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Gender and education in Uganda

Deborah Kasente
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Gender and Education in Uganda

A Case Study for EFA Monitoring Report, 2003

Prepared by Dr. Deborah Kasente
Makerere University.

1. National context

Uganda is predominantly agricultural, with over 90% of the population depending on subsistence farming. Between 1979 and 1985, the country faced a period of civil and military unrest resulting in the destruction of the economic and social infrastructure, including education. Until late 1990s the national political context was still dominated by the process of emergence from conflict. Some parts of the northern region are still in this mode. Since 1996 the government has priorities strengthening of the economy and reform of governance as the key political issues. At the same time, an economic reform programme has been going on to try and transform the current situation where the country ranks among the 20 poorest countries in the world. The Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) as Uganda's comprehensive development framework highlights education as one of the instruments for enhancing the quality of life of the poor. Primary education is perceived to benefit the poor directly by bringing higher incomes, better health and empowerment, especially for girls. The Education Strategic Investment Plan (ESIP) 1998-2003 commits government to allocate at least one quarter of public expenditure to the education sector for this period. Most of this money has gone towards supporting Universal Primary Education (UPE).

In all regions of the country men have a clear advantage over women in access to and control over resources while cultural practices also bestow men with more power than women in different aspects. The current national constitution includes elements of economic and social rights that help to underpin efforts to mainstream gender equality in policies and programmes but high levels of poverty and resilience of patriarchal social constructs play a big role in constraining impact of many well intentioned policies.

2. Trends in gender parity at primary and secondary school level over the past decade.

2.1 Access to primary school

Trend data on access as shown by **enrollment** data from the Ministry of Education indicate progressive increase of girls enrollment into primary schools. Most current data (DHS EdData, 2001) indicates that 87% of primary school age (6-12 years) attend school (87.3% boys and 86.9% girls). While attendance is higher today compared to ten years ago, there are regional differences with the highest attendance rates in the Eastern region (94.3% boys and 93% girls) and the lowest in the Northern region (84.1% boys and 80.6% girls). Trends show a clear move towards parity in access between boys and girls and towards universal enrollment of all school age population at primary level.

Substantive reduction of the gender gap in enrollment at primary level is mainly related to deliberate government policy to improve the social sector, particularly education, health and water and sanitation. Since 1997, government’s main education priority is to ensure that all children enroll in primary school. The plan tries to address gender concerns and sets specific output targets for different components. For example, as part of the UPE programme, school buildings and facilities have been provided by government through a School Facilities Grant (SFG) which is fully supported by funding partners. The grant included funds for compulsory provision of separate latrines with doors, for girls and boys. The grant operates through a ranking system which prioritises poorest schools and rewards schools with 48% or more girls enrollment. The UPE has greatly increased enrollment of both boys and girls aged between 6-12 years even among the very poor, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Primary Net Attendance Ratio by Wealth

Asset Index	Boys	Girls	Total	Number of Children
Lowest quintile	82.4	79.4	80.9	1,305
Second quintile	89.0	87.0	88.0	1,341
Middle quintile	87.3	86.9	87.1	1,442
Fourth quintile	88.8	89.5	89.1	1,537
Highest quintile	88.8	90.9	89.9	1,341

Source: Uganda DHS EdData Survey 2001 pp38

This being the first survey of its kind in Uganda, there is no trend data to compare with, but literature from several studies illustrates low attendance rates among the poor, especially before UPE started in 1997. However, as the data shows, there is a wider gap in access among girls from the lowest and highest wealth quintiles than there is among boys. This pattern is reflected in higher levels of education where most of the girls that access secondary and, much more so, higher education tend to come from middle and above wealth quintiles while the pattern for boys has a fairer representation across all wealth categories (Kasente,1995).

