

## **Future Schooling in Uganda**

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### **Abstract**

For the past decade, most countries have been striving to achieve universal primary education consistent with the United Nations Millennium Development Goal on education. Indeed the recent Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2006) shows that most countries are on the way to achieving EFA by the year 2015. Perhaps this is what has forced the academia to shift the debate to what future classrooms would look like, for example, the role of Information Communications Technology (ICT) and possible future virtual learning environments. This paper examines schooling in Uganda at all levels of education, and highlights the changes that will take place in the next two decades thereof. The analysis is based on a study of key policy documents including the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, the Government White Paper on Education, the report of the Ministry of Education's comprehensive analysis of basic education in Uganda, the Education Sector Strategic Plan, as well as empirical data generated from the study of schooling in one of Uganda's disadvantaged communities. The paper describes the changes that will take place including the focus on non-formal education, the dual centralisation and decentralisation system, curriculum review embracing skills training, homeschooling as a complementary mode of primary and secondary education delivery, and distance online learning at the tertiary level.

### **Introduction: The National Context and Background to Future Schooling in Uganda**

Uganda, with a total population of 27 million people, is a land locked country located in the eastern part of the African continent, totalling to a surface area of 241,039 sq/km. It is bordered by Sudan to the north, Kenya to the east, Tanzania to the south, Rwanda to the southwest and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west. The landlocked nature makes Uganda economically dependent on her neighbours' coastal ports thereby accounting to the high fuel prices and the comparably high cost of living. This directly and indirectly impacts on the national investment in education. The main economic activity of Uganda is agriculture, particularly coffee. However, like many other countries in the world, Uganda's coffee

production capacity was affected by the coffee mosaic in the previous decade. This, coupled with the ever dwindling coffee prices on the global market, together with the effect of the HIV/AIDS scourge and the political instability has accounted greatly to Uganda's weakened economy, with a per capita income of \$300. To-date, the country has had to depend largely on external donor assistance to finance the key sectors including education. However, the economy is likely to improve in future as the result of the recent discovery of oil in the country's Western Region. Oil production and building of an oil refinery is set to begin in 2009, with an initial production of 6,000-10,000 barrels a day (Associated Press 2006).

A former British colony, Uganda attained its independence on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1962, and since then, it has witnessed dramatic changes in its political system. The changes in political policies were accompanied by changes in socio-economic policy framework. However the political turmoil of 1971-1985 negatively impacted on the Ugandan economy leading to a decline in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), decline in agricultural and industrial output, a deterioration in export performance, high rates of inflation, wide spread poverty and poor health services.

This decline was closely associated with the managerial vacuum created by the expulsion of Asians in 1972, economic mismanagement of the 70's and 80's and the ensuing civil unrest. Soon after the current National Resistance Movement (NRM) government came to power in 1986, and in concert with International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other development partners, it embarked on the process of extricating Uganda's economy from institutional poverty and reverse the process of retrogression. The government executed a number of reformist programmes including the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP), Decentralisation, Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), Poverty Action Fund (PAF), civil service reform, and Universal Primary Education (UPE). Reforms in education were given top priority because it was hoped that positive changes in education would facilitate an improvement in other sectors (Uganda Government 1992, p.3). This was based on the view that education is the backbone of development for any nation in political, social or economic terms because it enhances people's literacy, income, health, political participation, liberty and general welfare.

Uganda's formal education system comprises seven years of primary, followed by four years of lower secondary and 2 years of upper secondary. This 7-4-2 pattern is followed by three to five years (3-5) of tertiary education. Alongside this, there is a technical and vocational track that later follows primary school and follows 3, 2 depending on the level of entry. Technical and farm schools, and a diverse array of government and private business technical and vocational institutions offer programs that generally follow completion of lower secondary (See Table 1 for a summary of the structure of Uganda's education system). At all levels there is a variety of government, private and community institutions. By 2005, Government operated 78 percent of primary schools, 35 percent of Post-primary and 80 percent of tertiary institutions. The rest were shared between religious institutions and the private investors (MoES 2005a). With the ever increasing population at a growth rate of 3.4% per annum, the demand for education provision is going to increase in the next 20-25

years, and therefore private investment in education will continue to play a major role.

