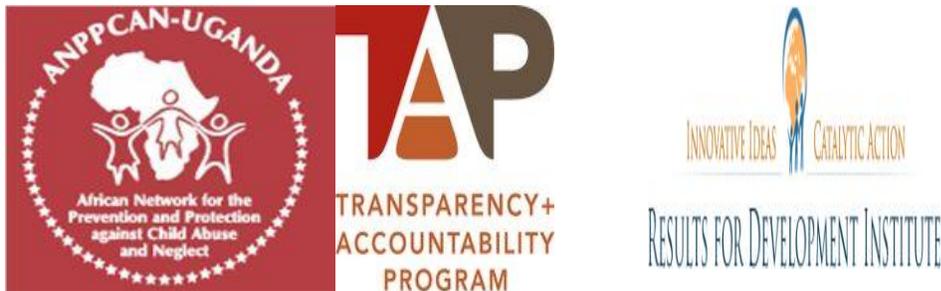


Primary School Absenteeism in the Iganga District of Uganda

A Study conducted by the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) Uganda Chapter with Support from Transparency and Accountability Program (TAP) of the Results for Development Institute

Zero Report



Researchers

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	1
Abstract.....	4
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	7
1.1 Background to Universal Primary Education in Uganda.....	7
1.1.1 Stakeholders in UPR Policy Implementation	8
1.1.2 Implementation progress.....	9
1.2 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY	10
2.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY	11
2.1 Sampling Plan.....	11
2.2 Methodology	12
2.2.1 Desk Study.....	12
2.2.2 Key Informant Interviews.....	12
2.2.3 Facility Survey	12
2.2.4 Data Analysis Plans.....	13
2.2.5 Measurement of absenteeism.....	13
3.0 FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	14
3.1.0 Background to Iganga District	14
3.2 Magnitude of teacher absenteeism in Iganga District.	16
3.3 The underlying causes of teacher absenteeism in Iganga District;	19
3.4 Teacher absenteeism and pupil performance.....	23
3.5 Existing initiatives on curbing teacher absenteeism within the district.....	24
3.6 Best practices in curbing teacher absenteeism	27
4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE TEACHER ABSENTEEISM	28
4.1 Strengthen the inspection function of the central and local governments.....	28
4.2 Strengthen local accountability mechanisms.....	29

4.3 Punish non compliant school heads.....	29
4.4 Teacher Transfers	29
4.5 Pro-active steps should be taken to stimulate, motivate and empower the children and communities to become actively engaged in school activities.....	29
4.6 Construct houses for teachers and head teachers to ensure they stay at school	30
4.7 Increase primary teachers' ceiling for the affected schools.....	30
4.8 Provide meals for teachers at school.....	30
4.9 Ensure timely distribution of instructional materials to schools	30
4.10 Activate school management committees.....	30
4.11 Increase teacher salaries	31
4.13 Arrangements should be made for teachers to draw salaries in or near school locations.	31
4.14 Leaves	31
4.15. Appoint teachers on performance contract.....	31
5.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY	33

Abstract

Uganda pledged in 1996 to have universal primary education for all children by 2015, and even though there has been progress and improved education outcomes, primary education in Uganda is still not completely free and the pupil completion rates are still low.

In this study ANPPCAN Uganda, undertakes to measure the extent of and reasons for teacher absenteeism, and develop recommendations for curbing it in the Iganga district of Uganda.

Using both random and non-random sampling methods, the study focuses on Iganga district because of the history of not only its low performance in the national primary education examinations, but also due to reports by the district office about possible teacher absenteeism in the previous three years.

The study reached a total of 620 people, including education officials and experts at national and district levels, head teachers, teachers, pupils, parents, community members, officials at the district level, as well as managers of civil society organizations, who have education interventions within and outside the district.

Teacher absenteeism was found to be at 43.6% being higher among females (51%), than males (49%). It was found out on average, the absenteeism rate of head teachers is 19.7%.

Regarding the dates of absence, 10% of the teachers are absent on Fridays and they take advantage of the head teachers' absence in schools (which often occurs on Fridays) to also be out of classes.

Sickness, active teacher involvement in other income generating activities, inadequacies in inspection, weak monitoring mechanisms at schools level, lack of teachers' houses, low pay coupled with a high family dependence ratio and distances to banks were correlated with absenteeism.

Transport was cited as a problem partly responsible for high teacher absenteeism in the district. Majority (48.3%) of the sampled teachers reside in a radius of between 2-5 kilometers, 27.9% within a radius of more than 5 kilometers while 23.7% reside within a radius of less than 2 kilometers. 20% of the teachers stay more than 5 kilometers from their schools, they walk long distances and get tired and may sometimes not report on a Monday, especially when they left the school late on Friday. 3.3% of the teachers are absent for close to two days a month to collect their salaries because the nearest collection point (bank) is based in an urban center.

In addition, 19.6% of the teachers walk for more than 5 hours, 7.6% more than 4 hours, 12.3 between 2 and 4 hours, 17.8% between 1 and 2 hours and 43.2% less than one hour. 33.3% of the teachers are absent because they are sick, 6.7% absent themselves to do farming, especially during the rainy season, 6.7% absent themselves to do housework or when they have been affected by domestic violence/beaten, 13.3% to engage in income generating activities, 3.3% absent themselves because of events such as marriage ceremonies, funeral

rites, burial, among others while 3.3% are absent because they go to banks to withdraw their salaries.

Different disciplinary modes are used to punish absentee teachers. 80 percent of the head teachers interviewed reportedly warn absentee teachers, 16.7% advise them on the consequences of the practice while 3.3 percent report them to the district authorities.

Whereas head teachers report the errant teachers to the authorities, some of them with high connections at the district go without any punishment.

According to the available records on pupil performance of the 30 selected schools, a total of 2,122 pupils had sat for PLE between 2007 and 2009 and 65 of them had passed with a first grade, 1,084 with a second grade, 166 in third grade, 673 in fourth grade, 69 in division X and 65 in division U (failures).

An average of 0.72 pupils passed in grade one in the 30 schools between 2007 and 2009. This shows that whereas the teachers contend that the quality of teaching has improved, it is not reflected in the pupil academic performance over the years.

The study found out that most of the schools had just been inspected as 36.7% them were last inspected 1 month back, 26.7% were inspected within the month of the study, 23.3% had been inspected 6 months back while only 13.3% had their last inspection a year ago. Sometimes, information on inspection is leaked to some teachers who are highly connected.

On the best practice, 63.3% introduced a teachers' register, 9% parents' cooperation, 6.7% got a new School Management Committee and their academic performance improved.

