

John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre

**A rapid assessment of the quality of Universal Primary Education in North and
North Eastern Uganda**

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Acronyms

UPE	Universal Primary Education
NNEU	North and North Eastern Uganda
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PRDP	Peace Recovery Development Program
Ushs	Uganda Shillings
PLE	Primary Leaving Examination
UNATU	Uganda National Teachers Union
AGM	Annual General Meeting
SFG	School Facilities Grant
CCG	Classroom Completion Grant
DEO	District Education Officer

Chapter One

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Under the program of good governance and human rights, John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre embarked on assessing Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy in delivering quality basic education to children of school-going age in North and North Eastern Uganda (NNEU). The Millennium Development Goal number two calls for primary education for all girls and boys. Right to education generally, free and compulsory education has been adequately provided for in international, regional, and constitutional instruments. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy, which Uganda started to implement in 1997 within a decentralized framework, is referred to, at international level, as provision of free and compulsory basic education to all children of school going age in the country by the government. However, in reality both the government and parents have financial obligations to meet in provision of basic education in Uganda. The government's obligation is to mobilize resources, pay tuition fees through capitation grant, train teachers, construct classrooms, etc. The parents are to provide scholastic materials, school uniforms and basic requirement for survival of their children, such as providing for the feeding of their children during school time. As parents have clear financial obligations, Universal Primary Education cannot be described as "free". Again it is not compulsory for the parents to send their children to school, as there is no act of parliament that makes it mandatory. Consequently, the misconception of UPE as being totally free by parents reduces their contribution towards the education of their children.

1.2 Background

Education is a necessary condition for development in the widest sense, because empowering people, especially the poor with basic cognitive skills is the surest way to render them self-reliant. The ability to read and write, for example, is crucial in the acquisition and application of modern production and marketing skills. The need for free primary education was emphasised by the United Nations General Assembly (1948). This assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR Article 26 (1)), which among other things stated that: "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free for at least the elementary and fundamental stages"¹. However, as mentioned above Uganda has not measured up to provide free education, even though the children statute of 1996 (Article 28) further emphasised the responsibility of the state in providing basic education by stating that; "The child has a right to education and the state's duty is to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory"². It (the statute) goes further

¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

² The Children Statutes 1996, Uganda's Laws for Children

stating that the government should engage in international cooperation to implement this right.

In Uganda, the great potential of primary education, as an engine of economic and social development was recognized right from independence in 1962. Prior to this, the education system was narrow and elitist and hence alienated the majority of the citizens from participating in it. UPE was initially designed in 1997 as a national programme aimed at providing free education for only four children per family, but later reviewed to provide basic education to all children of school going age. It is funded jointly by international development partners (funding agencies), Government of Uganda and the community. It is implemented by the Local Government and has five main components on the government side which include infrastructure expansion, payment of tuition fees, supply of qualified teachers, review of the primary school curriculum, and adequate supply of instructional materials.

Having realized that primary education is the engine for economic and social development; UPE was introduced in the country to increase access, equity and quality of primary education in Uganda. This was to be achieved through: establishing, providing and maintaining quality education as the basis for promoting necessary human resource development; transforming society in a fundamental and positive way; providing the minimum necessary facilities and resources to enable every child to enter and remain in school until the primary cycle of education is complete; making basic education accessible to the learner and relevant to his or her needs as well as meeting national goals; making education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequalities; and ensuring that education is affordable by majority of Ugandans³. In this context therefore, the government aimed at fulfilling its mission to eradicate illiteracy as every individual acquires basic skills and knowledge to exploit the environment for both self and national development.

However, the implementation of UPE in Uganda leaves a lot to be desired in terms of increasing access, equity and quality. It is the concern of most Ugandans and development partners that the quality of UPE does not reflect the education, which leads to economic and social development. Again the accessibility of UPE is not guaranteed, by the virtue that the implementation of the policy imposes financial obligation on the parents as well. Therefore this study investigated into factors which constitute access, equity and quality of basic primary education. Specifically, it evaluated the accessibility and quality of UPE in terms of infrastructure, funding, teaching, curriculum, and instructional materials. It also investigated into parental responsibility as UPE in Uganda calls upon them to meet their financial obligations towards the education of their

³ Ministry of Education and Sport, A Case Study on the Impact of UPE on the Quality of Basic Education in Uganda,

children, in terms of scholastic materials, school uniforms, and basic requirement for survival.

This study focused on the area of Northern and North-Eastern Uganda as this region is and has been for a long time marginalized in terms of service delivery and infrastructure in general. It suffered from two decades of civil war and the region of Karamoja additionally struggled with violent cattle rustling and poverty. In cases where UPE lacks in quality and does not provide the equal education it is supposed to, this is even truer in the Northern region. Recognizing the need of the region to develop to match the standards of living of the rest of Uganda the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) has been designed and the implementation began in 2009. Education represents an important objective under the PRDP.