Despite UPE, decisions still get taken that deny 12.7% boys and 13.1% girls of school going age from getting access to primary school education. Research shows that the children themselves hardly make these decisions but rather it is their parents, guardians and relatives. While more than one member of the household may have input in the decision for a child to start school, there is evidence that the final decision is made as indicated in Table 3. The total number of parents and guardians that participated in the study were 4,246 sampled from all regions of the country.

Table 3: Household Decision Making about Enrolling Children in School

Who takes final decision	Urban %	Rural %
Mother	24.7	16.5
Father	26.5	39.9
Both parents	29.4	26.0
Guardians	12.4	10.9
Parent/guardian and child	4.8	4.7
Child	0.3	0.2

Source: Uganda DHS EdData Survey 2001 pp 51

The child's father emerges as key in deciding a child's enrollment, this trend being more prevalent in the rural areas and highest in the Northern region (55.9%). The Northern region also has the lowest enrollment rates for girls in the country, but it is followed by the Eastern region (44%) which also has the highest girls' enrollment rates. Joint decision making by both parents is next, more prevalent in urban and highest in the Western region. The role of a father as head of household and decision maker comes through as one of the key influencing factors in taking the decision for boys and girls to enroll in school, especially in the rural areas. In the Eastern region where there is the highest rate of enrollment for girls, mothers also have the least decision making power over a child's enrollment, thus showing that fathers can be key players in enhancing girls' access to primary education. It should also be noted that in urban areas and some regions, a mother either jointly with the father or singly can influence the decision for a child to enroll in school.

The fact that UPE has not attracted all children shows that making schooling free does not necessarily get all children to school and that more effort is required to address the problems that continue to keep children from going to school and that keep the gender gap in access in place. For the children that are not enrolled in school, there are explanations for what drives the decisions taken by their parents and guardians. A comparison of five top reasons for non-enrollment in 1997 and 2001 is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Key reasons for never attending school by sex

Reason for never attending school	Boys	Girls
1997 Uganda DHS Survey (from age 6 years)	%	%
Too young/sickly/disabled (Physical considerations)	53.2	34.3
Monetary costs	22.4	29.5
Child indifferent to education	15.1	23.6
Orphaned	2.4	5.2
Need to work	2.7	3.8
2001 DHS EdData Survey (age 6-18 years)		
School too far	21.6	26.3
Labour needed	14.4	24.4
Monetary costs	24.2	22.5
Disabled	15.6	17.9
Too young	17.8	17.3

Currently, concern about the girl child's safety, need for her labour and monetary costs top the factors that drive decision to enroll her in school, for the boy it is monetary costs, school distance and the child's physical readiness that drive the decision to enroll him or her in school. There is evidence of a shift in concerns that were expressed at the start of UPE 1997 where the reasons were the same for boys and girls but with variation only in emphasis.

At that time, decision to enroll a child in school was predominantly shaped by the perceived physical readiness of the child, monetary costs and the child's interest to go to school. For the girl to enroll the considerations seem to take the trend; is it accessible and safe, can we do without her labour, can we afford it while for the boy it is: can we afford it, is it safe and accessible, is he fit? It would appear that the girls comfort and safety and the need or not for labour take precedence over monetary affordability to determine whether she can enroll in school or not. But for the boy, if it can be afforded, he will enroll in school as long as the school is not far and he is physically fit. The UPE policy has eliminated tuition fees in public primary schools and has reduced the monetary burden to households with dramatic increase in enrollment of boys and girls but with a gap between the two. Existing social relations of gender that structure women as providers of reproductive labour also affect the girls who are socialized as apprentices of their mothers so that they can play similar roles in future. This factor is key in keeping the gap between girls' and boys' enrollment in primary schools, monetary and safety considerations notwithstanding. UPE policy has led to increased access for both sexes but it does not challenge the social construction of gender in society that tends to disadvantage girls by allocating them endless reproductive work, among other gender inequalities that specifically keep girls from enrolling in school. More steps are required to make UPE not only open the school gates but to also to give education that will lead to transformation of society.

