



# **GENDER IN EAST AFRICA: GIRLS AGAINST THE ODDS**

*The Uganda Pilot Study*

## **Gender Report 2**

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discovery of vast oil reserves in western Uganda near the Lake Albert River Basin has sparked great interest and could potentially have a positive impact on human development.

Uganda has experienced dramatic changes throughout the past decades and it has managed to put behind it the negative impact of the political turmoil of 1971-1985 which had a devastating effect on the country's economic and social infrastructure. A number of reformist programmes including The Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), Decentralisation, Poverty Action Fund (PAF), Civil Service reform and Universal Primary Education have contributed to Uganda's progress in making significant strides in improving human development.

Significantly, Uganda is the only nation in the world which has substantially reduced its HIV infection rates; it has dropped from a high of 18% to an estimated 6.5% since 2001.<sup>3</sup>

## ***1.2 The education system in Uganda***

Uganda's formal education system consists of seven years of primary schooling, followed by four years of lower secondary and two years of higher secondary education. This 7-4-2 pattern is followed by three years (3-5 yrs) of tertiary education. In addition, there is an alternative path of vocational and technical schools after primary.<sup>4</sup> The age of entry into primary school is 6 years. The medium of instruction is English.

Universal Primary Education was introduced in 1997 with subsequent rapid increases in primary school enrolment and the associated problems of large class sizes, pressure on infrastructure and teachers, and shortages of books and materials. In 2009 primary education enrolment increased by 3.4%, from 7.96 million pupils in 2007/08 to 8.19 million in 2009. Net primary school enrolment reached 93.2% in 2008/09, up from 84% in 2005/06. The primary education completion has also risen but remains low at 52%. According to a DFID study, "Uganda is still off track to achieve 100% primary school enrolment by 2015".<sup>5</sup>

In order to make improvements in primary education, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in partnership with donor agencies launched the Quality Enhancement Initiative (QEI) to improve the quality of primary education in 12 poorly performing districts.<sup>6</sup> This initiative seeks to improve the instructional processes at school level to enable pupils to master basic literacy, numeracy and life skills.

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<sup>3</sup> UNAIDS Report on the Global Aids Epidemic, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Nakabugo, M., Byamugisha, A. and B. Justus. 2008. Future Schooling in Uganda. CICE Hiroshima University, Journal of International Cooperation in Education, Vol.11, No.1, pp. 55-69; Kasente, D. 2003. Gender and Education in Uganda: A case study for EFA Monitoring Report, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> DFID: key facts Uganda. 2010. (<http://www.dfid.gov.uk>)

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education and Sports: 2010 Policy Tracking in Selected Primary Schools in 12 QEI Districts.

Uganda became the first African country to have free secondary education. Irrespective of this initiative, the gap between primary and secondary school enrolment remains high. It is estimated that only 25% of children make the transition from primary to secondary school. This is due to the lack of secondary school places available.

### ***1.3 Gender within the Ugandan Education System***

The Ugandan government has put in place a number of policies over the last two decades in order to foster gender parity in education. For example, the National Strategy for Girls Education was launched, together with the Promotion of Girls' Education scheme to facilitate girl child retention and performance at primary level. The Equity in the Classroom programme is also being implemented. Some progress has been made, with the 2010 UNESCO Report showing that, like Kenya, Uganda had also achieved gender parity with respect to enrolment in primary education between 1999 and 2007, when half of all primary school enrolments were girls. With respect to secondary education, boys' enrolment still outstrips that of girls, with only 83 girls enrolling for every 100 boys – though still a considerable improvement since 1999, when only 66 girls enrolled for every 100 boys. Beginning with the 1990/91 academic year, all female applicants to public universities were awarded 1.5 bonus points, a measure that had increased the female population of Makerere University to 41% by 2002, compared to 23% before the scheme was introduced.<sup>7</sup>

### ***1.4 Selection of case studies, schools and girls***

In order to study girls' retention, the case-study areas needed to be districts where there were known to be challenges and hardships which might prevent girls from attending or continuing with school. The pilot areas were selected initially by colleagues at the University of Makerere and then through UNICEF. Research permits were obtained from the Ministry of Education and Sports, and schools were selected in discussion with relevant District Education Officers. In Nebbi, an informal interview was held with Ogen Stanislaus and in Kyenjojo with Gertrude. The aim was to choose schools which were recognised as providing a relatively high-quality education, and which had a reputation for encouraging girls' education, and hence schools where girls were retained 'against the odds'. In Uganda, because of the long distances involved to the two main case-study areas, no preliminary visits were made. What we did not know at

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<sup>7</sup> Muhwezi, D. 2003 Gender sensitive educational policy and practice: a Uganda case study (Background paper for EFA Global Monitoring Report)

the outset was that two of the districts we had selected had been identified in the Quality Enhancement Initiative.

