

Regional Inequality and Primary Education in Northern Uganda

Policy Brief No 2.

Prepared for the World Development Report 2009

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Summary: This brief examines Universal Primary Education in Uganda and its impact on reducing regional inequality in education access, quality and performance. This brief finds that while the universalistic approach to addressing regional disparities in education is effective and has improved primary education access and quality in the lagging northern region of Uganda, it does not have an equalising effect. Additional resources are required to reduce regional disparities, particularly in relation to primary education quality and performance.

1. Introduction

This brief examines Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda and its impact on reducing regional inequality in education access and quality by focussing on the lagging northern region of Uganda. The first part of the brief provides some context, briefly discussing the development and poverty context in Uganda. The second section examines regional inequality in Uganda, focussing specifically on northern Uganda. The third section explores the education dimension of this regional inequality, comparing primary education access and quality in the Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda with the Ugandan national average. The fourth and final section examines the effectiveness of the universal policy approach to primary education, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of the approach as a policy mechanism for addressing regional inequalities.

2. Development and Poverty in Uganda

Uganda has made significant development progress over the last two decades. According to the latest Uganda National Household Survey, published late in 2006, the national poverty rate has declined to 31% for 2005/06, from 56% in 1992/93 and 38% in 2002/03 (UBOS, 2006). Prudent macroeconomic policies have generated robust growth, at an average rate of 5.6% over the five years to 2004/05 and forecasted at 6.4% for 2006/07-2008/09. HIV/AIDS adult prevalence has declined significantly from around 18% in the early 1990s to 6.4% in 2005 and primary level net enrolment rates have increased from 62.3% in 1992 to 92% for girls and 94% for boys in 2006 (World Bank, 2007a).

Uganda remains one of the poorest countries in the world, however, ranked 145 out of 177 countries by the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2006). In 2006, per capita income was approximately US\$300, life expectancy was approximately 49 years and population growth amongst the highest in the world at 3.3% (World Bank, 2007a).

3. Regional inequality in Uganda: The 'lagging' north

The poverty decline in Uganda has not been experienced uniformly across the country. In the Northern region of Uganda, for example, poverty decline has been modest at only approximately 17% since 1992/93. This is compared to substantial progress made in the West and Central regions of Uganda, where poverty has declined by around 60% since 1992/3 (World Bank, 2007b: 3). Table 1 compares a range of welfare indicators across the four regions of Uganda, highlighting that the Northern region has the highest poverty rate, highest annual average population growth, highest fertility levels, highest proportion of people living in a hut and lowest proportion of people owning a mobile phone.

Table 1: Welfare Indicators by Region

	Poverty 2005/06 (%)	Annual average population growth (1991-2006) (%)	Fertility (births per woman, 2000) (%)	Dwelling type – hut (2005/06) (%)	Ownership of mobile phone (2005/06) (%)
Central	16.4	2.6	5.7	3	23
East	35.9	3.5	7.4	31	11
North	60.7	4.2	7.9	68	5
West	31.1	3.2	-	22	17

Source: Regional Forecasts (2007: 12) based on UBOS Population and Housing Censuses 1991 and 2002, National Household Survey 2005/06 and Uganda Demographic Household Survey 2000

Lacklustre progress in the North can be attributed to a vicious cycle of conflict, massive displacement, thwarted economic activity, complications in service delivery and the immense poverty that has gripped the northern region of the country (World Bank, 2007b: 3). The conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Ugandan Government's Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) is a significant driver of this poverty and poor development and the disparity between northern Uganda and the rest of the country. Explanations for the conflict are complex and intertwined and include Uganda's colonial history (Doom and Vlassenroot, 1999:7), a tradition of political mobilisation along ethnic and regional lines since Independence (Van Acker, 2004: 336; Allen, 2006:28-31) and the LRA's (albeit unclear) religious and identity driven agenda (International Crisis Group, 2004: 4; Dolan, 2005: 98-100). While the drivers of and explanation for the conflict are complex, the poverty and development implications are clear. More than 1.3 million people – mainly in the Acholi sub-region comprising the districts Kitgum, Gulu and Pader – are displaced. Women and children represent 80% of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and have been the direct targets of attacks, abductions and sexual violence. The right of access to essential services in health, nutrition, safe water, shelter, protection and education by the most vulnerable populations remains largely unfulfilled (UNICEF, 2007: 1). In these physically insecure contexts, it is very difficult for households to make economic investments (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2004: 18). On the one hand, this insecurity has prevented Northern Uganda from accessing and benefiting from markets. On the other hand, it has substantially hindered investment and hence growth (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2004: 16).¹

¹ Note that there are two other unique problems facing northern Uganda. First, refugees from Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo in refugee camps across the North. Second, cattle rustling in Karamoja, in north-east Uganda.

