

Jayna Misra
Ames High school
Ames, Iowa
Uganda, Education

Education Empowers the Youth of Uganda

In today's world, there are many challenges to bettering the ways in which we live. The world faces serious problems concerning the lack of distribution of resources and trying to feed a growing population. As recently as 2014-2016, World Hunger News found that one in nine people on the planet suffers from hunger and undernourishment. According to a report made by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, one-third of food produced in the world goes straight to waste.

This issue of malnutrition is especially hard-hitting in developing countries like Uganda, which has a steady rise in the number of people, due to significant influxes of incoming refugees. This is in spite of the fact that the country suffered a great population loss due to the rampant AIDS epidemic in the 1980-1990s. Uganda is located in East Africa, a landlocked country that neighbors Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Being a very accessible and hospitable country, they receive tens of thousands of refugees coming in from neighboring countries, many of whom are children coming in without any parents. This sudden rise in population poses problems concerning adequate food and nutrition.

A fundamental solution to this problem is improving education. With better education, the people of Uganda will be able to create solutions to problems as they occur on the ground. Studies have also shown that even one educated person in a family can substantially create a higher standard of life for the whole family unit (Situational Analysis of Children of Uganda). Education, therefore, creates more opportunities for the entire family. Right now, 70% of Ugandans live in rural communities and many, especially girls, do not have access to school (World FactBook).

There are many issues that come into play with a lack of education in government affairs. The World Factbook has noted that Uganda's government has "a weak and inefficient judicial system and pervasive corruption." This is a huge problem and would lead to a decrease in the development of the country. In Uganda, the government has started to look at education as a basic human right that should be available to all. While the general public is also in agreement with this sentiment, the system of providing that education has run into multiple challenges.

Uganda's current education system is organized with several years of primary school, six years of secondary education, and an option of three to five years of higher learning. Although this sounds like a fantastic education system, the truth of the matter is that many students after or during primary school, do not continue their education. A lot of this has to do with the location of schooling areas. Many students are from agrarian households, meaning that they live in rural areas to grow crops as their family's main source of income. A majority travel on foot to school, the country average being roughly a 45-130 minute walk from and to school (Walking School Bus). Even being close to a school might not mean that the child will attend school, because some families can't sacrifice that child's time, as they need their help in providing for the home.

Another major barrier is the lack of physical facilities. School is often taught in buildings that are structurally unsound, or sometimes not even in a building at all. Secondary schools have a meager rate of attendance at only 25% of children being able to go to school. It is tough to learn when you're not in a place of learning. It creates an atmosphere of chaos and uncertainty.

Of course, all of the issues of facilities and language instructions are pointless if there aren't enough teachers committed to teaching. One of the significant problems we find in Ugandan is a lack of teachers due to very little pay and delayed pay. Teachers are often forced to look for additional work that conflicts with their teaching duties and aren't able to put their entire focus into teaching students. Treating education as an investment in the country, policy must be formulated and enforced, that keep talented individuals from leaving the country to look elsewhere for employment.

Another primary concern is language barriers. Refugees who come to Uganda to escape war or persecution, do not often speak the local language. There is no official language in Uganda, but many schools teach students in English or the native language of that community. However, many children of refugees are not able to speak either of those languages. Without language instruction, such children are at a severe handicap to learn and will grow up without the skills to work and become productive members of society. All children, whether born or coming into Uganda, are believed to have the right to education. Under the Uganda Teacher and School Effectiveness Project, early grade teachers are being trained to teach in the local language of the region. The government believes that by teaching native languages in primary school will give the children a better development of necessary numerical skills and an overall stronger literacy rates. These measures will help further their education by giving them secure basics before learning English, which is the language they will be taught in for all of their higher education.

Students also often don't have an immediate incentive to come to school. There is no one in the family encouraging the child to learn, and most of the time the children won't be able to complete their education anyway. An average family in Uganda will most likely have a big family, and force the children to leave school to support the family. There needs to be an emphasis on educating the parents on why they should be sending their kids to school. Currently, a family might make the hard choice to keep one or two children in school if they can afford it, and usually will pick a male child instead of a female one. Leaving school earlier in life will keep these children in the vicious cycle of poverty. This also means that they will begin to adopt more traditional roles, where the female child will start to take care of the household, and the boy will do manual hard labor jobs to give more

financial support to the family. This will give little opportunity for a young boy or girl to advance in society.