1.3 Objectives

The study established the quality of UPE in Northern Uganda basing on the obligations of the government and parents in ensuring basic quality education for all children of school-going age. Specifically it:

- a) Evaluated government commitment to the obligation to the provision of infrastructure, funding, quality teaching staff, instructional materials, and review of curriculum.
- b) Evaluated parents' commitment to their obligation in providing scholastic materials, school uniforms, and basic requirements for survival of their children.
- c) Established the challenges faced in the provision of quality UPE for all children of school-going age in North and North Eastern Uganda.
- d) Ascertained efforts undertaken to address the challenges faced in the implementation of UPE in the region.

1.4 Methodology

A case study design of Gulu, Lira, Soroti and Moroto districts was used in order to assess the quality of UPE in North and North Eastern Uganda (NNEU). The case study design was used to learn from the particular context of the four chosen districts in ascertaining strive which has been made to ensure access, equity, and quality basic education through the UPE policy to the people in the NNEU. The four districts may not be representative enough for all the districts in this region; nonetheless the districts have similar education challenges. Interviews were used as the main method for primary data collection. Three schools were selected from each of the four districts for the study. The following schools were visited: Gulu Public Primary School, St. Martin Lokome Primary School, and Bungatira Primary School for Gulu district; VH Public School, Boke Primary School, Lira Primary School for Lira district; Arapai Primary School, Olwelai Katine Primary School, and Soroti Demonstration School for Soroti district; and Nakapelimen Primary School, Musas Primary School, and Nadunget Primary School for Moroto district. Effort was made to address urban and rural schools. The study population included head teachers, teachers, parents and pupils. A total number of 12 head teachers (or in case they

were not present their representatives), 48 teachers, 96 parents, and 96 pupils were interviewed. The schools were randomly selected to avoid bias in data collection. Data was collected using an interview guide seeking the views and perceptions of head teachers, teachers, parents, and pupils who are the direct beneficiaries of the program. Individual interviews were used for head teachers as key informants, while group interviews were conducted for the teachers, parents and pupils. To ensure informed and quality information from the pupils, only those from upper classes (P.7 and P.6) were interviewed. Primary qualitative data was organized into clusters of themes according to the areas of the obligations of the government and parents in ensuring quality basic education for all children of school going age. To authenticate the information from the primary data, related literature was reviewed.

Chapter Two

Presentation of the Findings

2.1 Introduction

From the primary data there are several issues that emerged which compromise the accessibility, equity and quality of UPE in the NNEU. These issues are directly linked to the government and parents' obligations to ensure quality basic education for all children of school-going age. Some of the issues are due to financial constraints, while others emanate from lack of political will, negative attitude and negligence. Consequently, all the factors necessary for the accessibility and quality of UPE that lead to equity have been hampered.

2.2 School Infrastructure, furniture and teaching material

From all the schools visited in the four districts (Gulu, Lira, Soroti, and Moroto) the challenges regarding infrastructure are related to either the state, lack of or the number of the structures, namely: classrooms, teachers' accommodation, latrines, furniture, and water supply. In terms of state of the infrastructure, some are old, not adequately renovated, in poor condition, and some windows were without shutters. Respondents in Gulu, and Soroti schools alluded to very old and inadequately renovated buildings. They said the structures were up to forty or fifty years old and there had been no renovation carried out since the buildings were constructed. In some schools the state of the buildings is dangerous to the safety of the pupils. In one school parts of the building fell off during a storm and injured one pupil. The lack of structures, library and sport facilities was mentioned in four schools. One school in Soroti lacks a library and the teachers do not have a room for safe storage of school text books as the houses are leaking and infested with termites. The one with the library has small space that could only allow a few books to be stored compared to the high number of pupils. From the schools visited in Gulu, sometimes a classroom is allocated as a library, but none of the schools has a library big enough for the pupils to use it for research and revision purposes. Two schools in Moroto lack libraries and one does not even have text books. However, the major problem is on the number and size of the structures. Teachers' accommodation was mentioned as a big problem in all the schools visited. None of the schools has enough accommodation for all the teachers. This results in teachers' late coming or even absenteeism as the teachers have to move long distances to reach their respective schools. This is a huge challenge especially during the rainy season. Moreover, some of the available accommodation is of poor quality – consisting of either semi-permanent or very old buildings like in two schools visited in Soroti.

In Moroto district, one of the schools visited had six teachers and the head teacher sharing one house. The house is across a river from the school and during rainy seasons it is sometimes difficult or impossible to cross it. The house has limited rooms that they cannot stay together with their families. In the second school only a minority of the

teachers were accommodated at the school, while in the third school there was just enough accommodation for half of the teachers on the school premises. In one school in Moroto district some of the teachers had to sleep in the classroom, on the floor in a small area separated from the rest of the room by a curtain. In Lira district, one school did not have teachers' accommodation even for the head teacher.

Regarding sanitation, all the schools that were visited have problems of shortage of latrines. Generally, the latrines are not enough. For instance in the three schools visited in Gulu district, the ratio of latrines to pupils was estimated at 1:54 to 1:194. In one school the latrines are dirty and smelly. However, in two schools the girls' latrines are slightly better than those of boys and there is a higher number of latrines assigned to girls. The situation of latrines is even worse in three schools visited in Moroto. In two of the schools visited, they have one latrine each, while the third one has two. The latrines are shared: 5 stances by 293 pupils and 2 stances by 240 pupils. The school with two latrines of 5 stances each for 336 pupils and all teachers stated that the quality of the latrines is very bad. In one school the latrine under construction collapsed before being finished. All schools reported that teachers share latrines with the pupils. According to education policy the ratio of stance to pupils is supposed to be 1:50.

