

# UWEZO UGANDA STRATEGY (2025-2028)

Promoting Support for Quality Education for All





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# ABBREVIATIONS

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AI:	Artificial Intelligence
AKF:	Aga Khan Foundation
ALiVE:	Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa
ASER:	Annual Status of Education Report
AU:	African Union
CLAs:	Citizen-led Assessments
CLL:	Community-Led Learning
CSO:	Civil Society Organisation
EAC:	East African Community
EAN:	Education Advocacy Network
ECCE:	Early Childhood Care and Education
FENU:	Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda
FLN:	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
GDP:	Gross National Product
GEMR:	Global Education Monitoring Report
GER:	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GNI:	Gross National Income
LGF:	Luigi Giussani Foundation
MEL:	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoES:	Ministry of Education and Sports
NCDC:	National Curriculum Development Centre
NPA:	National Planning Authority
NGOs:	Non-government Organisations
OH:	Outcome Harvesting
PAL Network:	People's Action for Learning Network
PD:	Positive Deviance
RELI:	Regional Education Learning Initiative
SEN:	Special Education Needs
TAC:	Technical Advisory Committee
ToC:	Theory of Change
UACE:	Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education
UBC:	Uganda Broadcasting Corporation
UNATU:	Uganda National Teachers' Union
UNEB:	Uganda National Examinations Board

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uwezo Uganda is a non-profit, civil society organisation (CSO) dedicated to promoting support for quality education for all in Uganda. Since it became an independent organisation in 2019, it has built on the work done by the 'Uwezo' programme under Twaweza East Africa in the period 2009-19. Citizen assessments of children's literacy, numeracy and life skills are a core activity and we also engage in many research and advocacy activities that are related to improving learning outcomes. This document is our second strategy as an independent organisation and is designed for the period 2025-28.

The strategy was developed over a period of one year, with a wide consultation of local, national and international stakeholders. The review of what had been achieved under the first strategy was guided by an outcome harvesting methodology (Blommestein, 2024). This systematic review led to revision of the theory of change and of other core elements. After further internal consultations, the strategy was approved by the Board in November 2024.

Section 2 of the Strategy outlines the educational context in which we work, which presents many challenges. The high level of participation in primary education has not been matched by an adequate level of public investment: in 2021, for example, Uganda's public educational expenditure was 2.7% of GDP, whereas a minimum of 4% is recommended. Within primary education, high levels of repetition, absenteeism and dropout continue, interacting with learners' difficulties in foundational literacy and numeracy. The pre-primary and secondary levels of education have much lower levels of participation and depend heavily on private (i.e. non-government) providers. The nursery school age group (3-5) had achieved a gross enrolment ratio (GER) of about 53% by 2019 but there is no government subsidy at that level. Secondary education had a GER of 25% but more than half of the enrolment was in private schools. At the primary level, 32% was in private schools: a level that reflects lack of confidence in the government-aided schools. The Uwezo assessments show fluctuations but no major improvement in children's reading and numeracy outcomes over the period 2019-24. There are signs of recovery from the school closures of 2020-21: but the basic limitations of teaching and learning have not changed (Uwezo Uganda 2024a). A plan announced in 2023 to recruit a large number of additional teachers for government-aided primary schools was not implemented and the capitation grants paid are so small that schools depend partially on parents' contributions.

In response to this situation, Uwezo Uganda has continued to draw attention to the low level and great inequality of learning outcomes at the primary level. We have also

systematically advocated increased public investment in pre-primary education, action to remedy the shortages of teachers and classrooms in primary schools, improved training for teaching in local languages, and adjustments to curriculum and pedagogy. At the same time, we have taken part in the Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) initiative to assess and nurture life skills and values, recognising the importance of children's social and emotional development.

In Section 3, which reviews the achievements of our previous strategy, we conclude that we have continued to make effective use of the citizen-led, household-based assessment methodology, now applying it to life skills and values as well as literacy and numeracy. The findings from our assessment and research work have reached a wide range of actors, at local, national and international levels, in the 'complex dynamic' environment of the education sector, and have been used by them in their own reporting and initiatives. Some local partners have used Uwezo findings effectively in their advocacy and fundraising.

At the same time, we consider that more explicit use could have been made of the guiding principles in the strategy, that the approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) could have been more robust and that, at times, the small core team of the Secretariat took on too many commitments.

The latter problem could be alleviated by working with allies at national level and setting up a community of practice for district-level partners. Collaborative strategies could help us to trigger interventions that would improve the quality of education. This conclusion is reflected in the new mission statement (in Section 4), which is 'To promote support for quality education for all through assessment, research, engagement and influencing, in collaboration with other stakeholders'. Our vision continues to be: 'A society in which all children are learning and realising their full potential'.

The new theory of change (ToC) in Section 4 gives more detail than the previous ToC about the links between (1) our core areas of work, (2) actors' use of evidence, (3) decisions to change or modify policy and practice and (4) longer-term changes in the delivery of education and in children's learning. It is recognised that the long-term impact of our work depends critically on government bodies and development partners and that we can only hope to improve the public funding of education by working with partners and allies at all levels.