The impact of this insecurity on regional inequality, and the implications of this insecurity for growth and development, is recognised as a significant challenge by the Ugandan Government.² Throughout Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (Uganda's PRSP), reference is made to the importance of improving security in Northern Uganda and reducing regional disparities between the North and the rest of the country (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2004). For example, it is noted that, if real consumption had grown during the period 1992-2003 in Northern Uganda at the same rate as the rest of Uganda, real consumption in the Northern would be 38% higher and aggregate national consumption approximately 3.3% higher (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2004: 18). The need to address this insecurity and resulting regional inequality is also acknowledged through the Ugandan Government's development of the *National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons*, the Ugandan Government's policy response to the humanitarian crisis (Office of the Prime Minister, 2004). The World Bank-funded and government-supported Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), which aims to empower Northern Ugandan communities by enhancing their capacities to identify, prioritise and plan for and implement sustainable development initiatives, is also demonstrative of the Ugandan Government's commitment to improve the situation in Northern Uganda (World Bank, 2007c). Further, the recent announcement by President Museveni of the \$600 million Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda is demonstrative of this commitment (Republic of Uganda, 2007).

4. Regional education inequality in Uganda

While the analysis above indicates that Northern Uganda is 'lagging' behind the rest of Uganda across a range of development dimensions, in terms of education access, the conflict-affected Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda fares relatively well, as Table 2 shows. The region does not fare so well in education quality and performance terms, however, as Table 3 shows.

Table 2: Education Access Indicators – District and National Level

District	Gross enrolment ratio, 2005 ³	Net enrolment ratio, 2005 ⁴
Gulu district	143.85	128.21
Kitgum district	142.37	124.08
Pader district	179.49	159.64
National	107.77	93.1

Source: Ministry of Education and Sports (2005)

² Other factors including poor prices for cash crops contribute to the relative poverty of the North, but insecurity is undoubtedly the most important factor (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2004: 18).

³ The ratio of total enrolment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the primary level of education.

⁴ The ratio of the number of children of official school age (as defined by the national education system) who are enrolled in primary school to the total population of children of official school age.

Table 3: Education Quality and Performance Indicators – District, Regional and National Level

District/Region	Pupil: teacher ratio	Pupil: classroom ratio	National Examination Division 1 Scores ⁵ , %	National Examination Division U Scores ⁶ , %	Schooling status – no formal schooling (% 15+ years) 2005/06, %	Literacy (18+ years) 2005/06, %
Gulu	67 (2005)	94 (2005)	1.1	28.4	-	-
Kitgum	85 (2005)	98 (2005)	2.2	15.7	-	-
Pader	91 (2005)	137 (2005)	1.2	22.7	-	-
North	58 (2004)	92 (2004)	-	-	27	59
Central	43	63	-	-	13	80
East	55	90	-	-	20	61
West	73	73	-	-	26	66
National	50 (2004 & 2005)	74 (2005)	5	15.2	20	69

Source: Ministry of Education and Sports (2005); National Service Delivery Survey 2004 (in Regional Forecasts, 2007: 14); National Household Survey 2005/06 (in Regional Forecasts, 2007: 14).

A number of factors drive this regional disparity in terms of education quality, performance and completion. First, the impact of the conflict on education infrastructure, resources and systems is significant. Schools, and their teaching materials and resources, have been destroyed through looting and the majority of schools are displaced. In the Kitgum district, approximately 86% of schools have been displaced and temporarily established in other schools, which results in immense overcrowding and inadequate infrastructure such as classrooms and latrines (Kitgum District, 2005: 38). This affects the pupil to classroom ratio and teaching effectiveness.

Second, teachers are not attracted to teaching in the North. For example, in late 2006, 500 teaching positions were advertised in the Kitgum district, but only 210 applications were submitted, and out of these only 180 applications were deemed suitable.⁷ There is also a financial disincentive to teach in the North. While in other regions parents tend to supplement teachers' salaries, in the North families often do not have the capacity to do this. For example, teacher in the North only receive their salary of 130 000 Ugandan shillings per month, while in Kampala teachers' salary supplementation is in the order of 500 000 Ugandan shillings per month (Education Journal, 2006: 18). Teachers are also attracted to work for humanitarian agencies in the district, where salaries are higher and working conditions and allowances are more generous. High rates of teacher absenteeism in the North reflects the challenge faced by teachers: many schools lack teacher housing, forcing teachers to commute long distances, often along insecure routes; salaries are low and without hardship supplementation; and students are often traumatised and former LRA soldiers (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2005: 8).