Majority of the schools reported challenges with the number and size of the classrooms. The teachers, pupils and parents from two schools in Gulu, reported the inadequacy of classrooms as such there are too many pupils per class. Similarly two schools in Soroti reported high congestion with several classes having over one hundred pupils. In Moroto the situation in one school is even worse, whereby two different classes have to share one room and another class has 138 pupils.

Other factors related to infrastructure that affect the quality of UPE in the region are furniture and water supply. Most of the schools have inadequate furniture, desks, chairs and tables. Children in lower classes frequently do not have desks and have to sit on the floor and some teachers share desks with the pupils as it is in the case of some Gulu schools. The same situation was mentioned in one of the schools visited in Lira. Also the blackboards are of very bad quality. In some of the schools water supply is a problem. All three schools visited in Soroti reported the problem of water supplies. In one school the water supply is unreliable, especially when the tap water supply is off. The other two schools just have one borehole each for over 1000 pupils. Moreover, in one of the schools the one borehole constructed by an NGO had to be closed because it had been built near the latrines and the water was contaminated threatening the health of the pupils. The other school has only one borehole and the water is smelly. One school in Soroti complained of lack of facilities for disabled children although they have 114 pupils with disabilities.

Peculiar to Moroto is the issue of insecurity. All three schools stated that a fence around the school is necessary but unfortunately missing. In one of the schools the head teacher reported that a fence was promised under PRDP funding but has never been constructed as the money got "diverted". In the past there have been attacks by the warriors or they have been passing through the school premises. This aspect of insecurity has reduced but

teachers and pupils still do not feel safe without a fence. Stealing has been reported but also animals invading the school premises, especially the gardens and destroying crops. The school furthest from town (around 10km) reported an additional security challenge. The road to town is very dangerous and several people have been murdered on that road just in the few months preceding the interview. The school has no transport means and as walking is very dangerous and town is far they are mostly cut off from the outside world including for example medical facilities. The head teacher reported that some pupils died in the school because the hospital in town could not have been reached. Boda Bodas are sometimes the only available means of transport but they tend to be very expensive – and even more so because of the risk of using that dangerous road.

And additional challenge reported in Moroto is the issue of dormitories. Some pupils come from distant places and due to the constant insecurity cannot risk moving daily on the road to the school and back home. They need to be accommodated at school but the facilities are missing. In several schools in Moroto pupils have to sleep in classrooms on the floor, without mattresses or even blankets. The lack of dormitory facilities has been repeatedly stated as a big challenge.

2.3 Funding

All the schools expressed discontent with the amount allocated and said they would be comfortable with 2 million to 5 million per term, depending on the number of pupils in the school. On average the amount stated by the head teacher as sufficient was several times the amount of UPE funding they have been allocated. According to the head teachers, the areas mostly affected by the constraints are: scholastic materials, co-curricular activities, management, and administration. Apart from inadequacy of the funds, the head teachers also said there is a problem with irregularity and inconsistency of the amount per term. According to the head teacher of one school in Moroto the school used to get Ushs 1.5 million but the amount has been reduced for the last four quarters and the last quarter was 200,000 Ushs. The reduction came suddenly without official communication. At another school – in the last financial year: 1st quarter was Ushs 900,000, 2nd and 3rd quarters Ushs 800,000/=; and the 4th quarter Ushs 300,000. In the third school, the disbursement in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd quarters was between Ushs 450,000 - 600,000. The head teacher of one rural school has to move to town frequently. A boda costs Ushs 15,000 – 20,000 because of the high risk involved (the school is 11 Km from town). *The road is dangerous and several people have been already killed this year on that road – even during the day*, they emphasized. This is supposed to be covered by funding for management but is not enough. The school is being supported by NGOs such as WFP, UNICEF, Save the Children, ASB, COOPI, and Restless Development. The NGOs provide books, pens, tools for football field, musical instruments and sometimes help sick pupils.

From the three schools visited in Gulu District, the quarterly funding they get ranges from Ushs 1.1 million to 2.5 million. According to them, the money is extremely inadequate and additionally there are delays in sending the money. *“There is a big fluctuation of prices – prices have increased but not the funds allocation”*, one of the head teachers complained. For instance one school spent up to Ushs 1 million in three

days' athletics. The allocation for the school is as follows: scholastic materials 40%, co-curricular activities 30%, management 10%, administration 10%, and contingency 10%. The break down for another school is as follows: scholastic materials 35%, contingency 20%, management 15%, co-curricular activities 20%, and administration 10%.

