



# How equitable is access to Primary Education in Uganda

## Overview

Education is a fundamental human right and is a strong foundation for socio-economic development. Uganda is a signatory to a number of international conventions and goals for education which emphasize education for all.

One of the key strategic objectives of Uganda's education sector is to achieve equitable access to relevant and quality education and training. To achieve this, government is implementing the Universal Primary Education (UPE) among others.

The education system should ensure that all children of school going age have access to education regardless of economic status, geographical location and special needs.

This policy brief discusses the level of access to primary education using secondary data majorly from the Ministry of Education and Sports statistical abstract for 2016; among others.

## Introduction

Education is a human right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNICEF, 2018). UPE is one of the Government of Uganda's main policy tools for achieving poverty reduction and human development. The major objectives of UPE are to; provide the facilities and resources to enable every child join and complete primary education and make education equitable and affordable for majority of Ugandans.

Government has made important strides in extending education to a great majority of Ugandans. Implementation of UPE since 1997 resulted into increased enrolment from 2.5 million to 8.7 million in 2016 (Statistical Abstract, 2017). A detailed analysis is made of the progress in access to universal primary education in Uganda.

## Key Issues

1. A significant gap of 44% of the children between the ages of 6-12 years are out of school nationwide, with 62% them in Karamoja region; and girls majorly affected.
2. The nearest school for 23.2% of the households was more than 3km away, especially in rural areas.
3. Inadequate infrastructure has limited access to education especially in Karamoja region with only 43% of pupils accessing seating and writing space; and West Nile region having the highest pupil classroom ratio (89:1).
4. There are inadequate teachers especially in West Nile with pupil teacher ratios of 60:1; Lango and Acholi (58:1) respectively

## Access to Primary Education

The Inter Regional Inequality Facility (2006) defines access to education as enrolment of children; availability of primary schools; and number of primary school teachers. Access also takes into consideration needs for the vulnerable children, and availability of other infrastructure. This brief analyses access to education focusing on; i) enrolment of children; ii) distance to nearby primary schools, iii) access by the vulnerable and Special Needs children iv) availability of school infrastructure<sup>1</sup>, and v) number of primary school teachers.

### i) Enrolment in Primary Schools

Enrolment is a key variable used to track all pupils that access primary education. Access and equity means that all children of school going age regardless of their strengths or weaknesses should be part of the

<sup>1</sup> The brief focuses on classrooms only



schooling community. Table 1 shows enrolments by sex.

**Table 1: Net Enrolment by Sex**

Region	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Acholi	53	60	56
Ankole	80	86	83
Buganda	58	65	62
Bukedi	86	93	89
Bunyoro	45	51	41
Busoga	64	72	68
Elgon	76	80	78
Karamoja	42	34	38
Kigezi	99	105	102
Lango	46	53	50
Teso	74	80	77
Toro	58	63	60
West Nile	65	66	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>66</b>

*Source: MoES Statistical Abstract 2016*

The country has attained parity in enrolments but only 66% of children within school going age are accessing education. Karamoja region is worst affected with only 38% accessing school and only 34% are females. The northern region has the highest level of education deprivation.

### ii) Distance to the nearest primary school

The distance to the nearest primary school is an important factor when households are deciding whether or not to send their children to school, especially young children in primary school. Table 2 shows distance to nearest primary school.

**Table 2: Distance to nearest primary school**

Location	Below 1km	1-2km	2.1-3km	3.1-4km	4.1-5km	5km +
Peri-urban	1,642	985	254	117	80	54
Rural	2,980	4,571	2,711	1,833	1,236	1,176
Urban	1,413	478	100	44	25	19

<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6,035</b>	<b>6,034</b>	<b>3,065</b>	<b>1,994</b>	<b>1,341</b>	<b>1,249</b>
<b>% Total</b>	<b>30.61</b>	<b>30.60</b>	<b>15.54</b>	<b>10.11</b>	<b>6.80</b>	<b>6.33</b>

*Source: MoES Statistical Abstract 2016*

A total of, 30.6% of the households were situated less than 1km away from the nearest primary school, while 23.24% were situated over 3km away from the nearest primary school. In rural areas, children walk longer distances, compared to their colleagues in peri-urban and urban settings.

### iii) Access to Education by Vulnerable Children

According to UNICEF's Thematic Series on Leaving no Child Behind (2018), children who are not attending school are often the most vulnerable; the girls, children with disabilities, those from pastoral communities or from minority ethnic groups. Many of these children do not have a chance to go to school because they have to work to support their families or the walk to school is too long and/ or dangerous.

The MoES Statistical Abstract (2016) indicates that out of 8,655,924 pupils enrolled in primary schools, 12.4% are orphans. Majority of the orphans - 905,610 (84.4%) are found in Government schools. Analysis by grade indicates that most orphans are in P.1 (206,054) and these decrease with ascendance to higher classes. This indicates the possibility of orphans dropping out of school for various reasons.

A Situation Analysis of Children in Uganda (2015) indicates that there are about 2.5 million children with disabilities which include challenges in seeing, hearing, communicating, mobility or moving, touching, learning among others.