**Table 1. The Structure of Uganda's Education System**

EDUCATION LEVEL	CYCLE	AWARD	PROGRESS OPPORTUNITIES
Pre-Primary (not mandatory)	2 Years	-	Primary Education
Primary Education	7 Years	Primary Leaving Examination (PLE)	▸ Lower Secondary (O'level) ▸ Technical school
Lower Secondary (Ordinary Level)	4 Years	Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE)	▸ Upper Secondary (A' Level) ▸ Primary Teachers College ▸ Technical Institute ▸ Other Departmental Training Institutes.
Technical School	3 Years	Certificate	▸ Technical Institute
Upper Secondary (Advanced Level)	2 Years	Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE)	▸ University ▸ Uganda College of Commerce ▸ National Teachers College ▸ Uganda Technical College ▸ Other Departmental Training Institutes
Primary Teachers College	2 Years	Certificate	▸ National Teachers College
Technical Institute	2 Years	Certificate	▸ Uganda Technical College
Uganda College of Commerce	2/3Years	Diploma	▸ University
National Teachers College	2 Years	Diploma	▸ University
Uganda Technical College	2 Years	Diploma	▸ University
University	3/5Years	Diploma/Degree	▸ Post Graduate Studies

*Source:* Uganda Government (1992)

The medium of instruction at all levels of education has remained largely English. Uganda is a multilingual country because of the large number of languages spoken, identified at over 30. Language has as a result been a big challenge in education and at national level in general. In spite of several efforts to adopt a national language, it has not been possible because of the failure to agree on one language to adopt. This is likely to change in the next 20 years following the revival of the East African Community which is promoting the use of Kiswahili as the official language. However, the principle that literacy should first be acquired in the mother tongue has been accepted in the education policy and efforts are made to practice it in both primary and adult education.

This paper examines schooling in Uganda at all levels of education, and highlights the changes that will take place in the next two decades thereof. The analysis is based on a study of key policy documents including the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) (MoFPED 2004), the Government White Paper on Education (Uganda Government 1992), the report of the Ministry of Education's comprehensive analysis of basic education in Uganda (MoES 2005a), the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) (MoES 2005b), as well as empirical data generated from the study of schooling in one of Uganda's disadvantaged communities.

## **Schooling in Uganda: Where Now and Where to?**

In Uganda, investment in education has been prioritised in the last 2 decades because it is hoped to facilitate reform in other sectors after a long period of civil strife. Education is expected to contribute to the accumulation of human capital, which is essential for higher incomes and sustained income growth (MoFPED 2004). There has been extensive expansion of the education system in order to make it accessible to the larger population. With the introduction of Universal primary education in 1997, primary education is now accessible to at least 86% of the school going age children (MoES 2005a), and with the introduction of Universal Secondary Education in 2007, it is hoped that the majority of the children in Uganda will be able to access the full cycle of primary and secondary education. This is a huge investment as education is linked to children's survival, and secondary education is associated with smaller family size.

Government's focus for the next few decades is going to be on maximising the impact of public expenditure by focusing resources on those who would not otherwise access education, particularly in remote areas and those adversely affected by war as well as access to secondary and tertiary education, where universal access is yet to be achievable. The main challenges are going to be ones of delivering primary education to all children and strengthening the performance of higher levels of education. The issue of quality is also going to take a central position. Primary education has been continuing to expand (with net enrolment in household survey data steady at about 86% since 1997). The gender gap in most levels of primary education has been eliminated. Nevertheless, the retention of children in education remains a serious challenge, partly because of the costs borne by households, and the achieved proficiency of students shows no clear trend. Absenteeism and dropout rates are still high among girls due to inadequate hygiene and sanitary facilities at schools (MoES 2005a), but are also high across gender in disadvantaged remote areas as exemplified by research undertaken in a remote fishing community that is presented later on in this paper as a case study. Therefore, quality of education will remain an important challenge.

Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (MoFPED 2004) projects that in the next few decades government will take measures to improve the efficiency of primary education, including multi-grade teaching, double-shift teaching, and incentives for teachers in hard-to-reach areas. Quality will be improved by teacher training, implementing the use of mother tongue in lower grades, and increasing the relevance of the curriculum. Access will be improved by the continued provision of schools and classroom facilities, training teachers in special needs education, and provision of basic education in emergency situations. Issues of formal versus non-formal education will also become central particularly in remote areas where formal education has proved inaccessible and irrelevant. There is likely to be an expansion of the vocational training institutions in order to address the needs of those children to who for some circumstances completion of the formal education cycle has been elusive. Although transition to post primary education has increased from 35% in 1997 to 50% in 2002, there remains a big gap between those transitioning and those dropping out after

