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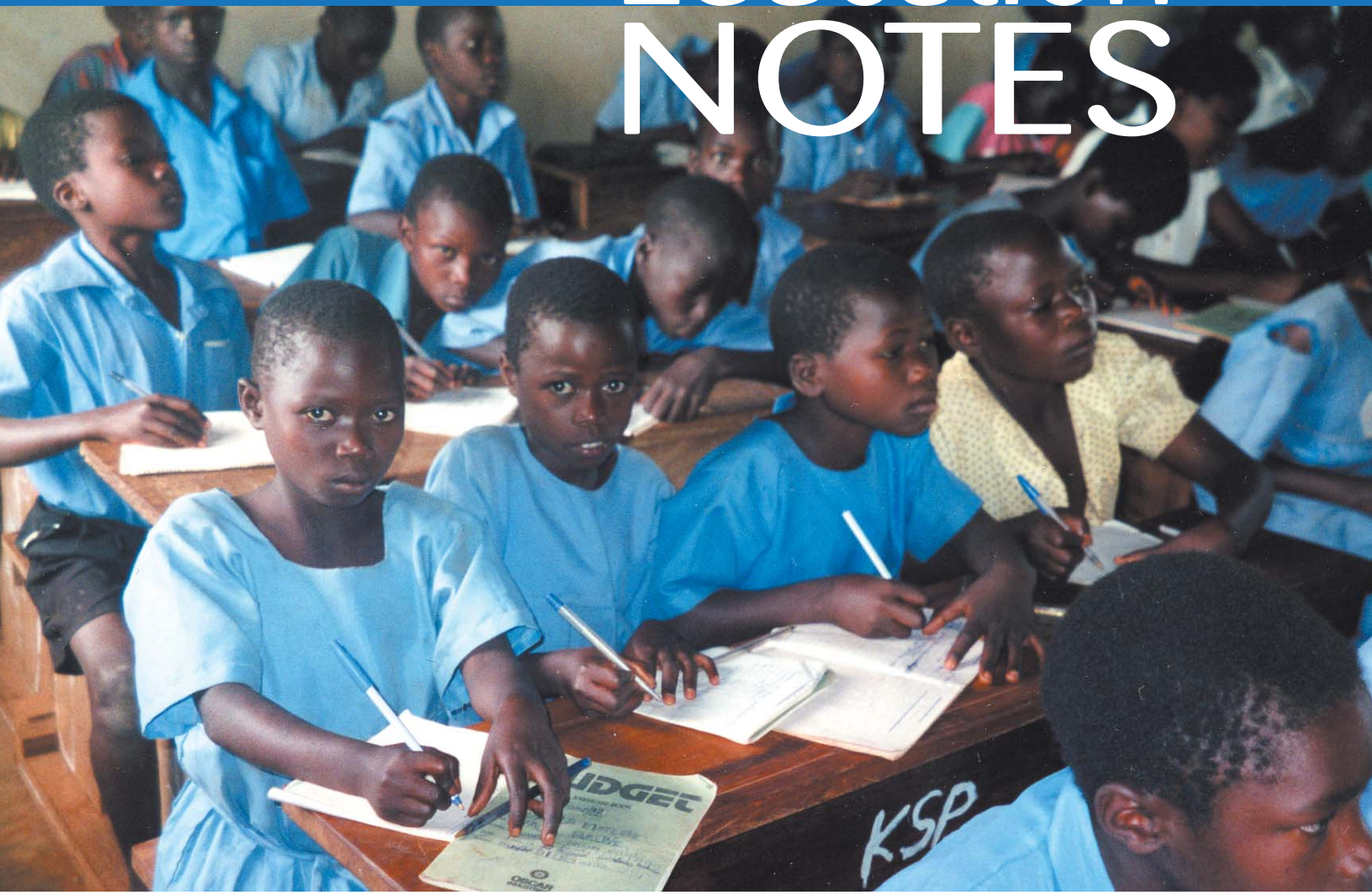
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Education NOTES



Achieving Universal Primary Education in Uganda: The 'Big Bang' Approach

Uganda's primary enrollment rates have risen remarkably since 1996, when the Government eliminated fees in a bold attempt to achieve universal primary education. But the massive expansion in numbers has affected the quality of education; and it will be a major challenge to cope with the rising demand for post-primary education. What can we learn from Uganda's experience?