Though according to UPE policy parents are supposed to contribute as well, the parents do not contribute anything in the case of Moroto. According to the head teachers the reason is a general negative attitude towards education. In one school in Moroto parents are supposed to contribute Ushs 2,000 for firewood per term per child but very few of pay. In some instances pupils end up raising the money for extra-charges themselves, said the head teacher. The head teacher of one school in Soroti stated that according to education ordinance by-laws, a task force is supposed to collect money from parents, but they (parents) do not pay. "*Parents were supposed to pay Ushs 10,000 per term per family*", he confirmed. In the second primary school in Soroti parents contribute Ushs 500 towards exam fees. In one school in Gulu parents pay Ushs 10,000 per term. If they do not pay, their children's report cards are detained at the end of the year. In only one school in Lira the contribution of parents is spent to feed the pupils. The parents in this school have to contribute 25,000 per child per term and according to the head teacher the school does not have problems in raising the money.

2.4 Parental Obligation

As already mentioned, UPE is not free in Uganda due to financial obligation parents have to meet. In the up country schools visited the extra-charges ranged from Ushs 500-25,000. However, most of the parents are reluctant to pay these extra-charges except for those in urban setting, due to the wrong perception of UPE as being free. The head teachers of the schools visited in Gulu, reported it to be a serious problem. According to the head teachers and teachers, the parents are frequently not willing to pay for stationary and do not cater for the feeding of the children. None of the schools in Gulu provides food and the parents are supposed to take care of the feeding. The children can either go home during lunch time or come to school with packed food for lunch. However, all schools reported that feeding is a problem and that many pupils stay hungry the whole day. Some do not even get breakfast at home.

The head teacher of one of the rural schools in Lira district also reported that there are difficulties raising the extra-charges from parents and that they keep the pupils at home in case they cannot afford the payments. The teachers in Lira also stated that there is a problem with feeding and that pupils stay hungry most of the time except the ones in the boarding section. However, in one urban school visited in Lira, the teachers explained that the cooperation between teachers, parents and pupils is very good. The parents generally pay the extra charges as well as an additional amount for feeding. This allows the school to provide food for pupils in the breaks. Parents also contribute towards building the staff accommodation. In fact this school is performing very well in PLE. Similarly, in one school in Soroti, teachers reported that parents support the school through contributing to the construction of teachers' accommodation (a semi-permanent structure).

The lack of contribution towards children's education has been reported to be worse in Moroto. All head teachers said that parents do not contribute anything. Although there are some extra-charges required as in other regions, all schools stated that very few pay even very small charges. The teachers asserted that parents generally display a negative attitude and do not value the education of their children. They also do not contribute to the feeding, but this is entirely catered for by the World Food Program in all the schools visited.

The head teachers and teachers at the schools visited in Soroti also complained about parents' attitude and commitment towards their children's education. Especially in the rural schools, the parents keep children at home for field work during the planting and harvesting periods. Feeding is a problem in all the schools, including the urban school in Soroti town, although some pupils have the option to eat lunch at home. In all schools the head teachers stated to have addressed the issue of feeding with parents but there has been no or very little improvement. Several head teachers said that sensitization of parents would be necessary and one stated that the presence and support of district officials is helpful for trying to change the attitude of parents. Further, some teachers stated that parents do not provide uniforms or scholastic materials. In almost all schools the majority of parents do not attend meetings regularly and consequently they are not informed about the school budget or challenges faced by the schools. All the above problems have affected the performance of the pupils in most of the UPE schools visited.

Finally, the education of girls is still a challenge. They drop out more frequently due to early pregnancy or early marriage arranged by parents at an age as young as 12 or 13 years. They are kept at home more frequently than boys and especially in Karamoja the value of girls' education is still not widely recognized and valued.

2.5 Teachers' Situation

Critical to ensuring quality UPE, is the supply and payment of qualified teachers. On average the teacher-pupil ratio for the four districts were estimated: 1:54, 1:53, 1:43, and 1:31, for Gulu, Soroti, Lira, and Moroto respectively. The ratio is within the set standard of 1:53. This does not mean that all the schools are reasonably manageable, since for some schools the ratio was as high as 1:67, 1:65, 1:71, etc. Again the ratio is only within the set because of the high drop out in upper classes (P5, P6 and P7). Apart from the teacher-pupil ratio another challenge for teachers is the pupil-classroom ratio. Especially in the lower classes in most schools more than 100 pupils share one classroom. In those cases there are frequently two teachers assigned for such a big group. This poses a serious challenge for the teachers and contributes negatively on the education and performance of the pupils.

The respondents said the main challenge the teachers face is the low salary. A primary school teacher's salary is only 250,000/= yet the work is too much, a teacher in Gulu lamented. This situation led to teachers' national industrial action in 2011. The teaching staff expressed dissatisfaction with the government and vowed to continue demanding better remuneration. However, the performance of some teachers is also problematic.

Although there is a number of teachers struggling to perform well and concerned about the education of their pupils many, as reported by parents, head teachers and even teachers themselves come late, are absent or do not come back to school after going home for lunch. The late coming and absenteeism are frequently related to the accommodation of teachers. The ones on school premises tend to come on time, while the ones staying outside the school are often late or even absent. .