The study recommended the following as ways of curbing teacher absenteeism:

- The government should work with the civil society to strengthen the inspection function of the central and local governments
- Civil society and government should strengthen local UPE accountability mechanisms
- The government should design mechanisms to heavily punish non-compliant school heads
- The government and civil society should undertake pro-active steps to stimulate motivate and empower the children and communities to become actively engaged in school activities.
- The government and civil society organizations should construct houses for teachers and head teachers to ensure they stay at school
- The government should increase primary teachers' ceiling for the affected schools
- The government should provide meals for teachers at school
- The government should ensure timely distribution of instructional materials to schools
- The government, communities and civil society organizations should work to activate school management committees.

- The government should increase primary teachers' salaries
- The government should cooperate with the private sector to put in place arrangements for teachers to draw salaries in or near school locations.
- The government should consider appointing teachers on performance contracts

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to Universal Primary Education in Uganda

Uganda is one of the 189 countries the world over that have pledged to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS), which aim at eradicating extreme poverty and improving the conditions of poor people. One of the goals set by these countries and to which Uganda subscribes is the achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE) for all children by 2015, while another is to eliminate the gender gap in basic schooling.

In December 1996, the President of the Republic of Uganda, H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, announced that four children of school-going age per family would benefit from free primary education, starting from January 1997. This policy is what came to be known as the Universal Primary Education (UPE). It was seen as the main tool for achieving the economic, social and political objectives outlined in the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports policy document of 1998 in a decentralized framework. Broadly, the objectives of UPE are to:

- establish, provide and maintain quality education as the basis for promoting human resource development;
- provide the facilities and resources to enable every child to enter and remain in school until the primary cycle of education is complete;
- make basic education accessible to the learner and relevant to his or her needs, as well as meeting national goals;
- make education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequalities;
- ensure that education is affordable by the majority of Ugandans;
- meet the objective of poverty eradication by equipping every individual with basic skills and knowledge.

When the implementation of UPE started in January 1997, the registration was limited to four children per family proved problematic, particularly regarding the exact definition of a family. Eventually, the government removed this restriction, and allowed all children that wanted primary education under the UPE programme to enrol. Under the UPE programme, the Government of Uganda abolished tuition fees Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) charges for primary education.

To ensure success of the programme, the government instituted complementary financing measures. Financing of the education sector as a whole increased significantly, from 2.1% GDP in 1995 to 4.8% of GDP in 2000, while the share of the education sector in the national budget increased from 13.7% in 1990 to 24.7% in 1998. In the financial year 2005/2006, government spent about Shs 635.6 billion on the education sector and about Shs 708.4 billion in 2006/2007, making it the second biggest funded sector in the country.

Uganda's Education Sector Investment Plan also makes it mandatory that, not less than 65% of the education budget must fund primary education. UPE was also implemented alongside the liberalization of the provision of education services that enabled private schools to operate.

However, private primary schools are mainly concentrated in urban areas where only 12% of the population resides.

Despite the abolition of tuition and PTA charges, primary education was not made compulsory. Neither was it made entirely free, since parents were still expected to contribute pens, exercise books, clothing, and even bricks and labour for classroom construction through community work. During the implementation stage however, the Government realised that parents were not willing to contribute large amounts of bricks and labour, partly because of the many other demands on their time. The Government has therefore, since provided cash for construction of more classrooms, paying of more teachers, and purchase of the requisite scholastic materials, especially textbooks.

1.1.1 Stakeholders in UPR Policy Implementation

Key partners in the implementation of the UPE policy include the Ministry of Education and Sports, local authorities, and the school management committees elected by parents. Each of these have clear roles, which are further elaborated below.

1.1.1.1 Ministry of Education and Sports

The main roles of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in the implementation of UPE, as specified in the guidelines of 1998, are as follows:

- training and retraining of teachers;
- providing instructional materials in the form of textbooks and teachers' guides;
- contributing to the construction of basic school facilities (e.g. classrooms, libraries);
- supervising, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of UPE;
- providing curriculum, monitoring and assessment standards.

In terms of expenditure, the MoES provides two types of grants for UPE, namely capitation (fees) grants and school facilities grants. Capitation grants are paid on the basis of the number of students enrolled in a school and the level of education. The monthly grant per child was fixed at about US\$5 per pupil for classes P1–P3, and US\$8 per pupil for classes P4–P7, payable for a fixed period of 9 months per year. The MoES also provides guidelines for the spending of capitation grants in primary schools, which are as follows: 50% on instructional materials; 30% on co-curricular activities (sports, clubs etc.); 15% on school management (school maintenance, payment for utilities such as water and electricity); and 5% on school administration. With the aim of improving the quality of the program, the government also undertakes capacity building programs for teachers, which also act as a motivation to their performance.

1.1.1.2 Local authorities

Under the leadership of the Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs), local authorities are responsible for ensuring that all UPE funds released to them by the MoES reach schools and are not retained for any other purposes. UPE funds are therefore conditional grants, over which district authorities have little power of reallocation to other uses. The CAOs are also responsible for ensuring prompt disbursement of UPE grants to schools, proper accountability of UPE grants, the formulation of the education budget and its successful fulfillment, and adequate briefing of District Councils on the implementation of UPE. Sub-county chiefs represent the CAOs at the sub-county level. They make regular visits to schools, implement local government byelaws on UPE, keep a record of both pupils and teachers in the sub county, submit regular reports on education to the CAOs, ensure safe water and sanitation in schools, and in schools under their jurisdiction, enforce proper use and accountability for UPE grants and public funds.

1.1.1.3 School management committees

School management committees are statutory organs at the school level representing the government. They give overall direction to the operation of the school, ensure that schools have development plans, approve and manage school budgets, monitor school finances, and ensure transparency especially in use of UPE grants. Head-teachers of primary schools report to the District Education Officers, but also work closely with the school management committees in running UPE primary schools. They are accountable for all money disbursed to schools and for school property.

1.1.2 Implementation progress

1.1.2.1 Strengths

Since the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1997 there has been an improvement in the area of access to primary education for a large proportion of the population particularly in the rural areas. As a matter of fact, there has been a growth in pupil enrolment from 3.1 millions in 1996 to 8.193,267 millions in 2009 (Ministry of Education and Sports Annual Sector Report, 2009). Figures from the 2002 census indicate that 83 percent of males and 71 percent of females aged 15-29 are able to read and write as a result of the UPE Program. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of primary schools from 13,576 in 2005 to 14,179 in 2008. In terms of human resource development for primary education, the number of teachers with certificates/diplomas grew from 2,905 in 2007 to 5,397 in 2008 (UBOS: Uganda Statistical Abstract 2008). At the national level, about three in every five pupils who enroll in primary schools have adequate sitting space. However, pupils in lower classes are at a disadvantage compared to those in upper classes given that the completion rate is still low.

1.1.2.2 Gaps

Between 2007 and 2008, there was a 3.7 percentage decrease in the number of primary schools in the country. It is significant to note that the number of primary teachers also reduced by 13.8 percent between 2007 and 2008. This was as a result of streamlining the teachers' ceiling. The pupil-teacher ratio increased from 50 in 2005 to 57 in 2008 while pupil-classroom ratio reduced from 74 in 2005 to 72 in 2008.