primary. Secondary education has expanded because of the liberalisation of private sector participation and the introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007. However, access to secondary education remains very unequal, and where has been attained it is characterised by lack of instructional materials, overcrowding and teacher shortage. The future will see government seeking to improve secondary education by further investment in USE and by supporting private community secondary schools, and increasing efficiency by double-shift teaching and increasing the teacher-student ratio above 30. Vocational education will be matched with the economy's skill needs, and will be expanded to cater for those who may not complete the entire secondary education cycle to proceed to tertiary education. A more flexible framework will be developed allowing for modular courses. The Education Sector Strategic Plan (MoES 2005b) envisages that vocational education will become an alternative to academic education.

The following sections highlight some of the key features of Uganda's education system, their current status and what their outlook will be in future, 20-25 years from now.

### **Education and Skills Development: The Focus on Women through Adult Homeschooling**

The current PEAP (MoFPED 2004, p.179) shows that education in Uganda is both a privately and socially profitable investment. Estimated rates of return to education increased in the 1990s for all sub sectors, partly because self-employment opportunities outside agriculture opened up. Based on incomes alone, social returns to primary are highest at 24%, followed by tertiary (13%) and then secondary (10%). Non-income returns are also significant; parental education is a powerful factor in child survival, and education above the primary level is associated with lower fertility. The total fertility rate for women with secondary education is only 3.9, in comparison with 7.9 for those with no education and 7.8 for those with just primary education. Women with secondary education are also much more likely to receive antenatal care and have deliveries attended by a health professional.

Based on the above evidence, it is projected that universal completion of secondary schooling and elimination of gender disparity at all levels of education are going to be core issues in the years to come. Government will double efforts in promoting education of women from multiple avenues. Adult home schooling is likely to emerge as an alternative mode of education delivery in order to reach out to as many people as possible, especially girls and adult women. The concept of homeschooling in the United States of America and other developed countries involves a commitment by a parent or guardian to oversee their children's educational development. In the Ugandan context, the concept will be broadened to include adult education, where illiterate adults will oversee their own education development within their homes and communities. It will still mean learning outside of the public or private formal school environment, but will involve adults learning from the rich resources available in their community, environment and through interactions with other adult learners.

## **Decentralisation and Centralisation of Education: A Dual System**

Decentralisation policies in Africa increasingly place responsibilities and resources for the provision of public services including education in the hands of public bodies at the lowest levels (Prinsen & Titeca 2008). In Uganda, a dual system of both decentralisation and centralization exists. This is likely to continue 20-25 years from now. While secondary, vocational and tertiary education are managed by the central government's Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), the management and provision of basic education is now largely in the hands of the district administration, while the centre remains responsible for policy control and maintenance of standards through control of teacher education, curriculum and examinations. This enhances flexibility, transparency & accountability. It also allows local administrators to be creative in seeking solutions to problems that are unique to their localities.

The dual system of centralisation and decentralisation also operates at the level of monitoring and evaluation. For example, the Ministry of Education and Sports has the overall responsibility for monitoring and evaluating Education for All (EFA) goals being implemented in the country.

The Education Planning Department at the centre takes overall responsibility for the Monitoring and Evaluation of EFA goals in close collaboration with other line ministries like, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Local Government and Ministry of Public Service.

Monitoring at district level is done by the Chief Administrative Officer's (CAO's) office, Planning Unit, District Education Office's (DEO) office, and Secretary for Education, Local Council V.

In the Local Government Act, it is specified that the work of the Centre is to monitor and ensure quality control in the programmes being implemented in the districts. The districts are also expected to do some monitoring at the district level and keep the centre informed of what is happening on a quarterly basis. It is on the basis of the information received from districts that the centre monitors a sample of districts.

At the sub county level monitoring is done by Sub-county chiefs, Local Council III Chairperson, and Coordinating Centre Tutors (CCTs). These are to ensure proper utilisation of funds and timely accountability and provide guidance on finance related issues. They should make regular visits to schools to check on all school operations, especially finances and remit regular reports to the Chief Administrative Officer.

Finally, at the school level monitoring is done by School Management Committees (SMCs), Parents Teachers Association, Local Council I and Local Council II Chairpersons. These are responsible for the supervision of all the school activities. They are expected to give overall direction to the day-to-day operations of the school. These include assisting the school administration in planning & budgeting, fund utilisation & timely accountability and record keeping.