For instance in the schools visited in Gulu, both pupils and parents noticed some setbacks with the teachers of some schools, namely: teachers who are paid by parents are more committed than those paid by the government, no mutual understanding among the teachers, some of them smell of alcohol in class, and one school has only one science teacher who is always absent. In another school a parent lamented that teachers are frequently late and sometimes tell pupils that being late does not prevent them from getting salaries. *“There are huts constructed for teachers but they are not willing to stay at school and therefore they are being late”*, he added. In Soroti shortcomings of some of the teachers include: coming late at around 9.00 am, leaving pupils to play or loiter around the compound, being very rough and beating the pupils when uncalled for. In one school an attendance list was introduced, but still the teachers are poor at time keeping.

In Lira notwithstanding challenges faced by the teachers, parents pupils and head teachers generally confirmed that the attendance by teachers in the three schools visited was good. The reasons they advanced for the good attendance include: some teachers staying within the school premises, some are self motivated and the school has attendance register for monitoring. In VH Public School 22 of the teachers are staying in teachers' quarters. Of course this does not mean that all the teachers in these three schools are doing well. In one school it was mentioned that the attendance of some teachers was really poor.

Finally, in one school in Moroto the parents registered challenges of teachers insulting the pupils and some teachers come from other districts which creates a vacuum of teachers at some period of the term as they go to visit their relatives. An additional challenge reported in Moroto, is that many teachers do not come from Karamoja. They do not speak the local language and communicate with the pupils in a mixture of different languages. That causes serious communication problems between teachers and pupils and has a negative impact on the performance of pupils.

2.6 Pupils' Performance

Generally, the performance of pupils in almost all the schools was rated as either poor or fair, except for VH Public School in Lira. Parents are not satisfied with the performance of their children. A mother in Gulu gave the example of her daughter in P5 who can write well but has a serious difficulty with reading. Another parent in Soroti gave the example that pupils in P7 cannot comprehend, write and spell English properly. The parents in two rural schools visited in Lira confirmed that a child in P7 is on average not able to comprehend what he or she learns at school. In most of the schools visited either very few pupils completed the PLE with grade 1 or in some schools there were none.

Especially the rural school faced challenges regarding the performance of pupils. From the two rural schools visited in Lira, the pupils who completed PLE in 2011 with grade one were the minority, namely: 3 pupils out of over 50 in one school and in the other 18 out of 152. In Soroti in one of the rural schools there was one pupil in grade 1 and in the other school there were none. Pupils of urban schools usually perform slightly better.

The respondents attributed the poor performance to several factors, namely: poor infrastructure (overcrowded classrooms), late arrival and absenteeism of teachers, lack of contribution of any kind from parents including not giving the children any food so that they stay hungry the whole day, late arrival and absenteeism of pupils, lack of or insufficient scholastic materials, lack of text books, teacher-pupil ratio, national UPE policy including specifically the automatic promotion, inadequate facilities such as lack of furniture (chairs, desks) in classrooms, too much time spent on sports and other additional activities, lack of appreciation of the teachers by the community, and negative attitude of parents and teachers. Some parents criticized that children whose parents cannot pay the extra-charges are being sent home and that selected pupils receive additional lessons from teachers. Others complained of the policy of teaching in local language from P1-P3. Consequently, at the time of transition to teaching in English in P4 the pupils are very much behind and are not able to read or write in English at all. Several interviewees pointed out that this is not the practice in Kampala, where pupils study in English from the start, and therefore the performance in the capital is much better.

Moroto has some unique setbacks regarding attendance. Pupils only come to school when there is food provided and when it gets finished they stay at home. All the schools in Moroto receive food from World Food Program but it is not always enough for all the pupils for the whole term. Further, another challenge that makes pupils stay away from school is insecurity. The roads to some schools are very dangerous, with people being killed and also incidents of pupils being attacked. The schools are not fenced, which makes some pupils feel unsafe within school. In one of the rural schools an incident was reported where a 14 year old girl was kidnapped from the school premises for the purpose of forced marriage. The roads are very bad, which makes the schools hardly accessible during rainy seasons, while at the same time boarding facilities are missing. Finally, some pupils and parents stated that even when pupils struggle to complete primary education there is usually no money to enable them continue with education. According to the teachers and head teachers the parents do not support education at all and this makes it difficult for pupils to attend regularly. There is a high drop-out rate resulting in very few candidates taking the Primary Leaving Examinations. It has been pointed out by several teachers and head teachers that specifically the drop-out rate of girls is high. Also the absenteeism of girls is higher and many parents believe education has a negative impact on girls. Although extra-charges are rather small, the parents do not pay them and frequently it is the pupils raising the school extra-charges and this in turn also negatively impacts on their attendance.

The parents of the children in urban schools are fairly satisfied with the performance and some stated that it is progressing. VH Public School is according to the head teacher the best UPE School in Lira district. In 2010 over 50% of pupils completed PLE and passed

in division 1, the rest in division 2 and only 1 pupil in division 3. In 2011 more than 40% obtained division 1 and the rest were in division 2. The self rating of the performance was “good” according to the head teacher and teachers. The teachers and parents are equally satisfied with the performance and parents additionally gave examples of incentives such as mattresses and even cash prizes for good performance sponsored by a local hotel and an alumnus of the school. The reasons given for this good performance and general satisfaction were good cooperation among teachers, parents and pupils, parents providing for children’s needs such as scholastic materials and food, remedial teaching and regular testing, punctuality of teachers as the majority are accommodated within the school premises, teachers being motivated by parents and general discipline in the school. This school is the only one of the visited schools providing food for the pupils. The parents contribute Ushs 25,000 per term and according to the head teacher none of the parents refuses to pay.