The current pupil book ratio is 18:1¹ implying that one book is used among 18 pupils in each school. This affects the quality of reading and performance and also given the fact that majority of the parents are indigent..

According to Dr. Kamanda Bataringaya, the state minister for education, about 60% of UPE pupils who start primary school complete P.7. However, out of 1,712,420 pupils who started P.1 in 2002, only 516,890 pupils sat PLE in 2009, representing only 30.1% of the pupils. This is an improvement from 463,631 pupils who sat PLE in 2008 and an average of 450,000 pupils in the previous years, representing only 27% and 26% pupils respectively.

Also, while the number of teachers with Masters Degrees grew from 52 in 2007 to 65 in 2008, the number of those with a postgraduate diploma reduced from 171 in 2007 to 88 in 2008 and those with Phds from 29 in 2007 to 19 in 2008.

While we acknowledge that deficiencies in schooling outcomes are influenced by a complex array of determinants (child, household and community factors, access, school quality, linkages across sectors) – this study limits its focus to examining one specific institutional deficiency, that of teacher absence. If the teacher is absent either for 'valid' reasons (e.g., pulled away from classroom (for non-teaching duties) or for 'dubious' reasons (absenteeism), *and* there is no substitute teacher available, it must go without saying that the quality of teaching will suffer. Reduction of teacher absenteeism in schools is critical to improving academic performance and realization of children's rights to education.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The overall goal of the study was to generate evidence to be used in an advocacy campaign aimed at curbing teacher absenteeism in public schools in Uganda. Specifically therefore, the study had the following objectives:

1. To document the magnitude of teacher absenteeism in UPE schools in Iganga district;
2. To identify the underlying causes of teacher absenteeism in Iganga district;

¹ Education Sector Review Report, 2010

3. To establish the correlation between teacher absenteeism and pupil performance in the district;
4. To identify existing initiatives on curbing teacher absenteeism within the district;
5. To identify and document best practices for countering absenteeism for synergy and replication in other schools within the district

2.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY

2.1 Sampling Plan

Both random and non-random sampling methods were employed. The study largely used random sampling methods to select the schools and study participants. Non-random methods were used to select the study area as well as the study participants with relevant characteristics, experiences and knowledge to share about the subject under study.

Iganga district was selected as a study site because of the history of not only its low performance in the national primary education examinations, but due to reports by the district office about possible teacher absenteeism in the previous three years.

The study reached a total of 620 people, including head teachers, teachers, pupils, parents, community members, officials at the district level, as well as managers of civil society organizations, who have education interventions within the district. A total of 5 sub-counties and 30 UPE schools were areas of focus during the study.

A population frame or list of all public primary schools in the selected sub counties was obtained from the district education office.

To ensure that the study is balanced, stratified sampling was used to select schools at the sub county level. Schools, all rural based were stratified by performance into high performance and low performance and the sample in each stratum and separately selected.

Disaggregating the sample of schools by performance is considered important because of the impact of absenteeism on academic performance. Data from the 2008 national primary leaving examinations administered by the Uganda National Examinations Board was used to categorize the schools into these strata.

The sample of teachers that were interviewed within each sampled school were chosen from a list of all teachers within that particular school.

In each sampled school, the head teacher and chairperson of the school management committee were purposively selected for an interview.

2.2 Methodology

Four main methods was used in the implementation of the study included a desk study, key informant interviews, a sample survey of teachers and physical spot checks at the selected schools.

2.2.1 Desk Study

A desk study was done on national and district documents and research reports that are relevant on absenteeism in schools. It also entailed a review of teacher attendance records within the schools. The desk study was done for the following reasons:

- to identify and document existing policies and guidelines on teacher absenteeism
- to assess the trends and magnitude of absenteeism among teachers within the selected schools
- to identify best practices that will be recommended for replication
- to aid the development of data collection tools for the study

2.2.2 Key Informant Interviews

Unstructured interviews were administered to senior managers within the education sector in the districts, specifically the District Inspector of schools and the Secretary for Education.

These levels of management were interviewed mainly because they either formulate policies and guidelines or implement the policies and guidelines developed by government. They had rich knowledge on teacher absenteeism policies and guidelines and programmes/activities in their schools. Targeting these categories was also critical for making inroads for the advocacy interventions that shall result from the study.

The main information that was collected during key informant interviews was addressed under the following major themes:

- Existing policy/guidelines to address teacher absenteeism and their main features or components;
- Knowledge/concern about the problem of teacher absenteeism
- Factors underlying teacher absenteeism;
- Strategies employed to curb the problem of teacher absenteeism;

2.2.3 Facility Survey

The study comprised of a facility survey that was conducted using two methods.

- a) *Interviews* were carried out with head teachers and selected teachers, with a view of establishing the factors underlying absenteeism within schools, as well as existing interventions within the schools to scurb absenteeism.

- b) *Unannounced spot check visits*: three visits were made to each of the selected schools to assess whether teachers were present at the school, and in class with the learners. In the case of absences, the study team established reasons why a particular teacher was absent from school and action that had been taken. Spot checks also targeted the head teachers; since available evidence indicates that head teachers are usually absent from schools

2.2.4 Data Analysis Plans

Data processing involved data editing, coding where appropriate and data entry in computers.

- Data editing was done by ANPPCAN after data collection had been completed. This process was supported by two clerks
- Coding of a few open ended questions was done concurrently with office data editing.
- Data entry of the facility survey was done by two data entry clerks.
- Data from the key informant interviews was processed by ANPPCAN.

Data analysis and report writing was done by a team from ANPPCAN. Two main methods namely qualitative methods and statistical methods were used to analyze the data. Qualitative method was used to analyze the key informant interviews while statistical methods were used to analyze the individual IP staff data.

2.2.5 Measurement of absenteeism

Absenteeism is the term generally used to refer to unscheduled employee absences from the workplace.

In this study, absenteeism was assumed to have occurred when teachers who were scheduled for work do not attend. Since scheduled work is the critical defining point, vacations and excused holidays, authorized sick-off, absence due to authorized training/workshop or official duties elsewhere/outreach activities were not considered as forms of absence. In addition, absenteeism involves non-attendance from scheduled work in terms of hours and days.

3.0 FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

3.1.0 Background to Iganga District

3.1.1 Location of the district

Iganga District lies in the Eastern region of Uganda. It is a land locked district that lies between longitude 330 10' east and 340 0' east and latitudes 0o 06' North to 1o 12'. It is located in the South Eastern part of Uganda and the distance is approximately 102 Km from Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. It borders Mayuge district to the south, Bugiri to the southeast, Kaliro and Namutumba to the North and Jinja District to the West. It covers a total area of 1680 square kilometers, much of which is land and swamps. The districts headquarters are located in Iganga Town Council on Saza Road along Nakigo Road.

