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# **National Integration in Uganda**

**- The Quest for Universal Access to Education**

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Uppsats SOC 464, 61-80 p  
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Handledare: Göran Djurfeldt

## **Abstract**

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In 1997 the Ugandan government introduced a reform program with the ambition to implement universal primary education. The abolition of tuition fees would ideally guarantee access to the public service delivery system as far as primary education is concerned and help to integrate underprivileged groups with the rest of the diverse society. The launch of universal primary education in Uganda implied a tremendous expansion of the education sector and the capacity of the system proved not sufficient to absorb the drastic increase of enrolment. The study answers the question why the public sector reforms haven't led to the intended national integration and highlights that the reform program was utterly politicised and subsequently difficult to implement. The study consists of a literature review, an ample document analysis and an interview-based minor field study. A comprehensive comparison is made between government aided schools and private schools in Uganda and the survey shows that the standard and quality of government aided schools is severely deteriorating as a result of the reform program. Ugandan parents who can't afford to send their children to private institutions access pseudo-education only.

Keywords: education, Uganda, nationalism, integration, access, public service



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## **Introduction**

President Museveni's 1996 election pledge to provide free primary education catapulted education issues up the policy agenda. Until that point education had arguably been low and declining priority for the government. In 1987 when the National Resistance Movement first came to power it set up an education-policy review commission to report on the state of the education sector. The commission's most remarkable recommendation was to attain universal primary education before the year 2000 by gradually abolishing tuition fees in primary schools. According to the government's official political manifesto this would lead to greater access to education especially for girls, handicapped and other disadvantaged groups in the Ugandan society (Ssekamwa, 1999: 61-62). Uganda is a multicultural society and a few ethnical groups have recovered from the devastating post-independence political and economic turmoil, while other groups are left deeply marginalised. The current administration, enthusiastically supported by international financing agencies, hopes that universal access to service delivery would help to integrate the diverse population.

This thesis which is an attempt to answer the question why the introduction of universal primary education in Uganda hasn't meant a significant step towards increased national integration. Contrary to the explicit ambition of the authorities and the widely acknowledged risk of continued fragmentation and social decay in Uganda, the efforts to increase access to public services have essentially failed. Universal access to primary education has proved itself to be an insurmountable task and in order to understand the reasons for the interminable segregation of the Ugandan people, an in depth analysis of the manifold characteristics of the Ugandan civil society is required.

## **Theory**

Several theories are used in this study to grasp the various aspects of the topic in question but as far as possible I have tried to use regionally generated theories. Ethnocentrism is always an issue when dealing with African circumstances and conditions so the comprehensive writings of for example Okuonzi, Birungi and Ssekamwa are very helpful when analysing African features. Ssekamwa is a lecturer at Makerere University in Kampala and has among other things produced some dissertations about the history of formal education in East Africa and about the changing character and status of the teacher profession in Uganda. Also from Kampala, the social scientist Joy Kwesiga has written extensively about the complexity of educational access and her roots in feminist theory often shine through, assisting the scholar to be sensitive about gender disparities. Notably she uses a much wider definition of the term 'access' than for example the Ugandan government, and it is by using her definition I have come to my conclusions. Ian Leggett sets focus

on processes of national integration and draws attention to public service delivery as a means of promoting national unity and harmony. On the other hand he also emphasises the factors that could potentially undermine social unanimity and suggests that universal access to services and capital, systematic inclusion and equity of security are necessary ideals to build a sense of nationhood.

Oloka-Onyango's theory was chosen because it asserts the two wheels of national integration, the socio-cultural and the economic, and stresses that the economic dimension of integration is inherent in all trans-ethnic relationships. In addition, it is important to remember that policy-making in Uganda does not exist in a shared vacuum and the theories of Holsti and Castells pronounce the political context and the social climate in which policy is being engendered. Castells elucidates the international dimension and the fact that many regimes struggle to attract donor support, while Holsti's theory sheds some light over passionate politics and how ultimate-end visions tend to weaken the legitimacy of regimes. Much research has been carried out regarding effects of primary education on societal development and some social indicators like for example productivity gains and health variables are being assessed considering the novel writings of the World Bank economists Ritva Reinikka, Paul Collier and Simon Appleton. However, the deteriorating quality of public education in general is found to significantly erode theoretically expected effects of universal primary education, so the exploratory research of Kim Otteby from Oxford University was utilised to guideline my study since she fruitfully links common educational production functions to academic performance and equity of educational opportunity.

## **Method and material**

This study was basically conducted in three different stages and the initial phase represents a review over relevant literature, both theoretic and empirical. The literature study was followed up by the second phase, namely interviews of key informants and document analyses. In order to reveal and clarify government considerations, figure out the political culture and in detail comprehend the primary education reform program and the associated strategic investment plan, several reports, policy documents and internal newsletters were collected from the Ugandan Ministry of Education's Resource Centre in Kampala. To complement the written material, a few public accountants and a former minister were consulted and interviewed on several occasions. The third phase of the research project was a minor field study carried out in the remote and rural districts of Soronco and Kisoro as well as in Kampala. Altogether nine primary schools were sampled, three in each district, and those in Kampala are privately operated while the others are government aided. The reason for choosing both private and government primary schools, and moreover rural and urban primary schools, is the profitability of being able to make comparisons.

Private schools were selected in Kampala since the majority of primary schools in Kampala are privately owned and likewise most primary schools in rural areas are government aided.

Each sampled school was visited and although important observations were made regarding classroom environment, facilities and infrastructure, the minor field study is mainly based on interviews. Twenty-five individuals were interviewed separately, nine headmasters and sixteen primary school teachers, and probably the only thing they had in common was that they have been employed in either a private or a government aided primary school for at least seven years. This limit was set to assure that the respondents all have experiences of professional teaching in Uganda before the introduction of universal primary education. Three headmasters and five teachers were interviewed in Kampala district, three headmasters and six teachers were interviewed in Kisoro district, and finally three headmasters and five teachers were interviewed in Soronco district. As the sample of schools and the number of teachers is quite small it is not likely to be representative of the total range of primary school in Uganda, but according to the respondents themselves their situation could be described as typical. The kind of interview conducted can be categorised as semi-structural since some recurrent, standardised questions were used to collect quantitative data and that was the case concerning for example results of Primary Leaving Examinations, dropout rates and the local pupil-teacher ratio. Other questions were more open in character and encouraged the respondents to reflect over how he or she perceives for example the current working conditions, the standard of education and in what ways they feel the situation in their school has changed since the launch of the universal primary education reform program.

### **The years of discord and decadence**

The NRM Government was slow to implement the measures and commit the resources needed to meet the recommendations of the education-policy review commission of 1987. For nearly two decades the country had been ravaged by a variety of social, political and economical ailments even though Uganda inherited a fairly robust agriculturally based economy at independence in 1962. Unlike Kenya the autonomy campaign was not characterised by insurgency or bloodshed, and the transition to sovereignty was orderly and relatively harmonious. Investments in education, health care and other public services also helped to explain the positive expectations that accompanied the achievement of independence (Leggett, 2001: 1). Prospects for growth and development were reasonably positive, albeit one could say that this was true for most African economies at the time, but within a few years after obtaining autonomy a military dictatorship replaced the civilian administration. The junta's economic policies, amongst them the attempted indigenisation of the economy through the expulsion of Asian entrepreneurs, proved particularly disastrous. Civil war, serious political mismanagement and internal repression greatly added to the economic malaise that

the country was drawn through, and by the time the present NRM Government took over office in Kampala the national economy was in dire straits (Oloka-Onyango, 2000: 30).

Uganda had been notorious for the tyrannical and oppressive reign of Idi Amin and Milton Obote and corruption, black-marketing, tribalism and violation of human rights were the epithets by which Uganda was well known. The decline and into violence and poverty was marked by the flight of more than half a million of its people, and the killing of a similar number, as successive governments terrorised those communities regarded as being sympathetic to rebels or political opponents. Spectacular as it was, the precipitate expulsion of a nation's collective capacity of merchants, traders and industrialists was not exactly a viable policy of economic development, and as a few individuals prospered the economy as a whole crumbled. By 1985 Uganda appeared to be on the verge of fragmentation with different armed factions controlling different parts of the country and the economy too was in a state of siege. It became increasingly difficult to do any kind of trade and there was a subsequent shortage of all essential goods. The rampant inflation rate made the salaries paid to the public servants practically worthless and left the public service sector severely disintegrated. (Leggett, 2001: 2-22) External pressures arising from worsening terms of trade and the backbreaking public debt combined to strike a heavy blow to the financing of social services in Uganda during this time.

The civil strife affected primary education as it affected other sectors of development in the society. The dismissal of all Asians from the country had an impact on the education system because the qualified Asian teachers departed and left many schools without teachers. It became utterly difficult to get books from abroad because shortage of the hard currency, and due to insecurity even the foreign publishing closed business and went abroad. Consequently textbooks which in the past were provided by those publishers got off the market. The availability of scholastic materials in general was quite adversely affected and the stock of in particular science equipment and science chemicals ran dry. After Idi Amin came to power the school construction industry, which characterised the period from 1963 to 1970, halted and this meant that many primary school pupils began to experience difficulties in finding schools to attend. Another setback to education development during the Amin regime and the period when NRM were trying to seize power from the Obote regime, was the tremendous destruction of school buildings, school furniture, scholastic material and equipment. The primary education sector was totally disorganised when military forces were systematically using schools as temporary barracks, and were putting up campfires with school furniture and used textbooks to light them. (Ssekamwa, 1999: 59-60)



## **Economic policy and growth of inequality**

The years of civil war had created an impact on the structure of the economy, which signified a process that produced sharper and sharper contrasts between private wealth and public decay. The collapse of the formal sector led to the emergence and strengthening of an informal sector which still today dominates the Ugandan economy, both in terms of the numbers of people involved in informal economic activity and the value of this activity to the national economy. It is against this background that the achievements of the current government need to be understood. Recognising that Uganda had no choice but to seek financial assistance, president Museveni embraced the policies of economic orthodoxy. Despite some initial reluctance the NRM government has persisted with that strategy and now has an impressive record of financial discipline which is reflected in an uninterrupted series of arrangements with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank stretching back to 1987. (Leggett, 2001: 57-60)

IMF granted Uganda large credits and extensive resources were drawn from the World Bank sponsored Special Program of Assistance, a facility for enhanced aid flows to concessional low-income Sub-Saharan countries. In order for a country to qualify for IMF loans however, it must agree to a set of policy reforms and criteria of performance. The usual conditions involve liberalisation of trade as well as restrictive monetary and fiscal policies. The idea is to remove distortion by narrowing domestic aggregate demand and create incentives to shift resources from non-tradable to tradable goods, and consequently boost exports and improve the balance of payments position. The key objectives of the Ugandan structural adjustment programs promoted by the international institutions was to stabilise the economy by reducing inflation, bring about rapid economic recovery and move towards increased viability in the balance of payments. Related objectives of the macroeconomic reform packages were to rehabilitate the economic infrastructure and attract investments.

The primary strategy in this area set out by the IMF was to establish more realistic relative prices, and the principal instrument was a drastic nominal depreciation of the exchange rate. The devaluation of the Ugandan shilling during the eighties was followed by measures to increase domestic savings, which theoretically support higher levels of investment. Recognising the importance of agriculture to economic recovery, the structural adjustment programs focused on alleviating the scarcity of foreign exchange for agricultural inputs and the elimination of inefficiencies in processing and marketing. To contain aggregate demand and lower inflation the NRM Government has been attempting to follow a consistent set of fiscal and monetary policies including maintaining strict public expenditure control. Trade taxes and the custom tariff structures were rationalised, which in most cases meant simplified and lowered, in order to strengthen domestic resource mobilisation while ensuring appropriate incentives in international trade. (Hansen & Twaddle, 1991: 25-67)

The process of post-conflict reconstruction by implementing IMF supported macroeconomic reform programs has continued since the initial experiences with structural adjustment, and the vast majority of the former public commercial enterprises have been privatised or liquidated. The NRM Government has effectively managed to smooth over the Ugandan history of expropriation of foreign investments, and considerable economic liberalisation has inflated investor confidence. This in turn has resulted in a massive repatriation of assets, previously held abroad due to insecurity and political disorder, hence leading to the current re-capitalisation of the Ugandan society. (Reinikka & Collier, 2001: 31-38) Reports on the recent economic situation present a glowing picture with growth rates averaging nearly 6 percent per annum for the past decade. By any standard, the achievements are impressive, implying an inflation kept to a low and consistent minimum and a currency with a reasonably stable exchange rate backed by steadily increasing foreign exchange reserves.

