

# EDUCATION FINANCING

## ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION FINANCING ON RETENTION, COMPLETION, AND TRANSITION RATES IN UGANDA



Pupils from Awa Primary School, Uganda

This study was conducted in November 2024 to assess the impact of primary education financing on learner retention, completion, and transition rates. The analysis was focused in two of Uganda's most marginalized sub-regions West Nile and Karamoja over the period FY2021/22 to FY2023/24. These regions face unique challenges, including high poverty levels, insecurity, refugee influx, and limited infrastructure, all of which significantly affect education outcomes. By examining financial allocations, teacher availability, infrastructure, and learning materials, the study provides critical insights into how education financing influences performance in these underserved areas.

Findings from the study highlight significant disparities in education financing, resource allocation, and school completion rates between Uganda's West Nile and Karamoja sub-regions. Despite Uganda's commitment to strengthen the education system, persistent systemic and financial barriers continue to deny children in these regions access to quality education. The study provides recommendations to address resource allocation challenges, equity-related barriers, and systemic infrastructure gaps ensuring no child is left behind.



Pupils from Awa Primary School, Uganda

*"The schools don't have enough classrooms, and some children study under trees. When it rains, classes stop. My child's school also doesn't have electricity, so they can't use any modern teaching tools"*

Male Parent, Madi Okollo District

*"Girls in their adolescence face many challenges. Without private changing rooms or sanitary supplies, they miss school during their periods, and some drop out completely after failing to catch up in lessons missed"*

Female Parent, Yumbe District



Pupils from Awa Primary School, Uganda

## LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Uganda's local and national policies on primary education are closely aligned with international and regional frameworks, reflecting a cohesive commitment to ensuring equitable access to education.

At the national level, the 1995 Constitution and the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy of 1997 guarantee free primary education, mirroring the mandates of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Education Act (2008) formalizes these commitments, specifying roles and responsibilities in line with the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action's emphasis on adequate and equitable financing, which recommends that countries allocate at least 4-6% of GDP and 15-20% of national budgets to education.

Regionally, Uganda's adherence to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child underscores its dedication to addressing educational disparities, particularly for marginalized communities.

These alignments ensure that Uganda's educational strategies are comprehensive and inclusive, addressing both local needs and responding to global standards.

Despite these efforts, Uganda's **public education spending was only 2.7% of GDP in 2021**, far below the recommended minimum target of 4-6 % of GDP set by international frameworks. This highlights Uganda's ongoing challenge in meeting the international financial benchmarks.

*"Teachers come and go very quickly. They don't stay long because the conditions here are hard, and they are not paid on time. Without enough teachers, the children are left idle or taught by unqualified substitutes, which affects their education"*

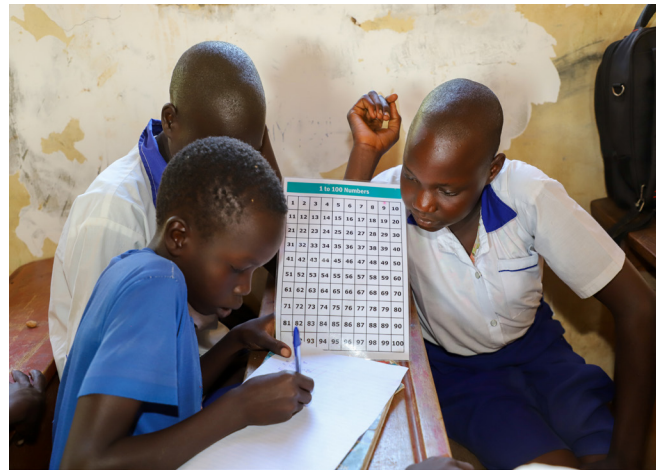
Male Parent, Abim District



Pupils from Awa Primary School, Uganda

## KEY FINDINGS

Although the UPE policy has increased education funding in the country and reduced national dropout rates, Uganda's investment of 2.7% of GDP remains well below the international benchmark of 4-6% of GDP. Further, **distribution of funds is irregular, insufficient, unequal, and disparities in allocation persist.** This systemic underfunding leaves regions like Karamoja and West Nile disproportionately disadvantaged, facing both financial inequities, coupled with socioeconomic factors affecting children's learning and retention in school and persistent local barriers to accessing education.