The decentralisation policy at primary level as described above has achieved high

participation of the private sector and parents in education. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of education at all levels, it is likely that the future will witness expansion of decentralisation to post primary education services in order to increase the participation of the private sector in the provision of post primary education. Nevertheless, decentralisation at the primary education level has on the other hand been characterised by inadequate capacity at district level to handle tendering mechanisms, accountability of funds, and education management information systems (MoES 2005a). Therefore, the future is likely to witness an increased dual system and much control from the central government as checks and balance to ensure efficient utilisation of funds.

### **The Academic-Vocational Balance in Post-Primary Education**

The current scenario in Uganda is that even with the introduction of USE; overall, the incidence of secondary education is highly unequal. Secondary school education is skewed toward the higher income groups and urban and semi-urban families. About half of the sub-counties (over 500) in rural areas do not have secondary schools and these are in rural areas, which are unattractive to private investors in education. While gender disparities have been overcome in the primary sub-sector, there are between 20% and 35% more boys than girls in Senior 1 to Senior 4 and over 60% more in Senior 5 and Senior 6. Indications are that in contrast to primary education, the incidence of education has been becoming more unequal, and that the public sector is not yet successfully targeting the poor. Although the recent implementation of USE in 2007 could help close the gap, the policy itself is affected by factors such as shortage of classrooms and teachers and overcrowding. Yet it is no guarantee that the secondary school graduates would be economically productive and self-reliant as the curriculum in place is very academic and theoretical.

It is projected that future secondary schooling in Uganda will attempt to achieve an appropriate balance within post-primary education between academic and vocational education. The secondary school curriculum will be reviewed to make it more responsive to national labour demands, and most secondary schools will be vocationalised. In order to access the vocationalised curriculum to as many people as possible, short modularised courses will be introduced to make it possible for adults to acquire skills over their lifetime.

### **The Focus on Distance Learning within Tertiary Education**

Higher education in Uganda is becoming increasingly diverse, with over fifty institutions of higher learning including 16 licensed universities, (4 public and 12 private) and many programmes of study (MoFPED 2004). There are over 75,000 students enrolled at this level. Assuming the target age group of 18-22, this yields a gross tertiary enrolment rate of 2%, whereas the rate for sub-Saharan Africa is 3.9% and that of less developed countries is 10%. Although numbers have increased, the proportion of students taking science and technology is low.

The incidence of tertiary education is highly unequal both by income group and gender. A study carried out by the Ministry of Education and Sports revealed that out of over 700 Government schools, 139 elite Government schools, with high paying fees contributed 59% of the total enrolment on Government scholarships to Makerere University (the largest public university) from 1996 to 2000. The richest 1% of society access over 40% of available positions at Makerere and other universities. The private sector share of financing in the sector is significant, and most of the increase in numbers has come from private sponsorship.

As with primary and secondary education, the aim of Government policy for the next two decades will be to make tertiary education accessible to qualified and able students who could not otherwise afford it. The increase in numbers has also stretched the resources of universities. This is because most of the programmes offered are face to face. The future will be characterised by more distance learning programmes, and this will require huge investments in ICT facilities both in rural and urban environments.

### **Non-Formal Education versus Formal Schooling**

Primary education, though universal in Uganda, there are many children who cannot access formal education due to the unique circumstances in which they live or the negative attitude of their parents towards formal schooling. Such circumstances include rural farming, pastoralist, trading and fishing communities (Okurut 2001). Some communities or families value child labour because of the income that accrues from it for family survival than formal schooling, thereby affecting children's access to formal schooling (Lockheed et al. 1991). In the next 20-25 years, non-formal education will become an important complementary form of education to formal universal primary education. To illustrate how non-formal education will play a major role in future, a case study of how formal schooling has had minimal impact on one of the remote fishing areas – Rwangara and Ntoroko - in Uganda is presented below:

Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages are two villages located on the southern shores of Lake Albert, in Kanara Sub-county, Bundibugyo District in Western Uganda. They are found in the western rift valley floor, which has a semi-desert type of climate with high temperatures between 28<sup>o</sup>c and 35<sup>o</sup>c year round that does not support crop production but only animal rearing and fishing. The problem is even complicated by the ethnic composition of the area. The population has migratory tendencies with a large proportion of the people who migrated from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and other places of Uganda in search of fishing and trade opportunities. The majority of the immigrants from Congo such as the Lendu, Ngiti, Hema, Lugbara, and Alur constitute the largest ethnic groups in the area with low or no educational background (Uganda Population Secretariat 2002). The life style of these people is characterised by activities such as alcohol drinking, dancing and leisure sex. They are inclined towards material wealth rather than schooling. Due to the harsh climate, ethnic complications and the presence of Lake Albert, the majority of the population in Rwangara and Ntoroko villages is engaged in fish-based economy. Since fishing



involves participation of both adults and school going age children; this has led to detrimental effects on formal schooling in the area.

### ***Current Schooling in Ntoroko and Rwangara Fishing Villages***

Ntoroko County in Bundibugyo District is comprised of Karugutu, Rwebisengo and Kanara sub-counties. Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages form Kanara Sub-county. Formerly, this sub-county had Rwangara and Ntoroko primary schools. Later on in 2002 Kamuga in Rwangara and Umoja in Ntoroko primary schools were established to supplement UPE in the area. However, a closer examination of pupil enrolment in Kanara Sub-county in relation to the 2002 population census data reveals that almost half of the school going age children is not enrolled in school (See Table 2).

**Table 2. School Enrollment in Kanara Sub-County between 2000-2004**

Year	Sex	Rwangara	Ntoroko	Sub-total (boys & girls)	Total
2000	Boys	291	306	597	1037
	Girls	201	239	440	
2001	Boys	284	395	679	1111
	Girls	216	216	432	
2002	Boys	300	309	609	1119
	Girls	212	298	510	
2003	Boys	374	420	794	1349
	Girls	272	283	555	
2004	Boys	210	309	519	1009
	Girls	197	293	490	

Source: D.E.O's Office, Bundibugyo District 2003

The 2002 population census showed that there were 2213 school going age children in Kanara sub-county, but according to the above table, only 1119 of these were actually in school during that year. If we were to put the average number of school going age children (for the years 2000-2004) at between (2000-2200), then Table I above shows clearly that for five consecutive years, half of the school going age children were not in school.

The situation in Rwangara and Ntoroko as presented above is worrying. The figures on the number of school going age children who have failed to respond to primary education are quite big. The enrolments also fluctuate in terms of attendance and dropout rates.

Our research found a serious problem of pupil under enrollment for both boys and girls in Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages. School admission/enrollment registers revealed, for example, that the pupil total enrollment for the year 2004 was only 49% of the total school going age children. Similarly, findings on school attendance generated from the school visits we made indicated a negative trend. It was established that pupils in Rwangara and Ntoroko irregularly attended school as was evidenced by the high absenteeism figures

of 64.2% that was recorded in the daily taught mathematics and English subjects. Interviews with the relevant stakeholders including teachers, head teachers, parents and children also confirmed how severe the problem of absenteeism is in Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages. Children almost go to school when they so wish and many parents are not bothered. There are several types of child labour in which school going age children are engaged that detract them from going to school. These range from fishing to domestic chores such as housekeeping. The parents were the enforcers of child labour. Many saw no value in taking children to school, and viewed the presence of the lake as “God-given unending wealth” as in the words of one of them: “If we have our natural wealth in the lake, what more do we need?”

Further findings indicated high rates of dropouts, implying that it was difficult to retain Rwangara and Ntoroko children in school throughout the entire primary education cycle. Head teachers, teachers, parents and pupils lamented the high pupil dropout and low retention rates, a finding that was confirmed by the schools’ enrollment and Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) records that showed pupil dropout rate of 93% and only 7% retention rate for the years 2002, 2003 and 2004 for Rwangara and Ntoroko primary schools. Absenteeism and dropout cases were higher in upper primary (P.5 – P.7) than in lower primary (P.1 – P.4) because children in upper primary were mature and did aggressively engage in socio-economic activities, which disrupted their schooling. Lower primary was less affected because children were still young and had less to do at home and around the landing sites. More so, children in P1 and P2 only stayed half day in school, so they could engage in domestic work in the afternoon hours without disrupting their daily school attendance.

It was further revealed that schooling of both sexes in terms of enrollment, attendance and retention was more or less equally poor due to their equal participation in fishing related activities. However, besides fishing and other responsibilities that deterred children from schooling in Rwangara and Ntoroko, girls were further subjected to domestic chores, sexual abuse and early marriages by fishermen and traders.