However, the significant economic growth in gross domestic product terms conceals a hidden reality characterised by a reducing commitment to fundamental transformation of political and social rights. Such rights are implicated in the debate over poverty and questions have been raised to which extent there is a genuine aspiration to substantiate equality, non-discrimination and equitable development embedded the institutional mechanisms established by the NRM Government. The growth figures are insufficient to give a comprehensive view of the state of the society and they fail to capture the differential or class-related dimensions to the issue. In fact the economical recovery has not resulted in either a fair distribution of recourses or a greater adherence to the basic principles of economic participation and social inclusion. The main concern is that the benefits of strong growth have yet to translate into measurable improvements in the standard of living for the majority of the Ugandan people. (Oloka-Onyango, 2000: 23-27)

The irony of Uganda's recovery is that the macroeconomic stability that has been achieved is based almost entirely on conditional transfers of development aid, as a result of the close relationship with the international financing institutions, and not on any fundamental improvements in the basic structure or capacity of the economy. The emerging elite has enough money and access to information to enjoy the shift to market economy, in which state companies are sold off to private bidders, and which links with foreign investors and companies are beneficial. Meanwhile, sections of the population have got poorer over the last fifteen years, and at most risk of increased vulnerability have been the small-scale peasant producers trying to eke out a living in areas where conflict and insecurity still is a way of life. Uganda's economic revival demonstrates that growth does not necessarily lead to poverty reduction. Poverty reduction depends on how the benefits of growth are distributed and utilised, and the most obvious consequence of recent economic growth in Uganda is the associated growth of inequality (Leggett, 2001: 60-62).

## **Ethnic disparities and the absence of a national identity**

The social differentiation, accentuated by the uneven distribution of opportunities, is based on geography, but dangerously open to interpretations based on ethnicity. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the British and others started to explore East and Central Africa, Buganda was the largest, most sophisticated and most prosperous of the kingdoms of Central Africa. Buganda's early alliance with the British proved to be critical in the subsequent fortunes of the Baganda tribe, and its importance and dominance over other tribes was enhanced. Colonialism built upon differences in economic development apparent in pre-colonial times in such a way as to produce a strongly unbalanced economy. As a result, disparities in income between the fertile crescent around Lake Victoria and the poorer, drier northern districts became pronounced. With the construction of the railway from Mombasa to Kampala in the early 1900s, which sufficiently principally incorporated southern Uganda into the imperial economy, areas with reasonable access to the railway were encouraged to produce cotton and coffee for export to Europe, and consequently cultivation expanded rapidly. Formalising the division, the colonial authorities designated northern and south-western Uganda as labour reserves rather than production zones, and the process of uneven agricultural development meant that by the mid-1950s farmers in Buganda had cash incomes three times higher than those of farmers in Acholi and West Nile, and nine times higher than the cattle herders of Karamoja.

A major problem for educational reform in Uganda is the difficulty of identifying a national ethos that could unite the people into a coherent social order, and whose core values could vitalise and guide the design of the educational system. At the same time, the education-policy review commission of 1987 concluded that lack of national integration is the single greatest obstacle to development in Uganda, but that the type and form of education provided has a central role in building such integration. The commission's recommendation to universalise primary education was mainly motivated by that it would help to achieve the transformation of the society leading to greater unity among its people (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 1999: 5). Uganda is a culturally heterogeneous and historically shallow collection of people with basically none of the attributes of a nation. Hence, besides the ethnic loyalties and religious sectarianism, there are no generally accepted national political or cultural values that can be internalised by individuals to foster a sense of belonging or a 'we-feeling' (Hansen and Twaddle, 1991: 329). It is a young country and the announcement of its creation, with the initial status of a British protectorate, was first published in the London Gazette in 1894. Unfortunately, most people who lived in the territory that was described as Uganda had never heard of the London Gazette, nor did the word Uganda mean anything to them. Its borders were determined almost entirely by competition between England, France and Germany for control over African territory, and not surprisingly the people on the

ground felt no allegiance to an imperial creation whose borders cut across existing economic, political and social relationships. (Leggett, 2001: 1)

When the British demarcated the districts that would comprise the basic units of administration they tried to ensure that these corresponded with ethnic boundaries as far as possible. Moreover, while different socio-cultural communities were forced into the unity of a nation state, the divisive local-based colonial structure constrained the realisation of common identity, or nationhood. The British authorities ruled through what can be described as coercion and division, and consequently the perception of the people remained predominantly determined by ethnicity as far as identity is concerned (Kironko in Okoth, Murunga & Ogwang, 1995: 78-79). There are over thirty different ethnical groups living in Uganda today with distinguishable cultural conducts, traditions and historical backgrounds. The peoples can be classified on the basis of language in four major groups; Bantu languages (e.g. Luganda, Lusoga, Runyankore-Rukia), Luo languages (e.g. Lango, Acholi, Alur, Dhopadhola) Nilo-Hametic languages (e.g. Iteso, Karimojong, Kumam) and Sudanic languages (e.g. Lugbara, Madi and Lendu).

While within each group some of the languages are mutually intelligible or at least easily learned by speakers of the others, across boundaries there is absolutely no lucidity, as the languages are totally different (Nsibambi in Parry, 2000: 16). The diversity of local languages in Uganda makes it difficult for the country to achieve universal and democratised education, literacy for all as well as attaining the much needed unity. It has been one of the most fundamental causes of social conflicts and economic backwardness in Uganda (Government of Uganda, 1992: 15). The country suffers from lack of communication both, vertically between the elite and masses, and horizontally among ordinary people. (Kasozi in Parry, 2000: 23-25) The failure to develop a national language in Uganda is affecting the economy by limiting trade, restraining access to information and hindering exchange of technology. There is also the issue of trans-ethnic integration, which is concerned with different ethnic groups forming a nation through communication with one another, and there are persistent misunderstandings and prejudices, factors that are likely to cause intolerance. Bantu speakers comprise about two thirds of the population and their numerical majority helps to explain the current pattern of political and economic supremacy, yet a commitment to national unity requires the ability for all people to feel themselves to be equal citizens.

If the ethnic divisions, which in modern history have proved to be so destructive in Uganda, are to be reduced and replaced with a national identity, it is critical that economic and social development becomes a mean of minimising differences, rather than accentuating them. (Leggett, 2001:10) However, economic marginalisation in combination with an official language that excludes certain groups from national discourse effectively alienates some parts of the country from the rest of the population. This concerns the capacity of the centre to establish control over local areas and to retain loyalty of local authorities, especially in maintaining the security and

stability of the state. Lord's Resistance Army, an obscure and peculiar rebel group, has perpetrated a war of terror in northern Uganda for over fifteen years, and western Uganda is irregularly destabilised by momentarily large numbers of members of the Interahamwe, the organisation responsible for the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 (Leggett, 11-12).

Unfortunately, because of the absence of a widely understood national language, the national troops fail to communicate with the multi-ethnic local areas and this causes mutual suspicion and animosity. The Ugandan army also stands the danger of acting without correct security signals from the local population because of the absence of horizontal linguistic communication (Nsibambi, 2000: 19). The ambivalence and scepticism among the people in the north towards the presence of the Ugandan army is also based on negative experiences with political leaders who have used the issue of unity to legitimise regimes. Political centralisation of the state with the claim of wanting to ensure cohesion and stability of the nation has always been backed up by ideological indoctrination or nourishing a monolithic political line. This has inevitably led to certain ethnic groups establishing dominance and attempting to eliminate others from political participation, in other words a subjugation and totalitarianism from within (Kironko in Okoth, Muranga & Ogwang, 1995: 79-80).

On the other hand, the failure to bring about unity and security has been an underlying factor in de-legitimisation of regimes and governments. The persistence of localism fundamentally frustrates efforts to extend effective state jurisdiction, and if there are numerous communities and categories that shape the nature of politics and authority structures, loyalty to the nation state becomes inhibited. In order to be considered a legitimate authority in the eyes of people the government has to, metaphorically speaking, sign a social contract with the various communities to provide law, order and at least a reasonable amount of security (Holsti, 1996: 94). The armed conflicts has caused social dislocation, economic disruption and population displacement in parts of western Uganda of a nature similar to that associated with the situation in the north. In those parts individuals have continued to give loyalty to the ethnic community, religion, or both and are resenting the political mainstream of the country. This has exacerbated the process of regional polarisation, and with the south emerging as the domain of the NRM, social life in the north is characterised by sectarianism, heresy and resistance. (Kironko in Okoth, Muranga & Ogwang, 1995: 80-81)

In the culturally complex and ethnically heterogeneous society, the idea and concept of a Ugandan nation hasn't yet reached the minds and hearts of many people living in Uganda. The fact that a sense of common destiny hasn't developed among the diverse population is perhaps not so surprising, considering the recurrent ruthless and virulent ravages of the LRA together with the NRM government's inability to guarantee certain socio-cultural groups a minimum level of safety and shelter. From an economic standpoint northern Uganda is the poorest region because it is the least accessible, the least fertile and offers the lowest returns on public investment. Little

agricultural diversification and economic growth has taken place and most rural households continue to be engaged in self-reliant farming, and hence are unspecialised. Overcoming the language-barrier and other obstacles to increase access to existing technology would most likely increase productivity, and household-specific characteristics such as primary education are found to be more important for market participation than community-specific characteristics, such as infrastructure and access to financial services (Collier & Reinkka, 2001: 23-24).

From a security standpoint investments in primary education would probably reduce the incentive to join rebel forces as recruitment into guerrilla movements usually are drawn disproportionately from illiterate young men with few other prospects. This reduced incentive may not have the desired effect when it comes to northern Uganda considering LRA's method of abducting innocent children and turn them into vicious soldiers. The relative prosperity of southern Uganda was inextricably tied to the marginalisation of the north and the south-west, and the uneven economic development has since then been reinforced by patterns of industrial and manufacturing development. Post-independence governments of all kinds have been confronted with the negative consequences of regional disparities, and it is an imbalance that the subsequent growth in commerce, public administration and services has only exacerbated. The underlying high fractionalisation of the Ugandan society and the experience of conflict have polarised Uganda into north versus south and Baganda versus non-Baganda. (Leggett, 2001: 55-57)

### **A fragmented education sector and the issue of school fees**

Primary education could potentially be the catalyst of the creation of a national identity among people of diverse ethnic origin that have been brought together only recently by colonial accident (Hansen & Twaddle, 1991: 333). Although, schools with a tolerable standard of education have to be made accessible to all Ugandan children if national integration shall be attained through education. The problem since the independence is that the primary education sector is as fragmented and shattered as the rest of the society, with large disparities in educational provision and participation between different categories of the population. The proportion of girls receiving education, particularly at secondary and university levels has traditionally been very low, and there are yawning gaps in the quality of education between rural and urban areas (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 1999: 1). The segregation in the primary education sector becomes most visible when comparing the desperate conditions and dismal performance of pupils in some remote schools, with the few eminent urban schools supported by parents paying very high school fees.