2.2 Access to secondary school

Enrollment to secondary school is determined by performance in national primary leaving examinations and available places in secondary schools. Trend data available shows that girls' enrollment at secondary school level has consistently lagged behind that of boys by about 20% and the gap is persistently wider than at primary school level. The secondary school sub-sector has received little development funding in the last decade, a part from a project that was short-lived and that provided support for teacher training. Government acknowledges the need to expand secondary school education to take care of graduates of UPE from 2003. The key factor leading to low expansion of the secondary school sub-sector seems to be the perception by government and funding partners that the poor benefit less directly from secondary education. The sub-sector has been rather neglected because it does not contribute directly to the realization of the PEAP development framework. It would appear that UPE 's expanded enrollment will drive the expansion of the secondary school sub-sector when the first cohort of UPE will be ready for UPE in 2004. That way it is hoped that girls enrollment will improve at secondary school level following the increased number of girls attending primary school. Some efforts made by different organizations to reduce the gender gap in access to secondary school are shared in a later section.

2.3 Primary school dropout trends

Table 3 gives an indication of dropout rates five years after UPE started.

Table 3: Percentage of UPE Primary One Cohort Reaching Primary Five (1997-2001)

Year	Level	Total	Girls	Boys	Girls%	Boys %	Both%
1997	P1	2,159,850	1,057,504	1,102,346	49	51	100
1998	P2	1,312,593	640,648	671,945	30	31	61
1999	P3	1,128,216	543,804	584,412	25	27	52
2000	P4	962,052	466,098	495,954	22	23	45
2001	P5	832,855	403,713	429,142	19	20	39

Source: Statistics Abstract, 2000; EMIS 2001.

Recent studies done on causes of children dropping out of primary school show that multiple social-economic related factors in the community and in the school are key in causing dropout and these are location specific and varied for boys and girls (Nakanyike, Kasente & Balihuta, 2002, DHS EdData Survey, 2001, Save the Children Fund, 2002). The DHS survey (2001), which had a national coverage, established that the majority of school going boys and girls aged 6-18 who have left school dropped out during primary school. Only about 10% dropped out while attending secondary school. The mean age at dropout for boys and girls is 13, indicating that children dropout at the time they are supposed to be completing primary school. The main causes of dropout can be multiple and are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: Main Causes of Dropout at Primary School Level

Reason for Dropout	Boys%	Girls%
Monetary cost(school fund, uniform, text & exercise bks, supplies)	57.9	51.3
Labour needed	8.7	15.9
Failed exams and did not want to repeat	10.9	10.1
Child perception that had enough schooling	28.2	20.9
Disability or illness	11.2	8.5
School too far	3.4	3.0
Travel to school unsafe	2.5	2.6
Poor school quality	1.4	2.4
No secondary school places	3.3	5.7
Number of dropouts that participated in study	415	363

Source: Uganda DHS EdData Survey 2001 pp 59

The monetary costs of schooling continue to lead reasons for dropout even with UPE. Cost is cited as a factor more in urban than in rural areas. Children's low aspiration for post primary education is the next important factor for dropping out of primary school, more pronounced among older children (13-18 years), more so boys, particularly in the Eastern region. The main attraction for boys outside school seems to be petty business to make their own money while it is early marriage and pregnancy in the case of girls.

The DHS EdData Survey (2001) indicated that marriage or pregnancy is an important factor for girls aged 13-18 years dropping out of primary school especially in the Eastern and Northern regions. Table 5 shows a breakdown of the magnitude of this factor by location.

