitalize on opportunities. By implementing these recommendations, the region can achieve sustainable growth, reduce disparities, and contribute to Uganda's vision of inclusive wealth creation. The West Nile Development Association (WENDA) should advocate for increased NPA support in capacity building and Governments equitable resource allocation to ensure effective LGDP IV rollout.