Despite the repeated criticisms of the inherited colonial system of education as anachronistic and irrelevant, during the first ten years of NRM governance no fundamental transformation occurred in relating education to the social and cultural realities of the country. The primary

education sector was in essence completely neglected, there was a critical shortage of teachers and the scarcity of suitable instructional materials in the classrooms at all levels was the most serious bottleneck for educational development. The effect of dwindling public expenditure on the one hand and the growing social demand for education on the other meant deterioration and an almost total absence of adequate learning materials in the government aided primary schools. (Hansen & Twaddle, 1991: 324-326) The public primary education was mostly funded by parents, who during the early nineties on average contributed as much as around seventy percent of total school spending. (Reinikka & Collier, 2001: 350) An assessment of primary education expenditure from 1994 showed that parents bore the greater burden, on average 81,2 percent, of the recurrent costs directly, not including building classrooms (Black, 1999: 112).

When the government retreated from funding and managing primary schools during the repressive Amin and Obote regimes, parents took over and this situation didn't change much until the mid-1990s. Teacher salaries was the largest item and capital expenditure was limited almost entirely to rehabilitation rather than new construction. While teacher salaries were given priority over instructional materials and other nonwage items, a major pay increase was perhaps warranted to reduce absenteeism and restore the quality of teaching. (Reinikka & Collier, 2001: 350-354) Some evidence suggests that this strategy worked, keeping in mind that under the actual circumstances teachers couldn't be expected to devote their full-time energies to teaching when they had to seek additional employment in order to survive. (Hansen & Twaddle, 1991: 323) At the same time a more balanced spending pattern between salaries and instructional and other material might have produced an even more commendable result, and strikingly parental contributions continued to increase in real terms. (Reinikka & Collier, 2001: 359)

A policy of educational financing whereby parents are required to share an immense burden for primary education and relatively little or no burden for higher education, raises an equity issue. Parents who can't afford to pay fees even at primary level have to withdraw their children from school, only to pay their taxes to support those lucky few who are able to gain admission to the university and other institutions of higher education. In the early 1990s tertiary institutions consumed a disproportionately high share of the educational budget. For example the ratio of government spending per capita in tertiary and primary education sectors was the order of 300: 1 (Hansen & Twaddle, 1991: 325). At this time in most parts of the country there was a primary school within five kilometre of every home, yet enrolment in primary schools ranged only between 30 to 50 percent of the school-aged children. The problem of low enrolment was made worse by poor quality tuition from inadequately trained teachers, lack of educational materials and sub-standard physical facilities. The enrolment in schools was further limited by the requirement to pay fees and other associated costs. (Okunzi & Birungi, 2000: 203)

By the mid-1990s parents across Uganda were struggling desperately to pay school fees, which had been risen out of all proportion the preceding years. Of the children who were enrolled

in primary school very few were likely to progress all the way to the final grade. The cost of education were equivalent to about one-fifth of the annual income of an average Ugandan family and overall, the government's spending on education amounted just 1,6 percent of gross domestic product. As a result many pupils were dropping out of primary schools because of financial reasons, and many school-aged Ugandan children were not enrolled at all. (Leggett, 2001: 65) In the beginning of the 1990s around 40 percent of the primary school aged children were still outside the formal schools systems in some parts of the country (Hansen & Twaddle, 1991: 329), and in a survey conducted by the East African in January 1997, 80 percent of parents who were not sending their children to school stated that lack of money were preventing them (Elwana: 2000: 2)

In a predominantly agricultural society such as the Ugandan where 80 percent of the people are engaged in farming or raising livestock, too often at almost subsistence level, government taxation is not even feasible and cash for school fees even within an extended family can be difficult to raise. In many parts of the country barter is common practice and a balance needs to be established between agriculture and commerce if for no other objective than to provide sufficient cash to maintain an infrastructure for services that the extended family on its own can't hope to provide. The public primary school requirement to pay tuition fees in cash effectively kept large segments of the Ugandan society out of the primary education system. (Black, 1999: 125)

Despite the various economic capabilities of parents, one of the main reasons for disunity in Ugandan primary education is the heritage from the colonial era when the foreign administration was in charge of directing the educational affairs, but the missionaries were carrying out the actual education work. Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries administrated the existing schools, maintained the old buildings, built new schools with money given to them by the colonial government and performed the religious preaching alongside with the teaching of literacy and numeric skills. It was not acceptable for children with deviating religious beliefs to attend class and each religious affiliation were above all interested in assisting its followers, and to teach separatist points of view. There was also a great deal of antagonism and rivalry between Protestants, Catholics and Muslims in their competition for souls and influence in Uganda, and under those circumstances sectarianism flourished. The Arab Muslim teachers were concerned mostly about setting up mosques and Koran schools in which reading and writing were taught in Arabic script together with the principles of Islam and its practice. (Ssekamwa, 1997: 47-57)

### **The urgent need for national integration**

The lack of a coherent and centrally directed educational system together with non-prevalent management procedures resulted in a situation in which schools were basically isolated islands onto themselves. In addition, when NRM seized power in 1986 the security situation improved



dramatically in the southern region and international humanitarian organisations promptly came to the country in large numbers. Initially these organisations provided relief services and emergency requirements for resettlement of the many displaced people, but in the absence of a viable public sector or an over-arching social policy, they started to play a major role in social service delivery such as primary education. Because the humanitarian organisations were affiliated to the policies of their countries of origin or to local parent associations, they had different and sometimes conflicting objectives than the new Ugandan government. With each organisation operating its own micro-policy without a firm control or direction given from a central authority, the social service sector became even more fragmented, highly inequitable and with varying service quality levels. (Okuonzi & Birungi, 2000: 206)

There is no doubt that the political uncertainty that has flawed Uganda since independence has diminished under the rule of NRM, and with the stability imposed by the Museveni government external organisations have considerably enhanced their financial support to the public sector (Black, 1999: 111-112). Policy dialogue, advisory services and technical assistance have assumed a greater role, as continued economic assistance has allowed much higher levels of public spending than would have been possible within the limitations of the country's own resources. The share of foreign aid has ranged between 33 and 66 percent of total public expenditure during the 1990s (Reinikka & Collier, 2001: 41-43). However, there can be no strong sense of community within the state if segments of the population is proscribed from participating in all the dimension of politics, or systematically excluded from state allocations of funds and services.

Equality of opportunity and participation is absolutely necessary for affirming a government's legitimacy, and denying certain groups access to resources seriously exacerbates social tensions. Hostility is a variable which derives from a variety of sources, among which are extended dominance of one group over another, exploitation and inequitable allocation or division of resources. Destructive ethnic conflicts are generally not the result of primordial hatreds but rather of state policies, and if social discord is going to be prevented resource allocation has to reflect some standard of justice between groups and communities in the society. A regime's legitimacy is highly performance based and the state has to earn and maintain the right to rule through the provision of services, including security, justice and a varying range of welfare measures. (Holsti, 1996: 91-107)

The endorsement of the NRM Government hides deep divisions between its supporters and others and these divisions lie along well-established social and economic fault lines. The people who live in southern and western Uganda are wealthier, have access to better public services, enjoy greater levels of personal security and for all these reasons, tend to support the NRM Government and the status quo. On the other hand those who live in the north have less access to public services which are, in any case, of poorer quality. Many of these people reject the NRM and the policies and practices of government have left them feeling excluded and unprotected. Therefore the current

regime needs to use economic development as a means of promoting equity and consolidating nationhood, as well as a means of achieving sustainable growth. (Leggett, 2001: 47-57)

### **Rehabilitating the public sector in order to build national integration**

By the mid 1990s, ten years after the first agreement with the International Monetary Fund, Uganda's principal donors recognised that the benefits of economic growth were not reaching the poorest Ugandans, and transferred attention away from purely economic measures of development towards other indicators. The shift in focus with respect to government is public investment, which presently is considered to be a necessary compliment to a strong private response to the structural adjustment reforms (Collier & Reinkka, 2001:4). Macroeconomic and externally oriented trade and exchange rate policies have ceased to be the most binding constraints in Uganda and instead domestic and institutional problems, notably deficient delivery of public services are now the most serious obstacles for investment and growth on the one hand, and poverty reduction on the other (World Bank, 1999). The United Nation Development Program released a report 1997 with critique of Uganda's success story and concluded that human development is not solely an automatic tickle-down consequence of economic growth, and that social aspects of society should be included as an essential element of development (Appleton in Collier & Reinkka, 2001: 372).

The decision by the international financing agencies to adopt a new development model confirms the widespread observation by Ugandans that the highly publicised growth in gross domestic product is not meaningful to the ordinary people as it hasn't improved the standard of living, or been matched by a significant improvement in public services. Therefore, the NRM Government and its development partners have begun to re-focus especially on education, which has been identified as priority area for poverty reduction actions. Uganda was the first African country to be declared eligible to benefit from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative, HIPC in 1998, with a fraction of debt relief allocated to education. HIPC is an initiative by the World Bank, IMF and other donors to cancel part of the huge external debt accumulated by the poorest countries, and as a condition, proceeds from the cancellation of debt and the subsequent increase in resources mobilised are to be used for improvements in the primary education sector (Elwana, 2000).

The renewed interest in social services has intensified the debate about accountability, priority setting and value-for-money in the Ugandan public sector and recent years this debate has been carried out in the context of decentralised decision-making. Seemingly important for the citizens has been the rehabilitation of the public services, epitomised by the creation of increasingly visible and credible local government. The first severe problem to be addressed was that it appeared that the volatility the HIPC creates for some spending items was relatively insignificant compared with

inefficiencies caused by lack of accountability. The fact that actual service delivery was much worse than what could be expected from the budgetary allocations, implied that money was subject to capture by bureaucrats and didn't reach the intended facilities. In the teaching profession, a high incidence of non-attendance was apparent and a clean-up of teacher's payroll removed 20 percent of teachers as "ghosts" (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 1999).

When primary grade enrolments recorded in official statistics didn't seem to improve despite substantial increases in budget allocations for education, primary schools were surveyed to examine public spending on education. The survey found that budget allocations don't matter much when institutions are weak, and at most 20 percent of the intended non-salary public spending on primary education reached schools during the period under review. The institutional problems seemed to be harder to correct than politics, which can often be altered by a stroke of a pen, and the study demonstrates that improvements in institution's accountability are much more difficult to achieve than macroeconomic reform. (Collier & Reinkka, 2001: 366-368) This emphasises the importance of separating the effects of public capital on welfare from the effects of public spending on public capital. Hence, using state budget allocations to measure actual service delivery on grass-root level may be misleading.

Another difficulty Uganda is facing in expanding its educational system is to, regardless of the policies of the international financing agencies, establish a tax base from which to raise money. Although tax revenues had increased substantially from 5 percent of gross domestic product in 1986 to 11 percent in 1999, revenues have shown signs of stagnation in recent years. The NRM Government has created a new tax collection service in which staff was paid well above civil service pay scales and held more directly in account, yet it has been the subject of many complaints about corruption. The attempt to rebuild professionalism and institutions has had only limited success and it highlights the actuality that it is one thing to aspire to improve and expand education to enhance development, and another thing to pay for it. It is a typical dilemma of needing development to have a tax base to fund education to generate development and the question is what comes first in this circular quandary. (Black, 1999: 125)

Generally, one can conclude that the NRM Government has been more innovative with respect to making revenue collection work than with respect to making public service delivery work, but the task may be more difficult than anticipated considering the finding that as a society's polarisation and degree of social conflict increase, the control of public policy is less effective (Collier & Reinkka, 2001: 345). For a society as fractionalised and divided as the Ugandan this means that more public spending not necessarily leads to improved public service delivery or better redistribution of resources. On the other hand the universal provision of basic social services is absolutely essential to promote equity and consolidate nationhood (Leggett, 2001: 63), so the issue again is dangerously close to being a circular quandary.