Third, the immense poverty experienced in northern Uganda effects the learning environment and opportunities of students. Most people in Acholiland are displaced, have little or no access to livelihoods and are dependent on humanitarian agencies for survival. While education is valued in the Acholi sub-region, it is often difficult to translate this value into reality. While UPE means that families do not have to pay school fees, uniforms and school materials do need to be paid for by families. This poverty limits attendance and enrolment at the primary school level, supported by findings from the *Northern Uganda*

⁵ Uganda National Examinations Board PLE 2005.

⁶ Uganda National Examinations Board PLE 2005.

⁷ District Education Officer at Education Sector Coordination Meeting, Kitgum, 21 July 2006.

Baseline Survey which finds that in the Acholi sub-region, cost is cited by 40.9% of school drop outs as the reason for leaving school (UBOS, 2004:21). Poverty can also hinder learning. Some children, particularly orphans and heads of households, are forced to work before and after school. Food is often limited, making it difficult for children to concentrate. Conflict and resulting economic poverty also appear to be instrumental in perpetuating gender inequalities in relation to educational access. According to the District Education Office in Kitgum, in April 2005 there were 4 338 boys compared with 2 496 girls in P7, the highest primary school grade, in the Kitgum district (Kitgum District, 2005). Evidence from the World Food Programme/Norwegian Refugee Council supports this. Of the 125 schools assisted through the School Feeding Program in May 2006, at the P7 level there were 2 789 boys compared with 1 571 girls. This is compared with the much closer to equal enrolment figures for boys, at 12 454 and girls, at 11 229 in P1, the lowest primary school grade (Kitgum District, 2005).⁸ This is supported by the *Northern Uganda Baseline Survey*, which found that 9.5% of school dropouts in the Acholi sub-region cited marriage or pregnancy as their reason for leaving school (this was the second highest reason cited for dropping out of school, after cost) (UBOS, 2004: 22).

5. Universal Primary Education (UPE)

The GoU's central primary education policy mechanism is UPE, which was introduced in 1996. UPE involved the abolition of tuition and other costs (such as contributions to parent teacher association and contributions to school building funds) (World Bank, 2006: 49). President Museveni's decision to implement UPE made Uganda the first African country to institute a policy of UPE, removed a significant obstacle to education for families and sent a signal on the importance of education to the nation. Since the early 1990s, the education budget has increased from 1.6% to 3.8% of GDP, boosted by donors and resources from the Poverty Reduction Fund and HIPC initiative (World Bank, 2006: v). Education is a priority of the human development pillar of Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan, reflecting the centrality of education to Uganda's development agenda.

The impact of UPE on primary school enrolment across Uganda has been significant, as table 3 shows. Additionally, the program has had a strong pro-poor and gender equalising effect. Those in the poorest quintile gained most and within the poorest quintile, the enrolment of girls increased more than 300 percent between 1992/03 and 2002/03 (World Bank, 2006: 49). At the regional level, the impact was also significant. In the Northern region, the increase in girls' enrolment between 1992/93 and 2002/03 was considerable, as Table 3 also shows.

Table 4: Net Primary School Enrolment by Region, 1992/93 – 2002/03

Region	Girls		Boys	
	1992/93	2002/03	1992/93	2002/03
Central	69.1	85.3	69.0	85.1
Eastern	62.0	89.7	66.7	89.4
Northern	39.7	72.5	54.4	73.5
Western	60.4	88.0	62.3	84.3

But as we see from the analysis on regional education disparities, and the extent to which Northern Uganda is 'lagging' behind the rest of the country, while UPE has had an equalising effect in terms of education access, it has not had the same equalising effect in terms of education quality and performance. Essentially, the universal approach that underpins UPE

⁸ Note that this does not appear to be a national trend. According to the Ministry of Education and Sports, the national average net enrolment ratio for P7 is 8.28% for boys and 8.64% for girls.

does not appear to be targeted enough, or take into account the challenges facing Northern Uganda in terms of education delivery, to reduce disparities in education quality and performance.