3.1.2 Administrative structure

Iganga district is divided into 3 counties namely is Bugweri, Kigulu and Luuka. It has a total of 19 sub-counties and 2 Town Councils with a total of 115 parishes and 644 villages or local council I (LCI)².

3.1.3 Population

The district population stood at 540,939 (females 283,375 and males 257,564) by the 2002 Population and Housing Census. It is projected to have increased to 651,796 by the end of 2007 of whom 371,524 were children, 60% of the total population. Population growth now stands at 3.4 % which is higher than the national average (3.2%). The population is projected to increase to 778,462 by 2013. This has serious implications on the natural resources upon which the people live and earn a living. Pressure on land for settlement and other resources is already significant as the density was 322 persons per square kilometer by census time of 2002. The district had 106,511 households by 2002 census but have increased now due to rapid population growth and coming to age for those who were young by census time. The average house hold size is 5 persons. The census revealed that there 9,511 deaths that occurred within one month prior to census and the majority of the dead were men (5,087) with women at 4,424 (47%). This means that many children are being orphaned per month which calls for early interventions to reduce their vulnerability.

3.1.4 Education and Sports Sector

There are 248 UPE schools fairly distributed throughout all the 21 lower local governments. Ideally, Iganga district is supposed to have a total of 3,084 teachers but it is currently a having a shortfall of 100 teachers. It should be noted that in 2009, the MOES recruited 4,128 teachers countrywide to bridge this gap but Iganga district still remained with a shortfall of 100 teachers.

² *Iganga District Development Plan 2007/8 – 2009/10*

The total enrolment in UPE schools as of January 2010 is 132,858 pupils (64,501 being boys and 68,357 girls). The schools have under enrolled by 2,230 pupils. However, this under enrollment is not evenly distributed. There are some schools with an over enrolment rate of 400 pupils. In terms of school infrastructure the district is well served except in very remote places where children have to walk a relatively long distance to school. There are also 506 teachers who are either pursuing further studies or attending a formal training and this has partly contributed to students missing classes, teachers failing to complete the syllabus and has put strain on the available few teachers³.

In terms of performance, Iganga district has since 2006 registered a total of 5,310 first grades, 31,476 second grades, 26,688 third grades, 19,442 fourth grades, 7,268 grades X absentees and 27,768 failures in grade U. In other words, 30% of the 117,952 candidates who sat for PLE between 2006 and 2009 in the district did not join any post primary institution of learning. In the 2009 primary leaving examinations results, the failures in Iganga district accounted for 3.6% of the total national failure rate of the 70,266 pupils.

3.1.5 Education accessibility

The Statistical abstract, 2007 of UBOS provides indicators of retention of children enrolled at both primary level of education.

Table 1: Primary Education accessibility indicators 2007-8 for Iganga district

Indicator	2007	2008
Gross intake	115.7	120
Net intake	65.3	59
Gross enrolment	115.7	120
Net enrolment	102.5	102

Source: Ministry of Education and Sports ESSR Report, 2009

The accessibility indicators show that in both years, the gross intake rate was very high but net intake rate was very low. This implies that less than half of those who enroll do not complete either primary or secondary education.

In terms of literacy, Iganga district has a literacy rate of 49% for females and 68% for males. This implies that most primary caregivers and key agents of socialization are still illiterate. The two rates are far below the national literacy averages of 70%⁴.

³ Interview with the DEO of Iganga District

⁴MOGL&SD 2009

The pupil teacher ratio for 2007 was 62:1 while that of 2008 was 63:1. In addition, the pupil classroom ratio was 91 for 2007 compared to 85 for 2008.

3.2 Magnitude of teacher absenteeism in Iganga District.

The study began with a consultative meeting with school head teachers and chairpersons of the school management committees from whom official school time tables with names, dates, time and classes the respective classroom teachers in the 30 schools teach were obtained. Discovering that the list of variables on which information was to be collected was not exhaustive at this meeting, it was agreed that during the consequent unannounced school visits by enumerators in the target schools, details of the missing variables frequency of academic performance per school, school inspections, monitoring visits, etc would be provided by the head teachers. This consultative meeting secured commitment from the district leadership of the much needed study on teacher absenteeism. Three rounds of unannounced school visits were made to the target schools.

On the first unannounced school visit, enumerators met with the head teacher and where the head teacher was absent, the deputies or the teachers in charge, to update a register of teachers who were actually employed at the school at the time of the visit.

The head teachers or their representatives were then asked to go through the register and indicate whether at the time of the visit the mentioned teacher was present or not. If a head teacher or his/her representative indicated that a teacher was absent, he/she was further asked why that particular teacher was absent on that particular day. If they were reported as present, the study team proceeded to verify this by visiting a class that particular teacher was supposed to teach. After the interview with either the head teacher or his/her representative was completed, the enumerators began interviewing teachers enlisted on the register, one at a go to a maximum of 10 and a minimum of six teachers per school (based on the total number of teachers employed at that school). The second and third unannounced school visits were conducted and information collected based on the updated register that was used at the first visit.

Based on the interviews with head teachers or their representatives and the verification of records, the study found out that in the 30 primary schools, there were supposed to be 561 registered teachers but only 289 were found teaching during the first abrupt visit, 300 during the second visit and 360 during the third unannounced visit. The absence rate during the first visit was 48.5% compared to 46.5% during the second unannounced school visit and 35.8% during the third unannounced school visit. This conforms to the 2004 World Bank study that concluded that measured absence in education is usually slightly lower in later survey rounds because of a possible “warning effect” created at the first and second visits by the survey teams.

The study established the magnitude of teacher absence in the district at an average of 43.6%. Compared to the 2004 study by the World Bank in Uganda that put teacher absenteeism at 27%, this study reveals that the rates of teacher absenteeism are even higher.

These findings are not shocking given the fact that information available shows that teacher absence rates in developing countries are high relative to both their counterparts in developed countries and to other workers in developing countries. For example, administrative data from a large sample of school districts in New York State in the mid-1980s revealed a mean absence rate of 5 percent (Ehrenberg, Rees, and Ehrenberg 1991).

In separate interviews with members of SMCs, children, community members and civil society groups, it was mentioned that in a school of 6 teachers, 2 teachers are absent for at least three days in a week and that the remaining four are either absent in the first week of the term or the last days of the month or both.

The reduction in the absence average was however, reportedly affected by a host of factors including the increased abrupt school inspections by district inspectors and the strictness by which teachers are handled by their head teachers.