Table 5: Marriage or Pregnancy as a Factor in Girls' Primary School Dropout

Percentage of girls aged 13-18 that dropped out of primary school			
Location	Marriage or pregnancy as the cause of dropout	Number of girls	Mean age at dropout
Urban	14.8	41	14.0
Rural	13.1	239	15.0
Region			
Central	8.6	102	15.6
Eastern	33.6	51	14.5
Northern	17.0	55	14.6
Western	3.0	73	15.4
Total	13.3	280	14.8

Data compiled by Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE, 1994) in Eastern and Southern Africa indicates that school careers of many girls are cut short because of pregnancy either by the girls withdrawing themselves from school or through the national policies that ensure that pregnant girls are expelled from the education system with little or no chance of re-entry after delivery. Pre-marital pregnancy among girls is stigmatized both in school and most African communities mainly on moralistic grounds, without addressing factors that lead to pregnancy among school girls. For example, a recent series of studies conducted in Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe between 2000-2001 about management of puberty in primary schools all came to the same conclusion that the current management of sexual maturation within the primary education system is failing to meet the needs of all children, but especially girls. The education systems in the countries studied were found to be failing to provide children with; accessible and accurate knowledge and information about the process of sexual maturation, essential facilities to ensure that children, especially girls, are not excluded from full participation in the system because of their maturing bodies and an adequate and appropriate value system through which boys and girls can be guided into safe and healthy adulthood. The studies documented the ways in which poor management of sexual maturation had a detrimental impact on children's acquisition of basic learning competencies and how girls experiencing menstruation without adequate preparation or facilities were regularly absent or even dropped out of primary school.

2.4 Secondary School Dropout Trends

There is no systematic data that tracks dropout rates and causes of dropout at secondary school level for the whole decade. It is, therefore difficult to be certain whether the gender gap at this level is reducing consistently or not.

Data from administrative records of the Ministry of Education and Sports indicate that school dropouts in all government aided schools in the country is higher at primary level than at secondary level and that more girls than boys dropout at this level, continuing the pattern at primary school level. Table 6 presents percentages of boys and girls dropping out of secondary school as presented by three national data sets.

Table 6: Secondary School Dropout Rates

Year	% boys dropping out		% girls dropping out	
	Urban	rural	urban	Rural
2001(DHS)	15.7	7.8	22.6	7.9
1997	6.0		6.9	
1995	6.0		7.6	

Source: DHS EdData 2001 pp 58 and Education Statistics Abstracts 1995, 1997.

The apparently increased dropout rates in 2001 may be due to differences in data source. The DHS survey(2001) was a nation-wide survey that has been commended for the scientific rigour with which data was collected and analysed. The current status of dropout at secondary school level indicates the same pattern over the years with more girls than boys dropping out. While the dropout gap is smaller for rural boys and girls, it is larger in the urban setting. The much larger gap is intra-sex between urban and rural where urban dropout rates are much higher than rural.

The DHS EdData (2001) indicated that in 55.4% cases of dropout for secondary school children, **monetary costs** are responsible and more predominantly in the urban areas and particularly in the central region. The 2001 DHS survey established that secondary school students' households spend about nine times more money total on a year's schooling than primary school students' households. It was also established that the mean total expenditure among secondary school students in urban schools (Ushs. 535, 010) especially public schools, is much higher than that of students in rural areas (Ushs.299,680).

A number of studies done recently to explore the relationship between poverty, gender and education in the country(UNICEF 1999, GoU 1999, MoES,1995) describe the ways in which girls are found to be disadvantaged in relation to boys. Poverty often serves to worsen already existing gender biases. When schooling costs become a pertinent issue and a choice has to be made to send a boy or girl, the boy is usually given precedence. This choice is driven by societal construction of gender where male children are expected to carry on the family tree across generations and are therefore accorded more value than girl children. **Perceived returns** to parents of educating their daughters beyond primary school tend to be lower than for their sons, particularly in patrilineal systems where girls join their husbands. Reluctance to educate girls for the other family into which they are expected to marry is compounded by the **opportunity costs** which continue to get higher for poor households who depend considerably on the labour of their children in order to supplement household income and help to take care of the sick, especially in this era of HIV/AIDS.