In Section 5, the Strategy outlines the 'directions of travel' for the three core areas (pillars) of our work: assessments, research and engagement and influencing.



In the assessment area, we expect to conduct at least two national assessments of children's reading and numeracy, to build on the pilot assessment of writing that was conducted in 2022, to develop procedures for assessing oral and audial skills in language, and to do further assessments of functional and/or life skills. In the research area, we are currently completing a study of community and family influences on learning, using a positive deviance methodology. Other research topics that are under consideration include, among others, (1) educational provision for children with disabilities and other special educational needs, and (2) the relationship between funding and provision for learning at school level. In the area of engagement and influencing, we intend to engage in five types of activity: (1) working with like-minded CSOs at national level, (2) supporting a community of practice at district level, (3) promoting citizen journalism through social media, (4) regional and continental engagement and (5) engagement at the global level.

Section 6 sets out seven guiding principles for the benefit of our own staff and partner organisations that use the evidence from our assessments and research. These include a commitment to 'quality education for all' ('every child deserves the best possible education, starting with preschool'), to relevance and to adaptability ('understand the context', develop appropriate content' and 'be prepared to adapt'). Other guidance is to base advocacy on evidence, and to build mutual respect with collaborators.

The approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning, as described in Section 7, puts an emphasis on learning and adaptation. The goals of the approach are to improve the efficiency and relevance of operations, to improve contextual knowledge, and to review the implications of outcomes for the various elements in the strategy, such as the theory of change and the guiding principles. A range of methods of monitoring and evaluation are to be used, such as monitoring of the use of research findings by other organisations and in the media, after-action reviews, principles-focused evaluation and participatory outcome-harvesting.

The structures and organisation of Uwezo Uganda, as developed during the first strategy and described in Section 8, are likely to remain fairly stable over the second strategy period. The core members of staff of the Secretariat are assisted for specific activities by

consultants, trainers, district and village coordinators, and interns. All of the latter are engaged for short periods, typically for specific assessments or research initiatives.

Oversight and guidance are provided by a Board of Directors composed of up to nine Ugandan professionals and a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of up to 13 accomplished educators. Plans for assessment and research are regularly reviewed by the TAC. Our work is funded mainly by private foundations, either directly or through partnership programmes.

We have collaborated, continuously or frequently, with a range of organisations at the international, regional, national and district levels, and we will continue to do so. At the international and regional levels, our engagement with the People's Action for Learning Network (PAL Network), the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI), the Uwezo East Africa Citizen-Led Assessment collaborative, the Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE), the East African Community (EAC), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), and the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) is of particular importance. At the national level, we interact frequently with relevant departments in the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), the National Planning Authority (NPA), leading universities, various CSOs in the education sector, the Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU) and other teachers' associations, among others. At the district level, we have links with CSOs, in all parts of Uganda, that are likely to continue.

The last two sections of this strategy present a risk map (Section 9) and an outline budget (Section 10). The risk map indicates actions that could help to prevent, or to mitigate, various risks during the period of the strategy. The budget shows prospective costs, for each of five areas of activity (pillars) and for each year of the strategy. The overall total for the four-year period is estimated at about US\$6.7 million. We would like to invite you to be part of our journey as we continue to promote support for the best possible education for every child.





## 1. INTRODUCTION

Uwezo Uganda is a non-profit, civil society organisation (CSO) mainly carrying out assessment, research and engagement for quality basic education. Implementing citizen assessments of children's literacy, numeracy and life skills is a core part of our work and we use the findings of our assessments and research to inform policy and practice. We have been operating as an independent organisation in Uganda since October 2019.

Uwezo, a Swahili word which means 'capability', was a programme of Twaweza East Africa from 2009 to 2019. Twaweza's mission has been to enable children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be responsive to citizens' demands in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Since 2020, Uwezo Uganda has continued this journey as an independent organisation, generating and curating evidence on learning outcomes and using it to engage with policy and development actors to address the learning crisis. Twaweza and Uwezo, adapted the approach pioneered by the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) in India, in which trained citizen volunteers carry out assessments and obtain other relevant data, in the household setting, from large, nation-wide samples of children.

This strategy is the result of a one-year participatory process of learning from the past and planning for the future. Together with many of our key stakeholders, such as our district partner organisations, trainers affiliated with Uwezo, the Board, the Technical Advisory Committee, local and international research partners and other key stakeholders, we embarked on a learning journey, which started with an Outcome Harvesting (OH) review workshop held in November 2023 in Kampala. After being trained in the Outcome Harvesting methodology, participants were guided to harvest and categorise outcomes that they were aware of and share preliminary conclusions and recommendations for the

new strategy. The insights were presented in an Outcome Harvesting findings report (Blommestein, 2024) and discussed during a second participatory strategy consultation workshop held in April 2024 in Kampala. During this workshop, participants translated the findings of the OH review directly into a comprehensive theory of change (ToC) for Uwezo Uganda. The participants also jointly developed a problem tree analysis to inform the problem statement, formulated guiding principles and contributed to a risk map for Uwezo Uganda. This process resulted into the development of a draft strategy that went through a series of internal consultations and refinements involving Uwezo staff, Technical Advisory Committee and Board. The final strategy was approved by Uwezo Board in November 2024.