Breaking this poverty cycle starts with children attending and staying in school, especially for young girls. In 2006, over half of Uganda's female population, were married before the legal age of 18. Unfortunately, there is a lack of knowledge of contraceptives and the ills of early childbearing. Uganda has one of the most substantial fertility rates of 5.8 children per woman. This has also caused Uganda's infant mortality rate to be abnormally high, as girls start having children at an age where their bodies aren't strong enough to endure childbirth yet.

Research shows that women who received an education in early years waited a much longer time before becoming pregnant. They also had fewer, but more successful children (Unicef). This follows the choice to use contraceptives, as this is something that may be learned at school. School isn't just about the core subjects, but also about teaching the skills essential to life. Without such knowledge, young girls are left in the dark about essential information to their health and suffer harsh consequences because of it. Since women in Uganda are in charge of their household and home affairs, mothers will be able to pass on knowledge to their children and open up new doors of opportunity for them.

Education is a gateway to improve quality of life. The government has become more active in ensuring learning is emphasized in the country. There is an enthusiasm to learn, as more people become aware of the benefits of education. In 2010, the department of education proposed a plan that centered around three primary concerns in the education system. The main issues they tried to address were 1) teaching a basic understanding of literacy and numerical skills, 2) preparing students to join the workforce, and 3) providing disadvantaged students the opportunity to advance to higher education. Youth unemployment in Uganda is very high, so there needs to be an option for practical vocational education. Programs such as the FFA program in the US, could be a good starting template.

There is a lack of adequate facilities and teachers committed to teaching in Uganda. To combat this problem, there needs to be more focus on collaboration with other parties to fully utilize all the resources. For example, through NGO involvement, rural communities can initiate training programs to hire and keep teachers at schools for more extended periods of time. New facilities built in collaboration with the private sector or donors also encourage more children to stay in school longer, as they're able to feel a part of a community atmosphere in the school. Educating the parents on the benefits of keeping their children in school is also only able to occur when you have leaders in the community like teachers to lead the way.

In 2011, Uganda joined the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which started initiatives on educating all children, regardless of backgrounds. Uganda has nearly 20% of its population living in poverty, with little to no access to education (World FactBook). Education can make a world of difference to a family unit, especially when they are under the poverty line. Roughly 70% of Ugandans live in rural communities, with little access to resources such as clean water, medical support, or education centers (World Hunger Poverty Facts). Some solutions have been outlined

through appropriate groups like UNATU, or the National Teachers Union of Uganda. They provide programs that focus on building facilities and hiring teachers in local communities with promises of benefits. SchoolNet Africa is also working tirelessly to ensure all children can access education by providing technologies in the classroom that enhance the spreading of information. Through education, Uganda can produce sufficient and well-qualified men and women, who are able and ready to work.

There is a need to build on these ideas and create an environment to better lives while respecting their cultural identities. Some ways that can expand the educational programs are through pre-existing organizations like UNICEF, who have been working with Ugandans to provide support to children under five who suffer from chronic hunger. Many programs are now looking at providing highly nutritious meals in school as another incentive to go to school, as it will be one less thing for the parents to worry about. A child that does not eat does not learn.

By investing in education, we're investing in the future for Uganda. Education is one of the most important solutions to the problem of hunger and malnutrition in Uganda. Education can hold an entire community together, and improve the country as a whole. There must be a serious push to make it possible for children to become interested in sciences, technologies, engineering, maths (STEM), and an amplitude of other subjects that arouse both their curiosity and intelligence. By creating an enabling environment, more Ugandans will be able to become doctors, researchers, and pursue many other jobs that will promote the growth of the country and themselves. Most importantly, is getting and keeping young girls in school. Programs that run in Uganda like Girl Up state that girl's education will create a higher standard of living in the country. Girl Up has said that "By supporting adolescent girls learning in a variety of life areas, we are building the next generation of confident women who will become leaders in their communities." Through school, they're able to build skills that will serve them all throughout their adulthood and prepare them to be future leaders of their community.

Schools similar to mine are also involved in this investment towards the future of Uganda. My motivation for choosing Uganda as my target country comes from a belief that as a developing country, Ugandans widely accepted that education is a necessity for their children and country. I plan to go to Uganda next summer as a part of my high school team that will travel to Uganda to work towards building a school for girls. Doing research and writing this essay has increased my interests and passion for going on this mission.

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