RESEARCH NOTE
Provision of alternative basic education to out-of-school children for urban areas of Kampala, Uganda: The BEUPA case

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Abstract
Owing to socio-economic and other related barriers, a large number of children in Uganda do not access primary school education, despite the existence of the Universal Primary Education Programme. To cater for out-of-school children of primary school age in poor urban areas of Kampala, the government set up Basic Education for Urban Poverty Areas (BEUPA), a non-formal education project. This project has established 72 learning centres in 70 of the 97 parishes of Kampala, trained over 170 instructors, interacted with over 1 500 community members and reached over 5 800 children. For this paper, qualitative data has been gathered through interviews and interactions with Kampala learners, community members, instructors and education officials. The paper finds that BEUPA in Kampala has been challenging to implement, as it deals with disadvantaged children. It stresses that for government to succeed in delivering non-formal education programmes, it is vital that local communities champion the process and there must therefore be determined efforts to educate these communities in this respect. The paper recommends a child rights and responsibility-based approach to development and encourages guidance, counselling and the provision of life and entrepreneurial skills.

Out-of-school children in the global context
Worldwide, an estimated 104 million children of the relevant school-going age are not enrolled in primary school (UNESCO 2004). This means that close to 14% of the world’s 742.9 million children are not getting basic education. About 67% are girls. Almost – though not all – out-of-school children live in developing countries. Further, 46 million (44%) and 44 million (42.3%) live in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and south-western Asia respectively (World Bank 2003). These are the poorest and most indebted regions, with a large proportion of the population living on less than US$1 per day (Kiirya 2003: 1). In a world that claims to have committed itself to universal primary completion by 2015, the Eastern and Southern African region is one of the furthest from realizing this goal. As a recent UNICEF report notes, ‘in the most disadvantaged regions and countries “business as usual” will not deliver’ (UNICEF 2005: 4). In Uganda alone, owing to non-enrolment and dropping out, between 15% and 18% of children are
still out of school. In Kampala it is estimated that over 30% of children of primary school age are not in school.

Rapid urbanization is a worldwide phenomenon. In Africa, cities, particularly capital cities, have grown enormously, attracting immigrants from the countryside who are escaping rural poverty but are often confronted again by poverty and its manifestations in urban and peri-urban conditions. One of these manifestations is educational crisis and deprivation. Undoubtedly, the cities of the global south are facing an urban educational crisis, and they need to learn from each other’s experience in confronting it. This article is a contribution to this process, taking the example of Uganda’s capital, Kampala, and discussing an initiative that, in the words of UNICEF, attempts to go beyond ‘business as usual’.

Recognizing the importance of education

Uganda has emphasised the importance of education for all primary age children, and is a signatory to the following:

- Article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), which recognizes education, along with other basic necessities such as food, shelter and water, as a fundamental human right
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by 192 countries in 1989, which affirms the right of all children to free and relevant education of good quality
- The 2000 Dakar World Declaration of Education For All (EFA), where participants from 164 countries pledged to provide education for all by 2015

In this context, Uganda is successfully implementing the Universal Primary Edu-
cation (UPE) programme, with enrolment having increased from 2.9 million in 1996 to 7.3 million in 2003 for primary school children aged 6-14 years (MoES 2003). Having realized that formal primary education alone is insufficient, the Ugandan government has also put in place non-formal basic education programmes like COPE, BEUPA, CHANCE and ABEK, among others, as alternative basic education programmes to cater for out-of-school children who for various reasons cannot access education.

Education provides people with the tools and knowledge they need to understand and participate in today's world (King 2004: 17; Kyeyune 2004; UNESCO 2005). It helps sustain the human values that contribute to individual and collective well-being. Kyeyune (2004) stresses that education is the basis for literacy and lifelong learning and that it inspires confidence and provides the skills needed to participate in public debate. It makes people more self-reliant and aware of opportunities and rights. It is therefore crucial to provide education for all children, including the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Education also enhances the ability of households to manage health problems and improves nutrition and childcare.

- It provides girls and women with greater understanding of basic health, nutrition and family planning, and of their own potential.
- Educated women marry later and tend to have fewer children and receive better prenatal care (UNICEF 2004).
- The children of mothers who have been to school are healthier, better nourished and more likely to attend and succeed in school than children of mothers who have never gone to school.
- Maternal primary education reduces the risk of child mortality. In the Philippines, for instance, it reduced it by half. Secondary education reduces it by a factor of three (OXFAM 2004: 23).
- Education helps to prevent the labour, trafficking and sexual exploitation of children and their use as soldiers.