Uganda's education system was undoubtedly in desperate need of reform and after being re-elected as president, Museveni announced that an ambitious program was to be launched in January 1997. The paramount objectives of the new revised primary education system are to forge national unity and promote humanitarianism and cooperation in the society. This implies the integration of Uganda's various ethnic groups to form one nation and the evolving of a national value system out of the multiplicity of cultural concepts and philosophies. Furthermore, it entails the integration of the diverse social categories and the reduction of the gap between the wealthy elite and the vast economically marginalised segments of the population (Rugambwa in Perry, 2000: 78). To achieve the principal objective of national integration the NRM government introduced a comprehensive and extensive strategic investment plan and addressed the need to improve operational mechanisms, administrative structures and processes for planning and implementing the provision of universal primary education. It targeted the essential and urgent changes in bureaucracy and public financing procedures in order to create new balances between private sectors, the central authorities and local stakeholders. The government wanted to regain the initiative in public service, fundamentally strengthen its role as a power to be reckoned with when it comes to education sector development, and moreover become the coordinator of donor funding from different sources. (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 1999: 6-8)

The highest priority of the investment plan, which year of completion is 2003, is to assure that elementary schooling is accessible to children by making it affordable to the majority of the Ugandan households. The main focus is therefore to increase enrolment, improve class attendance and subsequently enhance transition rates. A related aim is to make education equitable in order to eliminate disparities within the education sector, and the policy directives emphasise on removing gender, regional and social inequity over the plan period. In the government's declaration to provide universal primary education it takes on the responsibility of providing the minimum, necessary facilities and resources to enable Ugandan children of school-going age to enter and remain in school until the primary cycle of education is completed. Universal access to basic education will be achieved not only through the removal of financial impediments to access, but also by making the primary education relevant to the learners through the government supplying basic instructional materials, improving the teacher's training and preparing a rectified national curriculum. (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2000: 1-3)

The policy to offer free primary education has coincided with the decentralisation of several public services, and in this regard the ministry of education has transferred significant functions and decision-making powers to officers in the thirty-nine districts in Uganda to facilitate monitoring and supervision of service deliveries. Under the decentralised system the management of primary education is the responsibility of local government councils, and social services at both district and sub-county levels provide guidance to the formulation of strategies to address locally identified educational needs. Funds that are allocated to primary education in the government

budget are released to eligible primary schools through the District Education Offices in the form of capitation grants, and received by statutory School Management Committees, who in turn are responsible for the day to day administration of the school under their jurisdiction through the school's headteacher. (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2001: 2)

Ganyana, a headteacher of a primary school in Kampala said that since 1997 all primary schools in Uganda have to be registered and licensed by the Ministry of Education through the District Education Offices in order for them to be allowed to operate. The conditions set up by the Ministry of Education is to adopt the national standard when it comes to examinations and teacher's guides, submit to inspections by district education officers and follow the national syllabus, although a few international schools mostly utilised by expatriates are exempted from the latter rule and are authorised to use alternative syllabuses. Government aided schools are not allowed to charge money from parents and if a school wants to continue to levy school fees it can do so but then it will be registered as a private institution and subsequently be denied all kinds of financial support from the government.

The process of changing the structure of public service delivery in Uganda has been a crucial step and the government actions to take more control over the fragmented primary education sector was probably necessary in order to be able to implement the reform program. The management and provision of primary education lie in the hands of district administrators working on the behalf of the Ministry of Education, while the centre retains policy control and maintenance of standard through control over teacher education, curriculum revision and examinations. In this system the central government is in charge of the education sector but local administrators are nevertheless allowed to be creative in seeking solutions to problems that may have confined causes of consequences. However, the initial process of decentralisation revealed a number of inadequacies and there were many complaints about incompetence and insufficient professional capacity when the important administrative functions were transferred to local councils. The disposition of financial resources at district level meant in some instances that education funding drastically fell as districts allocated funds to areas they regarded as having higher priorities, and staffing, inspection and school-building construction suffered as a result (Ugandan Ministry of Education, April 1999: 22).

A fund-tracking study that was executed by a private company engaged by the Ugandan government found that during the initial phase of the decentralisation process only about 35 percent of the funds allocated centrally to primary education were actually received by schools (International Development Consultants, 2001: 3). This once again underlines the fact stated earlier that an increase in budget allocations to weak institutions doesn't necessarily lead to an improved public service. The World Bank also came to the conclusion that the decentralisation negatively affected input flow in the delivery system and that district authorities captured most of the non-wage public funds intended for schools (Collier & Reinikka, 2001: 367).

The findings of the independent investigators have caused a wave of criticism from in particular the international donor agencies, and several subsequent measures were taken by the Ugandan Ministry of Education to come to terms with the poor accountability of local authorities. To improve transparency the monthly transfers of public funds for wage and non-wage expenditure to districts are now regularly published in the main newspapers and broadcast by radio. Furthermore, all district headquarters are required to pay all conditional grants for primary education directly on individual school accounts and maintain public notice boards over transfers of funds. (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2001: 3-4) School Management Committees on each school are prevalently obligated to ensure that both expenditure and the funds received are publicly displayed at the school, and this system was practiced by all government aided primary schools sampled in the minor field study.

In a follow-up tracking study executed in the year 2000 it was established that through the transparency oriented actions the receipt average percentage had jumped close to 90, although with considerable delays because of inefficiencies in the districts and the banking system (International Development Consultants, 2001: 3). The central government's initiative to disseminate information on transfers and the positive response from School Management Committees nation wide has signified an immense institutional progress, and a more visible and accountable local government has meant an indispensable strengthening of the structure of public service delivery in Uganda.

### **Politicised education sector reforms and difficulties of implementation**

During the period before the presidential election in 1996 there was much popular discussion about universal primary education, and it was in the heat of the election campaign president Museveni promised free education for all children in Uganda if he was to be re-elected another term of office. There are many possible explanations, including short-term political considerations, to why Museveni gave this election pledge at this particular time back in 1996. School enrolment is the social indicator perhaps most directly affected by government policy and it is also instrumental in the attainment of other social development targets, such as health (Appelton in Collier & Reinkka, 2001: 372). At this time there was a general acceptance of the view that universal primary education was crucial for the modernisation of the society and consequently for dealing with the issue of illiteracy which is considered one of the main factors that compounds poverty. The main argument was the provision of basic literacy and numerical skills would to larger extent enable them to enter self-employment (Okuonzi & Birungi, 2000: 203). Therefore, by promising free education for all children Museveni appears as concerned about social development in general in the political debate, and successfully managed to target the vast population in the rural villages, among which most potential beneficiaries of free education are.

Without the support of the agricultural communities around the country it's not possible to win an election in Uganda, but the limited access to information in those areas in combination with gravely low levels of education repeatedly makes these segments of the society subject to populist political manipulation. By including free education for all children in the government political manifesto just weeks before the presidential election, public opinion instantly switched to Museveni's advantage and most respondents in the field-study asserted that this particular issue determined the outcome of the election. Still, the primary school teachers interviewed perceived the intentions behind the campaign pledge quite differently as the following testimonies indicate;

"The government should have put proper infrastructure and staff before the launching of the program. You see, the political climate is populist. Museveni wanted votes and was concerned about image, he wanted to appear like a good president and didn't mention any of the external funding. It was presented as a government flagship".

"He (Museveni) is investing in the people. At least he wants everyone to be able to read and write... I think that the intentions behind the program was to give all children basic skills but the government image is depending on whether it is successful or not. Is the main reason why the regime is still in power. Well, it has not collapsed yet".

Shortly after Museveni's announcement that the campaign pledge of free education for the Ugandan children was going to be fulfilled, sensitisation seminars on the up-coming primary education reform program was held at national and district level with political, administrative and religious leaders and personnel. In January 1997 the government stated to the public through news media and other channels of information that four children per family were allowed to begin the next school-term free of charge, and that a nation wide enumeration exercise was going to take place in order to register the children for school. Geraldine Bitamazire, minister of state for education and sports (primary), explained that ideally the government encourages all children to enrol although the financial resources available at the time can only give tuition grant to maximum four children per family (Carasco, 1997: 2).

At a Makerere University seminar in December 1996 the administrators who participated were informed at first that registration would take place on home-to-home basis, but some officials argued that that was likely to increase the risk of corruption because then only the enumerators and parents are present during the enrolment. To increase transparency it was proposed and agreed to have certain open registration centres located in all villages and available to all communities. Many representatives from local councils, elders and traditional leaders complained that they didn't fully understand the reform program and many government officials remarked that the notice was too short to mobilise and sensitise the various communities. The registration centres that were put up across the country were initially perceived by many people in the rural areas as just another polio immunisation exertion, and some were suspicious that the project was linked to recruitment of the army. Eventually, the word of mouth transmission proved to be an effective means of

communication in the villages and the early hesitation was quickly overcome as people started to show up for registration.

However, the enumeration exercise was largely a chaotic venture and a particularly contentious issue was that wives in polygamous marriages often were challenging husbands about which and therefore *whose* children were being selected for free education. Many expressed the view that registration of children should take place on a per womb basis, and in most polygamous families mothers registered the children under her own name as a single parent. Adults who brought children to the registration centres often declared they were guardians or relatives, and it was noted that many adults who claimed to be parents could not answer what appears to be obvious questions about the child they registered. A survey carried out by the Ministry of Education during the enrolment period found that 41, 3 percent of the families sampled said they had children of other relatives and friends living with them. (Carasco, 1997: 4-6) Hence, it is absolutely clear that the government's regulation to only allow four children per family was disregarded, and that parents basically enrolled all their children of school-going age.

The central government's decision to give capitation grants in order to service the expansion of the education sector turned out to be much more costly than expected, and overall expenditure on primary education increased with about 40 percent almost overnight. This means that primary education accounts for 64 percent of the total government budget on education, up from 30 percent at the beginning of the 1990s (Elwana, 2000: 1). The capacity of the primary education sector is very much challenged by the tremendous increase in pupil enrolment that followed the president's declaration that four children per family are admitted to schooling free of charge. Estimates had shown a relatively small price elasticity for education demand in developing countries and the assumption by some analysts was that that user charges for social services don't greatly reduce, and could increase, pupil enrolment in primary schools (Jimenez, 1987). The probability of a child attending school is primarily determined by factors like parental education and occupation, the child labour situation in the region, distance to school facilities and gender (Appleton in Collier & Reinikka, 2001: 373-378), so it was unclear whether the abolition of school fees would have a significant impact on pupil enrolment in primary education.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the initiative to implement universal primary education to date is the particularly large increase in overall enrolments following the removal of fees. Immediately, the number of pupils attending primary schools almost doubled with enrolment rising from 2.6 million in 1996 to 5.1 million in 1997 (Leggett: 2001:66), which indicates an extremely high price elasticity for education demand. A study performed by UNICEF in 1997 about re-enrolees, those who had dropped out of school but returned after the universal primary education program was introduced, showed that 75 percent of them had dropped out because of financial constraints, 15 percent because they had become orphans and 5 percent because of sickness (Carasco, 1997, 8-9). The study also recognised an anxiety among parents that the



president would change his mind and re-induct tuition fees, and this apprehension led them to register and enrol underaged children, something that partially explains the huge and to some extent unpredicted increase in pupil enrolment.

In January 1997 when schools reopened its doors after the holidays over five million children tried to squeeze into the 25,676 available permanent classrooms and attend the lessons taught by the 81,564 employed primary schools teachers in Uganda. The financial year 1998/99 the number of primary schools was 5.8 million but the number of teachers had just increased to 97,365 and the permanent classrooms in Uganda were only 28,330. (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2001: 6) The system obviously didn't have the size and capacity to cater for all the newcomers and there were major insufficiencies when it came to the construction of classrooms, making scholastic materials available to pupils and the teacher-training program. Many teachers conceived the magnitude of the task was to be insurmountable as the class sizes increased to unmanageable levels. Mapumba, a primary school teacher in Kisoro recalled;

“The increase in enrolment was terrible. Actually, it was chaos and the school was flooded with children. We were not expecting this and we didn't know how to deal with the situation. There was a huge shortage of funds but the parents now think that education is the responsibility of the government and not them”.

The amount of money budgeted per child and released to the School Management Committees proved to be inadequate, and while the government had committed itself to fulfil the needs of universal primary education it evidently was unable to carry out its pledge of actually providing the necessary resources. The capitation grant per pupil set by the government has ever since 1997 been 5,000 Ugandan shillings for the classes P1-P3 and 8,100 per pupil for the classes P4-P7 per annum. (Republic of Uganda, 1998: 4) Currently, about 2,000 Ugandan shillings equals one US dollar, and the grant still hasn't been adjusted to inflation even though the inflation rate has averaged 5 percent a year during the period of time in question.

