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The education of girls and women in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the contextual reasons for low enrolment and high dropout figures in Ugandan schools, particularly for women. It explains the extent to which sociocultural, economic, policy, and political factors are obstacles to the education of women in particular. It is partly based on the findings of study carried out in Uganda's Eastern District of Kamuli in 1996 by UNICEF/ACTIONAID² Uganda in which the author was the team leader. Both primary and secondary comparative data show that sociocultural, economic and ideological factors greatly influence parents' or guardians' decisions on which of their children should receive education. Political factors and traditional customs pertaining to the social status of women which have been integrated, consciously or unconsciously, into the economic and political policy framework, further aggravate the precarious position of women. A clear explanation of the factors responsible for lack of accessibility and retention of girls in schools is needed if policies are to address the causes rather than symptoms of the problem.

Introduction

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT for girls to have the same (or, logically, even greater) access to education as boys. Women fend for the family in both good times and in bad. They are often responsible for the economic well-being of their families and for primary health care. A woman is a manager and decision-maker of the home. She needs all the skills necessary to make a successful and happy "home enterprise". A household with an educated woman is better off than one with an uneducated wife and mother.

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2 My acknowledgements are hereby registered.

Uganda now has an average literacy rate of 64 per cent, up from 54 per cent in 1991 (Population Reference Bureau, 2000). Though the enrolment of both boys and girls in Primary One is often equal, from Primary Four the dropout rate for girls is higher than that of boys. Thus a very small fraction of girls have access to higher education and skills training. Because of the AIDS epidemic and the subsequent number of orphans created through the disease, many children have no one to finance their education. Due to discrimination girls find themselves in a worse situation than boys.

By 1996, the proportion of children between seven and 13 years of age in school in Uganda was 70 per cent nationally. The net urban enrolment was 78 per cent of the age cohort and the rural enrolment was 69 per cent. The net enrolment for girls was 67 per cent and that of boys was 73 per cent (World Bank, 1996:65). Dropout rates are high (UNICEF, 1989) and evidence from the 1992/93 Integrated Household Survey (IHS) shows that they have increased over time. The 1996 census conducted by Ministry of Education shows that 60 per cent of the children who are of school age get access to education, 34 per cent reach primary seven, 9 per cent complete secondary and only 4.4 per cent go through tertiary institutions. More specifically, girls account for about 26 per cent of the pupils enrolled in Primary One, 18 per cent in Primary Two, 16 per cent in Primary Three, 14 per cent in Primary Four, 11 per cent in Primary Five, 9 per cent in Primary Six and 6 per cent in Primary Seven (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1997b). The causes for such dropout rates are mainly the lack of school fees, pregnancies and early marriages. Lack of school fees accounts for about 61 per cent of the dropout of girls at primary and secondary school level, while early pregnancies and marriages are responsible for 13 per cent of girls who drop out at primary level (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1997b; Kayita and Kyakulaga, 1997).

While the main reason for existing literacy and enrolment levels and disparities is attributed to the failure of the education system to respond to the needs or demands of the society at the individual, household and community levels, its accessibility by children of different sexes is influenced by many more factors than the nature of education *per se*. It

is against this background that the paper has been written. For the education of women to be realized, the causes of existing gender disparities must be addressed (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1992:43).

2. Challenges to the education of women

MY DISCUSSION OF the challenges to women education in Uganda is categorized under the headings, sociocultural, economic, policy-related and administrative and political and security challenges.

2.1 The sociocultural challenges

SOCIOCULTURAL VALUES arise from patriarchal cultural traditions that uphold the interests and needs of men over those of women. They mainly relate to ignorance, the inadequate or mis-socialization of children, traditional perceptions of the social status of women and their subsequent vulnerability and the undervaluing or generally negative attitudes of the population to education and, particularly, to girls' education. Such attitudes tend to vary with the parents' education background, among other factors. In analysing the 1989/90 Household Budget Survey (HBS), it was found that poverty was not significant in determining school attendance once other variables, including the educational attainment of the household head, were included (World Bank, 1996:66), though it is not by that fact excluded as unimportant.

It is in enrolment and retention that the strong gender disparity in Uganda's education system becomes clear. Of the pupils who enter primary school, 48 per cent of boys and 29 per cent of girls complete the cycle. Firstly, parents have different aspirations for boys and girls. Girls are educated so they know how to read and write or be better mothers, rather than for employment. Secondly, married daughters are believed to be less likely than married sons to remit cash income to their parents. Despite the fact the educated and employed women repay their parents in kind and even more, by caring for the sick or the old, education is not seen to be particularly useful for the latter purpose.

To rural people, literacy implies no more than the ability to count, read and write. Their general perception is that the skill is simply functional and children are socialized on this basis. During early

Table 1: Education attainment for Kamuli in 1991

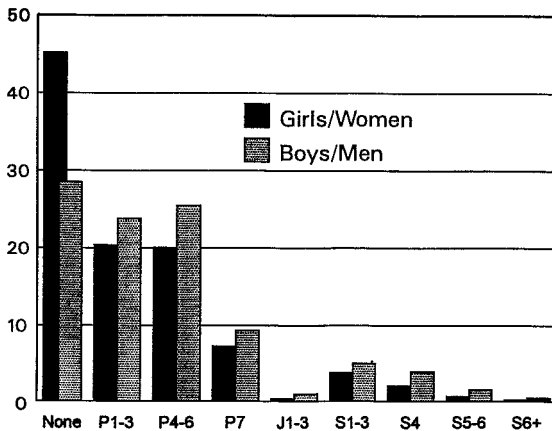
Level	Male	Female	Total
None	66,075	101,404	167,479
P1-P3	39,810	33,915	73,725
P4-P7	55,576	45,488	101,064
J1-J3	2,117	287	2,404
S1-S4	14,813	8,270	23,083
S5-S6	1,401	278	1,679
University	282	23	305
Age not stated	708	532	1,240
TOTAL	180,782	190,197	370,979

(SOURCE: THE 1991 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS, KAMULI DISTRICT)

socialization, mothers and aunts discourage their daughters from studying since ultimately they are to come back, marry, cook for their husbands, comfort them in bed and produce children. Williams (1972), however, sees socialization as a means by which the human race adapts to the changing ecology. Socialization is about child training and personality development: this differs from family to family, community to community and so on. Bardwick and Douvan (1977) note that socialization, the process of learning what is socioculturally accepted and unacceptable, is responsible for the differences in personality attributes among boys and girls. The authors see socialization as referring to the pressures—rewarding, punishing, ignoring and anticipating—that push the child towards evoking certain acceptable responses. Children are taught that men have to work to secure their status as adult men. The equivalent for women is maternity, which is necessary for a woman's fulfillment as an individual and to secure her status as an adult (Rossi 1977).