Education is one of the most effective weapons against HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and raises awareness of the need for improved living conditions and environmental protection. The UNDP (2003) reports that life expectancy rises by as much as two years for every 1% increase in literacy. The Economic Policy Research Centre (2004: 43) confirms that education is essential for economic development and eradicating poverty. It allows people to play a greater and more productive role in economic life and to earn a better living. Franks et al (2004: 3) and Bategeka et al (2004: 85) note that an adult with a primary education earns twice as much as an adult without any schooling. For example, OXFAM (2003) reports that in Niger the incidence of poverty is 70% in households headed by adults with no education, compared with 56% for households headed by adults who have been to primary school. Especially in Africa, education is essential where agriculture is vital, since farming practices can be improved through basic education. In Uganda, for example, four years of primary education raise a farmer's output by 7% (UNESCO 2005). In the technological age, education is important since it is the foundation for acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in and benefit from globalization and technological change. Hence, being out of school means that one is losing out on quality of life.

Despite many obstacles, progress is being made in reducing the percentage of out-of-school children globally. The number of such children fell by around 4% over the decade
1990-2000, and total worldwide enrolment in primary education increased from 596 to 648 million over the same period, an increase of 8.7% in ten years. This improvement, however, is uneven. Beyene (2002: 34) reports that there are strong regional variations. The highest increases in enrolment, outpacing population growth, occurred in sub-Saharan Africa (38%), in South and West Asia (19%) and in the Arab states (17%), yet these are also regions with very high rates of out-of-school children.

While some 57% of all out-of-school children are girls, this percentage has decreased by 0.6% over the last decade (1990-2000), with the steepest reduction occurring in East Asia and the Pacific. In these regions, however, the number of out-of-school boys has tripled. Globally, girls’ enrolments have increased faster than those of boys, but sub-Saharan Africa is still the region with the highest absolute number (23 million) of out-of-school girls, and South and West Asia, with 21 million, have the greatest disparity of any of the world’s regions between the enrolment of boys and girls.

In Uganda, for the period UPE has been in place (1997-2004), enrolment of children in formal primary schools has increased from 2.69 to 7.3 millions (Kakooza 2004: 3). Non-formal basic education programmes enrolled over 60 000 out-of-school primary school age children.

Analysing the problem
Despite the successes of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda, some children of primary school age are still not attending school. UPPAP (2000: 71-27) recognizes that the categories of children missing from school are related to conditions specific to where these children live. In turn, these conditions depend upon whether children are urban or rural and divisions within these categories. The economic activities of the community may also contribute to the problem of out-of-school children. Issues related to the socio-economic status of the households, families and communities where children live are also important in addressing reasons why children miss school. MoES (2004: 11), reports that among the categories of children often missing from formal school are children in pastoral areas, children from fishing communities, working children, street children and abused children. To this might be added children from small-scale mining communities, and indeed any community where child labour contributes to the family economy.

Between 15% and 18% of children of primary school age still miss out on formal schooling (Kiirya 2003: 1; MoES 2004: 12). In a country like Uganda, where Education For All (EFA) is a priority, the 15-18% ratio is significant. In Kampala alone, it is estimated that there are between 8 000 and 12 000 children of primary school age who are out of school (BEUPA-PRA 1998). Like other cities in Africa and elsewhere, Kampala has cases of neglected children and incidents of child abuse and denial of basic rights, with a substantial number of such neglected and at times abused children living on the streets.

With UPE in existence, why are there out-of-school children? Another legitimate question is, if complementary programmes to UPE are in place, what are their successes and challenges and what possible recommendations can be advanced for a more effective delivery of NFBE programmes? As a case study, this paper addresses BEUPA’s successes, challenges and opportunities. The findings will inform, amongst others, the Enhancement of Universal Primary Education and Community (EUPEC) project part-
nership on how to manage and deliver non-formal education appropriately in Kampala and Wakiso.

EUPEC is a school improvement project funded by the Aga Khan Foundation and other donors. The project is a partnership involving the Kampala City Council (KCC) and Wakiso district and is scheduled to last five years (2005-2010).

One of the principle objectives of EUPEC is to support BEUPA's successes and whatever lessons have been learnt over its lifetime through a programme aimed at scaling up achievements and building innovative interventions that promote sustainable non-formal basic education in the Kampala and Wakiso districts.

The overall goal of EUPEC is to improve the sustainability of interventions in education and to improve access to and the quality of education for children in poor disadvantaged urban communities. EUPEC will seek to achieve this by addressing the professional needs of teachers and by encouraging the effective participation of communities in the provision of education, as well as by strengthening the capacity of service providers, including non-governmental organizations, education specialists and government institutions. In particular, EUPEC will support BEUPA through efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of basic education for working children and street children within the city of Kampala and some neighbouring towns in Wakiso.