The dignified objective to enhance access to primary education is overtly politicised, and consequently there was deficient preparation for the multifarious issues associated with its implementation (Oloka-Onyango, 2000: 42). Political reforms characterised by “ultimate end” visions and mammoth ambition have a tendency to deny and reject the political structures in which they are generated, and consequently become eminently difficult to implement (Holsti, 1996: 111). Grandiose flagships launched by passionate leaders aim to directly transform the nature of the political community itself, instead of more constructively prioritise the sector of interest financially in order to increase the capability of the political community to transform in a desirable way. When a regime strive to boost its legitimacy by announcing ostentatious reform programs despite of organisational and economical constrains, the populist feature itself jeopardises the task, and contrary to the intentions, the legitimacy of the regime deteriorates. According to the primary school headmasters sampled in the minor field study the government aided schools are desperately

underfinanced since the capitation grant is calculated per pupil and not only spent on instructional materials for the subjects taught, but on school management including administration, school maintenance and renovation. Furthermore, the grants are supposed to fund utilities like water, electricity and latrines, so not much money is left to be spent on the teaching itself after all the other expenses have been covered.

The political rhetoric of the NRM government was efficient as long as winning the election is concerned, but it has very much complicated the implementation of the primary education reform program. During a national conference on the universal primary education program held in Kampala in 1998, the Ugandan minister of education, professor Apolo Nsibambi, stated that free education is regarded by the public as president Museveni's special and personal project, but that it is wrongly assumed that the government should shoulder the financial and other burdens of the reform program (Republic of Uganda, 1998). In his view the program to implement universal primary education in Uganda is owned by the stakeholders and the responsibility to provide the additional resources to fulfil Museveni's election campaign pledge lies in the hands of parents, the private sector, NGOs and the civil society in general. When confronted with the fact that the central government is not able to sufficiently finance the reform program, a public newsletter was published in which the minister of state for primary education, Geraldine Bitamazire officially announced that primary education is a decentralised service which success depends on the local capacities and resources available to implement the program.

He exhorted families and local communities to mobilise and supply satisfactory resources to the primary education sector, including among other things crucial and urgent arrangements like disbursement of grants, classroom construction and provision of sanitation infrastructure. (Ugandan Ministry of Education 2001: 2) It has become increasingly apparent that triumphant implementation of universal primary education in Uganda greatly depends on an apprehension and clear understanding of the various roles and responsibilities of the concerned litigants. In an attempt to elucidate and undeceive who is going to do what in the process of effectuating the objective to constitute national integration through increasing access to primary education, the Ugandan government quite recently distributed directives to the involved parties affirming that parents shall provide exercise books and pencils together with labour and materials for the improvement of school environment and facilities. All households in the villages shall also contribute to construction of school buildings by providing materials such as bricks, stones, sand, water and labour.

Moreover, the local communities shall offer safe water sources, office and staffrooms, sign posts, recreational facilities and be actively involved in sanitation promotion of the primary schools in the area. Religious foundations and churches are obliged to support school construction activities through direct funding, endowment and sponsorship. The School Management Committees are required to carry out public fundraising functions such as charity walks, fetes and public appeals,

and in liaison with churches decide how to best collect and utilise church dues. Furthermore, NGOs are invited and encouraged to participate in the provision of education infrastructure as well as to take over the training of teachers. (Republic of Uganda, 2001: 1-4) Every village has been requested to elect two so called Volunteer Community Mobilisers who are responsible for mobilising and sensitising the communities into direct active participation in promotion of the standard of their receptive primary school, and this program is seen by the government as an essential function of the implementation of universal primary education (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2001: 8).

So far, those community mobilisation programs have been complete failures and considering the widespread confusion and perplexity among parents and headteachers, they can collectively best be described as a total fiasco. The problem is mainly pedagogical since the mobilisers haven't managed to explain to ordinary people the paradox of why they have to directly finance the establishment of free education. In the eyes of parents it is the government's responsibility to fund the reform program, and during Museveni's election campaign it was not mentioned that the implementation of universal primary education was adherent to the resources and capabilities of local authorities. The government propaganda during the mid-1990s is definitely not forgotten in the villages, and as a result School Management Committees are not able to extract any money from the rural households since the introduction of the reform program. The headteachers of the government aided schools who were interviewed in the minor field study unanimously said that parents are unwilling to contribute to what is perceived as Museveni's personal project, and the general attitude of communities regarding who is responsible for the provision of universal education is that who ever introduced the program should finance it. As a result of this difference of opinion between policy-makers and the general public primary schools don't receive any additional funding beside the capitation grants.

However, a few teachers and some headteachers interviewed expressed gratitude towards the government for the capitation grants they receive and even though it is not enough to obtain a fully satisfying standard of education it is an appreciated contribution to many schools. Especially the remote primary schools in rural areas such as Kisoro and Soronco which in the past were hardly assisted from Kampala at all, the government funding is very welcome and looked upon as a tangible progress in comparison to the economic circumstances during former post-independence regimes. While families and communities haven't responded to the government's appeal to sustain the primary education reform program, several NGO's swallowed the bait and are in various ways involved in the public service delivery on local level.

Sebiswa, a primary school headmaster in Kisoro says that Adventist Relief Agency and COOP, Complementary Opportunity of Education, are operating in the region and are among other things running a school facility for blind and deaf children. Out of the nine primary schools sampled in the minor field study just one is in receipt of direct succour from an NGO and in this

case it is British Student Partnership Worldwide that sends volunteer teachers. Why this particular school is favoured and not the others is difficult for anyone to answer and this once again highlights the arbitrary and random circumstances that seem to occasion the establishment of an NGO. The blind and deaf children in Kisoro are definitely helped by for example the Adventist Relief Agency although disabled children in communities where NGOs is not equally active are sadly left behind. The uneven distribution and varying quality of service imply that relying on NGOs for service delivery can never lead Uganda to overcome the fragmentation of the education sector.

The strategic investment plan that followed the launch of the universal primary education reform program immediately attracted donor support and some governmental organisations like for example DANIDA, Japanese International Corporation Agency and Royal Netherland Embassy are directly participating in the implementation of the reform program by constructing school buildings under the management of the ministry of education (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2000: 10-11). More important though are the resources and conditionalities committed by the international agencies like the World Bank and IMF as a part of their so called poverty reduction strategies which have replaced the harshly criticised structural adjustment programs. To a large extent international donor organisations indirectly finance the reform program to universalise primary education by transferring money to the Ugandan discretionary recurrent budget together with conditions for its utilisation. (Black, 1999: 111-112)

About half of all Ugandan public spending comes from abroad through external development assistance disbursements (Reinikka & Collier, 2001: 42), and since international borrowing transactions and foreign economic aid is such a fundamental source of income for the Ugandan government it very much affects indigenous policy-making. A state recovering from economic recession has much to gain from drawing observance to its hardships and domestic political dynamic is often directed towards measures that generate foreign aid. By adopting a policy that harmonises with the intentions of major donors the political elite can effectively strengthen its position as well as procreate development. (Castells, 2000: 128) This is definitely the case in Uganda and president Museveni has devoted huge efforts to negotiations with donors and banks. It has also made extremely clever use of technical assistance, particularly in relation to seeking debt relief, and the government has followed its agreements with the IMF scrupulously and adhered to innumerable conditions set over the years. (Leggett, 2001: 62)

Uganda is pursuing an economic policy that conforms to priorities and thinking within the World Bank, and the introduction of universal primary education is no exception. The World Bank published its World Development Report 1998/99, which emphasised narrowing knowledge gaps, and as a result the Ugandan education reform program attracted attention from the international financing institutions. The conditions to receive the financial support for universal primary education were to implement market oriented reforms in the health care sector and withdraw state

funding from tertiary education. The prerequisites are motivated by the efficiency gains that can be made from having private clinics charging user fees, and the privatisation of the University and vocational Collages would theoretically release more resources for primary education. (Okuonzi & Birungi, 2000: 203-207). Yet, those donor conditions have proved not very beneficial and presently students in Makerere University are almost exclusively recruited from the wealthy elite in Kampala while the market based health care system is chronically underfinanced, highly variable in quality and denied to a significant proportion of the population (Oloka-Onyango, 38-39). Moreover, the subservience to the policy prescriptions of the international donors is utterly disempowering the people from control over its society and as this dependency continues, so does the poverty (Leggett, 2001: 60).

### **Expected economic returns from universal primary education**

Despite donor conditions, the NRM Government's drastic change in policy stance could presumably reflect a fundamental shift in thinking about education, both as an intrinsically desirable goal and as an investment in human capital. Before 1996 many officials questioned whether primary education was productive, especially when compared with investing in physical infrastructure, such as the road network, which generated an extremely high rate of return (Appelton in Collier & Reinkka, 2001: 383). Assessments from the mid-1990s indicate that pupils who left primary education had acquired few useful skills due to quality and relevance inadequacies, so that no great economic return could be expected from additional expansion of such schooling (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 1999). Yet, a study of urban wage employees in Uganda from 1992 found 4 percent wage premium to each year of primary education, indicating modest but significant benefits to primary education (Hoddinott & Knight, 1996: 211).

In the study they assumed that pupils forgo wages attending school and since pupils may be too young to be generating notable income, the appraisal may underestimate returns to primary schooling. The higher estimates have nevertheless been questioned and the most common concern is perhaps that the individuals with primary education were more productive for unobserved factors such as higher pre-school ability, better family background and so forth, rather than their education. In addition, changes in the provision of education like implementing universal primary education, will reduce the scarcity value of education and lower its returns. For example, the expansion of secondary schooling in Kenya appears to have dramatically lowered conventional estimates of returns to education during the last two decades (Bigsten & Manda, 1999). If the Kenyan experience is typical it means that the findings of most studies of social returns of education in Sub-Saharan Africa need to be adjusted to that variable. On average, wage employees who are more educated receive higher wage in Uganda as in most other labour markets, but in Uganda most

workers are self-employed and only a minority of the labour force is in wage employment. In such a context positive correlation between wages and education do not necessarily reflect productivity effects of education (Appelton in Collier & Reinkka, 2001: 380).

The pivotal question is whether return to education is lower in agriculture and nonfarm self-employment than in wage employment, and there are two mechanisms through which education raises income, which have to be considered. One is that education potentially raises productivity within particular income generating activities, and the other is that education may increase the likelihood of the household engaging in higher income activities. The latter will be referred to as entry effects because education hypothetically affects the probability of a household entering other sectors of the labour market. The question is important in assessing the benefits of education to children in rural areas where opportunities for wage employment are limited.

It is possible that primary education doesn't raise returns in either farming or wage employment, but merely allows people to enter a higher return sector. In that case, if total employment in the higher income sector doesn't increase and a given number of jobs are rationed, the private benefits of education may not lead to corresponding social benefits. Still, during the mid-1990s it came into view that primary education increases the likelihood of a household receiving nonfarm earnings by twice as much as it reduces the probability of receiving earnings from farming (Phillips, 1994: 149-150). For this reason, the overall entry effects of universal primary education seemed positive and another contemporary study indicated that each average year of primary schooling of the household workers raises earnings from both farming and wage employment by 4 percent (Appleton and Balihuta, 1996: 420).

The finding that primary education had comparable direct productivity effects in farming to those in wage employment was surprising to most officials. As most studies of the impact of education on agricultural productivity usually measure labour input in workers, rather than hours, it raises the possibility that before 1996 the direct productivity effects of education on agriculture were substantially underestimated. As mentioned earlier, education is also related to other social circumstances and returns of primary education can also be measured in terms of health sector indicators. According to World Development Report 1998/1999, during the years 1980-1986 when Uganda was ravaged by civil war the infant mortality rate averaged 11, 6 percent of all children and the under-five mortality was 18, 0 percent. Ten years later the figures were still remarkably high with an average infant mortality rate around ten percent of all children 1996-1999 and an under-five mortality of 14, 1 percent.