This second Uwezo strategy (2025-2028) seeks to inform us and explain about our improved theory of change, expand our core areas of work and strengthen our ties with partner organisations and stakeholders. We hope that we have done justice to all contributions and we want to whole-heartedly thank everyone for their valuable input.





## 2. THE CONTEXT OF UWEZO UGANDA'S WORK

### THE EDUCATION CONTEXT IN UGANDA

Uganda is a country with great geographical, ethnic and linguistic diversity and an estimated 2024 population of 45.9 million, of which 64% is below the age of 25 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2024). It is classified as a low-income country, having an estimated gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$980 in 2023 (World Bank, 2023a). Over the past 25 years a high level of participation in primary education has been achieved. Public educational expenditure, however, has been persistently low by international standards, being 2.7% of GDP in 2021, far from reaching the minimum recommended level by the Education 2030 Framework for Action (at least 4 percent of the GDP) (World Bank, 2023b).

There are great variations in participation by level of education. For the early childhood age group, there was a gross enrolment ratio of about 53% by 2019. For the primary level there was a gross enrolment ratio of 115%, and for secondary education as a whole a gross enrolment ratio of 25%, in 2017 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019). Within general secondary education, participation is much more limited in the upper two-year cycle, compared to the lower four-year cycle: only about 20% of the students in S1 reach S6 and take 'A' levels (UACE). Recent trends in participation are uncertain, as annual education statistics have not been published since 2017.

Within primary education, there are high levels of repetition, absenteeism and dropout, despite an official policy of automatic promotion, and the survival rate to P6 in Uganda was estimated at 36% in 2017, far below the rates of 72% for Ethiopia and 68% for Rwanda (World Bank, 2018, 5). This inefficient progression interacts with learners' difficulties in foundational literacy and numeracy.

In considering educational policies and their effectiveness, it is important to be aware of the large share of the private sector in the delivery of education. The role of private schools, both non-profit and other, is recognised in the Constitution (Constitute, 2005) and the 2008 Education Act (Government of Uganda, 2008). Pre-primary education still depends entirely on private providers and, as of 2019, private schools accounted for 32% of the enrolment in primary education, 56% in secondary education and 58% in tertiary institutions of all kinds (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Parents with the necessary means invest in private education to save their children from the limitations of public education and this in turn reduces the incentives for politicians to prioritise policies that benefit all children, such as increasing public investment in foundational literacy and numeracy. Private schools and universities also have leverage because of their potential to supply high-level human capital.

Uwezo has always focused on the question of promoting effective foundational literacy and numeracy and our previous strategy drew attention to the twin challenges of low learning outcomes and great inequality in those outcomes. At the same time, in the previous strategy we have also come to appreciate that developing a whole-child goes beyond literacy and numeracy skills to include nurturing other life skills (21st Century Skills) and values such as creativity, problem-solving, self-awareness, communication, respect and integrity, to mention but a few. Therefore, in addition to promoting foundational literacy and numeracy, we have also, in partnership with counterparts in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda united under the Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) initiative been advancing assessment and nurturing of such skills to foster development of a whole child with critical skills to make the best out of life and thrive.

The focus on foundational literacy and numeracy and life skills continues to be entirely appropriate in the current situation.

Effective foundational literacy and numeracy is, to quote Beeharry (2021), ‘critical for any meaningful progress on the wider Sustainable Development Goal 4 agenda’ (p. 1). Effective foundational literacy, numeracy and life skills is also essential for realising Uganda’s ‘civic vision’ of education as a basis for useful citizenship, as expressed in the 1992 White Paper and supported by the Constitution (Government of Uganda, 1992; Constitution, 2005). But Uganda has shown little, if any, improvement, in the period of the last strategy, in foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes. In some instances, the learning outcomes have been on the decline. To mention just a few statistics from the Uwezo assessments, the proportion of ten-year-old children achieving Primary(P)2 level competence in English reading was estimated as 15% in 2018, 16% in 2021 and 14% in 2024 while the estimates for their P2 level numeracy competence were 23% in 2018, 20% in 2021 and 32% in 2024 (Uwezo, 2019; Uwezo Uganda, 2021 and Uwezo Uganda 2024a). Although the school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic had an adverse effect on foundational literacy and numeracy among younger children, they added to challenges that were already serious before 2020. This is not to overlook the commendable efforts made by the Government, educational partners and schools to encourage home-based learning during the pandemic and remedial teaching after it.