Currently, BEUPA operates in Kampala city. Even within Kampala, it benefits only a limited number of working and street children. Although many target children still remain outside BEUPA's reach, a significant number of very young children are enrolled in the centres, effectively turning them into nursery schools.

Considering all this, EUPEC will intervene by developing and designing an appropriate strategy to provide consistent professional support to BEUPA's non-formal education instructors, as it is already doing for government-funded formal schools. This will enable them to deliver higher quality services, carry out systematic community development to enable BEUPA/non-formal education centres to make appropriate use of services provided and become involved in the management of the centres, and conduct action research on specific issues that may be identified. It is hoped that the outcomes will go a long way to informing stakeholders on how best non-formal educational programmes can be developed and implemented.

This work is not only intended to determine what else can be done to support BEUPA efforts, but also to provide data for the baseline study.

Secondary data supplemented with some primary data were used for this paper. Secondary data consisted of policy documents, statistical abstracts, programme implementation reports, M&E reports, and published and unpublished articles, both online and others. Primary data were gathered through interviews and interaction with policy-makers, education officers, community members, instructors and learners within Kampala.

**Results: Problems and opportunities**

Given the gravity of the problem of out-of-school children analysed above, it is clear that basic education programmes like UPE alone cannot absorb all children of primary school age. Also, whatever enforcement is attempted or whatever incentives are put in place, there are other factors that make universal access to formal basic education for all children of primary school age impos-
sible. It is therefore important that alternative approaches to enrolling out-of-school children be explored in an attempt to circumvent these difficulties.

The government of Uganda and other partners committed to provision of equitable education for all children of primary school age developed non-formal basic education programmes. These are aimed at providing second-chance education for out-of-school children as an alternative to formal basic education. By the year 2002, four non-formal basic education programmes were in place. The table below indicates the programmes, their areas of operation and the number of children supported by a given programme.

BEUPA is the NFBE programme that serves Kampala City. This alternative education programme is important, since Kampala has the greatest number of out-of-school children in Uganda. BEUPA was set up specifically to address unique challenges facing poor urban communities in Kampala. For this reason, this paper discusses BEUPA rather than other NFBE programmes.

BEUPA is a non-formal basic education programme of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). The Education Department of the City Council of Kampala (KCC) implements the programme. The German government through German Technical Co-operation (GTZ) supports the project with financial and technical advice, with the MoES and Kampala City Council giving recurrent financial support. The broad goal of BEUPA is to improve the quality of life of children and adolescents in poor urban areas by providing alternative basic education. The programme aims at complementing the Ugandan government’s efforts to provide education for all as a means to combat poverty and provide appropriate life skills to children and adolescents in impoverished urban areas.

BEUPA seeks to fulfil four major objectives, namely:

- The provision of basic education appropriate to the needs of out-of-school children in poor urban areas
- The preparation and provision of a skills-oriented curriculum that caters for literacy and numeracy, and life and practical skills related to the environment of the learners
- The provision of a flexible learning programme in terms of time and content that enables learners to better carry out their