Pupils from Awa Primary School, Uganda

- The northern region faces serious socioeconomic barriers that affect education, causing a **52% dropout rate in Karamoja** and **37% in West Nile**.
- In Karamoja, **36% of girls are married before the age of 18**, and **30% have experienced pregnancy**. Such harmful social practices contribute significantly to high dropout rates for girls and young women.
- With a staggering **poverty rate of 45.6%** in West Nile and **66% of households** in Karamoja **living below the poverty line** (national average is 20.3%) many families cannot afford basic school supplies, undermining the effectiveness of the UPE.
- **Geographic location**, including whether schools are in rural or urban areas or which region they are located in, accounts for over **40% of the inequality in school enrolment, grade progression, and timely completion**, exceeding the influence of household socioeconomic status and highlighting the severe disadvantage faced by remote, insecure, and underserved communities.
- **The lack of teacher training, poor housing, and delayed or low wages**, contributes to high attrition and absenteeism of teachers (30% in Karamoja, 24% in West Nile), and reliance on noncertified teachers. **Only 70% of teachers in Karamoja and 84% in West Nile are on the government payroll** (well below the national average of 95%). This payroll gap undermines teacher morale, stability, and long-term commitment, further straining the quality and consistency of primary education in these regions.
- **Food insecurity affects 42% of households** in West Nile. Moderate to severe hunger contribute to lower school attendance and retention of learners.
- **Over 40 schools in Karamoja were temporarily closed in 2022 due to insecurity**, affecting over 12,000 learners. Episodes of cattle raids, perpetuated by inter-ethnic conflicts and the proliferation of illegal firearms, continue to disrupt education.
- **Wildlife incursions and nomadic pastoralism** have added to Karamoja's challenges, creating unsafe conditions for learners and teachers traveling to and from schools.
- West Nile generously hosts over **1.3 million refugees**, accounting for 65% of Uganda's total refugee population. The **lack of infrastructure** has resulted in overcrowded schools, with **pupil-to-classroom ratios reaching 108:1 (Karamoja) and 85:1 (West Nile)**, significantly exceeding the national standard of 53:1.
- Only **18% of children in Karamoja and 38% in West Nile complete primary education**, starkly below Uganda's national average of 61%.
- **Infrastructure deficiency with limited electricity access** (18% in Karamoja, 33% in West Nile) leaves schools behind, increases the digital divide, and **inadequate sanitation and gender-segregated facilities exacerbate dropout rates, especially for girls**.
- The annual capitation grant per pupil was **UGX 17,000** in the FY 2022/2023, far below the National Planning Authority's (NPA) recommended figure of UGX 63,546 for urban schools and UGX 59,503 for rural schools.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the education challenges in Karamoja and West Nile, this study has provided the following key recommendations.

- The government and development partners should **strengthen community-based interventions and child protection laws to reduce harmful gender norms.**
- The government should adjust the **capitation grant** according to the increase of education costs.
- The government should introduce an **equity-based funding model** to address the additional financial burden faced by refugee-hosting and rural districts and prioritizing districts with the greatest needs.
- Districts should **allocate a fixed percentage of local revenues** for teacher recruitment, school infrastructure, and learning materials, and coordinate with national and local governments to ensure an equitable distribution of resources.
- The government should allocate dedicated funds for classroom and teacher housing construction, essential utilities (electricity and water), and **improve the implementation of the School Facilities Grant** to ensure equitable infrastructure development.
- The government should **fast-track teacher recruitment** to reduce overcrowded classrooms and **invest in continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers.**
- **Teachers' salaries should be paid on time and hardship allowances** for teachers in remote areas should be implemented in line with the existing guidance. This should be coupled with improved monitoring of teacher attendance.
- **The government should ensure that approved education budgets are fully disbursed in a timely manner** to avoid funding gaps combined with enhanced monitoring and **accountability** in education financing.
- In a context of reduced aid, **continued donor support to education** in the most marginalized areas in Uganda, including refugee receiving areas is critical.
- School management committees and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) should be **empowered to monitor resource allocation and decision-making at the school level.**



Pupils from Awa Primary School, Uganda

*"Refugee children are welcomed into schools, but this has increased the number of pupils too much. The classes are overcrowded, and the teachers cannot handle the numbers. This makes learning very difficult for our children"*

Male Parent, Yumbe District

This study was commissioned by the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG) in collaboration with Oxfam and funded by DANIDA.



Photos by Ivan Rackara