Promoting effective foundational literacy and numeracy depends on many factors. These include, but not limited to a) the language of instruction b) structured pedagogy initiatives, even if these programs have not been in mother tongue (Chakera et al., 2020; Piper et al., 2018; Gray-Lobe et al. 2022), c) provision of pre-primary education (for children aged 3-5), even on a low-cost basis (Bendini and Devercelli, 2022) d) adjustments to the curriculum and ability-grouping interventions to allow instruction to be better catered to pupils’ learning level, (Banerjee et al., 2023), e) provision of enough teachers and teaching assistants, in primary school classrooms, for active learning suited to children’s varied needs. Despite evidence and advocacy by ourselves and other organisations, however, provisions for effective foundational literacy and numeracy have remained low in the period of the last strategy, which could explain the stagnated learning outcomes.

For example, despite the existence of a policy of teaching in mother-tongue or a common-language for children in the first three years of primary education, there is a dearth of teachers trained in mother-tongue instruction and teaching and learning resources, which could explain the low learning outcomes in mother-tongue literacy referenced earlier. Beyond providing frameworks, oversight for teacher training, minimal guidance and supervision and allowing some primary school classrooms to be used, the national government still provides no funding for early childhood care and education, even while local communities struggle to run preschools for the poor. In contrast, other national governments in the region such as those of Kenya and Ethiopia are now providing financial support for two years of early childhood care and education. On a positive note, a new policy for early childhood care and education, prepared in 2018 and promoting a more equitable approach (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018)<sup>1</sup>, has now been approved and has the potential to improve the situation.

Trends in the employment of teachers in government-funded primary schools have not been well documented, but we can compare the statistics reported by the Education Abstract for 2017 and those reported in an announcement of March 2023 (Government of Uganda, 2017; Government to recruit over 78,000 primary teachers, 2023). In 2017 there were 129,018 teachers, for an enrolment of 7,107,202 in government-funded primary schools, giving a national pupil-teacher ratio of 55.1. But in 2023 the situation was worse: there were 136,819 teachers for an enrolment of 8,624,264, giving a pupil-teacher ratio of 63.0. We note that a plan was announced, in March 2023, to recruit a large number of additional teachers, and this is yet to be realised. The findings of our primary school surveys show that pupil-teacher ratios (PTRs) at school level are much more realistic in private schools than in government-funded ones.<sup>2</sup>

Other key inputs to basic education have also received low priority. The capitation grant actually paid for government-funded primary schools in 2023 was UGX 14,500 per pupil: a level which made schools financially dependent on parents’ contributions. Uwezo’s school surveys show that, in the Eastern and Northern Regions, severe classroom shortages have continued over a long period.

In seeking to explain policy makers’ low interest in prioritising foundational literacy and numeracy, in low-income countries, Beeharry argues that ‘there is

1 [Reviewed-Draft-Early-Child-Care-Education-Policy-Approved-by-ME-WG-Dec-2018.pdf](#)

2 For example, our primary school survey of 2018 shows mean PTRs of 25.6 in private schools and 51.9 in government schools and our survey of 2024 shows mean PTRs of 21 in private schools and 52 in government-aided schools.





no electoral demand for quality primary education', that some education officials have little awareness of the need, and that many policy makers prefer to focus on the higher levels of 'human capital' that can be supplied by a small, educated elite (Beeharry, 2021, 4). The first and third of these do seem to be relevant to Uganda, even if we have found some awareness among educational officials. Neither quality primary education nor subsidised early childhood care and education seem to have had much electoral appeal. Instead, attention is focused on a National Teacher Policy (Government of Uganda, 2019), which has the prestige-seeking, 'human capital' goal of producing an all-graduate teaching force, even at the primary and pre-primary levels. The idea probably appeals to elite school managers and parents, for whom such teachers may be affordable. For the under-resourced schools, however, it seems extremely imprudent to raise the costs of training and employing teachers at this time. The problem is only slightly alleviated by the decision to retrain teachers at the diploma level, as an interim measure.

In the area of life skills and values (or what is called generic competencies in Uganda's curriculum), there's still a lot of effort needed to strengthen the system to assess and nurture these skills. Despite the major focus on such skills in the lower secondary curriculum and these being stated in the primary curriculum, little focus is put on teaching and learning such skills. Learning outcomes in life skills are low. For example, a recent assessment of over eleven thousand adolescents aged 13-17 years across 20 districts in Uganda (RELI 2022) found that 2% reached the ultimate problem-solving proficiency level where they could identify multiple approaches and strategies of solving a given problem.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Our problem statement revolves around the ever-low literacy and numeracy outcomes, especially in government-aided schools. Overall, government-aided schools are inadequately supported, as exemplified by their high pupil-teacher ratios at school level. In addition, the recent Spotlight report on basic education completion and foundational learning highlighted a lack of textbooks, and other learning materials and teacher guides in primary schools (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2024). There has been little, if any sustained system-wide commitment in the promotion of effective foundational literacy and numeracy in recent years, save for a few short-term donor-funded partnership programmes<sup>3</sup>. Funding for the promotion of foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes also remains low, such as for provision of teachers and teaching assistants. Apart from having in place an approved early childhood care and education (ECCE) policy and provisions for the training of teachers and curriculum frameworks, currently, early childhood care and education ECCE (for children aged 3-5) is not funded by the government.