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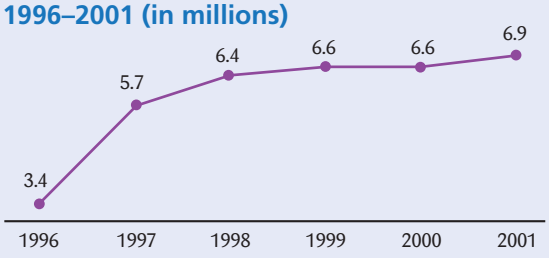
Despite some progress

over the late 1980s, the basic education system in Uganda was in an unsatisfactory state in the early 1990s. The gross primary enrollment ratio was 87%, basic inputs were lacking, and Ugandan households were paying too much for primary education. In 1996, the President decided to remove fees for up to four children per family (of which two should be girls), in a bold effort to achieve universal primary education (UPE) for all children aged 6 to 12 years by 2000—a goal set in 1987. The President's decision removed a key obstacle for families, also sending a signal on the importance of education.

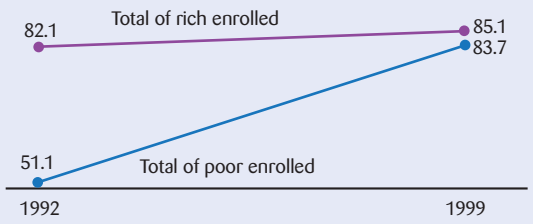
Total Primary School Enrollment, 1996–2001 (in millions)



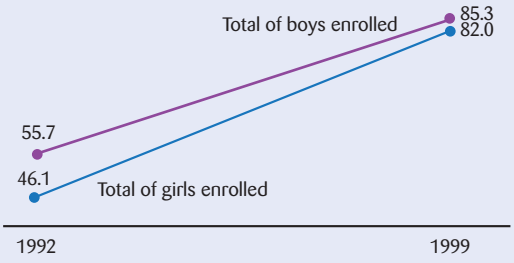
Access and Equity: Uganda's success story

Coverage improved dramatically. An additional 1.1 million girls and 1.2 million boys responded immediately; by 2001, the number of children enrolled was more than double the 1996 level. Enrollment ratios improved dramatically: the gross enrollment ratio first rose to 123% in 1997 and then decreased to 117 percent[1] in 2000.

Improved Access to Education for Poor by Consumption Quintile



Improved Access to Education for (Poorest) Girls by Consumption Quintile



Uganda was also largely successful in narrowing primary enrollment gaps between rich and poor and between boys and girls. The wealth bias that had characterized access to primary education prior to UPE was all but eliminated by 1999. In addition, the improvements in female access to primary education have been enormous. Uganda has made great strides towards UPE; data from 2000 (see footnote 1) shows virtually no gap between male and female net enrollment ratios (89.3 percent vs. 88.8 percent).

What went right?

The success of Uganda's "big bang" approach—an all-out effort to achieve UPE by making primary education free and sharply increasing public spending in support of this—confirmed that, for Uganda, financial constraints on the demand side had been by far the most important reason for low primary enrollment. Key underlying drivers of change were:

- Strong political commitment, backed by a strategic vision and policy framework for the education sector that had the buy-in of key ministries—Finance, local Government, Public Service, and Education; primary education was also placed at the centre of the Government's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP).

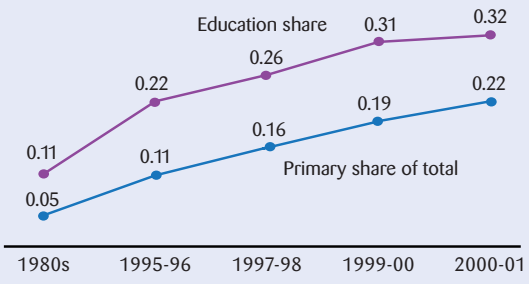
- The establishment of inclusive, effective partnerships, domestic and international, which helped build a strong constituency for education facili-

1 The best estimate available is for 2000, a combination of enrollment by age from the Education Statistical Abstract, and population estimates from the 1999/2000 Household Survey.

tated through Government-led semi-annual education reviews.

- Sound macroeconomic policies, which fostered the expansion of the education system and supported a dramatic increase in funding (by 2001, nearly a third of the total discretionary budget was allocated to education, compared with 24 percent in 1996, with the share of primary education reaching 70 percent of total education resources, and real per-pupil spending rising by 50 percent between 1996 and 2000).

Share of Education and Primary in Total Government Recurrent Expenditure



- Measures to improve transparency and accountability of spending at the school level in combination with predictable flows of aid, permitted remarkable efficiency gains in the use of sector resources (the share of funds reaching schools has risen to about 90 percent, from 28 percent in 1996).