In Kamuli rural district literacy levels are below the national average and manifest the gender inequalities described above. The district's overall literacy rate in 1992 was 40.8 per cent compared to the national average of 54 per cent; the male literacy rate was 49 per cent compared to 65 per cent and female literacy rate was within the limits of national rates i.e., 34 per cent compared to 35 per cent (Ministry of Finance and

Fig 1: Percentage distribution of population aged 6 years and over by educational attainment and sex, 1991



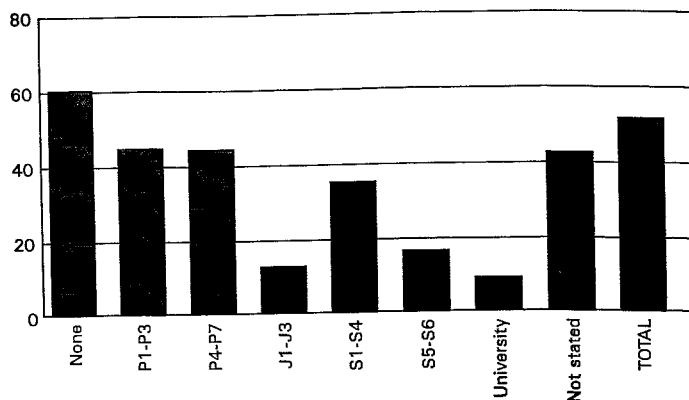
(SOURCE: REPUBLIC OF UGANDA, 1995, THE 1991 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS, VOL. II, P.26)

Economic Planning, 1992). Of the literate population of 16 years old and above, only 42.2 per cent are women and women comprise 59 per cent of the illiterates.

Table 1 indicates that women constitute about 61 per cent of the people who have never had any education at all. The proportion of women decreases the higher the level of education. The figures show particularly steep falls at almost all levels but most especially after Senior Four (a fall from 8,270 to 278 persons). There were only 23 women compared with 282 men university graduates from the District by 1991. Figure 1 shows comparative national education attainment levels. In 1991 45 per cent had had no education at all. The higher the levels of education, the lower the numbers of people attaining that level. The proportion of people who attained post-S.6 education was 0.25 per cent with sex differentials of 0.41 for men and 0.10 per cent for women.

The current national enrolments continue to depict this gender disparity. The National Strategic Plan for Girls' Education (Republic of

Fig 2: Educational attainment of girls and women as % of total at each level, in Kamull District

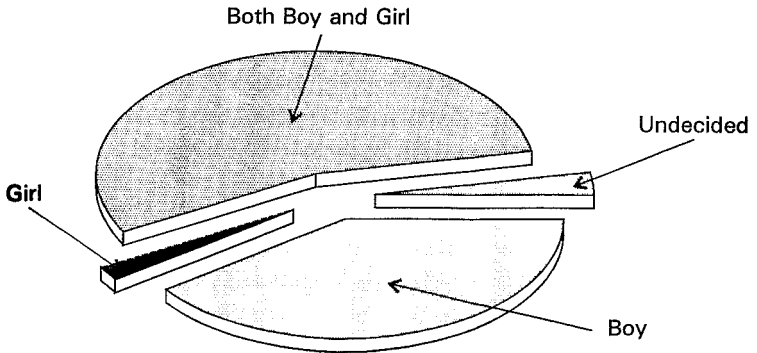


Uganda, 2000a:3) shows that at primary level girls constitute 47 per cent of the total enrolment, at secondary level they constitute 32 per cent. In primary teacher training institutions women constitute 34 per cent, in secondary teacher training institutions only 18 per cent are women and in polytechnic institutions women comprise only 13 per cent of the student body. It is only at the higher institutions of learning that the proportion of women rises, but to no more than 35 per cent of the student body. This information is shown in Figure 2.

The sociocultural factors that are partly responsible for such wide gender disparities in education often relate to decisions that must be made during times of financial hardship. Some parents have a preference based on sex as to which child goes to school. Figure 3 shows the decision-making patterns during the study in Kamuli District.

Education priority is given to boys for various reasons. First, some parents do not send girls to school during times of hardship since their educational benefits are enjoyed by the family into which she marries and not by the family of origin. The husbands' families similarly do not hold the education of their sons' wives as very important since they are

Fig 3: Selection of children to go to school, by gender



expected to be no more than “toiling donkeys, sex- and child producing-machines”. An educated boy can assist when the parents grow old; he is the heir and the pride of the clan and he will continue the lineage. The fruits of the boy’s education will therefore trickle down through the entire lineage, unlike that of a girl. Thirdly, some parents argue that a boy naturally has many future problems as a head of the household to prepare for. He needs to be educated so that he can cope with them. It is argued that when a girl gets married the husband must look after her.

It is also believed that girls cannot be relied upon; that they are easily lured into sex and, after becoming pregnant, drop out of school to contract early marriages.³

³ Though such people remain silent on why such girls get pregnant and, most importantly, on the fate of the men or boys that make them pregnant. This silence emanates from the government policy that does not allow pregnant girls in school or their re-registration after delivery.