Similarly, in Soroti the reasons given for the relatively better performance of the urban school are: support from parents (also in the form of paying the extra-charges of 10 000 per term per child, which the majority of parents contribute), commitment from the teachers, encouragement of parents on the side of the school to get involved in school matters (regular class meetings with an average turn up of 50%), boarding option for a part of the pupils which enables remedial teaching and feeding at school for the boarders.

An additional issue that emerged in many schools was not only the presence of text books (which are scarce or even missing completely in some schools) but also the availability of the books for pupils. According to the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education⁴ the books should be accessible for all pupils and from P3 onwards the books should be given into the care of pupils to be returned at the end of the term. This is not the case in the majority of the visited schools. In some schools pupils can only access the books in the libraries, that are usually too small, and in other cases pupils can never access them as they remain in the care of the teachers all the time.

2.7 Priority Areas for Improvement

In order to improve the quality of UPE, despite the numerous challenges faced by the schools, the respondents ranked teachers’ accommodation and salary as priority areas for improvement. Further, the respondents referred to provision of infrastructure, meals and instructional materials, to classroom renovation, and water supply as essential. Unique to Moroto district, was the demand for a chain link (fence around the schools) for security purposes.

All the schools in the study alluded to teachers’ accommodation as a priority as this issue affects the availability and accessibility of the teachers by the pupils. And as already mentioned, it has been the reason for late coming or absenteeism of the teachers in many

⁴ Ministry of Education, and Sports, Guidelines on: Policy, Planning, Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders in the Implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) for District and Urban Councils, October 2008

schools. The respondents feel this issue should be addressed by both the government and the parents. For instance the majority of parents in one rural primary school in Soroti helped to construct teachers houses. In another Soroti school some teachers' houses have been renovated by the management committee. In two schools in Lira parents are contributing to staff accommodation. However, in Moroto district the schools were not successful in involving the parents to contribute towards teachers' accommodation. Efforts were made by the school management to address the issues through the local government, but in most cases the efforts were futile.

The parents, teachers and head teachers feel teachers' low salary impacts negatively on teachers' motivation. *Teacher's salary is only 250,000/= yet the work is too much and we cannot send our children to good schools*, teachers in a school in Gulu lamented. The head teachers, teachers and parents, think that it is only the government which can address this problem. In fact effort has been undertaken to address it through a national strike of teachers in 2011 that compelled the government to sit at a round table with the leaders of UNATU. However, regarding the salary increment the debate is still ongoing. Although the frustration with remuneration is high among teachers not all join in the protest fearing that they might be labeled rebels and might face repercussions.

Another area of concern is the feeding of the pupils. In most of the schools visited the pupils study on empty stomachs. Those, who go home for lunch also face challenges. In some cases the lunch is late, sometimes not there, the home is far from school, etc. Being hungry most of the day seriously affects the level of concentration and consequently the performance of the pupils. On the issue of feeding pupils the majority of the interviewees felt it should be addressed to parents during the AGM. While the issue of instructional material, which is lacking in most of the schools, is to be addressed to the government. Renovation of classrooms also features as a concern in the realization of basic quality education. Poor classrooms have become dangerous to the lives of the pupils. *"There was an accident recently when a student got seriously injured due to parts of the building falling off due to storm"*, the head teacher in a Lira primary school lamented. Moreover some of the classrooms lack window shutters. Sanitation facilities are a problem in most schools, especially latrines and clean water supplies. The issue of latrines can be addressed to the parents as well, but for water supply the government should take the sole responsibility, interviewees recommended. Construction of adequate boarding facilities was mentioned in several schools, especially in Moroto. These challenges could be addressed by the government or parents. In one school in Gulu the issue of boarding has been addressed with the parents and they are now contributing towards the construction of dormitories.

Chapter Three

Discussion of the findings

3.1 Introduction

The implementation of UPE in Uganda, and in particular the North and North Eastern Uganda poses a big challenge in provision of quality basic education for all children of school going age. In fact it is far from increasing access, equity and quality of primary education as the finding of this rapid case study reveals. This is based on the fact that, out of the 12 schools visited in the region all reported more or less serious problems associated with infrastructure, funding, staff, and instructional materials necessary for attaining quality basic education. In some cases, the situations are not only wanting, but lacking. Further, the parents have not yet understood the UPE policy as not being free; as such they fail to meet their obligation.