The 1995 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey showed that educating a girl up to the end of primary education reduced the infant mortality of her children by 50 percent. (Okunzi & Birungi, 2000: 204-212) Even though this latter finding can be questioned methodologically and the reduced rate could be caused by unobserved factors in the selection, this is a very powerful argument in the Ugandan context. It is plausible that a girl who finished primary school before the introduction of

universal primary education had a financially more favourable background in general, which in turn affected the infant mortality rate of her children. Still, for a country in which infant mortality rates are decreasing only painfully slowly, equity of educational access appears exceedingly important.

### **An expanding education sector, drop out rates and the deterioration of quality**

At the primary level the enrolment was about 70 percent in 1996 (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 1999: 4), but within just two years of inception Uganda's universal primary education program had achieved about 90 percent enrolment and has therefore been acclaimed as successful. The high enrolment figure indicates that previously disadvantaged children are now able to attend school and it also demonstrates that universal access to public sector services is possible, even in a country that is recovering from severe economic adversity. If this trend with increased access continues, the impact of education on the standard of living will be significant (Okuonzi & Birungi, 2000: 201-204). The view that inequalities have disappeared or considerably diminished with the launch of the primary education reform program is prevailing among NRM politicians, at least officially. For example Khiddu Makubuya, a Member of Parliament wrote in a government newsletter;

By all indices, universal primary education is a revolutionary achievement and a big victory for the ordinary people of Uganda. The Ugandan girl child and children with disabilities, who have been historically neglected, now access education on more or less equal basis like the boys. All districts, religions and tribes share equitably in the bounty of universal primary education. The curse of school fees, which eliminated many children from school, has been abolished (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2000).

The indirect costs of education that Ugandan households continue to pay are seldom mentioned in the political rhetoric but more importantly, the quality of the education offered by the government aided primary schools is consistently left unaddressed (Oloka-Onyango, 2000: 42). Nevertheless, in three government education and census surveys from 1994 it was verified that how education develops would influence not only the quantity of students available, but also the quality of education and their subsequent potential for enhancing success at secondary level (Black, 1999: 112).

If the capacity of the service delivery system is not built properly it is uncertain whether universal primary education will be able to provide necessary basic skills for self-employment, and the reform program is in the present unfortunately associated with low quality of tuition and indigent academic performance. An education sector with over-crowded classrooms, lack of educational materials, inadequately qualified and de-motivated teachers erode and diminish the expected positive effects of primary education on health and standard of living. (Okuonzi & Birungi, 2000: 204) The finding that education has similar proportional productive benefits across

different economic activities, including farming and wage employment, is together with the presumably positive entry effects very promising, but ultimately the efficiency effects of the universal primary education initiative are depending on how the reform program affects the quality of education. (Reinikka & Collier, 2001: 10)

According to the Ugandan Ministry of Education the 90 percent enrolment rate that was documented already two years after the reform program was introduced is a success since the expressed government goal for the implementation of universal primary education is a national enrolment ratio of 100 percent. More specifically this figure is the gross enrolment ratio and refers to the total number of 6-13 year old children in school to total possible. However, it is recognised that the government's definition of universal primary education does not necessarily mean all children will be in school, and the factors that influence the percentage are rather complex and not always obvious. Definitely not all children in Uganda start P1 at the same age even though reducing school fees usually bring about a narrowing of the age spread in P1 and subsequent years. The enrolment patterns is also altered by the circumstances that some children repeat years, some early withdrawals return when they are older and the percentage of each cohort in school may vary by year and gender. More boys than girls attend school, about 55 of pupils are males and 45 percent are females, and the average pupil age in P7 is fourteen. Hence, the gross enrolment rate can even exceed one hundred percent although very many children are excluded from the primary education system.

More valid indicators of success of universal primary education would consequently be the net enrolment ratio, which expresses total in school less repeaters to total possible, or even better the transition rate, which signifies the primary school completion. Even though many children who had dropped out are returning to primary school now that school fees are abolished, there is a significant net loss each year and therefore it is difficult to determine just what percentage of pupils actually complete primary school. An estimate from 1999 based on the ratio of the number enrolled in P7 and the mean age cohort, suggest that 43 percent of the boys and only 28 percent of the girls in Uganda go through all seven years of primary education. (Black, 1999: 113-114) A similar estimation from 2001 showed that the transition rate for boys had increased to 49 percent but that it had diminished for girls to 25 percent (Leggett, 2001: 80).

The high dropout rate in Ugandan primary schools is severely eroding the positive effects of education on economic development and health and in the minor field study teachers and headmasters in all nine selected schools were asked to give their opinion on why persistence is low. The annual average dropout rate in the six rural primary schools sampled is about six percent compared to around two percent in the three urban primary schools. Early marriages and pregnancies appears to pull many girls out of the education system and children who have become orphans because of the AIDS epidemic often fail to maintain themselves in school. In rural areas more girls than boys drop out, and despite the important reason of early pregnancies, family



negligence, domestic work and limited time for revision seem to drastically undermine girl's achievement and interest in school work. Parent in rural areas who are illiterate themselves may not value education and sometimes daughters are taken out of school by force to marry or work as housemaids.

Surprisingly, in the capital city Kampala boys tend to drop out of school to a larger extent than girls due to characteristics of the urban labour market. The traditional division of labour give boys more odd-job opportunities in the city and many school-aged boys work in public transport, newspaper stands or in the street selling peanuts and popcorn, shining shoes, washing cars and so forth. Moreover, the financial restraint is not completely eradicated and very poor parents and guardians of orphaned children still can't afford to buy the required exercise books, uniforms, pencils and paper. Those children are kept out of school to do domestic work or productive work like looking after cattle or brewing local beer.

The transition rate figures don't look as impressive as the frequently publicised gross enrolment rate, but on the other hand they still indicate a considerable growth of the actual number of children finishing primary school since the population cohort has grown momentarily. The current annual growth rate of the population is about 4 percent so the demand for primary education is rising steadily simply due to population growth. The primary enrolment would increase enormously even if the gross enrolment ratio remained constant or stagnated slightly, with a corresponding increase in demand on teachers, school facilities and instructional materials. Consequently, just to preserve the present enrolment ratios implies a considerable additional cost for Uganda, which once again points out the fact that it is one thing to aspire to expand and improve the education sector to enhance development but another thing to pay for it. (Black, 1999: 123-125)

### **The complex issue of access to education**

In primary educational terms, access measures the proportion of an eligible group who is enrolled in the education sector and subsequently one hundred percent gross enrolment rate is defined by the government as universal primary education. For analytical purposes this definition of educational access may be far too narrow since universal primary education could hypothetically contain serious limitations and restrictions. The most basic meaning of the word 'access' refers to the right or privilege to approach, reach, enter or make use of something, and access in an educational context quickly leads to questions of equality of opportunity. Educational access in terms of equality of opportunity involves equal chances to take part or share in the system for individuals, regardless of social circumstances as well as equal gains of education. When measuring access to primary education it is therefore essential to recognise persistence, which is a variable that refers to

what levels of education the pupils reach, causes of retention and reasons why certain pupils drop out of school completely. Another related variable which is vital to educational access is achievement, since pupils who perform poorly may do so because they have not been given a fair opportunity to actually learn in school even when enrolled. Achievement can be measured in terms of how pupils perform on examinations academically and if they have accomplished enough in school to be able to make use of the skills in society. (Kwesiga, 2002: 48-50)

In a Ugandan context it is fruitful, if not necessary, to distinguish between formal and real access to education. Formal educational access is by definition increased when legal and administrative obstacles to enrolment are removed. On the other hand, an increase of real educational access requires that the individual pupil have a fair chance to participate in tuition on equal terms as other children and that the pupil has an opportunity to acquire and make use of basic skills and knowledge taught in school. In other words real educational access implies a certain minimum standard of the education accessed and that the general social situation admits learning. For example, formal access may exist in a system of universal primary education but if children in a community are obligated to work full time in the crop fields for their family's survival, real access is indeed not prevailing.

The literacy rate is a social indicator that gives a hint at access to the primary education sector in terms of what pupils have real opportunities to achieve within the system. According to the World Development Report 1998/99 the literacy rate in Uganda was at that time 50 percent for men and 26 percent for women (Okuonzi & Birungi, 2000: 213), in the year 2000 the national average literacy rate reported to be 54 percent (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2000: 3) and in 2001 the male adult literacy was 64 percent while the female adult literacy rate was 53 percent (Leggett, 2001: 80). Since both average literacy rates and adult literacy rates are mentioned here it is problematic to make comparisons between them and the impact of the universal primary education program is probably not yet fully visible in the national statistics. However, the huge gender disparity in literacy indicates that there possibly are several social factor and circumstances that affects whether a child is attending class or not, despite the issue of tuition fees.

For practical reasons Kwesiga conveniently encompasses these Ugandan access factors through categorising them into family, societal and institutional. Decisions to enrol a child in primary school and to keep it there are made at the family levels by parents, hence parental attitudes and perception of costs and benefits of education are very important. For example, a report from Malawi's Ministry of Education and Culture in 1990 indicated that although 85 percent of the girls who dropped out of school attributed this to lack of school fees, it was really their parent's method of prioritising their finances in terms of consumption and investment. There is no doubt that parents' ability to pay school fees and meet other educational expenses is an ample factor in schooling, and even where there is official universal primary education additional costs such as uniforms, exercise books and transport may still constitute an immense financial barrier.

Poorer parents may often be able to afford to educate only some of their children even when education is free and in Uganda this situation has not yet been reversed. Children's contribution to the welfare of the family through labour is also particularly vital in developing countries and fetching water, collecting firewood, various household chores and some agricultural tasks generally fall on children. There are many competing demands on children's time especially in rural areas so schooling is often interrupted depending on the farming season. Pupils often attend primary school regularly when there is little agricultural work but much less during harvest times, and in some cases domestic work withdraws children from school permanently. (Kwesiga, 2002: 52-55)

A societal factor that affects real access and is closely linked to the family sphere is the institution of marriage. If a girl's main role in society is to be a wife and mother it may be felt that the sooner the better to marry her off and let her achieve recognition in the community in that capacity. In Uganda particularly the girl's aspirations tend to be directed to marriage rather than towards working careers, and in an educational context, early marriages has a negative impact on both achievement and persistence. Deficient health and high fertility rates are conceived to be other precarious general effects of early marriages and Uganda's current total fertility rate of almost eight children (Okuonzi & Birungi, 2000: 213) is in itself jeopardising economic development. The situation is aggravated by the fact that pupils who have become pregnant before marriage are often seen as bad influence on other children and are usually officially expelled from school (Kwesiga, 2002: 59).

Nevertheless, where schools are rare absenteeism may be better explained by distance than by socio-economic characteristics of the home and there is also a connection between primary school persistence and employment opportunities in the region. When there is good prospect for wage employment and a perceived link between education and jobs, there is an additional incentive for parents to send their children to primary school. On the contrary, a high demand for unskilled labour in the area may have an effect in opposite direction. The substantial urban and rural disparities in Uganda also embody differences in educational access and in general there is a lack of reinforcement for education in rural areas where libraries, radios and newspapers may be scarce and television unavailable. The spread of information is obviously restrained as long as just about 4 percent of the population have access to electricity (Leggett, 2001: 80). Qualified teachers often reject deteriorated districts where scholastic material and other equipment are less obtainable, and nomadic pastoralists, like the Karimojong tribe for instance, are not likely to take up primary education even when facilities are provided since the national curriculum is considered not suitable and relevant for them. In addition, children in marginalised and remote localities sometimes lack proficiency in English and teachers use their mother tongue to explain difficult concepts, yet English is the language in which examinations are conducted.