Because it is known that girls begin to drop out of primary school around the age of puberty, teachers were asked to select 5 girls in Class 6, who were from backgrounds where families were poor or where education was under-valued, but who were in school and likely to continue with their education. These were girls who would be expected to be 11 years old, though in practice, because of late starts and disrupted patterns of schooling, a number of the girls proved to be several years older.

The researchers had to tread a sensitive path with respect to differentials of power and position, as well as dealing with ethical dilemmas caused when girls revealed situations which seriously affected their personal safety.

## **1.5 Methodology**

### **1.5.1 Interviews with Girls in Class 6**

A common interview guide was devised by those researchers directly involved in data collection, in consultation with the wider research team. This sought to obtain biographical data as well as asking questions related to the participant's experience of schooling, the problems she faced, her aspirations and the factors which encouraged her to remain in school. Initial questions were devised to put the respondent at ease and to enable rapport to be established. The guide was modified following an initial pilot interview, and then revised at the Nairobi workshop in the light of findings following the Kenyan pilot stage.

Interviews took place in 2 schools in Uganda in December 2009, with further interviews with 10 girls in two schools in the Western Region (Kyenjojo and Ntoroko Districts), and a further 10 girls in two schools in West Nile Region (Nebbi District) in April 2010. In Uganda they were interviewed in their local language. With the exception of the initial Ugandan interviews, all interviews were audio recorded. Each interviewee was given a small gift of an exercise book and pen as a token of thanks. This report focuses only on the results from the four schools in Western Region and Western Nile.

### **1.5.2 Focus Group Discussions with Boys in Class 6**

A focus group discussion guide was devised with boys in Class 6 in each school in order to capture their biographical data, to document their main activities, and to find out their experiences of schooling and the challenges they faced, their career aspirations and their



perspectives of gender specific factors affecting enrolment. It was also important to gather their perspectives of what the school and teachers could do to assist them. Four focus group discussions were held during the pilot study.

### **1.5.3 Focus Group Discussions with Teachers**

A focus group discussion guide was devised for teachers in the participating schools. The aim of the guide was to find out from their perspectives the challenges facing the school, the gender specific challenges, the strategies that the school employed in encouraging students in terms of retention and completion. In addition, their own personal experiences of teaching were recorded. The guide also provided a backdrop of the teachers' perceptions of the communities in which the school served. In the pilot study, only three schools participated in the focus group discussions: Athele, Nyaksenyi and Pakwach. An interview with the Rwangara headteacher was conducted, but it was not possible to conduct a focus group discussion because of the shortage of teachers on the day of our visit.

Informal discussions were also held with two district education officers, Mr. Ogden Stanislaus in Nebbi and Grace in Kyenjojo. This background information helped to provide the context of the districts and in particular to capture the challenges and constraints affecting enrolment, retention and completion in primary school.

### **1.5.4 Analysis**

Interviews from Nebbi, Kyenjojo and Ntoroko were fully transcribed and translated, with analysis undertaken using the software package QSR NVivo 8. Analysis was first of all undertaken deductively, using the interview guide as the basis for initial coding. This was followed by inductive analysis, drawing out insights from the interviewees' own words. Observations of the school building and its surroundings, as well as informal discussion with the Principal and teachers of each school provided contextual data and enabled a fuller understanding of data obtained through the interviews.

## **2.0 Case Study Background**

The pilot study was conducted in four schools in three distinct districts in Western Uganda: Nebbi, Kyenjojo and Ntoroko. They vary significantly in terms of ethnicity and livelihoods. Below is a brief description of each area.

### ***Nebbi District***

Nebbi District is located in north-western Uganda. It is bordered by the Arua District to the north, Amuru District to the east, Buliisa District to the southeast, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the south and west. It comprises a total area of 3,288 sq. km and has an estimated population of 535,400. The district was originally divided into three counties, Padeyere, Jonam and Okoro, but Okoro County has now become a new district. The main ethnic group is Alur. The main economic activities are predominantly farming and fishing on Lake Albert and in the Lake Albert Nile. According to the District Education officer, there are 233 primary schools and 31 secondary schools. In comparison with national averages, Nebbi is more disadvantaged than other districts. For example, the pupil class ratio is 1:128 compared to the national average of 1:55. Although enrolment in primary school is increasing, the average drop-out rate for girls is 53.8% as compared to boys at 46.2%; this is a major concern.<sup>8</sup> Two schools in this district participated in the study: Athele (rural) and Pakwatch (semi-urban). Athele has a population of 447 pupils with 8 teachers (7 male and 1 female) and Pakwatch has a population of 1007 children with 15 teachers (10 male and 5 female). (Annex 1 shows the enrolment by gender and class).

### ***Kyenjojo District***

Kyenjojo District is located in western Uganda. It is bordered by Kibale District to the south, Mubende District to the east, Kiruhura District to the southeast, Kamwenge District to the south and Kabarole District to the west. The district headquarters are at Kyenjojo; the district was created in 2000. It is located approximately 274 km from Kampala. It is part of the ancient Kingdom of Toro. It has an estimated population of 481,000. The main economic activities are tea plantations and farming. Nyakasenyi School which is located on the main road from Fort Portal participated in the pilot research. The school population is 671 with 10 teachers (7 female) and a female headteacher.