3.1 Government Financial Obligation

Regarding government obligation to fund UPE schools, the government is fulfilling it. However, the challenge has been on the adequacy and consistency in the amount and disbursement time. According to the 12 schools visited in Gulu, Lira, Soroti, and Moroto districts, all of them registered discontent with the amount and irregularities in the disbursement of the fund to their respective schools. The total amount sent to the schools ranges from Ushs 200,000 to 1.5 million per term. Yet the amount proposed by the administrators of these schools for effective running of the schools ranges from Ushs 2 million – 5 million depending on the number of the pupils. Consequently, all these schools have been constrained in areas of instructional materials, co-curricular activities, management and administration. Frequently, the funds are delayed by weeks or months, which makes it even more challenging to breach the gap until the UPE funds arrive. Apart from the inadequacy in funding, sometimes the little funds sent to the schools are mismanaged or embezzled. All those factors have greatly affected the access, equity and the quality of basic education rendered in the UPE schools in most of the schools visited in the North and North Eastern Uganda.

3.2 Enrolment and Staff Welfare

The introduction of UPE meant that enrolment would increase. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of instruction, there was a need to increase the supply of qualified teachers. Government guaranteed funding for payment of the additional teachers and for clearing salary arrears⁵. However, the payment of teachers and teacher-pupil ratio has remained a major challenge to the government. According to UPE policy, the teacher-

⁵ Ministry of Education and Sport , Draft report On A case s A Case Study on the Impact of UPE on the Quality of Basic Education in Uganda,

pupil ratio is 1:53 and each class is entitled to a class teacher. From the findings the teacher-pupil ratio was estimated at 1:54, 1:53, 1:43, and 1:31, for Gulu, Soroti, Lira, and Moroto respectively. Moroto ratio was low due to the low enrolment rate, which has been estimated by the DEO of Moroto to be around 25 %. However, it should be noted that, although the ratio of teachers to pupils is within the acceptable standard this is not true for the lower classes. In the lower classes in some schools it is as high as 1:138. The lower ratio is only obtained due to high drop out in upper classes. Quality of teaching does not only depend on qualification of the staff, but on a number of factors. These include the number and adequacy of staffing, satisfactory remuneration, and staff facilities (accommodation) which motivates them to teach. One of the major challenges that interviewees raised was inadequate salary. In fact the teachers felt the work is enormous but they are poorly remunerated. They are not able to educate their own children in better schools. This has a negative impact on the motivation of the teachers. There is no wonder then that the quality of UPE performance in most of these schools is poor. The issue of teachers' remuneration has remained critical in all the schools visited. Equally, discouraging to the teachers is the lack of teachers' accommodation within school premises. They face challenges reaching the schools during rainy season and the lack of accommodation leads to late-coming and absenteeism.

3.3 Infrastructure provision

Construction of new and renovation of infrastructure (i.e. classrooms, latrines, and teachers' houses) has been one of the key areas for government obligation in ensuring accessibility, equity and quality UPE. To that effect the government set up two conditional grants i.e. the School Facilities Grant (SFG) and the Classroom Completion Grant (CCG). Parents are also supposed to continue to supplement government efforts whenever possible. Additionally, in the Northern region classrooms and teacher's accommodation facilities have been constructed under PRDP. The SFG assists the most needy school communities in building new classrooms, supplying furniture for the constructed classrooms, building latrines and at least 4 teachers' houses per school. Classroom Completion Grant is used for the completion of partially built classrooms.

The findings reveal that infrastructure is still a big problem in UPE schools. In some of the schools, teachers' accommodation is not only wanting but lacking. This situation has affected the availability of some of the teachers to the pupils. They report late and leave early to reach home. Some of the classrooms are in pathetic conditions, only partially finished or very old and never renovated. The schools most in need of new structures have not received any support under PRDP, which in turn was used to support some urban schools that have been in a better condition even before the construction. Another problem with the classrooms constructed under PRDP was that some standard measurements have been applied without taking account of the size of the classes and particular needs of the school.

3.4 Performance Setback

UPE failure to provide quality basic education can be blamed on both the government and parents and their lack of meeting their respective obligations. In the first place ensuring quality basic education requires adequate instructional materials. The introduction of UPE entailed increase in enrolment. Therefore, with all the schools registering lack or inadequacy of instructional materials there is no way of quality and equity without improving access and usage of scholastic materials. Instructional materials in primary schools include: core text books, teacher's guides, supplementary text books and basic teachers' professional references and pedagogic materials, pupils' basic reference books (atlas and dictionaries), supplementary reading books and learning aids such as wall charts. Moreover, although education is called "universal" there is no compulsory education, meaning the introduction of legal measures to prevent parents from keeping children at home. It has been noted that some children are kept at home by their parents to do domestic work. The domestic work they are engaged in includes but is not limited to: babysitting, harvesting, digging, etc. According to our findings, although boys and girls are both occasionally prevented from going to school, this is more prevalent for the girls. Moreover, girls also face the issue of early marriage resulting in early pregnancy and consequently drop-out from school. In several schools all over the North and North East the interviewees reported early marriages of girls as young as 12 or 13.

Another reason for the poor performance falls solely under parental obligation. According to the UPE policy, parents have the obligation to provide scholastic materials, school uniforms, and basic requirements for the survival of their children. The findings indicate that most parents are not able to provide it either intentionally as they regard UPE to be free, or they cannot afford it. Therefore, some of the children stay hungry the whole day and those who go home sometimes do not come back or come back late. Other pupils are sent back home to bring scholastic materials instead of studying with others. These situations impact negatively on the concentration and performance of the children at school.