The GoU does acknowledge this. For example, the IDP Policy states that IDPs, particularly displaced children, should have the same access to education and attain the same educational standards as students elsewhere in the country (Office of the Prime Minister, 2004: 29). At the sectoral level, the Education and Sports Sector Annual Performance Report 2006/07 acknowledges that the conflict has severely disrupted the provision of education in northern Uganda and lists a number of action being taken to address this, including school facilities and infrastructure support through NUSAF and a 'Go to school, back to school and stay in school' campaign in partnership with UNICEF (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2007: 23).

But analysis of the flow of public resources to northern Uganda sheds some light on constraints to reducing regional educational disparity, showing that these resources are limited and potentially inadequate. Public resource flows include central government transfers to districts through unconditional and conditional transfers, GoU development expenditures (such as the Northern Uganda post-war recovery plan); donor on and off-budget projects (such as NUSAF); United Nations agencies resources; and NGOs resources (Regional Forecasts, 2007: vii).⁹ In terms of central government transfers, the *Northern Uganda Public Expenditure Review* (NUPEM), which is the most extensive analysis of resource flows to northern Uganda conducted to date, has established that the region has not been neglected. When compared on a per capita basis, total CG transfers to the wider North are approximately equal to the Ugandan national average. It is therefore fair to say that the region has not been neglected in terms of central government transfers (Regional Forecasts, 2007: ix). The corollary of this, however, is that the northern region is not receiving additional transfers per capita to reflect the possibly higher service delivery costs and scale of needs (Regional Forecasts, 2007: ix). The NUPER also finds that twelve of the twenty four new districts recently created in Uganda are in the north. This means smaller districts, and smaller unconditional transfers. While the population size to some extent justifies the smaller unconditional transfer, it does not acknowledge that the district still must perform a minimum set of functions, in an often difficult conflict-ridden context, and this has hindered the capacity of local government to function in the North (Regional Forecasts, 2007: xi). In addition, this study finds that while an equalisation grant is in place, and 85% of this flows to the North, the size is small - in 2005/06 it was the equivalent of only 265 Ugandan shillings per person – and therefore ineffective in achieving its objective of equalising disparities (Regional Forecasts, 2007: xi).

In the education sector, the main budgetary outputs from the GoU's primary education budget are the primary teachers' wage bill, the UPE Capitation Bill and the School Facilities Grant (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2007). Teachers' wages are standard and no supplementation exists for teaching in difficult contexts. So, in terms of this budgetary mechanism, regional education disparities are not taken into account. UPE capitation grants are paid for on the basis of the number of students enrolled and their level of education (Bategeka and Okurut, 2006:2). Again, no account for regional education disparities has been taken into account. The School Facilities Grant is based on need, however, with allocation based on pupil to permanent classroom ratios. Therefore, allocation to the North is well above average, potentially having some regional inequality reducing impacts (Regional Forecasts, 2007: 45).

⁹ Prior to the *Northern Uganda Public Expenditure Review*, little analysis of regional allocation of total resources to Northern Uganda beyond central government transfers had been conducted (Regional Forecasts, 2007: viii).

It is important to note that while districts are able to supplement primary education through the district budgeting process, conflict-affected districts of Northern Uganda have an eroded revenue base. Preliminary analysis through the NUPEM shows that local revenue in the North is roughly 30% below the national average (excluding Kampala). This is unsurprising given so many people are displaced and as a result economic has been lower. Additionally, prior to the abolishment of the graduated tax, IDPs were exempt. Thus, graduated tax compensation transfers to Northern Uganda are lower than the national average (Regional Forecasts, 2007: 41). While it might be assumed that humanitarian agencies and NGOs 'fill this gap', this does not appear to be the case. In fact, the NUPER did not find that there was a significant difference between per capita donor and NGO support to the districts of the wider North.¹⁰ In education terms, analysis of humanitarian funding to northern Uganda shows that the proportion of Consolidated Appeals Process funding committed to education remains very low - between 0% and 2.4% over the 2000 and 2006 period (UNOCHA, 2007). Funds devoted to education through the Consolidated Appeals Process as a proportion of funds requested for education are low – much lower than the response-level figure. In 2005, the education sector just 34% of its requirements met, compared with 77% at the whole-of-response level. In 2006, this figure was 25%, compared with 90% at the whole-of-response level (UNOCHA, 2007).

In sum, this analysis of public resource flows shows that on the while, central government unconditional and conditional grants do not sufficiently acknowledge and or attempt to address regional inequalities. In addition, the local revenue base is low. Further, donor and NGO funding does not appear to sufficiently 'fill the gap' left by central government transfers and the eroded revenue base.

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¹⁰ The wider north includes the West Nile, Acholi, Lango, Karamjoa and Teso sub-regions.

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