### ***Ntoroko District***

Ntoroko District is a new district (formerly part of Bundibugyo). It is located in western Uganda near the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and is at the southern most end of Lake Albert. Certain events have had a profound impact on the communities, namely the 1995 Land Act and Demarcation of the Semliki Game Reserve (this act restricted access to resources

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<sup>8</sup> Unpublished report from the Directorate of Education – Nebbi District Local Government.

within the park and women, in particular, lost out). From 1997-2000, the insurgence caused mayhem and many people were displaced and there was considerable loss of life, property and food insecurity. The communities in this area are fairly heterogeneous and consist of many ethnic groups; they are a peripatetic migrant population whose major sources of livelihood are fishing around the lake, cattle rearing, local trade, and trade across the border with DRC. A government report of the district shows that poverty had prompted a number of women and teenage girls to engage in acts of prostitution and early marriages. In addition, other factors such as a high rate of theft, alcohol abuse and poor living conditions have contributed to the 'fear' of living in such a harsh environment. The schools in the area are understaffed and lack basic resources.<sup>9</sup> Education is poor with a very high drop-out rate and a lack of secondary education.<sup>10</sup> Rwangara School participated in the pilot. The school population is 616 pupils with 6 male teachers. It caters to a diverse and mixed community comprised of Balaalo (nomads), Batoro, Bamba, Batwa, Bakonjo and Batuku. Because of the fishing industry, Ntoroko hosts other ethnic communities from the rest of Uganda as well as the Congo.

### 3. Key Findings

#### Factors Affecting Girls' Participation

Analysis from the interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the pilot stage of the study illustrated the diversity of factors affecting girls' participation in the three districts. There were common constraints affecting participation of girls in all four schools such as pregnancy, early marriage, peer pressure from male peers (in and out of school youth), child labour, and poor menstruation management. However, there were also differences between the districts in terms of geography (difference between rural and urban), access and distance to schools, types of livelihood affecting participation, ethnicity, specific cultural practices, lack of parental involvement and kinship obligations. Unlike the Kajiado study, the majority of girls in Uganda seemed to lack aspiration for the future and lacked role models. This was particularly evident in two schools – Rwangara and Athele – which are remote, rural schools and where, significantly, there is a lack of female teachers. Most noticeably in Rwangara there are no female teachers because of the harsh environment, and in Athele there is only one female teacher. The lack of female teachers and the lack of female role models in the local culture appear to have a

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<sup>9</sup> Bundibugyo District Report, 2003. Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development: Uganda participatory Poverty Assessment Process.

<sup>10</sup> Second Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment : Bundibugyo District Report, 2003, p.12

negative impact on girls' motivation or aspirations beyond the community in which they live. In many instances this is exacerbated by living in difficult circumstances without close kin and the lack of support networks.

### ***Key challenges faced by girls***

Poverty was a key determinant affecting school enrolment, absenteeism and drop-out across the four pilot areas. Most respondents cited lack of money as a major factor affecting education. All the girls who participated in the study are also working children. Domestic activities are part of every day life and gender-specific tasks such as sweeping, fetching water, collecting firewood, looking after siblings, the elderly and the sick were identified as female responsibilities. In some instances, the girls had to take on the responsibility to try to earn enough money in order to pay for a school uniform, books and examination fees by selling vegetables or selling water to households. One girl in Athele (18 years) had to interrupt her schooling to assist her blind father and sell vegetables in order to pay for her uniform. She described herself as the 'mother' of the household. In Pakwatch, one of the interviewees fetched water and sold it for 200 shillings per jerry can (20-litre plastic can) in order to make money to buy 'soup' ingredients, so she could feed herself and her siblings.

A third of the girls interviewed were orphaned (in some cases due to HIV/Aids) and many lived in households without either of their parents. Many are defined as 'double orphans'<sup>11</sup>; in some instances, these children are often living with elderly grandparents or male kin members and in some cases, they are being defiled by uncles and grandparents.<sup>12</sup> The lack of parental support and the added responsibility of looking after elderly grandparents places extra burden on the girls.

Distance to schools was another factor affecting girls' access to education. Some of the girls were frightened to walk to and from school. In Rwangara where children walk long distances, the girls were not only scared of being attacked and raped but also killed. (This was near the game reserve and an area where there was political conflict). In addition to walking long distances, girls complained of hunger and not having any food during the day. It was also noted that many children only have one meal a day and arrive at school hungry. The lack of food can contribute to poor performance and underachievement.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> World Bank: HIV Aids Sourcebook, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Field Notes from Focus group discussion with teachers, March, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Levinger, B. 1994. Nutrition, health and education for all, UNDP. New York; Pollitt, E. 1990. Malnutrition and Infection in the Classroom. UNESCO. Paris.