This educational situation presents challenges both for the research and for the advocacy elements in the work of Uwezo Uganda. Findings that demonstrate the value of effective foundational literacy, numeracy and life skills and values, and the contribution of early childhood care and education to effective foundational learning will be used for advocacy purposes. From our recent assessment of young people and adolescents, we also have some evidence about the low levels of functional and life skills and values among school-going adolescents, school leavers and dropouts. More than ever, we need to work with allies and to call for action on the promotion of literacy, numeracy and other critical life skills outcomes.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of such programmes include USAID's Integrated Child and Youth Development (ICYD) activity (<https://www.edc.org/ICYD>) and UK Aid/Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)'s Strengthening Education Systems for Improved Learning (SESL) programme (<https://www.education.go.ug/sesil/>).



### 3. OUR LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE PREVIOUS STRATEGY

#### WHAT DID WE GET RIGHT?

##### **Rigorous evidence is critical in driving systems change in education**

During the last strategy period (2020-2023), we stayed true to our original mission and continued vigorously to generate rigorous and large-scale evidence on foundational literacy, numeracy and life skills and values outcomes. We adopted and refined the Citizen-led Assessments (CLAs) methodology and used it to generate evidence on learning levels in Uganda and East Africa in general. In 2021, we conducted a citizen-led household-based assessment in the difficult conditions of school closure and restricted movement, in the belief that its findings could contribute to the tasks of recovery of the education system, from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, that lay ahead. The assessment findings were drawn on by various development partners to implement education recovery initiatives, such as UK Aid's Community-Led Learning (CLL) initiative, in partnership with government (UK International Development and Ministry of Education and Sports, 2023). In addition, together with our counterparts in the Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) initiative, we adopted the citizen-led household-based approach and conducted a large-scale assessment of life skills and values among 45,442 adolescents aged 13-17 years across 85 districts in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar (RELI, 2023). This remains the largest source of evidence on the status of teaching and learning life skills and values for education systems in East Africa.

Through our assessments and research, we now have a clear picture of the history and current status of education and the socio-cultural, economic and political context that support or impede quality education in Uganda. We have found that our extensive evidence gives us a unique position to respond to the challenges faced by our society and allows us to contribute to systems change in the education sector. Our evidence allows us to draw public attention to the social problem we continue to face today: the lack of quality education, particularly in public schools. Through our unique position we have continuously expanded the network of development partners that use Uwezo evidence, influence practice and policy decisions, and support the development of solutions from local to global level. In

some districts, various local problems were prioritised and addressed, with the help of our evidence. These include the engagement of parents, teacher training in cultivating reading skills, actions to reduce teacher absenteeism, school inspections, bullying, students repeating classes, remedial classes, life skills, library, building classroom blocks and toilet units, and safe drinking water, among others (Blommestein, 2024).

##### **Our evidence influences actors at all levels in the system**

We have learnt the value of engaging stakeholders and development partners at all levels: school/community, district, national and global levels. Given the wide variety of actors, levels and topics that are touched by our work, we realised that we are operating in a complex dynamic environment (Patton, 2019). 'Complex' refers to the wide variety of actors and levels in the educational system that Uwezo interacts with, while 'dynamic' refers to the ever-changing context whereby nothing stays static and uncertainty and ambiguity are the constant. Policymakers, international organisations and research institutions used our evidence to inform their own reports or start new research. A few donors used our evidence to financially support large education initiatives. Although infrequently, even media exposure happened at all levels: UBC radio aired in a district, at least five media houses published at national level, and at global level we got referenced by the New York Times<sup>4</sup>. This demonstrates that, in this complex dynamic environment, we have an influence on how organisations behave, on policy and practice decisions that are made, on how resources are spent, and we can thus regard ourselves as an actor that contributes to system improvement (Abercrombie et al., 2015) in the educational sector in Uganda.

##### **Our partner organisations play a vital role in creating local change**

We came to realise the value of co-creation of evidence with our partner organisations in the districts and their vital role in ensuring the local uptake and utilisation of evidence. Due to their participation in Uwezo's activities, they were able to form a bridge between district officials and schools, teachers, parents and communities. After the launch of an Uwezo report, our partners organised Uwezo report dissemination meetings that were the

<sup>4</sup> New York Times (2022). Uganda Reopens Schools After World's Longest Covid Shutdown - The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/10/world/africa/uganda-schools-reopen.html> [Accessed on 27 October 2024].

starting point for their advocacy actions in their districts. During these meetings and also afterwards, they engaged communities, parents, teachers, schools, local leaders and policymakers which led to commitments of policy actors, and actual practice and policy outcomes. Our partners also helped to increase local funding for quality education. Some donors funded the districts to advance policy changes, made donations to schools, or funded grant proposals of Uwezo partner organisations (Blommestein, 2024). Our partners also encouraged district authorities to allocate funding to advance policy changes, and to give them recommendations for funding by other donors. Our partners have thus been able to use Uwezo evidence for their context-specific educational problems and were successful in engaging, influencing and networking with the relevant government and development partners in their districts.