It is clear that there are several family factors and societal constituents that influence educational access and the opportunity children have to remain in school and acquire basic skills, yet

serious obstacles of achievement fall into the category of institutional factors. School facilities determine the standard and quality of the education they offer, which in turn influence the persistence and achievement of its pupils. Availability of proper classrooms, laboratories, instructional materials as well as capable and competent teachers are important indicators of school standard. Indigent institutional conditions like for example insufficient school facilities lead to other shortcomings, the major ones being decreased academic performance and high repetition and dropout rates. (Kwesiga, 2002: 62-70)

### **The alarming state of public primary education**

In 1997 nine schools in the districts of Mbale, Moroto and Masaka participated in a study that was carried out by UNICEF, just after the introduction of the universal primary education program. Since there isn't a fixed maximum of children a government aided primary school can enrol, the number of pupils in school increased in geometric proportions after the abolition of tuition fees. The tremendous count of learners attending lessons in combination with loss of income due to the new system created an acute deficit of classrooms, furniture, blackboards and textbooks. UNICEF reported unmanageable classes where pupils squeeze into overcrowded buildings, children sitting on the floor in temporary shelters and how qualified teachers abandoned rural areas for greener pastures in urban areas. The conclusion was that the implementation of the reform program wasn't adequately planned and that quality of education suffered as a result. (Carasco, 1997: 11-14) Although it is too early to evaluate the long-term effects of universal primary education in Uganda on development and poverty reduction, exploratory research from 1998 showed that government educational expenditures will not be able to offset the abolition of school fees and the consequent expansion of pupil numbers (Otteby, 1999).

Most of the literature on educational production functions finds insignificant correlation between class size and academic performance (Appleton in Reinikka & Collier, 2001: 398) but nearly all existing literature relates class sizes below fifty and provide little guidance on what happens when class sizes rise to the high levels now observed in Uganda. Official statistics exhibit that the pupil-teacher ratio has increased from 38 in 1996 to 60 in the year 2000 (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2001), and the inquiry in twenty-two primary schools in Kampala and Mukono districts from 1998 showed that after the reform program was launched it rose in rural schools from 30 to 51, and in urban schools from 50 to 66. However, actual class sizes were typically much larger than the pupil-teacher ratio calculated at the school level and for example, the ratio for those in P2 rose from 41 to 77 while the average class size inflated from 96 to 136. The increase in pupil numbers exacerbated an existing shortage of chairs, desks and textbooks, yet the most important finding of the study was the negative relationship between pupil-teacher ratios and performance in

both English and mathematics. Generally stretched resources are likely to reduce the amount children learn at school and after the introduction of universal primary education a higher proportion of children are coming from schools with low indicators of quality. (Otteby, 1999)

Six government aided primary schools were selected in the minor field study, three each in the rural and remote districts of Kisoro and Soronco, and evidently they all struggle with insufficient infrastructure. Textbooks, pencils and papers are very rare and there is a desperate shortage of school furniture, latrines and other sanitation facilities. Many school buildings that are used are seriously dilapidated and the lack of sufficient classrooms is conspicuous. Soronco is an area where barter still is common and cash a scarce commodity, so when tuition fees were abolished the enrolment purely exploded. In for example Bugusege Primary School the number of pupils increased from 180 to over 900 and today children attend lessons sitting on stones, wooden logs or directly on the ground. Many classes are held outdoors in the shade of trees and teachers acknowledged that the institutional environment is not suitable for learning. Nafuna, a teacher in Bugusege explained;

“We have been told that the constructing of classrooms will start but we don’t know when. Now we are forced to go to the church and they have agreed to let us borrow the church for conducting lessons. Latrines is also big problem and the government direction is that there shall be maximum twenty-five sharing one latrine and maximum forty boys sharing one, but there are no resources to implement this”.

The problem of finding appropriate space to facilitate all pupils is also experienced in privately managed primary schools in Kampala, and a headmaster of a primary school in Banda said that urban government aided schools are likewise overcrowded since it is extremely expensive to construct higher buildings in the city centre, and even more costly to prospect new land. The inadequate educational infrastructure and wretched sanitation situation in Soronco is indeed shared with Kisoro, which is illustrated by the following statement of a headteacher in Matinza;

“There are only six classrooms so one classroom doesn’t correspond with one class and one teacher. The government can’t put up all the required buildings so parent should contribute meanwhile the funds are gradually released little by little. The government helps to construct some classrooms but not to renovate the old ones and still they are not enough. Somebody needs to help renovate buildings and in particular latrines because they are in a terrible shape. If someone doesn’t renovate soon the whole building will be demolished”.

The pupil-teacher ratio calculated for the sampled schools in Kisoro and Soronco districts average 56 (4023 / 72), up from 34 (1870 / 55) which was the quota before school fees were discarded. Yet, the current average class size is 115 pupils in the lower classes P1-P3 and 48 in P4-P7, but it is common to find classes where around 150 children are taught simultaneously. The considerable difference in size between upper and lower classes can be explained by the significant number of pupils dropping out of school each year.

Since the primary education reform program was implemented government policy is that repetition and dropout rates are going to be reduced in a system of automatic promotion, which means that a pupil is permitted to continue to the next grade regardless of its academic performance (Black, 1999: 125). This specific component was mentioned and criticised by the majority of teachers interviewed in the minor field study although often for different reasons. A teacher in a school nearby Mbale town said that automatic promotion doesn't motivate pupils to struggle hard enough, but most teachers express concern that the new praxis has led to the fact that many children even in the upper classes have not acquired basic skills. Serekwo, a headmaster in Nakasero claimed that the automatic promotion policy actually is contributing to high dropout rates as those pupils who slip through the system and eventually find themselves too far behind academically, inevitably and automatically depart from school. Waniale, a headmaster in Busamaga, Soronco gave a plausible explanation of the presumable considerations behind the policy when stating that the government's decree is an indispensable action to create more room for the constantly increasing cohort of incoming pupils.

Every child who comes to school is admitted and with the new system a teacher is not supposed to deny anyone the opportunity to attend lessons. Parents are moreover allowed to transfer pupils from one school to another even in the middle of a school-term. However, many children in the rural areas don't show up for school regularly and teachers said that especially during market days and harvest season there is a notable absenteeism. Girls are occasionally withheld from school to look after younger siblings and when a new child is born in the family they are more often than boys told by their parents to skip classes due to domestic obligations. Still, primary school headmasters and teachers in both Kisoro and Soronco districts pronounced that they experience a devastating lack of teachers, and since substitutes are unavailable the situation becomes totally unmanageable when somebody in the staff fails to show up for work due to illness or maternity leave. The deficit is aggravated since the launch of the universal primary education reform program in Uganda coincided with the implementation of a regulation that government aided schools are not allowed to employ unqualified teachers.

Even though there were utterly dignified reasons behind this regulation, the introduction of the reform program resulted in an acute shortage of primary school teachers. This in turn has forced the ministry of education to drastically change the structure and content of the education of teachers. Teacher Training Colleges have become free of charge for students as long as they live up to the academic requirements and the length of the course program has been cut down from three to two years. After just two years of training the student writes the final examination, receives a diploma which certifies the qualification as a primary school teacher and then the Ministry of Education, through the Executive District Education Office, posts him or her on an expedient location. A major modification has also been done in the recruitment of students to the Teachers Training Colleges as the criteria for admission have been remarkably lowered. There is for example no

obligation that a student has to graduate from secondary school before being accepted to a Teachers Training Collage and unqualified teachers perpetually working in primary schools are given the option to supersede collage with an on-the-job alternative.

Still, the problem of indigent educational infrastructure and insufficient facilities directly affects the qualified teachers since the respective primary schools more than often fail to accommodate them in their appointed villages. By tradition it is the school management's responsibility to provide a residence for the schoolteacher but the present situation has instead led to attenuated, tiresome and time-consuming travel distances. Transport costs appear to be a principal recurrent expense for many teachers particularly in an urban centre like Kampala, and a female teacher in Rwabara, Kisoro and a male teacher in Kirongo, Soronco made the following testimonies;

“I was recently posted here and so I am new in the area and I walk about eighth miles to school every day. That can take up to two hours depending on the weather. When it is rainy season the roads are all muddy and my shoes often get broken and it is not easy to get new ones. The clothes become dirty too and it is difficult to find the time in the afternoon to wash”.

“We get salaries but we are not motivated and encouraged and that would make us do a better job. Like for example decent accommodation nearby the school would also promote better education. I walk far and many times don't eat breakfast and there is no time to go home for lunch so I stay hungry. There is no way I can afford someone take me on a boda-boda (bicycle) every day and this contributes to poor teaching and learning”.

The salary for a primary school teacher in Uganda employed in the public sector is 105 thousand Ugandan shillings per month except for the taxation period January-April when 22 500 shillings per month is deducted, which makes it 97 500 per month on a year basis or approximately 50 US dollars. According to the teachers interviewed the amount is not at all satisfactory, the lowest in the whole public sector and definitely not enough to afford a decent standard of living. Even though the general price level is increasing each year the salaries have not been revised since 1997 and both symptomatically and ironically, Lilian, a primary school teacher in Kisoro district complained that she don't earn enough money to be able to buy exercise books, pencils and school uniforms for her own children. Furthermore, an atrocious inconvenience regarding salaries is that fluctuating liquidity on district level together with delays in the banking system has resulted in a situation where teachers never know exactly when they will get paid. The fact that payment of salaries is not prompt is complicating the life situation for many teachers whose morale deteriorates accordingly.

Formerly, during the era of colonialism teachers in the catechist schools were highly privileged and the prominent status of primary school teachers in society remained after independence. However, impoverished working conditions and the recent economic amelioration have put teachers in a position where they no longer are better off than the majority of citizens, and students who finish secondary education usually endeavour other professions. Some opposing fields of employment yearn to hire men and women who have trained as teachers, and subsequently

entice qualified personnel away from classrooms. (Ssekamwa, 1999: 68-69) There is no labour union or teachers association in Uganda that could potentially be turned into an instrument for their benefit and UNICEF has recognised that teachers miss a consolidated voice in the political debate, making “each individual teacher oppressed separately” (Carasco, 1997: 13). The following testimony made by Jinami, a teacher in Kisoro district, confirms the notion that the status of the teacher profession is on decline in Uganda;

“We the teachers can’t handle the big classes and the government can’t handle all the teachers because they fail to pay us on time. Already we earn less than other civil servants and the hard work is really affecting the motivation of teachers. I come home late, tired and hungry and don’t have any money. I have seen people collapse in bank queues... Teaching nowadays is something like a last resort for people with no other career options”.

Lessons usually start at 8.30 in the morning and the younger children are dismissed at two o’clock while the older pupils continue up until 16.30. Before leaving in the afternoon pupils often have to sweep and tidy up the compound and by then teachers begin marking exercise books and prepare the next day’s lessons. The limited time to mark and correct exercises appears to be a huge problem and several teachers said they are compelled to use weekends to prepare lessons. A commonly performed but unpopular coping strategy is for teachers to simply give pupils fewer numbers, so consequently the children don’t get enough practice and the education doesn’t keep up with the syllabus. Primary school teachers in rural areas are seemingly overloaded with work and request for bigger staff so that they can be able to divide the tasks between them. There are also indications that the imperfect capacity of the present education sector has reached the point where the motivation of primary school teachers is seriously affected, like stated by teacher Bayizere in Rwabara, Kisoro;

“Teaching over a hundred kids is very tiresome and after a long working day you are completely exhausted. I can’t give (the pupils) so many numbers because it would be impossible to mark them all... Too much time is wasted just keeping order among the kids, we work like donkeys. In the long run people loose interest in their work”.

To control and supervise the big classes is very difficult and tiresome, hence both teachers and pupils are worn out after a long hours in crammed and noisy classrooms. According to a teacher particularly the small children are “shouting, fighting and crying though out the lessons”, hence learners have a hard time concentrating on their exercises. Although corporal punishment is prohibited (Republic of Uganda 1998: 45) frustrated and stressed-out teachers often resort to caning and beating just to have some kind of discipline and order among the numerous pupils. Many children from poor families are not fed enough and the attention is extremely low in the afternoon since most children stay on empty stomachs the whole day. Unfortunately, there is no such thing as school lunch and the standard would probably improve radically if the children had at least something to eat during the day. A headmaster in Kirongo, Soronco says that he has tried to convince parents to send packed lunches with the children and moreover;



“Pupils are performing poorly because of many reasons. Teachers are not teaching effectively, the government has failed to control the teacher-pupil ratio and parents are not catering for their children. After school they don’t read but go dig, fetch water and so on. Teachers and parents must work together if the quality of education shall be good. Kids come from far, don’t focus on the schoolwork and even fall asleep in the afternoon.”