In all four schools, sexual harassment was identified as a key challenge facing adolescent females. This is consistent with other research conducted in Uganda on the risks schoolgirls encounter.<sup>14</sup> Some of the girls in the study were victims of sexual harassment and most cited sexual harassment and ‘bad behaviour by boys’ as challenges. They spoke of the abuse they had encountered by male peers and told harrowing tales of fending off attacks and rape. On their way to school they were often ‘bothered’ or ‘teased’ by boys and had been offered money (10,000 Ugandan shillings) in exchange for sex. Two young girls had to physically fend off their ‘attackers’ and one made a formal complaint to the police. As a result, she had to transfer to another school.

Another gender specific challenge is menstruation management. Two thirds of the girls in the study cited menstruation as affecting female enrolment and as a reason for absenteeism and drop-out. Most do not have access to sanitary pads, proper toilet facilities or access to water. Only one school, Nyakasenyi, provided an ‘emergency’ kit which provided pads and knickers to menstruating girls. They also showed the girls how to make pads from local materials.<sup>15</sup>

Engagement in certain types of livelihoods, such as fishing, was identified as a contributing factor for dropping out of school and non-enrolment. The immediate awards of fishing (money) create an environment where money is readily available and disposable. (This is combined with high alcohol consumption, prostitution and domestic violence). In addition, the lack of value placed on education by parents or guardians were other contributing factors associated with the high drop out. One teacher remarked that, “the fishing communities around the lake value money more than education.” This was confirmed by a visit to a primary school in Nebbi District (see Annex 2) where we had hoped to conduct our pilot study. However, the school had very few students in upper primary and did not even have a Class 7; therefore, it could not take part.

### ***Girls’ aspirations***

Unlike the Kajiado study in the Kenya pilot, the aspirations of girls in the Uganda pilot were limited and localised. Two thirds of the girls wanted to become a teacher or a nurse – both occupations that are observed in the local communities. Only one girl had an aspiration to be a

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<sup>14</sup> Mirembe, R. and Davies, L. 2001. Is Schooling a Risk? Gender, Power Relations, and School Culture in Uganda. *Gender and Education*, Vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 401-416.

<sup>15</sup> Somner, M. 2009. Where the education system and women’s bodies collide: The social and health impact of girls’ experiences of menstruation and schooling in Tanzania. *Journal of Adolescence*. Vol. 33(4), pp. 521-529.

lawyer and one had an aspiration to be like a minister who had visited the area. The role models who were identified tended to be teachers, nurses, a secondary school girl, bank clerks/managers, and others who were 'visible' in their everyday lives. None of the girls mentioned the names of eminent or prominent Ugandan women or men outside their communities as people they wanted to be like (i.e. from radio, newspaper, TV or video). This varied significantly with boys' aspirations of wanting to be a president, minister, engineer, or doctor.

### ***Role of the school and key figures***

The school plays a significant role in the lives of the participants. Many of them regard the school environment as a safe haven from the world outside. Significantly, they expected the teachers 'to protect' them from bad behaviour and peer pressure. Most of the girls mentioned that a major role of the teachers is to provide guidance and counselling, and they viewed the teachers' roles as mediators and disciplinarians to combat bad behaviour by male youths – both inside and outside school. If they encountered problems (such as abuse/male pressure) outside of the school, they would report it to the teachers.



*Athele Primary School: Mud and Thatched Classroom (Class 4)*

All the girls liked school and only one mentioned punishment in school as a negative factor. In all schools, the teachers played an important role in the girls' lives not only as educators, but also as advisers. This is especially pertinent because of the high number of orphans and vulnerable girls in the pilot study. The schools had afternoon clubs such as the GEM (Girls Education Movement) Club and HIV/Aids Club. Membership was open to both boys and girls. These clubs provided important information relevant to their lives outside the classroom.

The school environment was also one they valued and took pride in. In one school (Athele), there was a thatched/mud temporary classroom and the pupils mentioned it as something they didn't like about the school as well as the lack of stances latrines.

### ***Analysis of Boys Focus Group Discussions***

Four focus group discussions were held with 20 boys in Class 6. Analysis of the data shows that most of the boys who were interviewed came from poor backgrounds; the age range was 12-17 years; 55% did not live with their parents. It varied and in Nyakseniyi, all the boys interviewed were double orphans whereas in Athele they all lived with parents. However, poverty was a common denominator affecting boys in all four schools. Boys also faced a series of economic challenges in attending school such as lack of kin support, lack of money for school uniforms, lack of money for school fees, and parents refusing to assist in buying basics such as pens and exercise books. In addition all the boys were working children and their employment opportunities varied from 'digging' in the farming communities (Athele and Nyakasenyi), fishing along the River Nile (Pawkatch; Rwangara) or plucking tea in plantations (Nyakasenyi). It was noted that some of the agricultural activities are seasonal, and there were great fluctuations in enrolment and high absenteeism during harvest time.

All of the boys who took part in the focus group discussions come from challenging and difficult circumstances. One boy when asked what his father's occupation was, said, 'he is a drunkard; he digs for money, drinks it and he does not care about me. I have to dig to pay for my own school fees.'