Chapter Four

Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1 Conclusion

Primary education in Uganda is in a critical condition not being able to provide equal and truly universal education it is aiming at. The consequences are serious deepening the gap between those who can afford good schools or even private education, mostly located in Kampala, and those who cannot or who do not even perceive the education of their children as a priority.

The reasons for the failure of rising up to the promises and the expectations created when UPE was introduced are diverse. UPE has been promoted as “free education”, which has been understood by many parents in the way that it relieves them from any obligations and responsibilities. However, the Assistant Commissioner for Primary Education clearly stated that there is no free education. According to guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education and Sports parents have clear responsibilities including but not limited to feeding, provision of exercise books, pens, clothing, active participation in PTA activities and contribution of labor and/or material for the improvement of school facilities.

The government, while promising education for all, did not manage to provide an adequate learning environment up to now. In many upcountry schools the infrastructure is dilapidated to the point of being dangerous for the safety of the pupils, sanitation facilities are in a pathetic condition, clean water is a challenge, text books and basic furniture are missing. The additional grants put into place to address those challenges, such as SFG, CCG or PRDP frequently do not support the schools that are in most need of help. There is no law to make primary education compulsory, and consequently the basic education of children is left at the mercy and goodwill of parents. The policies of automatic promotion and the introduction of local languages as the language of instruction have been mentioned by several interviewees as negatively influencing the performance of pupils in upcountry schools.

Teachers struggle with minimal salary and many do not have adequate accommodation. Accommodation on school premises is just provided for very few teachers. In Karamoja some teachers have to sleep in classrooms on the floor. On the other hand many also do not perform their duties and there is rarely a functioning monitoring structure to supervise them. As there are only disincentives instead of enticements for the teachers in remote rural areas, their motivation is very low, to the point of being absent from school most of the time.

There are various NGOs trying to support the schools. However, those efforts are not well coordinated or monitored. In some cases the NGO interventions were counterproductive as in the case of one school in Soroti, where an NGO constructed a borehole next to latrines, which contaminated the water.

As primary education is the basis for the education of the whole population it is necessary that those challenges are addressed urgently. Otherwise instead of contributing towards equality for all Ugandans the imbalance between the rich and the poor will deepen, denying the majority of population a fair chance in the globalized world, where education is necessary for success.

4.2 Recommendations

To the Government of Uganda

- Clarify on roles and responsibilities of government vs. parents and dismantle the myth of “free education” through an information and awareness raising campaign.
- Provide adequate, safe and conducive learning environment. It is not acceptable that children risk their health or lives going to school due to dilapidated structures and poor sanitation facilities!
- Fulfill the obligations such as provision of learning materials, text books, furniture etc to ALL schools equally.
- Ensure that UPE funds reach the schools each term in time.
- Ensure that the grants established to support schools are distributed fairly and priority is given to the schools that are in most need of help.
- Strengthen monitoring and auditing structures for schools.
- Reconsider teachers’ remuneration, especially introducing incentives for teachers in remote areas.
- Make primary education compulsory.
- Revise the automatic promotion regulation.
- Introduce a policy to have one language of instruction all through primary school and this should ideally be the same language in the whole country. Local languages should be taught alongside other subjects from P1 up to P7 to ensure that children are able to read and write in their own language.
- Ensure special support, adequate to the needs of the population, in marginalized regions such as Karamoja. Pupils and teachers stay there in schools under pathetic and frequently dangerous conditions!

To the parents

- Fulfill the responsibilities of a parent, such as feeding, providing clothes or medical care as the government cannot take care of everything.

- Take the initiative of understanding the rules and regulations of UPE including the responsibilities assigned to parents.
- Contribute towards the improvement of your child's school and especially to the feeding as set out in the guidelines.
- Understand that the child has a RIGHT to education.
- Participate in the school and PTA activities, in school meetings and visit the school regularly. According to an Uwezo report the children whose parents take active interest in their education perform much better.
- Make sure you know the budget of the school and how the money is spent! The parents should act as monitors to ensure transparency and accountability in the school of their children.
- Support awareness raising and other activities directed at parents by explaining to other parents the need and importance of education.

To teachers and head teachers

- Make sure you are familiar with your roles and responsibilities as outlined in the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Sports. For example do not restrict pupils from accessing and using the books.
- Set up internal monitoring structures and make sure the amount of funds and how they are spent is in a visible place for anyone to see.
- Make sure that everyone is coming on time. Introduce structures to monitor the attendance and punctuality of staff.
- Be active in explaining parents their responsibilities. It is the responsibility of the head teacher to ensure that children are not hungry and to address it with the parents.

To the NGOs

- Organize awareness raising campaigns on the importance of education but also informing parents on their responsibilities.
- Organize awareness raising specifically on the issue of girl child education and against early marriages.
- Coordinate with other NGOs to avoid duplication and making sure that support is given to the ones most in need and that the selection of schools for support is conducted fairly.

- Make sure that your interventions as well as the interventions of other NGOs are of good quality.
- If you are active in the field of education familiarize the staff with the relevant documents so that your interventions are informed and productive.
- Link up with others working in the same field for advocacy to improve the standard of primary education in Uganda.

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