

Local Idealism Versus Central Government Indifference: Case Studies of Community-Based Preschools in Uganda

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Contrasting themes in social service provision

Initiatives of the ‘developmental state’, replacing or co-opting local efforts

- Illustrated by many UPE programs

For a relevant model related to poverty reduction, see Adrian Leftwich (2008).

Local community initiatives with minimal external support

- Illustrated here by community based preschools in Uganda

(‘Preschools’ here describes ‘nursery schools’ and ‘ECD centres’.)



The provision of ECCE in Uganda, for children aged 3-6:

- Provision is explicitly left to private providers (Education Act of 2008)
- Many households cannot afford preschool fees
- The quality of the service is very varied
- Much of the training of staff is left to private providers
- Regulation and supervision is weak: many preschools are not registered or officially recorded



Growing popular demand for ECCE: some statistics

Increase of registered pre-primary schools (Min. of Ed. & Sports):

Year	No. schools
2007/08	703
2012/13	4,092
2017/18	7,210

Widely differing NERs according to source, for 2016/17:

Source: NER for ages 3-5

MoES	15%
(probably limited to registered schools)	
UNHS	43%

Children Aged 6-14 Est. Percentages by Years of Preschool Experience (Uwezo 2018)

No. Years	0	1	2	3+	Total
Percentage	38.3	12.7	17.2	31.8	100.0



Advantages of community based approaches

- Potential for a realistic and graduated fee structure – to achieve wider access.
- Stronger local accountability of management and staff.
- Potential for public subsidy.
- Potential for linkage with other services: health, social development.

Common characteristics of the 4 preschools we studied (2 rural and 2 urban)

1. Origin in local community initiative.
2. Non-profit management by a centre management committee or school management committee.
3. Low fees and low contribution requirements.
4. No restrictions by religious denomination.
5. Supportive educational officials (district level).



Strategies / improvisations used in our cases

1. Allocation of a primary school classroom block for the preschool (in 3 cases).
2. Community construction of buildings (1 case).
3. Fund-raising and NGO aid for start-up.
4. Volunteer teachers and cooks (2 cases).
5. Feeding programs with contributions in kind (3 cases).
6. Parental contribution of hygiene materials (all cases).
7. Home-made toys contributed by parents (1 case).

'Central government indifference' – some indicators

1. Continuing unwillingness to subsidise ECCE.
2. Non-adoption of a new draft policy for ECCE (developed in 2017-18), which calls for equitable provision and selective subsidies.
3. Focus of national officials on preschools supported by large agencies (e.g. BRAC, the Madrasah Early Childhood Program, LABE, UNICEF).
4. Lack of interest in volunteer teachers and their potential benefits.
5. Out-of-date guidelines, e.g. 20 children per adult.

And more indicators of indifference:

6. Attempt to include ECCE in a new degree requirement for teachers – difficult for preschools to meet.
7. Prolonged closure of preschools during the Covid-19 pandemic, without clear evidence that it was necessary.



How relevant is a strategy of ‘problem-driven iterative adaptation’ (Andrews et al. 2012)?

In favour:

- Local initiatives such as feeding programs and the use of volunteers could contribute to a pragmatic sharing of costs between the state and local providers.
- Revised guidelines could recognise local realities.

Against:

- The central government has not shown a clear willingness to share costs. This is not a ‘capability trap’.
- A stronger commitment by the state to support ECCE is necessary for more equitable educational outcomes in Uganda.

Thank you!

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