Boys also mentioned going to school hungry even when there was food at the household. "There is hunger here; even our parents hide the groundnuts after harvest; they do not allow the children to eat them or take them to school."

Other challenges they faced included being beaten and caned at school. Interestingly, this was only raised by one girl during the female interviews (this will be probed for during the

next phase of the research). When the boys were asked why did children drop out of school, they mentioned the issue of 'over-age'. (This will be an important issue to explore in greater depth to look at the correlation between age and drop-out). In reference to girls, the focus group discussions revealed that the boys viewed **age and poor performance** as main reasons for girls' dropping out of school, 'some girls are failing and are too big to be in classes' other reasons included the lack of respect that girls have for parents and teachers and also the lure of money to buy material goods; 'boys do not love money as much as girls'. 'At 15 years, they do not want to take advice of parents or teachers; they opt to leave the house and the school.' It is interesting that the boys point out poor performance, because this corroborates some of the teachers' views about girls' under-achieving because of the burgeoning domestic and household chores they perform; significantly, as they get older they take on more and more duties and this impinges on their ability and capability to learn. In Rwangara and Nyakasenyi the boys mentioned that girls are often defiled and raped and needed to be careful in moving around at night. When probed about sexual violence towards girls, the boys in all the focus group discussions did know about girls being bothered and pestered by other boys but 'not them'.

However, boys also mentioned 'peer' pressure and being teased as a major challenge facing them. In Pakwatch the boys revealed that out-of-school boys tease them and that they are harassed and asked to bow to peer pressure. 'Boys are harassed and encouraged to smoke, drink, and go to discos. But we refuse. Sometimes they (out of school boys) ask us to steal chickens and they deceive you and lure you into bad behaviour and beat us'. The pressure between in and out of school youth is high and the school-going boys unanimously described the pressures of alcohol, smoking, going to discos and sex as 'bad peer pressure'.

### ***Role of Teachers to provide guidance and discipline***

Significantly, the boys thought that it was the role of the teachers and the guardians to stop bad behaviour – both inside and outside the classroom. They commented that teachers can stop children from watching videos and going to discos. They also thought that girls should not go out alone late at night.

The boys also opened up and mentioned things they did not like about school: in Athele the boys were proud of their school environment and they said they did not like the 'traditional' thatch/mud classroom used for Class 4 (as mentioned in the girls' interviews).



In addition, they did not like to be beaten by teachers or to be 'used' by teachers to work for them during school time. For example, one teacher asked them to bring grass to them for their own economic benefit. The boys mentioned that their parents' were not happy with this because if their son was going to work at school, then the boy should stay at home and work on the parents' farm. Teachers' behaviour was also commented upon by the boys in one school, and it was frowned upon that teachers occasionally arrived late or missed their lessons. The boys felt as if they were being cheated by this behaviour. Other issues that they did not like included the lack of recreational and sports equipment and a school band.

### ***Boys' aspirations***

The focus group discussions with the boys in the four schools revealed that the boys had a wide range of aspirations that included being a teacher, driver, bank clerk, Karenja (a manager in a tea factory), District Education officer, and someone like Jane (who had a good job and worked for a UN organisation). Interestingly, all these aspirations were visible and tangible in the sense that they saw these individuals in their every day lives. However, the role models they cited varied from President Museveni (who had visited the area recently), a disc jockey, a pilot, an MP, vice president, driver, engineer, doctor, captain, chief and lawyer. In many instances they wanted to be like these role models because they wanted material items such as nice clothes, a nice car and 'to look good'. In some instances they wanted money, so they could give something back to their people. Compared to the girls' aspirations and role models cited above, the boys did appear to have a wider range of role models and cited more people beyond their community.

### ***Analysis of Teachers Focus Group Discussions***

Three focus group discussions were held with teachers in Athele, Nyakasenyi and Pakwatch and a brief interview with the headteacher at Rwangara. Significantly, the teachers' views and perceptions corroborate many of the key findings discussed above about the challenges and factors affecting enrolment in the two regions.

*Poverty* : In all four schools the issue of poverty was cited by the teachers as the major challenge affecting the schools and the pupils. This was viewed in various ways. For example, children coming to school hungry, children without uniforms and exercise books, and children having to work for the families (farming, fishing, trading). This was especially true on 'market days' when absenteeism was high. In addition the teachers mentioned the challenges in trying

to get parents to contribute to exam fees and other costs such as improving the school environment and contributing to the parent teacher associations. In one focus group discussion, the teachers remarked on the challenge of getting parents to pay, “when we ask them to bring money the parents don’t contribute. Out of 100 maybe 30 or so would contribute. The community is not very active in town. But in other schools the community is active”.