## WHAT COULD HAVE GONE BETTER?

### We could have made better use of our principles

Six relevant principles/values were included in our previous strategy, but we concluded that we have fallen short of being intentional in making the best use of the full potential of these principles and their underlying values. Overall, organisations and programmes are turning more and more to principles to guide action in the face of complex challenges (Patton, 2017). We didn't use our principles sufficiently to provide guidance in making choices and decisions, in setting priorities, for inspiration or support for ongoing development and adaptation. However, we have implemented some principles, like the principle 'protection of respondents and sources', which we always adhere to in our day-to-day research practice. We think principles can be especially useful for complex, dynamic initiatives like ours, that strive for substantial changes in the educational system. We suspect that we are not the only ones to have formulated principles and values without putting them to explicit use and, by including shared guiding principles in this strategy, we hope to provide inspiration for others to start using principles to guide collective thinking and behaviour that leads to concrete results.

### We could have had a more robust Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) approach

We have learned that in our previous strategy we lacked a robust MEL approach suited for the complex, dynamic environment in which we operate. Initially we tried to identify specific indicators and intended to use them during implementation to monitor progress in achieving the set goals and evaluate achievement of the expected outcomes and impact, but we were unfortunately unsuccessful. After careful reflection, we realised that

our outcomes are not achieved in a linear way and cannot be monitored as such (Barnett et al., 2013). During the period of implementation, we tried to distinguish between outputs that could be monitored and longer-term outcomes that were more difficult to evaluate and would need a more qualitative type of evaluation using feedback from stakeholders but this approach was not tried out, mainly due to limited financial and human resources. In this strategy we present a complexity-aware MEL approach more suited for our advocacy work. At the end of 2023 we successfully implemented participatory Outcome Harvesting for the first time, a methodology well-suited for complex contexts. In this strategy we will include Outcome Harvesting as an integral part of our MEL approach. The overall focus of MEL will be on learning and adaptation, which will also be applicable to the MEL approach itself: during this strategy period we will implement it, monitor its usefulness, and adapt the approach as needed.

### The challenges of a lean Secretariat

Over the last years our Secretariat, a small team of 6-8 members on long-term employment, delivered work of a high standard. However, the workload was heavy and at times we were weighed down by back to back activities. There were moments when our team felt overburdened and stretched thin. Stress is a fact of professional life, but extreme and unrelenting pressures can adversely affect planning and implementation decisions. It is essential that we realise that, regardless of our high ambitions, we cannot do everything and we need a bit more caution about commitments and nurture partnerships. We will therefore pay more attention to being creative in expanding our partnerships and influence and setting realistic work limits. This strategy includes fostering an alliance at national and regional level and setting up a community of practice for our partner organisations at district level as a means to empowering and encouraging partner organisations at different levels to share knowledge, develop shared initiatives and strengthen each other. In this way, regardless of being a small team, we hope to expand the research uptake and influence of our evidence.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Our call is to use our evidence about the limited and unevenly distributed foundational literacy, numeracy and life skills among children and young people, and the contribution of early childhood care and education to effective foundational literacy and numeracy, to advocate a higher priority for quality basic education and for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). We aim to generate increased attention and support for changes that have an effect on educational practice.

We will raise our voices about what our assessment and research findings mean for current policy and practice and translate our evidence into priority interventions for foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) and life skills. We will seek out the appropriate people for our engagement and influencing strategy; we aim to involve those who have formal authority, resources, expertise, or information, in addition to those who are already interested.

Influence will not come about by simply disseminating the findings of our work and hoping it will be picked up. This will involve facilitating a collaborative approach to problem-solving and being involved in debates about change and how it happens. We need to be better prepared to react to change in the (local) political and socio-economic environment. We will focus on how information and knowledge can inform adaptations in our approach. We need to try to be problem-driven, flexible and adaptive.

We intend to mobilise a network of Uwezo evidence users to jointly work according to a set of shared guiding principles. We will do this in two ways: at national level we will foster an alliance of like-minded organisations and at district level we will set up a Community of Practice for our partner organisations. Policy-influencing is an inherently collaborative exercise. Collaboration triggers new relationships, new knowledge, and new initiatives. Local initiatives across different regions that use Uwezo evidence for engagement and influencing can feed into national and global initiatives and vice versa. We will collaborate based on trust, mutual respect and reciprocity.



## 4. OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

### VISION AND MISSION

This chapter presents our new theory of change (ToC), which starts with our vision and mission statements.