Besides fishing, other factors affected primary schooling in the two case study villages. These included the following:

Parents’ negative attitude: A good number of respondents indicated that parents’ negative attitude was a contributing factor to the under enrolment, absenteeism and high dropout rates of children in Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages. The respondents attributed this parent’s negative attitude to the socio – economic life of the people, which was entirely influenced by fishing and its related activities. Money earned was spent on non-schooling activities such as alcohol, marrying many wives and night clubs. The negative attitude was also attributed to the low or no educational background of the parents, who thought the only source of wealth was through fishing and commerce rather than schooling. Such parents never bothered to meet the costs of scholastic materials for their children at school and other school requirements such as supporting teachers not on Government pay roll. This negative attitude of illiterate parents has also been highlighted by Obiya (2000) and MoFPED (2000) as a hurdle to pupils’ schooling in many other Ugandan contexts.

**Lack of teachers:** Several respondents concurred with the data we had generated from documents and observation notes that the general lack of teachers was also responsible for poor schooling in Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages. There was poor staff welfare, low salaries or no salaries at all, lack of housing, high costs of food, water, fuel and transport. Teachers complained of hot temperatures and mosquitoes around the lakeshores and moving long distances to collect salaries. Also head-teachers and teachers complained of lack of staffrooms and head-teachers' offices; in most of the schools they operated in the open air. The research ascertained that the constant disappearance of head-teachers and teachers from schools were accounted for by these factors. The general lack of teachers and their poor motivation made parents and children develop negative attitude to school, since they expected no learning to be taking place. Indeed research elsewhere such as in Kalangara and Karamoja, Uganda, has attributed poor or negative schooling responses to the lack of teachers, poor staff welfare and poor working conditions (Lockheed et al. 1991; Mbusa 2003; Kambaine 2003; Delor 2000; Kibulya 2004).

**Migratory tendencies:** The nomadic nature of the people in Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages also negatively affected children schooling. Migrations were as a result of variations in fish catching seasons. Parents moved with their children to landing sites such as Zumbe, Lukwanji, Kabukanga and Kitebere looking for high fish catch and employment. Constant movements were also caused by parents of Congolese origin who were refugees, business men/women or fishermen who were ever on the move with their children or left the children behind without any responsible person to compel them to go to school. The migratory nature of the people is evidenced by the temporary nature of houses (with mud- and wattle and grass or polythene roofs) and loft to avoid being brown off by strong winds from the lake. The under enrolment, absenteeism and high dropout rates in Rwangara and Ntoroko, therefore, was partly as a result of peoples' migratory tendencies. Bishop (1985), MoFPED (2000), Owinyi (1991), Lubanga (2000), MoES (2003) and Okurut (2001) also note that provision of education for people who are always on the move, never staying long in one place is always very difficult.

**Poverty:** Though primary education fees in Uganda are met by Government, some stakeholders attributed poor schooling in Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages to poverty. One of the major concerns raised by the parents and children was that fish stocks and varieties have been dwindling over the recent years since 1990's; lack of fish and its socio economic implication was poverty in individual homes. It was observed that majority of parents economically were low income earners, had small fish catches and used small canoes and boats that were old and in bad shape. Such poverty characteristics disabled parents in meeting the costs of scholastic materials and other school obligations of their children. The little money that parents earned was spent on basic necessities rather than on schooling.

The study further revealed that as a result of Hema and Ngiti fighting in Eastern Congo, there were many orphans in Rwangara and Ntoroko who could not meet basic necessities of life and school requirements. These children cared for themselves, going to school meant one would not get food, they therefore; engaged in fishing and other petty work in order to

survive at the cost of schooling. Lockheed et al. (1991), MoFPED (2000), Ssinabulya (2001), UNICEF (1998), and Klotz (1999) also highlighted poverty in particular communities and homes as a major factor that negatively affected children's schooling.

**Distance of the school:** Distance of the school from the community was also mentioned by a sizeable number of respondents as a major factor that negatively affected children's schooling in Rwangara and Ntoroko. A distance of 6kms from home to school due to the sparse population with scattered settlement patterns in Rwangara zone, discouraged young children from going to school. The problem of distance was also caused by the lack of proper school mapping procedures before locating and constructing schools. For example, it was consistently mentioned that Umoja and Kamuga primary schools were poorly located without considering distance, partly causing under enrolment, absenteeism and dropouts in Rwangara.