*Low Value on Education:* Teachers also remarked on the low value that many parents placed on education; this was the result of the lack of education that parents (and guardians) had which in turn led to the lack of value placed on their children’s education. They remarked that parents do not value education, and even in situations in which they have money, they still will not pay. This was especially true in situations where girls in upper primary school are ‘grown’ and the parent’s think the girl should marry; they do not see the potential of investing in a girl who is going to go away and live with her in-laws. In fact, the teachers blamed the parents for the fluctuating enrolment and said that ‘parents are the ones responsible for poor enrolment because they often take children out of school to help with chores and farming during the harvest season’.

Another group commented that enrolment is low because ‘most children do not come to school in June/July because of the harvest season and in the dry season food is scarce. Also on market days – children do not attend school; instead they go to the market. Friday is also a prayer day for the Muslims (Pakwatch). All these disturbances affect enrolment and performance.

*Lack of Kin:* In many instances the children are not living with their close kin and as a result they do not get the same support as they would if they were living with a father or mother. One reason for this is due to HIV/Aids. Also, the cultural practices can adversely affect children, and they are also responsible for the mistreatment of children. For example: “In our culture the child belongs to the family of the man – irrespective of whether there is a wife or step-mother. Many children are mistreated by their stepmother. And when the season comes for planting they have to stay at home and work on the farm”. (Nyakasenyi)

### ***Gender specific challenges pupils***

In all four schools the teachers commented on a specific set of challenges facing girls such as the pressure of early marriage, teenage pregnancy, increased domestic responsibilities, menstruation management, and the lack of appropriate role models. They also mentioned the

impact of out-of-school youth and bad peer behaviour. However, the teachers said that bad peer behaviour was a problem for **both** male and female out-of-school youth. In Nyakasenyi the teachers mentioned the challenges facing girls living with extended male kin.

*“Those who left last year; they were shy and people they were staying with at the home were being defiled by their uncles. Five years back a girl was abused by her uncle. Defilement by male relatives is common. A new law is about defilement and we can report it to the police. 18 years or be in prison for life and if he is caught, he can get a prison sentence. If a man defiles a child less than 14 yrs, he will be hanged/killed. Relatives will be killed if they defile a young child or a handicapped child. Maybe something will be done. It is hard to enforce it. We will now explain more to the children now that we have [this] law. We can report it to the authorities.”*

In the sample of four schools, only two were pro-active and supportive of the needs of the girls. In Pakwatch and Nyakasenyi, the presence of female teachers on the ground is an important factor in assisting young, adolescent girls to stay in school; they thought that having a female teacher (who in turn is viewed as a role model in the school) was very important. In addition, the teaching of life skills classes enabled girls to talk about menstruation and menstruation management and this plays an important role and can have a positive impact. In Nyakasenyi, the female head teacher and her predominantly female staff have encouraged children (both boys and girls) to stay in school. They have re-enrolled 53 children in the community to return to school to complete their primary education. They have also started clubs for both boys and girls. The GEM (Gender Empowerment Movement) Clubs provide awareness of the rights of boys and girls and promote a safer, fairer school environment. The aim is to sensitise, enlighten and empower the children – both boys and girls.

The location of school was a problem for teachers in 3 of the 4 schools. However, it was viewed in different ways. In Pakwatch, the school is situated in a ‘unique’ position because it is located within the centre of the community without any clear boundaries. It is surrounded by huts and there are no walls protecting the school. As a result, the school is often vandalised by out-of-school youths who have broken the windows and have written graffiti on the walls. We were shown a clock that was destroyed and a classroom where some children defaced the property with excrement. In addition, the lack of security has led to classes being disrupted by youths shouting abuse to the teachers and school children during school hours.



*Pakwatch School: Note the school building on the right next to the round thatched huts. The school is not walled and this has become problematic in keeping out-of-school youth away.*

The location of the school was also a factor that affected teacher ratio and the number of female teachers in the two isolated areas. This was especially pertinent in two of the rural, remote schools. In Rwangara, for example, there were no female teachers and this was explained to us by the headteacher who said there was a lack of suitable accommodation and it was a harsh and difficult environment. Female teachers have declined to teach in this school because of its location, the lack of access to transport, poor accommodation and violence. Sadly, the school is short-staffed with only 6 male teachers for 7 classes. Similarly, in Athele which is located 36km from Nebbi town, there is a lack of appropriate accommodation and female teachers are reluctant to be posted there. During our fieldwork, there was only one female teacher present. Conversely, in the two schools which were located on main tarmac roads, the gender ratio of female teachers was significantly higher. In Nyaksenyi, the school has 7 females and 3 male teachers and in Pakwatch there are 5 female teachers and 10 male teachers.

Teachers also cited the lack of food, the distance between the school and their lodgings, the lack of resources for teaching, the shortage of trained teachers (especially in Rwangara),



the poor salary they receive and the long hours of teaching (8am-5pm). The general consensus from the discussions is that they feel they are overworked and underpaid.