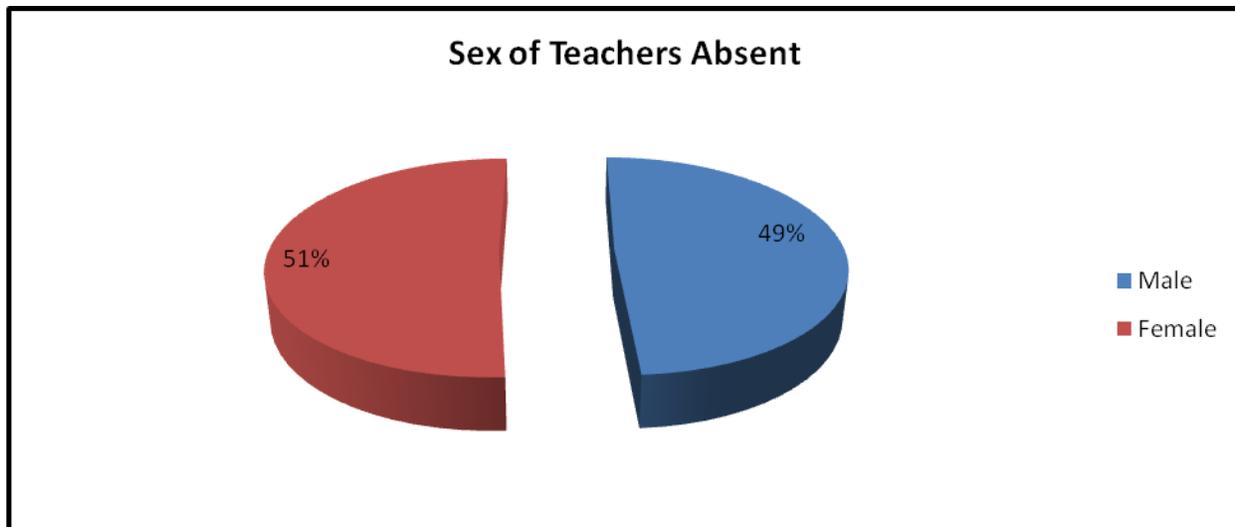
Teacher absenteeism in percentages (% and numbers)

Number of schools in the sample	30	Number of teachers absent at the time of the visit	Each visited thrice
Number of teachers in the Sample	561		Each observed three times
% of teachers absent Round 1	48.5%	272	
% of teachers absent Round 2	46.5%	261	
% of teachers absent Round 3	35.8%	201	
Average percentage / number of teachers absent	43.6%	245	

Table2: Table showing the rate of teacher absenteeism in Iganga district (% and numbers)

The research reached a total of 561 (286 being female and 275 being male) classroom teachers in three unannounced visits. An average of data computed for the three visits found out that 245 teachers were found to be absent of whom 125 (51% were females and 120 49% males). Whereas the study did not seek to particularly understand why female teachers were mostly absent, anthropological studies available indicate that most women in Africa are exposed to triple roles. It is therefore likely that most women who were absent at the time of the visit were affected by either household chores or child care. Another reason would be that being a

patriarchal society and a rural setting, it is mostly men who wield powers over household decision making, and it could therefore be that the absent female teachers could be affected by this, given that one of the causes of teacher absenteeism, from the findings was domestic violence.



The study also revealed the extent of head teacher absenteeism. A head teacher was regarded as absent when at the time of the unannounced school visit; he or she was away for reasons than official duty or approved leave. Information on head teacher absenteeism was collected from the deputy head teacher or when not present, the acting head teacher at the time of the visit. It was found out on the first visit that out of a sample of 30 head teachers, 30.0% of the head teachers were absent on the first visit, 20% on the second visit and 9% on the third visit, bringing the average absent rate to 19.7%. This proved community responses that some head teachers are always away, either doing personal business in town or attending to a private school which they own. Table 3 below explains this further.

Headteacher absenteeism %

Number of schools in the sample	30	Each visited thrice
Number of teachers in the Sample	90	Based on the observation in the panel
% of head teachers absent Round 1	30.0%	
% of head teachers absent Round 2	20.0%	
% of head teachers absent Round 3	9.0%	
Average percentage of teachers absent	19.7%	

Table3: Table showing head teacher absenteeism in Iganga district

In a separate interview with children and community members, 52% of the respondents said that a teacher is guaranteed to miss class for between 2 to 3 days in a week.

3.3 The underlying causes of teacher absenteeism in Iganga District;

In order to uncover the causes of teacher absenteeism, the study team interviewed district education officials, head teachers, teachers, parents, pupils, community members as well as representatives of the nongovernmental organizations at district and national level. The team also looked at leave records at the various schools to corroborate reasons given for absence by the head teacher or their representatives in the various schools. Documents from the ministry of Education as well as Gender, Labour and Social Development were reviewed.

The 236 teachers were interviewed on what made their colleagues absent. In response, 0.4 % of them said that their colleagues get absent to attend events such as funerals, parties, etc, 19.9% said that they are absent because of transport problems, 10.6% said their colleagues miss school when they have gone to withdraw their salaries from the bank, 28.4% said that they are absent because of domestic problems while 40.7 said that their colleagues get absent because they are engaged in other income generating activities to complement their incomes. They argued that those who teach classes with very many learners are exhausted sometimes fail to report or if they reported, they appear late.

Also, an interview with 30 head teachers or their representatives revealed that 33.3% of their teachers are absent because they are sick, 6.7% absent themselves to do farming, especially during the rainy season, 6.7% absent themselves to do housework or when they have been affected by domestic violence/beaten, 13.3% to engage in income generating activities, 3.3% absent themselves because of events such as marriage ceremonies, funeral rites, burial, among others while 3.3% of the head teachers said that their teachers are absent because they go to banks to withdraw their salaries.

However, 40% of the community members (health workers, parents, retired teachers, religious leaders and cultural leaders) who were interviewed said that most teachers fake illnesses and can be seen roaming about the villages. 10% said that since most head teachers are absent on Fridays arguing that the teachers take advantage of the head teachers' absence in schools (which often occurs on Fridays) to also be out of classes. 20% said that since teachers stay very far from the schools, they walk long distances and get tired and may sometimes not report on a Monday, especially when they left the school late on Friday. Others said that most teachers are absent for close to two days a month to collect their salaries because the nearest collection point (bank) is based in urban centres

As seen in the above explanation, the problem of teachers getting absent in order to get salaries comes out prominently. In an interview with the community members, it was found out that most teachers in one of the sub-counties usually don't teach at the beginning and end of each month,

a point that was re-echoed by a group of children and teachers in the same area. In his own words, one teacher was quoted as having said:

“...there is no access point here in the village, I have to move to town which is some 27 kilometers to access my salary and I can do this any time of the week... (Male: 35; rural)

Additionally, the study found out that absenteeism was highest among teachers whose relatives were in senior positions in the district. In a Focus Group Discussion with members of school management committees in Nawampiti Sub-county, a community leader asserted...