#### Vision

A society in which all children are learning and realising their full potential

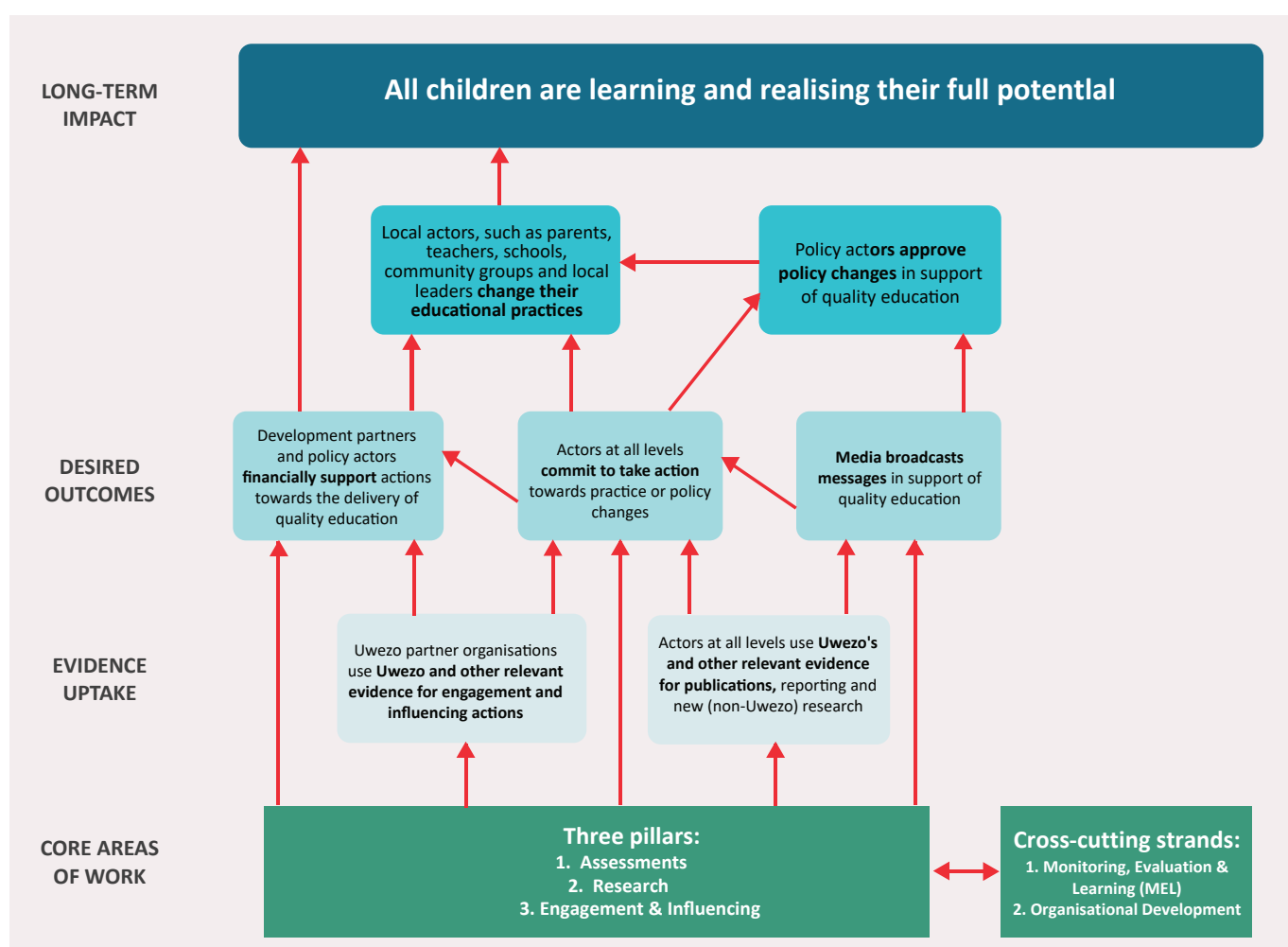
#### Mission

To promote support for quality education for all through assessment, research, engagement and influencing, in collaboration with other stakeholders

### LONG-TERM IMPACT AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

To work towards our vision and realise our mission, we have put our desired long-term impact at the top of our theory of change (see Diagram 1 below); underneath we have identified all the desired outcomes that must be in place. The arrows placed in between indicate the causal relations between the impact and outcomes. Finally, the ToC contains our core work areas, divided into three core pillars and two cross-cutting strands, that will contribute to achieving the desired outcomes.

**DIAGRAM 1: UWEZO UGANDA THEORY OF CHANGE**



## LONG-TERM IMPACT

### EVERY CHILD IS LEARNING AND BENEFITING FROM QUALITY EDUCATION.

#### Research uptake and desired outcomes

1. Practice change: Local actors, such as parents, teachers, schools, community groups and local leaders change their educational practices
2. Policy change: Policy actors approve policy changes in support of quality education for all
3. Increased funding: Development partners and policy actors financially support interventions towards the delivery of quality education, particularly for public schools
4. Commitment towards policy or practice change: Actors at all levels, such as policy actors or development partners commit to take action towards practice or policy changes
5. Media exposure: Media broadcasts messages in support of quality learning
6. Use of Uwezo evidence for reporting or new research: Actors at all levels, such as policy actors, international organisations and research institutions use Uwezo's evidence for publications, reporting and new (non-Uwezo) research, thereby building upon and spreading Uwezo's evidence
7. Use of Uwezo evidence by partner organisations: Uwezo partner organisations use Uwezo's evidence for engagement and influencing actions

Starting at the top, we believe that local actors, such as parents, teachers, schools, community groups and local leaders that change their educational practices can directly contribute to achieving the long-term impact. We aim for practice change that is lasting and wide-spread, so that learning outcomes structurally improve. With regards to policy change, we believe that there is great need for increased attention and support for the implementation of policies. We therefore think that policy changes should lead to practice changes, before the long-term impact can be achieved. We have already seen many actors expressing support for changes of policy and practice, but more commitment will be needed before these changes actually take place.