### ***Personal challenges***

Aside from direct challenges facing the teachers and their schools, the teachers also mentioned the *lack of opportunities* to improve themselves *and the lack of mobility* in their career paths. In the past, teachers could up-grade through government scholarships, but now it is very difficult to up-grade because of lack of funding. If they want to up-grade they have to pay for the course themselves and many cannot afford to do so. Interestingly, almost all the teachers were also engaged in other economic activities to supplement their income.

### ***Despite the Challenges - What keeps teachers motivated?***

Overall, there was an overwhelming sense of dedication and commitment by the teachers despite the challenges they faced, many in very difficult situations. Teaching is a secure profession and it has a stable salary. As one group said, “We are dedicated. We see children



*Mary, head teacher at Nyakasenyi Primary School, Kyenjojo.*

and we are determined to work hard. In Uganda teachers have to give the chance of education to the children. Mobility and training as teachers is a problem, but we tolerate difficult situations in the country.”

However, the teachers face a daunting task of not only teaching in difficult circumstances (poverty, illness, lack of parental/guardian support, environment) but also having to deal with the expectations of the wider community. In the interviews with the girls and the focus group discussions with the boys, it was revealed that they expect the teachers to provide guidance and counseling **both inside and outside the classroom**.

## 4. Next Steps

The four pilot communities yielded some very interesting and important data. We are grateful that they were willing to participate in the study, and they will be visited again. The research went very well, and we managed to collect some very thought-provoking data.

Further research will be undertaken with the same four schools as well as additional schools in the next research phase. The girls who were interviewed in 2010 (p.5) will be interviewed again in 2011 to see what has happened to them, and a new cohort of 20 girls in Nebbi and 20 girls in Kyenjojo/Ntoroko will be included in the next phase of the research. Field research in Nebbi District will be undertaken in April 2011 (Athele and Pakwach) and field research in Kyenjojo will take place in July 2011. This will entail detailed interviews with the district education office officials, interviews with the head teachers, focus group discussions with teachers in each school, and focus group discussions with boys in Class 6.

## Acknowledgements

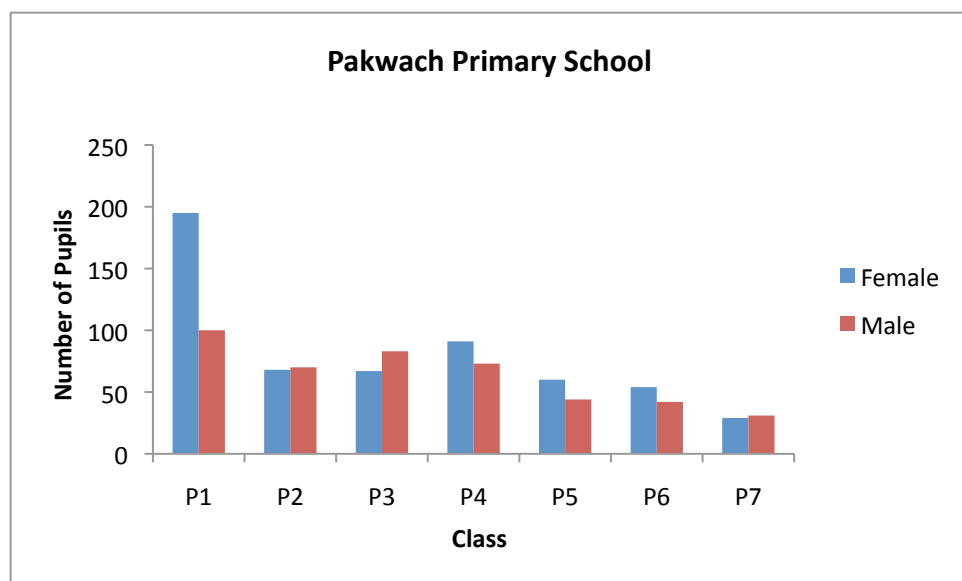
We are grateful to our main sponsors, the Commonwealth Education Trust and to the staff and pupils of the schools who participated in the pilot studies.

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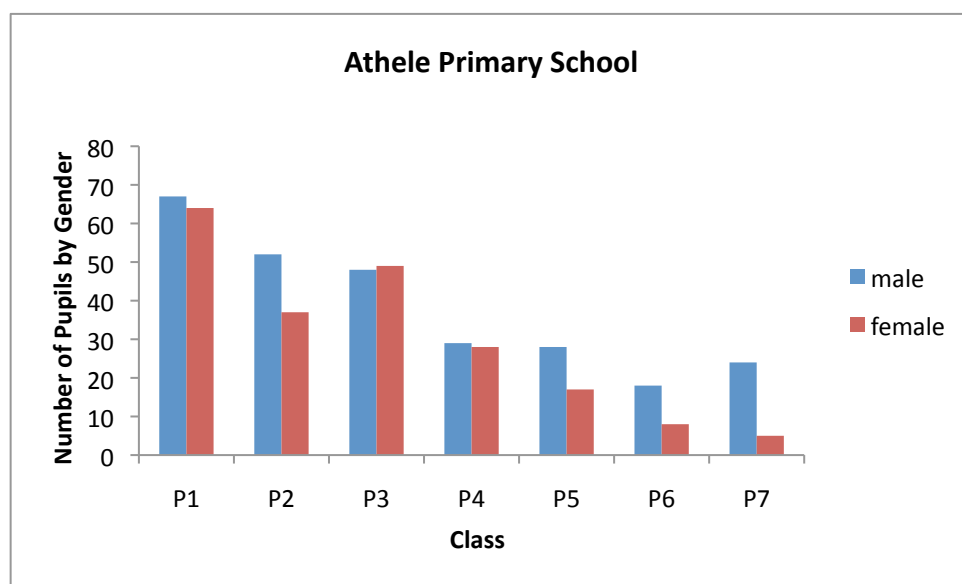
## Annex 1: School Enrolment in 2010