- Strengthened collaboration with and support from external financing agencies, as a new Education Sector Investment Plan drew support from all of the external financing agencies; the decision of the World Bank and other external financing agencies to provide significant financial support (over $400 million since 1997) created the resource base needed to make UPE a reality after eight years of internal discussion.

- The move to General and Directed Budget Support financing modalities, and more predictable flows of aid, on the part of the main funding agencies which has enabled the Government to improve planning.

Unanticipated consequences

As is often the case, Uganda's success was not unqualified, and the big bang, not without some repercussions:

Quantitative inputs. Notwithstanding government commitment and donor support, input ratios for textbooks, teachers, and classrooms suffered with the introduction of UPE. Pupil-teacher ratios rose from 40, pre-UPE, to 60 in 1999, while pupil-classroom ratios jumped from 85 to 145 over the same period. Though dramatically improved in 2001, the situation remains far from ideal. On the other hand, community based construction has been one of the bright successes of the UPE effort achieving much higher classroom numbers than centralized construction methods had.

Qualitative inputs. A new Teacher Development Management System (TDMS) was implemented to address the low share of qualified and trained teachers, featuring in-service teacher training and training on new teaching methods using innovative materials. While the ratio of trained to total teachers rose from 73 percent in 1995 to 83 percent in 2000 and teacher recruitment and management improved, less impressive has been the improvement in teaching methods.

Repetition and dropout rates. Repetition rates at the primary level appear to have declined significantly for boys and girls—17 percent before UPE and 9 percent after UPE. However, an automatic promotion policy which was put in place was only partially observed. Latest data on dropout rates show similar trends for boys and girls through grade 4. Preliminary data on completion rates show improvement, from 35 percent before UPE to 55 percent in 2000.

Achievement levels. Direct evidence on learning is scanty, but available evidence gives cause for concern. In tests administered to national random samples of 3rd-grade pupils, the number of pupils who achieved a satisfactory score declined from 48 percent in 1996 to 31 percent in 1999 on the mathematics test, and from 92 percent to 56 percent on the English oral test.

Education in Uganda

Socio-Economic Indicators:

Population (millions)	22.1
Percent below poverty line	34
GNP per capita	320
IDA/IBRD	IDA
PRSP[2]	2001
HIPC[2]	1998; 2000

Education Indicators:

Adult illiteracy rate: Total [Female/Male]	37 [49/23]
Primary gross enrollment rate: Total [F/M]	117 [113.1/120.7]
Primary completion rate: Total [F/M][3]	61 [32/48]
Secondary gross enrollment rate: Total [F/M]	18 [16/20]
Tertiary gross enrollment rate: Total [F/M]	2 [1/3]
Total Education Spending as % of GDP	4

Differences in achievement were large between pupils in urban and rural schools, and between regions.

Remaining challenges

Widespread as the support has been for UPE in Uganda, the effort has proved a challenge. Inputs were not increased sufficiently to cope with the massive expansion in numbers, and lower achievement levels point to declining quality. With the budget support from the Bank and the other major bilateral donors, and additional funds from HIPC, GOU has provided funds directly to schools to help them cope and has improved the classroom construction and teacher recruitment modalities over time. In addition to improving quality, other remaining challenges include the increased demand for secondary and tertiary education within a constrained resource envelope and the monitoring of service delivery through decentralized districts. These challenges will engage all of the partners to education in Uganda for the next decade.

Lessons Learned

- Successful education reform in developing countries like Uganda require high levels of political and education management commitment that is sustained over a long period.
- The big bang approach can be a very powerful policy instrument for getting all the children into school and Uganda had managed to do this very well.
- Timely, flexible donor support is a critical factor.

The downside of the big bang approach is that there can be a dramatic decline in quality and the key is to anticipate the likely impact of big bang approaches on quality and prepare accordingly.

This note series is intended to summarize lessons learned and key policy findings on the World Bank's work in education. The views expressed in these notes are those of the authors (Paud Murphy, Carla Bertoncino, Lianqin Wang) do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank. For additional copies of Education Notes, please contact the Education Advisory Service by email at eservice@worldbank.org or visit the web site: http://www.worldbank.org/education/

2 The *Heavily Indebted Poor Countries* (HIPC) Initiative was proposed by the World Bank and IMF and agreed by the international community in 1996, as the first comprehensive approach to reduce the external debt of the world's poorest, most heavily indebted countries. Since 1999, it has created a strong and transparent link between debt relief and poverty reduction by tying nationally-owned, participatory *poverty reduction strategy papers* (PRSPs) to the provision of HIPC debt relief and concessional lending.

3 Total data is for 2000, F/M data is for 1997.