Due to discrimination, inhospitable school environment, lack of teacher training and resources, children with disability are less likely to start school. Indeed, only 178,450 special needs children were in school. Table 3 shows school attendance rates among children by disability status.

**Table 3: School attendance of Special Needs Children by Impairment Type**

Impairment Type	Total	Percentage
Autism	6,673	3.7
Hearing Impaired	48,778	27.3
Mentally Impaired	41,393	23.5
Multiple handicaps (deaf, blind)	4,098	2.3
Physically impaired (such as accident)	32,513	18
Visually impaired	44,998	25.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>178,450</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: MoES Statistical Abstract 2016

Key constraints in the delivery of SNE in Uganda include: inappropriate infrastructure, and national examinations for learners who are deaf, lack of specialized support services (for example sign language interpreters, braille); unsustainable supply of specialized instruction materials and equipment. In addition, there is inadequate data collected on learners with special needs for planning; as well as inadequate funding.

#### iv) Availability of school infrastructure

Pupil attendance is affected by availability of school infrastructure. When a child is in a congested classroom, no desks, the morale for attending class and learning can be lost. Availability of infrastructure is analyzed at two levels; a) availability of sitting space; and the pupil classroom ratio.

a) **Sitting Space:** Pupils ability to concentrate in class greatly influences their attendance in school. An analysis carried out on sitting space by region is presented in table 4.

**Table 4: Primary pupils with adequate sitting and writing space by region**

Region	Pupils with Sitting Space	Total Enrolment	Percentage (%)
Acholi	317,156	482,690	67.5
Ankole	478,587	683,630	70
Buganda	1,460,130	1,890,377	77.2
Bukedi	380,160	592,169	64.2
Bunyoro	333,462	450,353	74
Busoga	624,605	934,522	66.8

Elgon	374,936	532,694	70.3
Karamoja	64,423	149,237	43.2
Kigezi	299,633	387,516	77.3
Lango	368,245	620,202	59.4
Teso	321,544	566,169	56.8
Toro	423,260	582,922	72.6
West Nile	449,601	783,443	57.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,895,742</b>	<b>8,655,924</b>	<b>65.9</b>

Source: MoES Statistical Abstract 2016

Table 4 shows that only close to 66% of the pupils in primary school had adequate sitting and writing space. Region wise, Karamoja had the lowest number of pupils with adequate sitting and writing space (43.2%) while Kigezi had the highest (77.3%).

b) **Physical Infrastructure:** Access to education is affected by the quality and quantity of physical and material infrastructure, as well as school environment. Table 5 shows the pupil classroom ratios by region.

**Table 5: Pupil classroom ratios by region**

Region	Government	Private	Total
Acholi	71	41	66
Ankole	44	27	38
Buganda	58	29	44
Bukedi	91	30	76
Bunyoro	67	26	47
Busoga	82	30	66
Elgon	80	31	66
Karamoja	75	85	76
Kigezi	47	26	42
Lango	86	31	78
Teso	84	25	68
Toro	65	28	51
West Nile	98	43	89
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>56</b>

Source: MoES Statistical Abstract 2016

Table 5 indicates that on average, pupil classroom ratio is 56:1. Some regions however had inadequate classrooms especially the West Nile region with a pupil classroom ratio of (89:1); Lango (78:1); Karamoja and Bukedi (76:1) respectively.



### v) Teaching Staff in Primary Schools

Teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring delivery of education. Table 6 shows the primary teacher ratio by region.

**Table 6: Primary Pupil Teacher Ratio**

Region	Government	Private	Total
Acholi	66	31	58
Ankole	42	23	35
Buganda	45	21	33
Bukedi	69	19	54
Bunyoro	55	20	37
Busoga	65	26	54
Elgon	58	21	47
Karamoja	53	60	54
Kigezi	41	21	35
Lango	65	22	58
Teso	67	19	54
Toro	51	22	40
West Nile	67	26	60
Total	54	21	43

*Source: MoES Statistical Abstract 2016*

Table 6 indicates that there are inadequate teachers as shown by the high pupil teacher ratio in most government schools especially in West Nile (60:1); Acholi and Lango (58:1) respectively.

### Conclusion

The Government has made important strides in extending education to a great majority of Ugandans especially with the introduction of UPE. Enrolment for children between the ages of 6-12 years has improved. Exclusion is however still existent especially in rural areas and; Karamoja sub region; among orphans and children with special needs.

Access was affected by long distances to nearby schools; inadequate sitting and writing space; school infrastructure; and number of teachers.

### Recommendations

- I. The MoES should prioritize construction of primary schools in underserved areas.
- II. The MoES in partnership with Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development should fast-track programs targeting education for children with disabilities; including sensitization of communities and provision of appropriate resources and infrastructure.
- III. The MoES in partnership with the District Local Governments should roll out an awareness campaign to have the girl-child enroll and stay in school.
- IV. The Education Service Commission should ensure that teachers are posted to marginalized regions.

### References

- Leaving no Child Behind: Thematic Series (UNICEF 2018)
- MoES Statistical Abstract (2016)
- Education and Sports Sector Strategic Plan 2017/18-2019/20
- NDP II (2015/16)
- Situational Analysis of Children in Uganda (UNICEF 2015)
- Statistical Abstract 2017