“...those are untouchables....where will you report them?” (Female: 43: rural)

Inadequacies in inspection were mentioned as a major cause of teacher absenteeism. Respondents said that inspections are done with the knowledge of some people known to the inspectors. Such people then inform their teacher friends about the impending inspection and by the time the inspectors reach the school, those who would otherwise be absent are already there. The inspection rates however, are not surprising given the fact that last year, only 9,013 out of the 14,179 primary schools in the whole country were inspected at least once in a term⁵. This they argued makes the whole inspection process to lose value. One of the teachers said, when asked about this that:

“when he knows that he is going to inspect his wife’s school, she is called and she will abandon whatever she is doing to go to school to be seen to be there. Information is also leaked through mobile phones on the impending days of school inspection visits by head teachers and some teachers who are too close to one another...” (Female: 27: rural)

The district officials also emphasized that teacher absenteeism exists but caused mainly by what most teachers consider to be low pay. Low pay coupled with a high family dependence ratio resulted into absenteeism as most of the affected were busy looking for other alternatives to supplement their incomes. Some of the teachers found it more profitable to go to their gardens for some hours to augment their income before appearing at school to teach. This could be true given that 53.3% of the head teachers reached by the study, 26.7% were living with one other person in their family, 22.3% with two and 6.7 with three people. Also, regarding dependency, 46.7% of the head teachers or their representatives were reported as the sole bread winners in their families while 53.3% have another bread winner complementing them.

Of the total number of teachers who were reached, 7.2% were residing with 1 person in their homes, 8.5% with two, 9.3% with three, 12.7% with four, 15.3% with five, 9.3% with 6, and 35.2% with more than 6 people. 57.9% of the teachers said that they are the sole bread

⁵ Ministry of Education and Sports-Sector Review Report, 2009

winner while 41.9% said that they have one bread winner in their home. Of those with other bread winners, 27.1% have one bread winner, 17.4% two and 2.5% have one.

In an interview with one of the teachers who preferred anonymity, he said in his own words that:

“...you cannot wait for a meager salary when there is a way you can get quick money. When I run short of money to run my family, I come out of school and ride a boda boda which gives me quick money in just a few hours. It’s a matter of faking a reason” (Male: 28: rural)

Transport was cited as a problem partly responsible for high teacher absenteeism in the district. Majority (48.3%) of the teachers interviewed reside in a radius of between 2-5 kilometers, 27.9% within a radius of more than 5 kilometers while 23.7% reside within a radius of less than 2 kilometers. This is compounded by the fact that only 8.9% of the teachers interviewed reside at school in teachers’ houses while the rest are either renting, 35.6% or staying in their own accommodation. 19.6% of the teachers walk for more than 5 hours, 7.6% more than 4 hours, 12.3 between 2 and 4 hours, 17.8% between 1 and 2 hours and 43.2% less than one hour.

Table 4: Means by which teachers travel to work (Numbers)

Duration of travel to school	Means by which the respondent travels to work					Total
	Private vehicle or motorcycle	Private Bicycle	Walk	Mixed	Public car/motor cycle	
Less than one hour	5	49	18	5	8	85
Between 1 and 2 hours	3	21	5	6	1	36
Between 2 and 4 hours	2	7	9	2	5	25
More than 4 hours	1	1	11	0	2	15
5 and more hours	3	4	7	3	3	18
Total	14	82	50	16	19	181

Head teachers attributed lower teacher attendance to sickness in both lower and upper primary. They added that since most districts are rural, it was difficult for teachers to access proper medical care in rural areas, which keeps them out of school for long periods.

Taking a close look at the forms by which head teachers punish the errant teachers, it can be concluded that they also partly lead to teacher absenteeism. Table below explains this further.

Table 5: How the head teachers handle teacher absenteeism

Mode of disciplining absentee teachers	Frequency	Percent
Advice	5	16.7
Warning	24	80.0
Reporting	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0

Different disciplinary modes are used to punish absentee teachers. In an interview with head teachers or their representatives in the 30 schools, 80 percent reportedly warned absentee teachers – 16.7% advised them on the consequences of the practice while on 3.3 percent reported them to the district authorities. However, in an interview with one of the head teachers, it was discovered that whereas they could report the errant teachers to the authorities, some of them with high political connections went without any punishment and this political interference has frustrated their efforts.

Table 5: Influence of the distance of teacher’s house from the school on absenteeism

		Respondent was absent at the time of the visit		Total
		Yes	No	
Distance of respondent's house from the school	Less than 2 Kilometers	21	34	55
	Between 2-5 Kilometers	61	54	115
	More than 5 Kilometers	34	31	65
Total		116	119	235

The study found out that the distance of a teacher’s house from the school was at least related to their absence or presence at school. It was found out that as the distance increased, the more teachers got absent. For example, whereas 21 out of 55 teachers who were residing within a radius of 2 kilometers from the school were absent, 61 out of 115 teachers who were coming from a radius of between 2 and 5 kilometers were absent. In addition, of the 34 of the 65 teachers who were reported as absent, they were coming from a radius of more than 5 kilometers. This shows that there is a positive relationship between the distance from a teacher’s house and teacher absenteeism. It should be noted that in 2009, only 22 teachers’ houses were constructed⁶.

⁶ Education Sector Review Report, 2009

3.4 Teacher absenteeism and pupil performance.

The study also wanted to correlation teacher absenteeism with pupil performance. To uncover this, the study reviewed the records of previous students who had studied at the school and also asked both the teachers and head teachers to comment on what the trend of teacher absenteeism in their schools. The following were the revelations:-

Results for the primary schools in Iganga District for the years 2008 and 2009 show that although there were some high performing schools, majority of them underperformed⁷. In the thirty schools, head teachers, their representatives and teachers who had spent at least one year in the school they were teaching in at the time of the visit were asked to give their views of what they considered to be the level of teacher absenteeism in their respective schools in the past three years.

Regarding their stay in the current schools they are teaching, 52.5% of the teachers interviewed had taught at the schools for less than 5 years, 39.0% between 5-10 years, 4.2% between 10-15 years, 3.0% between 15-20 years and 1.3% for more than 20 years. Also, of the 30 head teachers/representatives who were reached by the study, 70% had administrative experience in the same school of less than 5 years, 23.3% of between 5-10 years and 6.6% of between 10 and 20 years were interviewed.

Of the total number of teachers, 50% said that teacher absenteeism has been existent in their school since they joined and 50% said that teachers in their schools miss school only when they have been granted official leave. As for head teachers/representatives, 6.7% of those interviewed said that teacher absenteeism very often occurs in their schools, 3.3% said that teacher absenteeism often occurs in their schools, 86.7% said that teacher absenteeism has been rarely occurring for the past five years in their schools and 3.3% of them said that teacher absenteeism has been very rarely occurring at their schools in the past five years.