Those who have no preference with regard to education believe that children of both sexes require knowledge if they are to be employed and later on assist their family and community. Ignorance has no sex; all children need education. Secondly, in contemporary society children are equal since employment is no longer based on ascribed but achieved roles. Hence, some parents believe that each child needs a chance, so that the brighter ones may continue with school and the dull ones drop out. They argue that one cannot determine whether a child is dull by its gender and it is better to educate a clever child since a dull child is costly to educate.

This kind of attitude receives support, though not very strongly, by the current performance indicators for girls and boys. In the last five years individual girls have performed outstandingly well, though the overall performance of all girls is poorer than that of boys and serious gender inequalities are shown to exist in the northern and eastern regions of the country (Republic of Uganda, 2000a:3). The overall gender imbalance in performance can be explained by the factors that penalize girls while the regional imbalance could be explained by the persistence of rebels, war and cattle-rustling. It is also believed that both boys and girls are one's children should be loved equally. One respondent in Kamuli said, "I gave birth to all my children and I love them equally. So when they are at school or finish their schooling successfully, it makes me feel good." (A 28-year old woman from Namisambya I, Bugabula, who was married and had three sons).

In addition, it is argued that when both children are sent to school, the one who finishes first can help the younger children. In polygamous marriages, many children are valued but this is detrimental to girls' education due to the lack of resources to look after and educate them. In addition, the lack of living examples of educated people within the community to act as role models and parents' ignorance of the value of education affect children's access to and retention in school.

Superstition is another cause and is correlated with ignorance. There is a belief, for example, that an educated person who is development-oriented dies quickly. As such people tend to be isolated and they prefer to go and live in other regions. This partly explains absence of

Table 2: Reasons For School Dropout Rates in Kamuli

Reasons for School Drop-out	Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Poverty	65	65.0	65
High school fees	15	15.0	80.0
Lack of interest	6	6.0	86.0
Early pregnancy	4	4.0	90.0
Early marriage	1	1.0	91.0
Orphanhood	3	3.0	94.0
Others	5	5.0	99.0
Missing	1	1.0	100
TOTAL		100	100.0

role models. The main sociocultural factors responsible for high female school dropout⁴ rates presented in Table 2.

Barton and Wamai (1994) and Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (1992:42) observe that the dropout rate for the girls is higher than that of the boys though both sexes drop out. National indicators show girls drop out in upper primary classes by 9.4 per cent compared to 8.2 per cent for boys, with widening gaps among disadvantaged districts (Ministry of Education and Sports, 1995). This is attributed to many reasons, most of which are cultural and contextual. As the results indicate, poverty is a very serious barrier to the equitable participation of girls in education.

Poverty exacerbates sociocultural problems since it constrains the choices available to parents, even if they are willing to educate their daughters. If parents were well educated and employed so they could afford their family daily and developmental needs, gender discrimination would be less likely, as shown by indicators in urban areas where income levels are comparatively higher. The gain of 53 per cent made in access to primary education by girls in Kampala and major urban areas is offset

⁴ Some people refer to a school dropout as a person who goes to school but does not get either a certificate or a job and an office.

by the low numbers in the rural districts such as Kotido and Kitgum in northern Uganda. Even with positive discrimination practices aimed at registering more girls under the Universal Primary Education policy the gap still remains, with boys exceeding the number of girls by 16.6 per cent (Republic of Uganda, 2000a:3).

Another reason why children drop out at in upper primary is the way parents bring up their children and the value they see in education, as the following responses show:

Children often drop out of school at the level of Primary Four. Although both girls and boys drop out, more girls than boys do because girls are generally reaching adolescence then. Girls have more problems because their parents leave them at home to help with the domestic work and to avoid wasting their money in school fees, due to the high rates of pregnancy among schoolgirls. Others are taken as housemaids by the people from the urban areas while the rest are married off. (Participatory Rural Appraisal Workshop, Namwiwa Sub-county).

Parents often refuse to pay school fees after Primary four out of ignorance, because they say that after that children can fend for themselves since they are able to read and write. (Participatory Rural Appraisal Workshop, Kiyunga Parish)

Premarital pregnancies are a serious problem. In Luwero District alone, for example, 60 girls got pregnant and dropped out of school in 1998 academic year (Mulindwa 1998). This defeats one of the objectives of UPE, namely, to increase the enrolment and literacy levels of girls and women. Fathers often refuse to acknowledge paternity in such cases and the child-mothers are unable to care for their "Chiums".⁵ As a result, these children live with their grandparents. The study revealed that 12.4 per cent of the children in a household are the grandchildren of the household head. Furthermore, adolescents tend to involve themselves

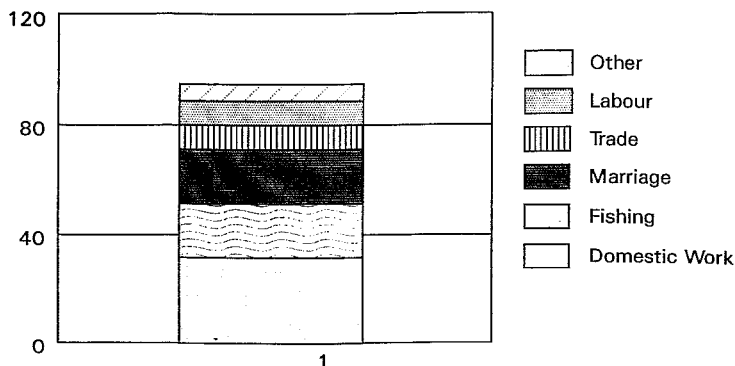
⁵ CHIUMs are Children of Irresponsible and Uncaring Men. The term was coined by Kathleen Cravero, UNICEF Country Representative in March 1996, during a Workshop of Research Findings.

in early sexual relations though this could also be attributed to other contextual factors. It was, for example, observed that there is a widespread housing problem in Kamuli district. In some families, a small temporary house is both a sitting room and bedroom for all family members. A curtain or an incomplete wall may separate rooms. Sometimes, parents have sexual intercourse when their children are listening. As girls enter puberty, they also try to test their sexuality. Such girls may get pregnant or decide to marry early to have their own husbands. The problem of AIDS has aggravated the problem by turning the attention of older men towards school-aged girls who are believed to be a risk-free alternative (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1992).