Interview responses also indicated that the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) has up to now failed to establish P.L.E UNEB seating centres to the whole of Kanara Sub-County due to the geographical isolation of the area as a result of Lake Albert and the Semuliki National Park. The poor road network and the insecurity in neighbouring Congo also make the place insecure, remote, inaccessible and logistically impossible for UNEB to conduct examinations. In such a situation, candidates in Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages are forced to travel 60kms or more to seat examinations in other sub- counties. Many of the pupils miss the examinations and those who endure the long distance end up with poor results due in part possibly to fatigue and psychological stress caused by change of environment.

It was also revealed that Kanara Sub-country where Ntoroko and Rwangara fishing villages are located has no secondary school. The few children who are able to complete P.7 have nowhere to go apart from dropping out or enrolling in secondary schools in other sub-counties that are quite a distance. This has discouraged many children from going far with formal education, the majority dropping out in P.5. Lockheed et al. (1991), MoES (2003) and Akinwumiju and Owolabi (1991) made the same observation that long distance from home to school as a result of poor location, geographical isolation negatively affected children's schooling.

**Floods and inadequate classrooms:** It was disclosed by the respondents that Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages suffered from sudden over flooding of the lake causing serious damages to homes and school property, thereby hindering children's access to schools. Roads and all places are covered by swamps especially around the months of September and December, which affect children and teachers' movements to school in Rwangara and Kamuga landing sites. Furthermore, the research findings revealed that the poor state of classes in Rwangara and Ntoroko did not attract children to be in school. Classes operated either in church halls or classrooms with rough walls and dusty floors.

The preceding factors, in addition to fishing have made primary education of pupils in Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages difficult. This indicates a bleak future for the two fishing villages in terms of literacy levels and sustainable economic development. There are

many other disadvantaged communities in Uganda such as Rwangara and Ntoroko fishing villages to whom current formal education is almost meaningless. Therefore in the next decades government will expand investment in non-formal education to cater for the needs of such communities. This will run parallel to a reviewed primary education curriculum that will integrate academic and vocational subjects. The current main academic subjects (mathematics, English, science and social studies) will remain relevant because they enhance numeracy, literacy, socio – cultural, sanitation and hygienic skills in the learners. However, they will be enriched with vocational schooling programs that will seek to teach practical skills that relate to the environment in which children study.

In fishing environments such as the two case study villages, the revised curriculum will include skills such as making materials for fishing, motor boat mechanics, boat making, tailoring and catering, building, modern fishing methods, lake preservation and business entrepreneurship. The reason for a vocational curriculum will be to make school learning relevant to the day-to-day living conditions of the area and also to cater for majority of the youths who are school dropouts. There will also be more flexibility in school time-tabling tuned to the local circumstances. The current “one size fits all” time-table will be supplemented with locally tailored teaching-learning schedules. For example, one other shortcoming of the current core curriculum in Rwangara and Ntoroko was attributed to the non-flexible and inappropriate school timetable and calendar, which was not tuned to local fishing circumstances. The school timetable and calendar conflicted with fishing activities that were very crucial for the community’s well being and survival. While the school timetable required children to be in school from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, the children were also required home to participate in fishing activities between 5:00 am – 11:00 am and also from 3:00 pm onwards. To cater for learners in such circumstances in future, alternative school time-tables will be developed that compress daily school programmes into three hours a day, instead of the usual nine hours, for example, from 12 noon to 3 pm for fishing communities.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has examined current schooling in Uganda with a view to projecting what schooling in future will be. The current status of schooling places more focus on formal face-to-face education in a school environment. At the primary school level, in the last decade formal schooling has been made accessible to a large population through the introduction of UPE. Nevertheless, there are many children in various circumstances who have not benefited from the current system as illustrated by schooling in the case study fishing villages. The next 20-25 years, therefore, will see government strengthening the quality of formal education through the dual centralisation and decentralisation system. At the same time, there will be investment in non-formal education to cater for the needs of children who for some reasons formal education does not appear to be immediately relevant. Curriculum at both primary and secondary education level will be reviewed to integrate in it skills training. In order to access the reviewed curriculum to as many people as possible,

particularly women, homeschooling will become a complementary mode of delivery. At tertiary education level, the current pressure on infrastructure due to the increased demand for higher education will be eased by massive investment in distance online learning.

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