The current child malnutrition rate in Uganda calculated by the World Bank each year has gone down from around fifty percent during the 1980s to 26 percent (Okuonzi & Birungi, 2000: 212), but tedious and meagre food is still preventing a large share of the population to fully access the educational system.

Research of household earnings from agriculture in Uganda suggests that child labour can be just as productive as adult labour on family farms and in a survey from 1993, children ages 7 to 14 not attending school worked average 33 hours per week. Conversely, children enrolled in rural schools worked on average 25 hours per week (Appleton in Reinikka & Collier, 2001: 382-383) and a simple comparison of these statistics implies that in rural areas school attendance reduces the amount of child labour by only eight hours per child per week. Here is also a significant gender disparity since girls by tradition are bound to take a more pronounced responsibility in the household. According to headmasters in both Kisoro and Soronco districts, many people don’t consider girl’s education as important as the boy’s education and consequently, in families where education is not special priority girls usually carry out arduous domestic work. Boys have relatively more time to study and subsequently a paramount opportunity to educational achievement although many boys still spend significant time looking after the family’s animals.

Malnutrition and fatiguing domestic workloads are in the minor field study found to be most important family factors that influence and constrain educational access, and the principal institutional factor is that the available resources don’t admit individuality in government aided primary schools. The high enrolment and lack of teachers has resulted in huge classes in which individual differences are not catered for as pupils are just taught mechanically like one big group. Slow learners who may not understand properly don’t receive any extra attention from teachers and consequently children with special needs fall behind and loose interest in the subjects taught at school. Teachers explained in interviews that there is absolutely no dialog with the children, so fast learners with good potential are not encouraged, and on the contrary, children who get stuck in their schoolwork feel mistreated or simply neglected. Hebiyaremge, a teacher in Kisoro said;

“I teach P1 and P2 and there are over a hundred children in the class... The kids are on very different levels of learning, some don’t participate, others are quick learners and some are very slow and shy. There are hardships in teaching big numbers and the kids don’t catch everything especially ‘cause we don’t have good instructional materials for everyone. We usually have oral exercises but the timetable isn’t being followed and the syllabus is only carried through half-way”

In the political rhetoric associated with the introduction of universal primary education in Uganda the view is often expressed that disabled children now for the first time can fully access the

primary education sector. Yet, none of the nine headmasters who took part in the minor field study said that they so far have experienced an increase in the number of disabled children enrolled. Disabled children are still very rarely found in Ugandan government aided primary schools for various reasons. School environment and facilities are strictly for normal children and there are no teachers who have special education to care for children with different abilities. Teachers who are already overwhelmed with work even sometimes have a suspicious and negative attitude towards children with handicaps. The Government's pledge to give disabled children access to elementary schooling is on paper only since there is no provision of extra resources or scholastic material to fit the manifold needs of different children. Just to use the latrines can be an insurmountable problem for children with mobility problems, and children who find school an inconvenient place for them sooner or later drop out. To give handicapped children qualitative primary education is considering the following testimony not done with a stroke of a pen. Headmaster Mwesigwa in Kampala said;

“There is a lot of stigma around disabilities so many parents are ashamed to bring their children to school. Some still think disabilities are a result of witchcraft or some kind of punishment for committed sins. School can be hell for disabled children... Insensitive children call them names and even parents sometimes try to get disabled out of school because they think they interfere with the learning process of the normal children”.

### **Conclusion: A continuously segregated primary education sector in Uganda**

The program to universalise primary education has made tuition affordable to many Ugandans and the financial status of parents is no longer the same determinant factor as it used to be. Before the introduction of the reforms primary education was in many cases considered something for rich people only and that caused demarcation and rupture in some communities. Families often experienced discord and jealousy when parents could only afford to send one or two of the children to school and although the general standard of education was higher the majority was left uneducated. Kibisi, a primary school teacher in Soronco said that now more children are given the chance to acquire basic skills; “Many pupils can't catch up with the education but at least now they are allowed to come and look at the choke-board without being chased away”. The humongous enrolment could potentially create an interconnection of collective experiences among the Ugandan population and the Government's current national curriculum is widely appreciated as a good effort for being more relevant to the young generation because of the new emphasis on vocational skills, agriculture, home economics, animal husbandry and health. There are definitely children in government aided primary schools who truly benefit from the schooling they receive, and for example the teachers Nafuna and Mafabi in Bugusege said that in particular farming lessons are valuable and that some of their former pupils have managed to make a good living from growing tomatoes and cabbage after finishing P7.

However, school statistics over academic performance in government aided primary schools make depressing reading. After seven years of elementary schooling the pupils sit for a final examination called the Primary Leaving Examination and the results of these examinations are valid and convincing indicators of achievement and can subsequently effectively be used to measure the standard of education in the respective school. In the six rural government aided schools sampled in the minor field study the percentage of pupils failing the PLE completely were 81, 74, 71, 66, 48 and 35. Practically none passed with the best grade and by any benchmark or yardstick, for a school to have around 60-70 percent of the pupils failing the final examination shows an extreme degeneration of quality, and obviously in those schools selected in the study very little learning is taking place. The implementation of universal primary education has resulted in classrooms filled with children of diverse backgrounds, potentials and abilities so the composition of pupil intake can possibly to a certain extent explain the decline of academic performance. The deterioration of academic results in mathematics and English documented in 1998 due to the initial experience of the education reform program was partially related to the fact that a larger share of children than before came from meagre households where parents themselves are illiterate (Otteby, 1999).

Nevertheless, according to the teachers interviewed in the minor field study the main constraint of achievement is that the school environment is not suitable for children to learn how to read. The lack of teachers and the absence of adequate scholastic materials are making reading a considerable problem for most pupils and it is not uncommon to find children even in the higher grades who can't read properly. Some teachers expressed concern that there is no functional and sustainable reading culture in their communities and many complained over the terrible scarcity of books. Caroline, a teacher in Soronco tried to explain the reasons for the poor academic performance in her school;

“How on earth can we teach the kids how to read when there is nothing to read! The few books that are available are not in the mother tongue and it is impossible to learn how to read in a foreign language, especially when you are sitting with a hundred others.”

It is clear that the present government aided primary school sector in Uganda is characterised by quantity rather than quality and in the cases where the recourses at hand are so defective and substandard that the syllabus is not followed through, it can certainly be described as pseudo-education.

The potential dynamic effects of education on productivity and health are eroded because people don't acquire enough relevant knowledge to significantly benefit from the schooling they receive and very few continue to secondary education. Robert, a teacher in Kampala fears that many children go through primary education, perform badly and stay in the villages without ever improving their situation. He therefore suggests that since most children start to work immediately

after elementary levels it is better to teach the children polytechnics to be used in various income generating endeavours;

“People finishes school after P7 and don’t continue, in many cases for economical reasons, and haven’t acquired any useful things like for example plumbing, tailoring or bricklaying. Museveni brings the child into the boat but don’t carry it to the other side of the river. They leave it half-way”.

Soon after the introduction of the universal primary education reform program the overcrowding of government aided schools caused bitterness in especially urban areas and parents started to opt for private schools (Elwana: 2000:3). The decline of quality of education in the government schools was unacceptable to many families on the upper parts of the wealth scale and the number of academic institutions owned and operated privately has increased considerably as a direct result of the reform program (Okuonzi & Birungi, 2000: 204). Notably, there is a greatly uneven regional distribution of private primary schools and unlike other districts Kampala has more private primary schools than government aided primary schools. In Kampala city there are 181 licensed, privately owned and operated primary schools, only 96 government aided schools and in the vast rural parts of the country private primary schools are very rare. (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2000: 4) It is common knowledge that all people who can afford it send their children to private schools because of the superior standard and quality of education and Bushenyi, a headmaster in Kampala said that a private institution is the only option if one wants a child to be able to continue to secondary education;

“The government has bitten more than it can chew”. If you want the child to perform well so that it can go on to higher education, government schools are not satisfactory. That is why they bring them here. Universal primary education in Uganda is not free. *Real* education costs still”.

In the minor field study three private primary schools in Kampala were randomly selected and visited. The most expensive school sampled charges about 1.2 million Ugandan shillings per year and the other two costs 600 thousand shilling and 150 thousand shillings respectively. Obviously the standard of facilities and scholastic materials are hardly comparable with conditions in the rural schools of Kisoro and Soronco. There is a huge difference in quality of education and academic performance between rural government aided schools and the urban private schools and in Kampala there is a much greater variety of books, learning equipment and other instructional materials. For example, in Kampala pupils are using sewing machines during crafts lessons and elaborate with assorted chemicals during chemistry class, while rural schools don’t have electricity and only view what is written on the blackboard. Teachers in both rural and urban schools said in interviews that the Kampala kindergartens and nurseries effectively prepare children for elementary education and this partially explains the outstanding academic performance among urban children.

The devastating effect on quality of an enormous increase in enrolment isn’t likewise experienced in the private operated schools and headmaster Bushenyi explained that when you run a school like a competitive business company quality of education is the crucial factor for survival

and subsequently the pupil-teacher ratios and class sizes constantly needs to be moderated. The pupil-teacher ratio in the three urban private schools sampled in the minor field study is 20, 2 (1373 / 68) and practically none of the pupils who graduate P7 in one of those schools fail the Primary Leaving Examination.

Primary school teachers working in private schools earn about twice as much as teachers in government aided schools (200 thousand Ugandan shillings), and since the regular cost of living is generally higher in Kampala than in rural areas, qualified teachers unmistakably choose to work for private entrepreneurs. Not surprisingly many teachers interviewed in Kisoro and Soronco also responded that they would prefer to work in a private institution rather than in the government aided school they were posted because of the better salary and more reasonable working conditions. The emergence of a state of the art private primary education sector and the inevitably deteriorating standard of the service delivery which characterises the public education sector, are in combination effectively preserving the regional disparity in Uganda. During the 1990s the total expenditure on primary education per capita was up to fifty times higher in Kampala, where the traditionally privileged Buganda tribe is predominant, than the rest of the country (Reinikka & Collier, 2001:361) and there are no indications what so ever that this inclination has been reversed.

The geographic and ethnic disparity is prevailing despite the efforts to universalise primary education and the centrally initiated reforms are still not reaching momentous parts of the diverse Ugandan society. Evidently, the ethnical differences have even widened in recent years since educational statistics show that the literacy rate is about 12 percent in Kotido and Moroto districts, where the majority belongs to the Karamoja tribe, compared with the national average of 54 percent (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 2000: 3). The educational reform program has had a minimal impact in the nomadic communities in the northern regions (Elwana, 2000: 3) and contrary to the ambitions of the NRM government, the number of primary schools has recently drastically diminished in Acholi and Langlo due to the situation of insecurity. According to a topical investigation there is virtually no meaningful primary education currently existing in the Acholi region (Leggett: 2001:46).

In addition, the prevailing regional disparity can be illustrated by an example from another function of the public sector; the share of the population that can access essential health care in Uganda is raging from 10 percent in Kitgum to over 90 percent in Kampala (Okuonzi & Birungi, 2000: 214). Despite institutional improvements in the public sector and the fairly successful process of decentralising service delivery in Uganda, the introduction of universal primary education has not resulted in the wished for, and much needed, national integration. The far too politicised reform program and its subsequent poor quality education and high dropout rates have eroded the expected positive gains of education on economic and social development. The renaissance for privately operated primary schools in Uganda has caused a new deep division between people with different economic capabilities and the national segregation will remain until

the Ugandan government has managed to transform the present formally universal access to primary education, to real equity of access to primary education.



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