The stability or instability of families is another important factor mainly caused by divorce or the desertion of the children by one parent. In Kamuli, for instance, when the wife deserts, divorces or dies, a man marries another wife. It is then highly probable that the children of the previous wife will stop attending school, if they go to school at all in the first place. Their fathers, without their knowledge or consent, marry off their daughters in bars in exchange for money to buy alcohol. Pons (1996:70) found that in Kamwokya (a suburb of Kampala) girls as young as eight or nine years old are sent to town to work as maids. He also notes that the proportion of girls at school aged 15 to 19 years falls more sharply than that of boys and the net result is there are many girls who have either left school or never attended it. Some children lose interest in studying. This sometimes arises from copying bad habits from classmates or from unsuitable movies and disco dances at night.

School dropouts without adequate or employable skills are forced to engage in activities which require little training (UNICEF, 1989a). In Kamuli district it was found that 33.3 per cent of the school dropouts turn to domestic work; 18.7 per cent to fishing, 16.7 per cent marry, 11.6 per cent engage in petty business, 12.1 per cent become casual labourers while 7.6 per cent get whatever work they can find. Their education determines their final level of income. This is shown in Figure 4. It is disheartening to note that even those women who achieve higher education levels are confined to their homes once they are married. As a result, there are fewer women than men upgrading their education

Fig. 4: Occupations after school: Kamuli, 1996



standards. It is, for example, culturally forbidden for a woman to leave her husband and children for further studies especially if it is far away from home, even if her job requires such skill upgrading.

Other sociocultural factors which pose a challenge for the education of women in Uganda, though not identified in Kamuli district, include the harmful traditional practices and attitudes that inflict physical and psychological damage, with particular reference to the initiation ritual of circumcision of girls.

Although the National Strategic Plan for Girls' Education also mentions the payment of bridewealth as a harmful traditional practice, the community at large does not hold this view. According to the preliminary findings from a study conducted among three ethnic groups of Bakiga, Baganda and Langi in both urban and rural contexts between October 1999 and March 2000, 82.6 per cent of the population still strongly support bridewealth payment, 17.0 per cent oppose it and 0.4 per cent say it depends on the motive and mode of payment. The location of the family is significant in this matter. More rural than urban families support bridewealth. According to the study, the tradition of bridewealth payment is not bad in itself but it has been abused due to the extreme poverty of a large section of the population. (Atekyereza, 2001:161). In summary, sociocultural challenges can be grouped into seven categories, which include discriminatory cultural practices, harmful

traditional practices and attitudes, the traditional division of labour according to sex that exerts greater demands on girls, family instability, certain religious beliefs that reinforce negative cultural practices, an insecure environment in and outside school that interfaces with the physical, social and psychological conditioning of girls, and, lastly, the differential motivational force for boys and girls that is reinforced by parental, societal and school expectations. However, though some challenges can be located at the community or societal levels, the point of interjection of much gender-biased practices is at family or household level with particular reference to the parents of the child. This is aggravated by conditions of poverty that set the decision parameters in the family.

2.2 The economic challenges

SCHOOL FEES

THE ECONOMIC CHALLENGES revolve around widespread poverty due to limited sources of income amidst the harsh economy, and poorly motivated or trained teachers (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1992). Ugandan families find the cost of education, including primary education, prohibitive (World Bank, 1996). Pons (1996) explains how schools are one of the most pressing financial demands on family budgets and are a constant source of anxiety at all social levels⁶. The costs of education includes government tuition (which is relatively low), PTA funds (which are comparatively high and a major problem), the building fund, coaching,⁷ costs of uniforms, books (both text and notes), sports and manual work equipment, and so on. These constitute a large part of the total family expenditure as Table 3 indicates. Though actual expenditure patterns do not necessarily reflect the reported expenditure prioritization shown in Table 3, the cost of education

⁶ A parent in Kanungu village in South-Western Uganda commented, "The thieves have come back", referring to the schoolchildren coming home for the school holidays.

⁷ Though PTA and coaching fees have been banned, the latter form a lucrative source of extra income for teachers in primary and secondary schools, so it has continued unabated though silently and/or informally.

Table 3: Expenditure Ranking Among Kamuli Households

Expenditure Item	Score (as %)	Rank
Medical care	98	1
Clothing	94	2
Essential household commodities	80	3
Education	58	4
Food	43	5
Shelter	35	6
Tax	27	7
Alcohol/drinking	18	8
Tobacco/smoking	09	9
Others (burials, land rentals, entertaining visitors and remittances to parents)	05	10

for all the children poses a huge financial and budgetary constraint for the household. In some families where a parent or parents are drunkards, alcohol takes a great portion of family income. Generally, educational needs follow after basic survival needs: medicine, clothing, and essential household commodities (salt, paraffin, soap, bedding and food have been met. Though food takes the fifth position in Table 4, the vagueness of the general term "essential household items" may have suppressed its position. This implies that there are few parents who can afford to pay all or most of the expenses of education. They may thus delay payment, pay in instalments or totally fail to pay. Sometimes, when only partial fees are paid, usually for tuition, after a week or two a child is sent away from school to collect the remaining money. If she cannot secure the money, she misses school for rest of the term or the year. If the money is found, the child will still find it difficult to catch up with the rest of the class. This is responsible for great frustration among children and affects their performance and length of stay in school.

WORKING FOR SCHOOL FEES

WHILE WAITING FOR THE money, the child may be tempted to leave school altogether. At such times girls may decide to marry or may be forced to marry, however young they are, while others leave home for the towns and cities in search for employment as housemaids, in informal sector activities like food-processing or as waitresses in bars and restaurants. While some girls may work in those places during the day many work as prostitutes at night.

Sometimes children start working when they are young to earn their school fees in the hope of going back to school but this may take longer than anticipated and they may subsequently fail to catch up when they go back. Such situations are the result of widespread poverty. One boy in Kamuli, for example, left school during the first term to earn his school fees through fishing. By the time he had earned the money it was already the third term and the other children were sitting their end-of-year examinations. His name had already been deleted from the register and he could not be re-enrolled for the year. Similar situations happen to girls who may be forced into early marriage instead of finding work.