Early marriage, especially in the case of girls is a common strategy used by poor families to raise income for the rest of household members, more practiced in rural than urban areas. Many girls perceive marriage as an escape route from family poverty while the common cultural practice of charging bride wealth brings quick and substantial income to her family. Girls sometimes withdraw themselves from school, especially if their needs for supplies like shoes and dresses are not met by their parents/guardians. In other cases parents encourage girls to drop out or fail to pay their educational costs and arrange marriages for them or encourage them to get married. Most societies define femininity in relation to marriage and girls have been socialized to accept that perspective. This social construction that relates femininity closely with marriage also lower girls' aspiration for secondary and higher education as most of them do not see the need to excel in education as a value related with marriagability.

Market-related factors lead in determining dropout rates for both primary school for both boys and girls. In the case of girls, however social relations of gender lead in creating and maintaining the gap between boys and girls dropping out of school. At primary school level it is gendered division of labour within the household that affects the girls while at the secondary school level it is marriage norms at community and household levels that adds to the gap already created by differentials due to market-related factors.

2.5 Primary School Repetition

It was not possible to get trends data on repetition but a recent case study of selected schools (Nakanyike et 20002) came out with findings that more boys than girls were repeating classes, contrary to what EMIS data has been reporting. Both data sets agree that repetition is highest in the Northern region. The children that had repeated classes were interviewed and the findings indicated that more boys than girls were repeating as a result of failing end of year examinations, although it was the larges reason for both sexes 66.7% boys compared to 55.8 % girls. While for boys the key factors for repetition were related with performance, 13.5% girls repeated because their parents decided so, compared to 6.7% boys for the same reason. It is not systematically documented what drives parents to chose that their children, particularly girls, should repeat a class when their teachers have not made that recommendation. The children blamed poor performance on poor teaching and teacher regular absenteeism. Frequent repetition has been observed by a number of studies as a good indicator of pupils who are vulnerable to dropping out of school. Parents deciding to make their children repeat classes against their will can lead to low morale and lack of interest in school. This phenomenon appears to be happening more with boys and girls. Repeating classes as a result of failing promotional examinations is still rampant even if it is not formal government policy. There is no evidence that repetition is an issue at secondary school level.

3. Gap between gender parity in education and gender equality in education

For purposes of this paper, the gap between gender parity as already articulated and the achievement of gender equality in the country is defined in terms of positive or negative changes in gender equality in the country that can be attributed to narrowing or widening of the gender gap in education. Attribution is difficult but there are qualitative studies done in the country that can point to possible answers to the question as to whether changes in gender parity in education affects achievement of gender equality in the country.

Lack of education was listed as one of the largest causes of poverty in Ugandan households because it leads to reduced income generating opportunities, particularly for women who have more illiterate rates than men (GoU, 1999). Education is seen by the poor as a route out of poverty as it has been seen to employment and business opportunities. There is evidence to show that during this last decade as the gender gap in access to primary education has been reducing, the gender gap in ownership of business has shifted, especially in sectors that do not require high levels of education. Table 7 shows the current status of women and men who own business.

Table 7: Percentage comparison between women and men who own business

Industries	Female Owners%	Male Owners %
Agro Processing	22	78
Construction	8	92
Finance	27	73
Hotels	64	36
Insurance	79	21
Manufacturing	76	24
Social Services	60	40
Trade	62	38
Distribution	14	86
Utilities	31	69

Source: Compiled from Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) several documents

As the data shows, there are some sectors (hotels, insurance, manufacturing, social services, trade) where women have exceeded men in ownership of business. This was not the case in the 1980s. Increased women's education is one of the key factors contributing to this trend.

There are a number of problems both within the UPE delivery system and the demand side that constrain achievement of gender equality in education. The school inspection system is weak with the result that motivation and enthusiasm among head teachers and teachers is low. Hence the high dropout rates, higher among girls than boys, is not matched with corresponding concern to keep children in school as there is to enroll them.