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<th>Contribution to basic education by non-formal programmes</th>
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<td>Programme</td>
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<td>Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK)</td>
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<td>Basic Education in Urban Poverty Areas (BEUPA)</td>
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<td>Community-Centred Alternative for Non-Formal Community-Based Education (CHANCE)</td>
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<td>Complementary Opportunities for Basic Education (COPE)</td>
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roles and functions as responsible mem-
bers of their families, communities and
society
• The development and provision of addi-
tional modules for employment-oriented
education, examining possible strategies
for career guidance and support
BEUPA has had a number of successes.
With its partners it has managed to develop
a user-friendly, flexible, thematic curric-
ulum tailored to the learning needs of child-
ren in the poor areas of Kampala. For exam-
ple, attendance is not compulsory, thus
allowing learners to adapt their learning
patterns to the homes they come from, with
the time to be spent at the learning centres
determined by the centre management com-
mittee in a participatory manner. Generally
the majority of the BEUPA centres have
implemented a three-hour learning day and
learners are supposed to participate in
deciding whether learning should take place
in the morning or in the afternoon. Also the
BEUPA curriculum has been designed in an
integrated manner, e.g. integrating theoret-
ic knowledge with pre-vocational skills,
life skills and issues like HIV/AIDS, adoles-
cent sexual reproductive health and child-
ren’s rights.
Through cooperation with community
members, its instructors and other actors
like ANPPCAN, BEUPA has developed the
necessary teaching, learning and training
material for instructors and children. These
materials have been instrumental in helping
children to learn and to enhance their psycho-
motor skills, i.e. learning that involves
physical and perceptual activities and skills.
This is aimed at developing life-long skills
among BEUPA learners, for future appli-
cation, self-sustainability and poverty allevi-
ation.
By September 2002, BEUPA had estab-
lished 54 learning centres throughout the
five divisions of Kampala (Ilon and Kyeyune
2002: 4). The learning centres were spread
strategically throughout the poor areas of
Kampala to cater especially for working
children in close proximity to their centres of
work.
Over 10 000 boys and girls have benefited
from BEUPA centres directly, indirectly or
both. Learners have received both theoret-
ic knowledge and practical skills, e.g.
learning to make and sell mats and bas-
kets. This is an aspect of practical skills
acquisition and a move towards poverty re-
duction and self-sustainability.
Through formal and informal campaigns,
BEUPA has spread messages encouraging
the appreciation of the value of basic edu-
cation for children. These have reached
approximately 5 000 members of the com-
munity. Unfortunately, it is not possible to
state with certainty how beneficial these
sensitization activities have been in these
communities. However, there is anecdotal
evidence that sensitization alone cannot
help in changing the attitudes of community
members.
BEUPA has trained 1 908 members of the
community to manage BEUPA centres as
centre management committee members.
Capacity developed among these commit-
tees includes but is not limited to resource
mobilization skills, curriculum supervision,
and general and financial management.
This empowerment has been valuable to
both individuals and the BEUPA pro-
gramme.
BEUPA has trained 176 community-
based instructors. BEUPA communities
identify respectable potential persons with
significant basic education attainment, thus
the term ‘community teachers’. This way of
identifying facilitators has the big advan-
tage of ensuring local ownership and sus-
tainability of the programme.
There are, however, many challenges facing the programme. Amongst the major ones are poor enrolment and learners dropping out of the programme once enrolled. This section discusses reasons for the challenges facing the implementation of BEUPA in Kampala.

Perhaps the most important barriers to children accessing formal and non-formal education in Uganda are socio-economic (UPPAP 2000: 70; UNDP 1998: 37; UNDP 2005). In Uganda, increasing numbers of children have socio-economic obligations. For example, some children have family responsibilities like looking after their siblings as a result of parental death from HIV/AIDS. Others include but are not limited to large families, poverty and the high opportunity cost for education and child labour.

Learning needs are yet another factor found to contribute to keeping children not only out of BEUPA but also out of the formal school setting. This is a serious issue, since in Uganda there is a tendency to misunderstand the learning needs of children requiring specialized education (Kajura 2002: 17). Learning needs encompass specialized needs for learning, life skills, vocational skills and remedial and/or additional competencies. In the event that the education system in place is not in a position to provide for such education, children will automatically drop out of school.

Some BEUPA centres have used harsh disciplinary measures, with instructors having negative attitudes towards learners, inadequate school facilities, irrelevant instructional materials, centralized and non-consultative planning of education programmes, and limited or no recreational facilities. This is a major factor leading to learners dropping out of BEUPA learning centres.

HIV/AIDS, malaria, malnutrition and inadequate latrine facilities and water are some of the most serious health and health-related factors leading to non-attendance and dropping out of school by learners in BEUPA centres. Topping the list is malaria. In Uganda, not only does malaria prevent learners from attending school, but, through cerebral malaria, it can lead to epilepsy and mental retardation (MoH 2005: 33).

One of the important achievements of BEUPA is the ability to involve poor urban communities actively. Therefore sustainability of community involvement is crucial to the success of BEUPA interventions. The other crucial aspect is financial sustainability. Here the major question is how BEUPA would be able to operate, for example if GTZ were to withdraw its support for the project.

Learners who complete the three years of the BEUPA programme find it hard to integrate into the formal education system. Yet the intention was that after three years of instruction at BEUPA centres learners would join formal schools at level five. That this seems to be difficult demotivates other learners in BEUPA centres. As a result of their peers failing to enrol in the formal school cycle, others with the same intention can be discouraged from continuing. After the three-year cycle, these children again add to the pool of out-of-school children.

Among facilitators, there is a lack of capacity to facilitate, train or teach and assess children with special learning needs and requirements. This means that these vulnerable children will continue to be at a disadvantage. It could be argued that this is so because BEUPA uses community teachers who are untrained. However, even in the formal primary schools in Kampala, there is not enough manpower to deal with children requiring assistance with special needs.
Other barriers to the success of the BEUPA project include inadequate monitoring and evaluation and a whole series of factors that may also affect the youth population at large, such as rape, harassment, insecurity, political instability, internal migration and mobility as a result of service in the police, army or prison forces.