Although it is claimed that hardcore poverty has been reduced in Uganda, relative poverty continues to exist under increasing socioeconomic inequality and the limited sources of income available (World Bank, 1996). This affects the ability of parents or guardians to pay school fees, forcing them to take hard decisions on which child should go to or remain at school. Furthermore, whereas education is intended to facilitate the improvement and expansion of economic activities, the latter sometimes hinder the processes of education acquisition. The fishing industry in the counties of Budiope and parts of Bulamogi which border Lake Kyoga in Kamuli district, for example, attracts young boys who prefer to make quick money rather than go to school. This, coupled with the way in which some parents allocate inheritance or property rights to children quite early, sometimes results in the early acquisition of wealth by teenagers. They use the wealth to marry and establish their own families, further contributing to the high prevalence of early marriages and school dropout rates in the district.

In addition, while at school, girls with financial problems who cannot adequately maintain themselves may turn to prostitution, either by getting a boyfriend or a sugar-daddy, or by going directly to well-known areas frequented by prostitutes such as nightclubs or big hotels in neighbouring towns. The prostitution industry is reported to have attracted even working women, secondary school teachers and women students from tertiary institutions (*The Monitor*, November 1996).

ALCOHOLISM

THE CRISIS OF DRUNKENNESS by the parents and their subsequent failure to pay school fees cripples the whole household's economically. Alcoholism results in the waste of time and money at the expense of productive work. Most parents are actually not so poor that they cannot send children to school but some drink away the family income. Sometimes the money intended for school fees is spent on drink or used pay bridewealth for a new wife. Some parents are economic liabilities rather than assets. Existing evidence also suggests that children who lose their mothers tend to drop out of school more frequently than those who lose their fathers (Atekyereza and Ezati 1996) and this justifies improving the education of girls and women in a patriarchal system which allows a widower to remarry, but not a widow.

LARGE FAMILIES

POVERTY HAS A GREAT influence on the sociocultural considerations surrounding education. There is, for example, a strong correlation between large families and poverty, although some men disagree. A male workshop participant, for instance, commented:

I have three wives and all my children are at school and I know some men who are here and have one wife but their children are at home. So it is not the number of wives or children that are a problem but the resources or sources of income to look after the family numbers. (Participatory Rural Appraisal Workshop, Kiyunga Parish)

With poor or inadequate education, women secure poorly paid or temporary jobs. Many kinds of formal and informal employment available to women are very insecure.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF structural adjustment programmes has meant more strain on the already limited number of survival mechanisms of most people. Though policies of privatization and liberalization have brought economic progress in Uganda, there is growth without development. Even this growth may not be sustainable since it is not self-induced. This has meant deepening poverty among a great section of population, especially rural people, though the Population Reference Bureau (2000) reports a decline in poverty levels from 56 per cent in 1991 to 55 in 1995 and 44 per cent in 2000. Retrenchment in Uganda under the Economic Structural Adjustment Program has been severe, especially for those in low-paying work and their dependants. As women are educated to lower levels than men they constitute a greater percentage of those who were retrenched and have sought survival in nonformal activities such as cooking food, hawking, occasional waitressing in bars and so on. Evidence of this can be directly seen from responses from prostitutes to *The Crusader* reporter:

... it is hypocritical that the very government that sent us on to the streets is showing belated concern. It is surprising....they are the ones who retrenched us from our jobs. What else do they want from us? ... They cannot ban us. Men will continue to want sex and we can provide it. So let them not waste time by talking about what they don't understand (A Senior Five school dropout prostitute who came on to the streets in 1994 after her former husband married a fifth wife and neglected her).⁸

⁸ The article was about the negative reaction to a suggestion by the Minister of Gender and Community Development that prostitution should be legalized to protect women from harassment.

In summary, poverty and other economic factors limit the accessibility to education of girls and make them vulnerable in terms of opportunities for gainful employment. Indeed, due to the lack of a clear government employment policy and to the negative consequences arising from the World Bank and IMF-backed economic reforms, even those who are educated cannot easily get gainful and secure employment. Unless there is radical change and women are trained in skills that can lead them to acquire better and secure employment and thus become economically emancipated, they will remain vulnerable.

2.3 Policy-related and administrative challenges

THE CHALLENGES RELATED to policies derive from politico-ideological perspectives that influence the formulation and implementation of women-focused projects, including education, the quality of education and how it is acquired by different sections of the population. Such policies tend to be aimed at capturing the vote of women rather than solving the causes of their oppression. Low value is still attached to education. One response in Kamuli District explains the underlying causes:

How can somebody value education, pay so much money in form of school fees and other scholastic requirements for his child, and then afterwards this young boy⁹ also puts on patched trouser? Others whom we thought were very well educated have also been retrenched. So why should we send our children to school when they are not going to get jobs, work for money and live a more decent life? How can we send our children to school knowing that afterwards they will be retrenched? (Focus Group Discussion, Namwiwa Sub-county)

and:

The current primary education syllabus is almost useless apart from teaching a person how to read and write. Otherwise, in practical terms, a child who finishes primary education is

⁹ Note the emphasis on the gender of the child.

sometimes even worse off than one who did not go to school at all. (Participatory Rural Appraisal Workshop, Namisambya I Parish)

Parents do not send their children to learn skills but to enable them know how to read and write or as they put it "to enable children read signposts so that they do not get lost". This also explains why children drop out of school mainly at Primary Four.