Using the testimonies from the head teachers and teachers on the prevalence of teacher absenteeism in their respective schools and crosschecking the records of the pupils in the past years it was concluded that teacher absenteeism has a correlation with poor academic performance of pupils in these schools.

Head teachers/representatives were also asked to give their opinion of whether the quality of teaching and learning had improved in their schools in the previous three years and 40% said that it has improved, 46.7% said that it has slightly improved, 10% said that it has remained the same and 3.3% said that it has become worse.

⁷ UNEB 2009 Results

Children were also asked whether they were affected academically when their teachers missed class and 80% said that they actually declined in academic performance in their next term. They also said that that was the main reason as to why they had registered very few or no first grades in their schools. Children from low performing schools said that on average, 7 of their teachers missed classes in their schools every month.

According to the available records on pupil performance (which would be used as a pseudo indicator of improved teaching and learning), of the 30 selected schools, a total of 2,122 pupils had sat for PLE between 2007 and 2009 and 65 of them had passed with a first grade, 1,084 with a second grade, 166 in third grade, 673 in fourth grade, 69 in division X and 65 in division U (failures)⁸. According to these results, an average of 0.72 pupils passed in grade one in the 30 schools between 2007 and 2009. This shows that whereas the teachers contend that the quality of teaching has improved, it is not reflected in the pupil performance over the years. As a matter of fact, absenteeism of teachers has a correlation with the transformation of the improvement in quality to actual results in students.

3.5 Existing initiatives on curbing teacher absenteeism within the district

Use of school Inspections

From the study, one of the strategies to curb teacher absenteeism is use of inspections. The table below show the latest dates of inspection in the selected schools by the district inspector of schools.

Table 6: Latest date of inspection

Period of monitoring visit	Frequency	Percent
This month	8	26.7
Last month	11	36.7
Six months ago	7	23.3
One year ago	4	13.3
Total	30	100.0

The study found out that most of the schools had just been inspected as 36.7% them were last inspected 1 month back, 26.7% were inspected within the month of the study, 23.3% had been inspected 6 months back while only 13.3% had their last inspection a year ago. This shows the inadequacies in inspection that are partly responsible for increased teacher absenteeism.

When inspectors visit, they were monitoring a number of indicators. The table below shows the indicators that are usually monitored at the time of the inspections as told to the team by the inspectors of school and headteachers.

⁸ UNEB 2009 PLE Results

Table 7: Key aspect of monitoring by the inspectors

Aspect of monitoring	Frequency	Percent
Staff absenteeism	8	26.7
Work process in school	4	13.3
Teachers' teaching methodology	8	26.7
School enrollment	10	33.3
Total	30	100.0

The study revealed that 33.3% of the inspectors mainly dwelled on the aspect of school enrollment during inspections whereas 26.7% of them were more interested in staff absenteeism and teacher's teaching methodology and 13.3% monitored work processes in school and 26.7% monitored teachers' teaching methodology.

The study team was also interested in knowing whether the inspection feedback was given to them or not. Table below explains this further.

Table 8: Received comments from the inspectors on how to improve teaching and learning

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	25	83.3
No	5	16.7
Total	30	100.0

83.3% of the schools admitted to have received comments from inspectors on how to improve teaching and learning whereas 16.7% confessed not to have received any such information.

The study team was also interested in knowing whether the inspection feedback was of importance to head teachers. Table below explains this further.

Table 9: Relevance of the comments given

Relevance	Frequency	Percent
Very useful	27	90.0
Useful	2	6.7
Not so useful	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0

90% of the schools gave high importance of the comments from the inspectors of schools and went ahead to work on them to improve their schools while 6.7 viewed them as useful and 3.3% saw them as not very useful

Record keeping

Table 10: Record keeping on teacher absenteeism at school

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	23	76.7
No	7	23.3
Total	30	100.0

The study revealed that 76.7% of the schools took the issue of record keeping very seriously as they kept a record of teacher absentism in their schools. However, 23.3% of the schools didn't have these records.

Head teacher supervision was also found as a means through which teacher absences were reduced. The table below shows

Table 12: Frequency of teacher supervision by head teachers

Frequency	Frequency	Percent
Once a week	15	50.0
Twice a week	2	6.7
Three times a week	6	20.0
Every day	7	23.3
Total	30	100.0

The study measured the frequency of class monitoring by head teachers and the following was revealed. 50% of the teachers said they monitored the classes once a week, 23.3% said they monitored everyday, 20% monitored 3 times a week while 6.7% monitored twice a week.

The study also uncovered the indicator that head teachers were monitoring, as follows:

Table 13: Indicators of monitoring by head teachers

Indicator	Frequency	Percent
Staff absenteeism	4	13.3
Students' absenteeism	3	10.0
Work process in school	5	16.7
Teachers teaching methodology	18	60.0
Total	30	100.0

It was revealed that 605 of them used the teachers' teaching methodology, 16.7% used work process in school, and 13.3% used staff absenteeism while only 10% used student absenteeism. It is clear that teacher absentism as an indicator was least used by the head teachers yet it is important as it directly affects other indicators such as student absenteeism.

3.6 Best practices in curbing teacher absenteeism

The table below shows the best practices used by various schools to curb teacher absenteeism. The study team also wanted to know other ways in which the school managed to control teacher absenteeism. The table below gives a lengthy explanation to this.

Table 14: Approaches used by head teachers to reduce teacher absences

Reason	Frequency	Percent
Introduced a teachers' register	19	63.3
Changed administration	1	3.3
Community got involved	1	3.3
Maintained qualified staff at the school	1	3.3
Increased visits from the district	1	3.3
Parents cooperation	3	9
Introduced allowances for teachers	1	3.3
There was strict supervision by head teachers and SMCs at school level	1	3.3
Got a new School Management Committee	2	6.7
Total	30	100.0

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE TEACHER ABSENTEEISM

The teacher absent rates are so worrying that most teachers stay back home and only go to fetch a salary yet they have not done any work. This genre of corruption that is acting as a barrier to the efficiency of the UPE programs in Uganda must be collectively handled.

The tendency is robbing the government of millions of money on a monthly basis. The Ministry of Education and Sports 2009 review report acknowledges indeed that the magnitude of teacher absenteeism is so large that reducing it should be a principal focus of Government efforts to improve efficiency in primary education in the coming years.

4.1 Strengthen the inspection function of the central and local governments

Effective supervision is necessary to reduce the high teacher absence rate in public primary schools as found in this study. The Ministry of Education should strengthen its inspectorate departments both at national and district level. This would involve appropriating funds, recruiting, training and motivating manpower in the key inspection positions at both central and local government levels. The civil society should also be allowed to undertake school inspections and submit reports to the education ministry for action. It was found out that due to resource constraints, the frequency of school inspections done per school on an annual basis was extremely low. It was found that 4 schools had been inspected only once in a period of one year, 7 schools in six months, 11 after a month and only 8 schools in a week's time by the district inspector of schools. Of the aspects of school supervision, staff absenteeism was only monitored in 8 schools, implying that the inspectors did not consider monitoring teacher absenteeism in the remaining 22 schools.