**Recommendations and conclusions**

- Since the existence of non-formal education programmes like BEUPA depends on the blessing of communities, community empowerment programmes in BEUPA should be well designed, planned and executed. Adult and community education initiatives that target critical issues in society, e.g. parenting, household income generation and functional adult literacy, should be targeted. These critical issues should form major components of NFBE programmes. EUPEC, therefore, should work with BEUPA stakeholders to develop and design appropriate community development programmes that will attract community involvement and participation for sustainable development.

- Education development agencies such as EUPEC engaged with NFBE development and sustainability should regard curriculum as critical. Second-chance education for vulnerable children should involve vocational and other life skills training and orientation. It should also address fields of learning and development in early life of capacities, self-awareness, empathy for others, self-motivation and discipline. These characteristics are essential for success in learning and in later life. Therefore, in planning NFBE programmes like BEUPA, curriculum and its delivery should be carefully designed to address these issues.

- Programmes for strengthening early childhood education should be targeted to serve the communities concerned. This can be done through pre-schools, places of religious instruction, churches or mosques, neighbourhood associations or family. This could help the very young to develop the curiosity, literacy and language skills that are essential for success at school. This may help with creating interest in learning and reduce school drop-out. BEUPA, with the help of EUPEC, may wish to take some lessons from the Madrasa Resource Centre (MRC), an early childhood education and development programme with rich experience and expertise in this area.

- Guidance, counselling and mentoring for those children who have no support system, and no role models to help them find their way to successful and responsible adulthood should be emphasised within NFBE programmes like BEUPA. It would be prudent therefore for EUPEC to assist BEUPA and the new NFBE efforts anticipated in Wakiso to develop and design appropriate programme that will help community leaders, programme managers and instructors to understand the culture and lifestyle of the least advantaged among poor communities, and help them appreciate the need to drop or at least modify those cultural values that hinder access to and retention in school systems.

- The means must be found to focus the attention of communities and local government on what BEUPA and other NFBE programmes are doing. This is a precondition for them giving the necessary support, including financial support, without which NFBE programmes like
BEUPA cannot offer second-chance education to the most vulnerable children, especially to those in poor urban communities.

- EUPEC, BEUPA and the Ministry of Education should collaborate in developing and designing a programme that would enable learners who may wish to divert to formal primary education to do so with less difficulty.

- There is a need to strengthen and enhance collaboration among central government (MoES), local government (KCC) and civil society organizations (community groups, supporting agencies like GTZ and NGOs like AKF, ANPPCAN and STF, among others).

- BEUPA should experiment with linking their centres with formal schools in the area. For example, a BEUPA centre could be housed in a formal school, especially from 12:00 noon onwards (space accommodating the two lowest primary classes is generally free in the afternoons). This arrangement is likely to add value to the centres and enhance BEUPA learners’ self-esteem and make them more respected in the community.

- EUPEC needs to assist BEUPA to plan and execute a research agenda based on well-developed objectives. Systems to ensure that periodic monitoring and evaluation take place alongside the programme interventions in an integrated and participatory manner are important and should be put in place. Participatory action research could serve this purpose. This will help in identifying gaps in programme implementation and give direction to interventions that are in line with programme objectives and the needs of the community.

If well planned and managed, innovative NFBE programmes like BEUPA can address community needs and increase opportunities for sustainable development. However, if sustainable development is to be realized, it is important that NFBE interventions be sensitive to community education requirements by using flexible approaches with regard to age, relevance of curriculum, duration, venues and methods of delivery. It is also important that, for purposes of ownership and sustainability, development of programmes like BEUPA should give a central place to community involvement and participation. Otherwise, for Kampala city and the rest of the country, with about 18% of children out of school and seven million adults with very limited levels of literacy, the attainment of education for all might not be achieved. Realizing that the task is considerably greater than anticipated, the need for an integrated effort amongst various stakeholders like central (MoES) and local (KCC) government and civil society organizations is vital. This kind of integration will utilize skills and expertise from different actors. This should create the conditions for more effective educational interventions relevant to the lives of those experiencing them. This will lead to beneficiaries from NFBE programmes developing life skills, which will in the long run contribute to poverty eradication. We are convinced that other poor communities, in Africa and elsewhere, can learn and benefit from both the positive and negative aspects of BEUPA’s experience.

References


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