INADEQUACIES OF INFRASTRUCTURAL PROVISION

THOUGH THE UGANDAN education system is well developed and most children have access to a primary school within two kilometres of their home (UNICEF, 1989a:46; UNICEF, 1996:50 and Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1992), these institutions have a poor physical and material infrastructure. Some education institutions were started with political and religious backing that could not be sustained later. A number of schools have no permanent structures or inadequate ones. Most, especially secondary and post-secondary institutions, even more importantly, lack teaching aids including laboratory chemicals and books. The teacher-pupil ratio is very high as there are more pupil enrolments and fewer trained teachers. The level of teacher qualification is low. In Kamuli District, the situation was alleviated by the implementation of the PAPSCA project by ACTIONAID Uganda financed by the World Bank between 1991 and 1995. The project rehabilitated many primary schools and before this most schools conducted lessons under trees. However, relevant teaching materials, aids, uniform and poor latrines are still a serious problem (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1992; Ministry of Education and Sports, 1997a). Poor latrines have, for example, been identified as a cause of girls dropping out of school especially for those who are starting menstruation and want privacy.

INADEQUACIES OF TEACHER PROVISION

IN 1992 NEARLY HALF of all teachers were untrained (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1992:42). According to the Education Census (1997), there are 81,564 primary teachers in Uganda. Of these, 59,747 (73 per cent) are trained. The highest qualification for 88 per cent of the

untrained primary school teachers is the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE). Such instructors cannot be thought competent to impart educational and life skills to the young. These teachers, although licensed, have no background in how to handle children (especially girl), given that most of them are young and even not married. They do not understand teaching ethics: this explains why many male teachers seduce their pupils. Some even blackmail girl students with the threat of failure. Over 63 per cent (37,996) of trained teachers and over 74 per cent (16,014) of untrained teachers are male. In Kamuli district, very few headteachers are women. There is a dearth of women rôle models for girls, especially in rural areas. According to 1995 statistics, out of 215 headteachers, only 7 (3.3 per cent) were women. This is a clear indication that gender disparities that start with access to education continue and spread to other life opportunities like employment.

Though the government has tried to encourage the training of the untrained teachers through the in-service training programmes,¹⁰ the situation has improved little. Current admission qualifications to teacher training colleges (TTCs), unlike in the far past, are undesirable. In the colonial period and immediately following independence, teacher training colleges aimed to admit the best students, who were thereafter well-paid. Today, TTCs largely admit poor students who have failed to get admission to high school education, apart from a few bright ones who opt for teacher training simply because they cannot afford the school fees required to continue with high school. Failure to attract better students is also attributed to the poor payment of teachers. Discriminatory policies have strong implications for the future employment of women and universal free and compulsory primary education is illogical when there are not enough buildings to accommodate all the children to be enrolled and not enough trained teachers to teach the enrolled pupils effectively (UNICEF, 1996; Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 1992; Ministry of Education and

¹⁰ Teachers are trained during the holidays and teach during term time. The programme is called Teacher Development and Management System (TDMS).

Sports, 1997a). Already, teacher-pupil ratios accepted in 1982 no longer obtain. The salaries for teachers are very low. The government has scrapped the PTA fund and the coaching fees that were a source of livelihood for teachers. It is unlikely that teachers will be motivated to teach a crowd of pupils under the tree when the least-paid teacher earns only 72,000/- (about US \$40) per month. This is equivalent to about 2.1 per cent of what a member of parliament earns (i.e. 3,500,000/- about US\$ 1934, going by the average exchange rate in the year 2000).

Teachers have, or plan to have families, and need to maintain a minimum standard of living in terms of nutrition, clothing, accommodation, and meeting their social obligations such as giving *Mabugo*¹¹. Their poor remuneration has sometimes resulted in the degeneration of teachers' ethics and some teachers top up their wages by getting money directly from students they teach. The underfunding of education negatively affects education standards. In all situations, as has always been the case, the first victim is the girl, whose future continues to be unpredictable but certainly vulnerable. Most of issues discussed under this category would fall under what the National Strategic Plan for Girls' Education calls the school-related factors. These are summarized as inadequate school facilities, lack of comfortable or appropriate clothing, negative gender stereotyping in the curriculum, factors related to school and college personnel, shortage of alternative quality education opportunities and facilities for girls who remain outside school and the critical bottleneck that makes access to secondary and higher education by girls difficult (Republic of Uganda, 2000a:5-6). Unless education policies and instruments are re-oriented to address these realities, the results and effects on women may not change.

In rural areas the government appears to have abandoned its obligation of investing in human resource development and left most of

¹¹ *Mabugo*, literary "bark-cloth", refers to contributions given towards burial functions. The rationale of *olubugo* is its high cultural value. The more bark-cloth one is buried with, the more prestige is accorded to the dead and his/her family. It is also a sign of social solidarity with the bereaved. The mourner expects also to be buried decently after death. With AIDS, this is the most respected cultural norm today.

the burden of education to the parents. Some children are given school fees by their mothers who work as casual labourers.¹² Most children go to school hungry, with no packed lunch. It is very hard for them to concentrate in class. Some girls end up being attracted to small amounts of money and gifts from boys and men to get something to eat.

PREGNANT SCHOOLGIRLS

THE GOVERNMENT EDUCATION policy of expelling pregnant girls and not allowing them to reregister after delivery while the men responsible (who are often teachers, fellow students, businessmen and politicians) go scot-free is discriminatory, sexist and contrary to the general effort to educate women. Teenage pregnancy is now a reality: world wide teenage pregnancy rates are high and continue to rise and Uganda is leading sub Saharan African in teenage pregnancy at 43 per cent. At the end of November 1996, for example, 15 pregnant girls at St. Katherine's Secondary School, Boroboro in Lira District were expelled and a girl from Arua Public Secondary School was not allowed to sit O Level examinations because she was pregnant, after she had studied for four years and paid all school expenses there (Mugeere 1996).

Teenage pregnancy is responsible for 60–90 per cent of girls who drop out of school (Kabatende 1998). So, though the White Paper (1992) proposed free and compulsory primary school attendance for all children of the relevant age starting by the year 2010 and free education for every four children in every family with effect from February 1997, this will not work without the co-operation and participation of parents and guardians and flexibility in the enrolment policy.

UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

OTHER POLICIES THAT would be effective in the education of girls are rendered ineffective by the barriers described above. The UPE policy of

¹² Casual labourers earn less than US\$1 per day, working from 8.00 am in the morning to 2.30 p.m. or sometimes to 4.30 p.m. in the evening. The minimum fees per child per term are approximately US\$12.5 at primary school level.

January 1997 made primary education free for four children in every family. No doubt, UPE has registered success by increasing primary education enrolment levels by 93.8 per cent (Republic of Uganda 1998) though great challenges were acknowledged (Mushega 1997 and Republic of Uganda 2000b). The implementation of the policy preceded conceptual clarity. The operational definition of a family has been taken to refer to monogamous, polygamous and single parent families. This definition, however, leaves out families headed by children, which are common especially in areas that have been hard-hit by war and the AIDS epidemic such as Luwero, Gulu, Arua and Rakai districts. In addition, the policy guidelines on how the four children would be selected (i.e., two girls and two boys) do not take into account the strategies and responses of the parents and guardians. Many policies that fail in developing countries do so through the passive resistance of the people and from sabotage by the bureaucracy implementing the policies. As long as these factors prevail, girls will be considered last or not at all.

Apart from selection of children to study free, fees are still generally very high. The tuition fees that the government pays constitute a small fraction of what the parents or guardians have to pay. This includes additional fees for the PTA and the building fund and buying uniforms, books and all the other equipment. The government promises to cover the costs of building, teaching and other teaching-related materials but experience has shown that, if parents do not do the work themselves, their schools collapse (UNICEF 1989a). In most progressive private and government schools, additional payments have not been removed. Some have even been secretly retained with the mutual agreement of the school authorities and parents. Thus, the policy looks more political than practical.

ADMISSION TO UNIVERSITY

ANOTHER IMPORTANT POINT is related to the admission of women students to institutions of higher learning. Makerere University, for example, started admitting female students in first year from 1989 on 1.5 points less than those used to admit male students. This was intended to increase the enrolment of women students in the university across all

courses. However, the policy appears to have been ill-conceived, given the facts on the ground. As noted earlier, most girls drop out of school. The enrolment figures of 1993/94 indicate that only 8,310 students enrolled in the University. These constituted 0.3 per cent of the original cohort that entered primary school (World Bank, 1996:171). With affirmative action, the percentage of women at universities has recently risen to 35 per cent. The implication is that the 1.5 points policy is helping only those families that are capable and care about the education of both sexes. The vast majority is not helped in any way by this policy. The policy is not bad but it is ill-focused. It assists the female élite rather than solving the root of gender disparity in the education system; it treats the symptoms rather than the source or causes. It would be more effective to implement policies that can bring up more women to the level where they can earn the 1.5 points.

2.4 Political and security challenges

WAR AND CIVIL DISTURBANCE affects the education system as a whole, with specific consequences for girls. Since independence, Uganda has passed through several crises such as the Kabaka Crisis of 1966; the Constitutional crisis of 1967; the coup d'état by Idi Amin in 1971 that institutionalized state terrorism and economic war and the rigged general elections of 1980 that sparked off the guerrilla warfare in 1981 to 1986. Since 1986 the government has been fighting rebel groups in the country, cleaning up the remnants of the Uganda National Liberation Army troops that supported the Obote II regime; the Holy Spirit Movement led by Princess Lakwena; the Iteso insurrection and, at present, the Northern War by the Lord's Resistance Army under Joseph Kony. It is now involved in war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. During wars women are systematically raped and held hostage; kidnapped from schools and from homes and forced to work for the warring parties and to give favours in many different ways. Abducted girls and women may get pregnant and are often contract sexually transmitted diseases including of course HIV/AIDS. As McFadden states,

Tens of thousands of women died at the hands of soldiers often following rape. These were not acts of sexually starved men but expressions of violence, aggression, anger, hatred, and revenge

in an army being defeated (GADU Newspaper, No.13, 1991, cited in Meena, 1992).

Apart from these effects of the war on women, who subsequently may not go to school again, the general effect of war and/or insecurity is the destruction of schools and property (especially buildings and teaching materials), the death of pupils, teachers and parents. Schools are closed for months or even years. Refugee populations develop. All this has an effect on the attitudes of pupils and parents towards education.

When the Allied Democratic Forces invaded Kasese (Western Uganda) in 1997, primary school children in the area could not sit their primary leaving examination and many people fled the war zone with all their families. In April 1998, the Allied Democratic Force rebels invaded Kichwamba Technical Institute, abducted some students and burnt almost 100 others with petrol while they slept. Wars increase the chances of children dropping out of school and deeply affect women who have to care for and keep the family together such a time.

Children who have been abducted suffer psychological damage. The impact of seeing dead bodies is very traumatic, as one girl narrates. Janet was forced to become the commander's wife but went back to school briefly after escaping. Her life could never return to normal after having witnessed death. She always feared that the rebels would come again. Thus traumatized and unable to concentrate on her studies she dropped out of school, saying,

I thought of running away. I found a man willing to hide me in a village far from home where the rebels would not catch me. Though I did not want to get married yet, and moreover to a man with another wife, I did not have an alternative (Mirembe, 1996:7).

Insecurity, as explained above, is responsible for reduced school enrolments or the dropping out of school by many children, particularly girls. During insecurity or war families spend without earning and consume without producing, resulting in mass deprivation and starvation. In short, women are more vulnerable than men in periods of war and insecurity and this seriously affects their education, just as their survival strategies are affected by their education.

3. Education and status of women

DESPITE GOOD WILL, international, regional, national and civil efforts to raise the social status of women and bring women into powerful leadership roles, Uganda still falls far short of gender fairness in education. Of the 146 developing countries rated on the Gender Human Development Index Uganda takes the 132nd place. The position of women in the country, and Kamuli District in particular, remains low.