The methods of undertaking school inspections should also be adjusted. From the study, communities and some teachers complained that some teachers who are known to the top district education leadership are given information on school inspections prior to the visit who sometimes, they leak it to their colleagues. It is therefore already known, the days when inspectors will or will not be at a school. There should be a way of ensuring that school inspections are done in an abrupt manner and that whoever receives or gives information on the impending visit of a school inspection to another school or teacher is reprimanded. A punitive measure to charge those involved with cheating the government and learners this way should be explored.

4.2 Strengthen local accountability mechanisms

At school level, there is a need to increase supervision to at least once a day and head teachers must check for teacher absenteeism. According to the study findings, only 15 head teachers monitored their classes once a week, 2 twice a week, 6 three times a week and 7 inspected classes every day. Head teachers should also prioritize staff absenteeism when monitoring classes since it was found out from discussions with communities that some teachers just report to school, fill the attendance sheet and return to their side businesses. As a matter of fact, only 4 out of the 30 selected school heads had inspected on staff absenteeism.

From the study, the schools with strong SMCs had less absence rates compared to those with weak or nonexistent SMCs. Education authorities should therefore consider supporting and encouraging these associations in all basic schools.

4.3 Punish non compliant school heads

There is a need to heavily punish errant school heads to ensure that they effectively supervise their staff. Some head teachers who connive with their teachers to report that they are sick when inspectors visit yet the teacher is away doing a second job outside the school must be upon getting such information be charged. Failure to inspect schools or supervise teachers negatively impacts on the provision of education at a very important stage in the child's development⁹.

4.4 Teacher Transfers

Key informants recommended that teachers who have stayed in a school for over 20 years should be transferred. Such teachers know a lot about the school and can deliberately absent themselves knowing that they will not be punished. Such teachers are often old teachers and younger head teachers fear to reprimand them.

4.5 Pro-active steps should be taken to stimulate, motivate and empower the children and communities to become actively engaged in school activities.

These may include national campaigns to raise the awareness of children, parents and local communities on how they can participate in the school decision-making process. There should be deliberate efforts to include children who are the final beneficiaries of the program in monitoring and reporting the levels of teacher absenteeism in their respective schools. Child monitors should be trained and facilitated, with support from focal teachers, to track teacher absenteeism at school level and provide feedback to the authorities. Communities should also be given regular updates on the status of teacher absenteeism in the schools within their reach and be allowed to give feedback on the situation.

⁹ MOES 2010 Education Sector Review Meeting Report

4.6 Construct houses for teachers and head teachers to ensure they stay at school

As seen in the foregone discussion, majority of the teachers walk long distances and some are even forced to borrow money to facilitate their travel to school and this correlates with teacher absenteeism. The Ministry of Education and Sports should consider constructing 30 units of teachers' houses in the affected schools in Iganga district between 2010 and 2011. The Ministry should also consider renovating the existing few teachers houses that are in a dilapidating state so that teachers are attracted to them.

4.7 Increase primary teachers' ceiling for the affected schools

As noted in the study, many schools had some of their teachers away on study leave and this had piled a lot of pressure on the other teachers. Strategically, if the government is to improve the quality of the program by reduce teacher absenteeism, Iganga district would be prioritized when it comes to appointing more teachers to reduce on the pupil teacher ratio.

4.8 Provide meals for teachers at school

The study found out that some teachers were out of school because they were out for meals. In most instances, they left and could not return for the evening shift. In some schools, teachers were reported to be feeding on the food that children bring.

4.9 Ensure timely distribution of instructional materials to schools

From the study, it was found out that untimely distribution of instructional materials had an effect on teacher absenteeism. Teachers argued that when they do not have instructional materials, they spend a lot of time looking for materials in order to avoid forging notes. In the process, they find themselves either late or do not turn up at all for class. Most of the head teachers interviewed confirmed that text books are delivered late in their schools and that this fuels teacher absence from school as teachers give looking for notes as a justification for their being absent. In an interview with the District Education Officer, timely delivery of instructional materials has a positive effect on teacher presence in schools. The officials both at school and district levels were dissatisfied with the way in which the instructional materials are delivered to the district and later to the schools.

4.10 Activate school management committees.

Schools that had scored a good number of first grades had functional school management committees while those schools with non functional school management committees performed poorly and also had a high number of head teacher, teacher and even pupil absenteeism.

4.11 Increase teacher salaries

Teachers' pay needs to be increased to match with the ever rising cost of living. It was found out that 35.2% of the teachers interviewed had more than 6 dependants yet they were the sole bread winners in their homes. It was found out that there were some teachers who had upgraded their academic qualifications but they had not been recognized by the system. This demotivates them. Others felt demotivated because they had been transferred from an urban school to a rural school. Although teachers' salaries account for a bigger percentage of Uganda's budget, there is a need to provide an estimated 299,000 shillings for teachers at the beginning stage and lowest level like it is in Kenya. It was also found out that salaries for staff varied. There is a problem of morale in having low-paid teachers (with limited opportunities to climb up the career ladder) working along higher paid teachers, deputy head teachers, and head teacher. Some teachers who upgrade are not recognized with a salary increment but have to go through the normal competitive recruitment process, which demotivates them, further especially when they have been unsuccessful. However, this could be a bit difficult for the government given that it currently spends 582.3 billion shillings on the primary school sector wages.

4.13 Arrangements should be made for teachers to draw salaries in or near school locations.

Many teachers receive their salaries through the banks, most of which are located in urban areas. For some teachers, especially those in rural schools, it takes more than half a day to travel to the banks and return to school. The MOES should consider alternative arrangements for teachers to access their salaries in remote locations. The introduction of the electronic payment system has not helped much. The authorities should encourage teachers to withdraw their salaries on Saturdays, since banks open then or use ATM cards even on Sundays, since the study revealed that 3.3% of the teachers are absent to fetch a salary in town.

4.14 Leaves

There is a need for school administrators to ensure that teachers who are absent because they are sick submit proof of medical treatment from a recognized health institution upon return. This will discourage faking of "sickness" by some teachers as reported by the communities.

4.15. Appoint teachers on performance contract

Respondents in the study pointed out that most teachers decide to absent themselves since they are already assured of their salaries which are paid directly on their accounts. To ensure that teachers value their profession and are motivated to work harder and efficiently, the Ministry of Education and Sports should consider appointing primary school teachers on contract, subject to renewal based on satisfactory performance and commitment. In some Asia and Latin American countries, this scheme has yielded fruits. This should however be done in a

way that there is minimum political interference especially when assessing and renewing teachers' contracts.

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