The trend seems to be that retaining girls and boys in school is not as highly prized by parents, schools and government as enrolling them. The policy of financing primary schools should have a formula that incorporates both enrollment and retention of pupils.

Another important problem with education concerns parental and guardian responsibility. There is evidence to show that parental lax attitude towards keeping children in school contributes to rampant absenteeism and poor performance and that repetition is closely associated with the quality of teaching and pupil readiness. Government should sensitise parents and guardians about their shared responsibility for the success of UPE and strengthen school inspection.

Within most communities, there is still widespread resistance to gender equality both because of inadequate knowledge of the meaning of gender equality and traditional perceptions that put men in a privileged position in all decision making. At institutional level, there is inadequate resource allocation to gender-related activities. The Ministry Gender Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) that has been created to oversee gender mainstreaming does not have an investment plan of its own and all their priorities get marginalized in other sectors.

An independent impact assessment of one of the MGLSD's oldest projects (UNDP,2001) found evidence that the ministry has done widespread gender sensitization for policy makers and implementers and provided a strong foundation for activities in different sectors. Capacity building in gender analysis has been done for many government employees, particularly those that were based at the MGLSD, many of whom have been promoted to high positions in government and outside government. The assessment confirmed that the implementation of the gender policy has been allocated minimal resources as compared to other ministries. Due to meager resources, the ministry is unable to carry out all its programmes. Most of the activities of the ministry have been funded through external support. Interviews with different gender staff shows that despite the achievements that have been realized through external support, the staff have not participated adequately in mainstream budget negotiations and decisions with a result that their expertise in this area needs to be stepped up. More staff capacity in gender budgeting and other related processes that offer an opportunity for meaningful gender mainstreaming.

4. Innovative measures helping to focus attention on achievement of gender equality

Research is top on the list of these innovations. The policy of UPE is supported by studies that have been commissioned by the Ministry of Education to set a baseline for improving both the quantity and quality of education. The findings of the baseline study (IEQ, 1999) indicated that classroom interaction of some teachers discriminated against girls and physical facilities in most schools were disregarding girls' need for privacy. These and other discriminatory factors were addressed in the budget to schools. The grant included funds for compulsory construction of separate latrines for girls and boys that must have doors.

A strong teacher development programme that includes a gender perspective was put in place. One of the reasons for the success of UPE in Uganda is the strong leadership that the Ministry of education has provided to address shortcomings that are identified with evidence. This has attracted many funding partners and NGOs that include women led ones like FAWE and others.

FAWE Uganda Chapter has mobilised funds to provide scholarships to girls from poor households who perform well in national primary leaving examinations but fail to join secondary school because their parents or guardians cannot afford the monetary costs involved. This started as a small effort, but because it was managed effectively and kept monitoring results and performance of the girls that were supported, the project has recently attracted large funds from donor agencies and quite a large number of girls are now in secondary school sponsored by FAWE. The project also already has a multiplier effect because a number of other women led NGOs have adapted this project in the areas where they operate. The efforts described are just used as examples, there are several initiatives trying to address the gender gap in education, targeting different aspects. The efforts are often small and do not cover the whole country and some of them are still at the experimental stage.

4. Impact of gender gaps in education

Qualitative studies show that one of the easily observable results of UPE is that parents can now send all children to school as soon as they turn 6 years. This has freed a lot of time for women from child minding and has led to increased agricultural activity. However, there is no evidence to show more empowerment for women as a result. UPE has also freed some money to the household but there is no systematic evidence to show how this money is being utilized in the households and to whose benefit.

There are conventional assertions made in literature about the relationship between women's education and smaller families, leading to women's better health and improved standards of living. However, the studies that I was able to access have not provided this evidence. This does not rule out the fact there might be high returns for investing in reducing gender gaps in education. There is need for systematic studies to track the impact of reduced gaps in education.

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