



Factsheet: Education in Uganda

Overview

Uganda is in East Africa and is often called the ‘Pearl of Africa’ due to its outstanding scenery and wildlife. It has a population of 39 million and life expectancy is 59 years. Uganda has also been affected by HIV/AIDs and around 1 in 4 households has at least one orphan.¹ 84% of Uganda’s population live in rural areas and 82% work in agriculture.² Uganda’s GDP is \$26.31 billion.³ GNI per capita (average income per person) is \$600⁴ but there is high inequality with 63% of the population living on less than \$2 per day.

Education in Uganda

Uganda has made some progress towards the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to achieve universal primary education (UPE) by 2015. Net enrolment in primary education is over 90%⁵ but retention is poor, with less than half of Ugandan children completing primary school.⁶ The government of Uganda allocates 14% of its total budget to fund education.⁷

Around 1 in 4 children continue on to secondary school.⁸ Although the government provides free secondary education to the brightest pupils, most families still need to pay school fees and all need to pay for uniforms, books etc. With fees averaging \$450 per year, many families simply cannot afford to send their children to school. In addition, only 30% of villages in Uganda have a secondary school⁹ so for many children without any means of transport school is just too far away. As a result, only 23% of boys and 19% of girls complete lower secondary school.¹⁰ If a family doesn’t have enough money to send all their children to school they are more likely to send boys than girls as a result of the perception that boys have greater earning potential, and girls are often kept at home to help with household duties etc. There is therefore a ratio of 0.87 girls to boys in secondary education.¹¹



Photograph © Jane Baker

¹ State of Uganda Population Report, 2013

² Farm Africa [<http://www.farmafrica.org/uganda/uganda>]

³ World Bank Development Indicators, 2014

⁴ ibid

⁵ Male 90%, female 92% (UNICEF’s ‘State of the World’s Children 2015’ statistical tables)

⁶ Male 48%, female 49% (UNESCO, 2012)

⁷ UNESCO (2012)

⁸ Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2010

⁹ USAID (2011)

¹⁰ UNESCO (2012)

¹¹ World Bank Database

Only 5% of boys and 4% of girls progress to tertiary education¹² - this level of education is generally only possible for those from the richest part of Ugandan society. The average higher education course costs around \$900 per year¹³ – with a GNI per capita of \$600 and 63% of the population living on less than \$2 per day this is far beyond the reach of most families. Only five of Uganda’s 34 universities are government owned, making the rest privately owned and exclusive to those lucky enough to be able to afford the school fees. Resourcing of public universities is generally poor, leading to food rationing and over-crowded lecture theatres. The Ugandan government sponsors around 4,000 state sponsored students at university but they are not necessarily those in the greatest need.¹⁴

Kabale District

Rafiki Thabo’s work in Uganda is concentrated in Kabale district. Kabale district has a population of 490,667¹⁵ and covers 648.3 square miles. It is in the extreme southwest corner of Uganda, bordered by Kisoro and Ntungamo districts and Rwanda. Kampala’s Human Poverty Index (HPI) is 9.6 compared to Kabale’s which is 24.¹⁶ The dominant cultural group in the area is the Bakiga, with a few other tribal clans (Batwa, Banyarwanda, & the Bahororo) who also live there. Kabale town is a densely populated area and the rest of Kabale district attracts visitors to Lake Bunyonyi and other tourist destinations.



Street scene in Kabale © Jane Baker

Net enrolment in primary education in Kabale district is 78.4% which is well below the national average. However, around 1 in 3 children (31.6%) manage to enrol in secondary school, compared to 1 in 4 nationally.¹⁷

Key challenges facing the Ugandan education sector

Like the education sectors in most sub-Saharan African countries, the Ugandan education sector faces lots of challenges. Public schools and universities are under-resourced as budgets are limited, classrooms are full, and there are not enough teachers.

As shown by the statistics above, Uganda is struggling to successfully transition pupils from primary to secondary school. Retention in secondary school is also an issue: one of the reasons for this is poverty. In addition to paying school fees, many parents struggle to afford pens, exercise books, school uniforms and even school lunch for their children. In addition,

¹² ibid

¹³ Based on fees paid by Rafiki Thabo Foundation in 2015

¹⁴ New

¹⁵ Uganda Atlas Dataset, 2015

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ ibid

30% of girls drop out of secondary school once they start menstruating simply because they can't afford sanitary towels. Both enrolment and retention rates are lower in rural regions of Uganda, like Kabale.

The quality of education in rural public schools is also an issue. The World Bank's Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs) for Uganda suggest that the quality of education in Kampala is of a much higher standard than rural areas. The Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (2013-14) states that Uganda needs to speed up expansion of its teacher force. In order to meet current demand, Uganda would need to expand recruitment by 6%, compared with a current average increase of 3% per year. Such teacher shortages mean larger class sizes which affects the quality of education delivered. Teacher salaries are low: teachers are the lowest paid civil servants in the country that means there is a lack of incentive for teachers to attend school and to commit to lessons. Absenteeism is therefore a major issue and exacerbates the problem of teacher shortages: the SDI data show that roughly 1 in 4 teachers was absent from school, and of those present in school, 1 in 3 were not teaching. As a result, 40% of public school classrooms did not have a teacher teaching in them when the data were collected. Availability of school text books is also poor, particularly in rural areas.¹⁸

The future of the education sector

In its national budget paper (2015/16) the Ugandan government sets out key priorities in relation to education.¹⁹ These include:

- Improving transition rates from primary to secondary school;
- Producing secondary education graduates with the skills and knowledge required to enter the workforce or pursue tertiary and higher education;
- Providing equal opportunities to eligible students including those from disadvantaged backgrounds to access quality higher or tertiary education; and
- Maintaining enrolment numbers at 4,000 in public universities for government-sponsored students.

It is encouraging that the government recognises and wants to address the key challenges facing the sector. The global community has also recently endorsed the Global Goals, which among many other things, pledge that every country in the world will aim to provide free secondary education to all children by 2030. It will be interesting to watch progress towards this goal in Uganda.



¹⁸ World Bank SDI Indicators, Uganda [<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/11/19/quality-uganda-education-and-health-services-poses-serious-risk-long-term-economic-progress>]

¹⁹ Taken from the Ugandan Ministry Education Budget Proposal. This can be found in the National Budget Framework from page 257: <http://www.budget.go.ug/budget/national-budgets-documents>