Economic status and employment

THE DROPOUT RATE of girls at school affects the economic empowerment of women through gainful employment (UNICEF 1996). Culturally, women do not own property. Their property rights are enshrined in their husbands (as wives) or fathers (as daughters). The study in Kamuli, for example, found that very few women own property. In the study, less than 5 out of every 10 respondents acknowledged that women may own land or cattle. Not only is the ownership and control of productive resources vested in men, women are often not consulted on important household matters including education, most particularly on expenditure. On the question of who is involved in decision-making, only 63 per cent consult their spouses. The rest consult their children; their relatives; their friends or no one. In the pre-test study, one respondent who said he consults the son, also said he did not consult his wife: "No, no. I consult my son because he is my heir. I cannot consult the wife. What does she know?" (A 70 year-old man from Nawansaso Parish, Kitayunjwa Sub-County). This confirms the "Districts Speak Out" study (1993) findings (cited in Barton and Wamai, 1994) ranking the lack of a voice in family affairs as third among women's leading problems.

The effect of AIDS

WITH AIDS, FAMILY EXPENDITURE rises to include nursing the patients. Girls are removed from school to nurse the sick. The AIDS infection rate was projected to be 1.9 million people in 1998 (Republic of Uganda, 1998). Though AIDS affects the more educated occupational groups aged between 35 and 45 years, a large section of uneducated or less educated women are very prone to HIV/AIDS infection due to high levels of unemployment and the lucrative prostitution industry fuelled by the

economically powerful. These are often the breadwinners in their families. Reduced labour in all the family's economic activities implies reduction in family incomes, leading to the need to select which child will go to school on limited family resources. Such chronic poverty is increasingly being concentrated in single-parent households particularly those headed by the never-married women (Wu and Martinson, 1993), a social group that is increasing in numbers but highly perceived as social deviants from the norm (Stuart, 1996).

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

TO EMANCIPATE WOMEN so that they can realise their full potential, they need to be educated and trained in appropriate development-oriented knowledge and skills. However, literacy levels in Uganda are still relatively low and manifest serious gender disparities. The relatively high enrolment levels in the first years of primary school are eroded later by high dropout rates, especially of girls and the lack of an adequate education affects the employment opportunities for women.

The reasons why girls may not go to school and why they drop out have been categorized as sociocultural, economic, policy-related and, political. These factors are not mutually exclusive. However, though the processes may differ in different regions, contexts and time, the ultimate effect is the marginalization of women.

The major factors affecting school attendance include poverty and the high cost of education. This is compounded by ignorance and sociocultural beliefs and traditions in a male-dominated society.

As far as policy is concerned, the primary school curriculum is not responsive to the needs of the community in general and women in particular. Education institutions are inadequate and teachers are badly paid. Girls are excluded from school when they become pregnant. The UPE fails to address the problem since the decision on which child should benefit from "free" education still lies with guardians who have to pay the remaining expenses involved. There has been no coherent employment policy that can address the unemployment that still puts poor families and uneducated women at risk.

As far as politics and security are concerned, countries are often at war internally or with each other. This creates political insecurity, with negative effects on the education of women. The paper acknowledges the efforts of the government that culminated in the formulation of the National Strategic Plan for Girls' Education (2000) but still argues that unless first things are handled first with the meaningful involvement of parents, little can be achieved by the targeted year of 2003.

4.2 Recommendations

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM should determine or, at least, influence the decisions on the nature of the solution. Though the solution to an equitable gender balance in education lies at another level, the final point of intersection is the family, where poverty and sociocultural factors meet. If the achievements of UPE are to be maintained and improved, government must continue on the same radical path as UPE and change its economic and, particularly, employment policies. The new policies must be aimed at enabling all people to earn at least a basic wage. The World Bank and IMF backed-economic reforms must be reconsidered in light of their microlevel consequences. The government cannot expect people with very unequal resources to endure the same socioeconomic conditions. As a result, parents must take their place as decisionmakers among the donors, international bodies, non-governmental organizations and the bureaucracy. It is they and only they who are the ultimate actors who can influence the success or failure of programmes.

Secondly, for an effective, full implementation of universal and compulsory primary education by the year 2003, there is need to gather relevant data on the reasons firstly, for low levels of school attendance; secondly, for high dropout rates; and, thirdly for the gender disparities in school attendance levels for each district. The specific peculiarities of each district must be addressed. The UPE programme should target the most vulnerable children; girls, the disabled, the "Chiums" and orphans. Government policy on school funding should be reviewed to reconcile the current ban on PTA funds with school and teachers' requirements. Similarly, the policy of expelling pregnant schoolgirls and leaving the men responsible needs to be revised. The government's affirmative drive must seriously address curriculum change, the

construction and maintenance of educational buildings, and the training, motivation and adequate remuneration of teachers, together with a code of conduct for them.

Due to the real and perceived widespread poverty throughout the country, the government needs to design microlevel programmes to assist the most vulnerable sections of the population, whose vulnerability has increased with implementation of the structural adjustment programmes (see Simon *et al.*, 1995, Onimode 1992, Khan and Sonko 1994, UNICEF1989b). There must be a fundamental shift from political rhetoric to a clear political will and effort to alleviate poverty and unemployment. The government must make a realistic policy to readjust the wages of all working people and promote rural economic investment to alleviate rural unemployment.

Together with the economic emancipation of families, there is need for a well-planned civic education policy on the value of education for both sexes. The public needs sensitization about alcohol abuse, child labour and the protection of the environment for fruitful and sustainable agriculture, which is a major source of income for rural families (Atekyereza 2001:204).

The government also needs to improve health facilities especially in rural areas and near schools and improve their accessibility to the poor, to women and to the young. Diseases negatively affect the productivity and retention in schools of children, especially girls, since they are the main caregivers. In order to maintain its own level of performance, the government should provide free diagnosis and treatment for malaria, which is a leading but controllable killer disease. This will allow girls more educational opportunity.

Lastly, on the political challenges, there is little that individuals can do if the government does not take the full responsibility for looking after its citizens. To avoid wars and rebel activities a culture of political and ideological tolerance must be developed. The standards of education of girls cannot improve when the general standards are worsening. In addition to wars, the government must contain the cattle rustling by the Karimojong. Children, especially girls, cannot go to school when they are always on the run for fear of being killed or raped.

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