### 1. Pakwach School, Nebbi District



Total number of pupils is 1071. 10 male teachers; 5 female teachers.

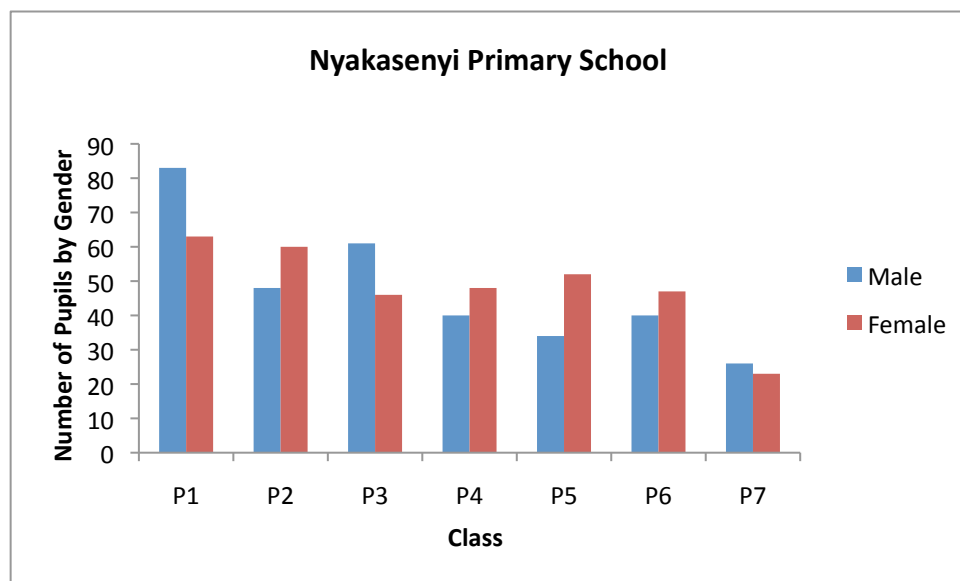
### 2. Athele School



Total number of pupils: 474 6 male teachers; 1 female teacher on maternity leave.

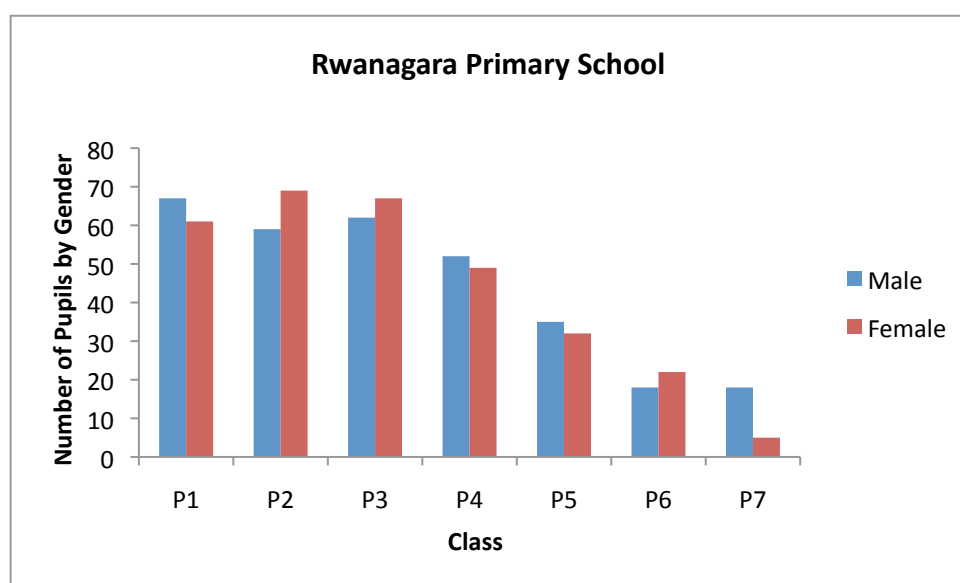


### 3. Nyakasenyi Primary School, Kyenjojo District



Total Number of Pupils 671. (7 female teachers and 3 male teachers.) Head teacher is a female.

### 4. Rwanagara Primary School, Ntoroko District



Total Number of Pupils 616.6 male teachers.