Government bodies and development partners that financially support interventions towards the delivery of quality education (increased funding), are of key importance for our long-term impact. Currently funding is limited, and we hope that additional funding contributes, directly or indirectly, to quality education for all.

We have found that the use of our evidence by partner organisations leads to (commitments towards) policy and practice changes, and increased funding. Our partner organisations that participate in our activities feel strengthened and are able to influence change based on their familiarity with the Uwezo evidence. They have proven to be capable of addressing a range of contextual-relevant problems and cooperating with political and development actors to achieve change in their districts.

We have also seen that other actors, such as policy actors, international organisations and research institutions occasionally use our evidence to inform their own publications, reporting and new (non-Uwezo) research, thereby building upon and spreading Uwezo's evidence, which can lead directly or indirectly to (commitments towards) policy and practice changes, and increased funding.

Finally, we are convinced that the media can broadcast important messages in support of quality education and particularly the importance of promoting foundational literacy, numeracy and life skills. Media exposure can contribute directly and indirectly to stimulating development actors at all levels to commit to policy or practice change.

## 5. UWEZO'S CORE AREAS OF WORK

### PILLAR 1: ASSESSMENTS

Our core activity is conducting Citizen-led Assessments (CLAs), an assessment model that is widely used in the Global South, especially by organisations in the People's Action for Learning (PAL Network)<sup>5</sup>. CLAs allow us to produce independent citizen-generated evidence on the learning levels of children, their distribution and factors associated with them, and compare our evidence with other countries. To conduct CLAs, we create a network of civil society organisations (CSOs) that support the implementation of assessments, in many cases gathering volunteers from the local communities to conduct the assessments themselves, after a carefully designed training.

The CLAs measure foundational learning of reading and numeracy skills, mostly at the grade 2 or grade 3 level according to our national curricula, typically on children between 4 and 16 years old. CLAs are conducted orally, one-on-one with each child, to ensure that the skills of children that are still learning to read are captured. We use tools that are quick and simple to administer and understand, which facilitates engagement from local communities and fosters interest by relevant stakeholders. We conduct the CLAs in households so that children that are not attending school (regularly or occasionally) are included in the assessment.

In the coming years we will continue to conduct CLAs, focussing on basic assessment of foundational literacy (reading) and numeracy. With regards to the age levels, we will maintain 4-16 years of age as this range captures even the pre-primary level, which is where the foundation of learning takes place. In this strategic period, we plan to conduct at least two national assessments, either individually or in partnership with our counterparts in the East-African region and PAL Network.

In 2022, we successfully piloted a new procedure for assessing children's writing (Uwezo, 2023). The procedure was effective in showing children's levels of writing skill and provided evidence of some of the issues of language learning in the upper primary grades. We will explore applying the procedure to a larger sample, which would provide a more thorough assessment of children's literacy than the traditional reading assessments, with important implications for pedagogy.

Assessment of learners' oral and aural skills is another area that we will explore. Governments and development partners have tended to focus mostly on reading, whereas all four language functions need to be developed in a manner that is balanced and age-appropriate. For the introduction of English in early childhood care and education and P1-P2, the emphasis should be on oral and aural skills initially. We could develop procedures for assessing oral and aural skills and train volunteers accordingly. Use of recording devices would enable performance to be analysed by trained assessors. As with writing, we would use samples of moderate size (e.g. 300 per district in two districts).

We will also continue to adapt the citizen-led approach to the assessment of functional and life skills, which we have successfully done in previous years (Uwezo 2020b, Uwezo 2024 and RELI 2023). At least one assessment of functional/life skills will be conducted during the strategy period to generate further evidence on the state of learning of these competencies.

Finally, we will continue to promote use of the various Uwezo assessment tools and data by other organisations and researchers to inform and/or monitor their interventions.

### PILLAR 2: RESEARCH

Historically, we have conducted complementary research, focussing on those areas that need further attention in the context of Uganda. We aim to make available a repository of high-quality evidence and insights on the learning levels of children, factors that affect learning outcomes and their distribution, and the state of the education system in Uganda that can be used by all actors in education.

We will continue to explore research on raising the quality of community-based early childhood care and education. We will try to raise funds for our plans for interventions to improve teachers' skills, to establish suitable assessment practices and to improve learning materials in early childhood development centres, and bring in expertise from early childhood care and education specialists.

We plan to conduct positive deviance (PD) studies to enhance learning opportunities and outcomes for girls and boys. Using the PD approach, we will explore a number of issues that have a bearing on children's learning outcomes e.g. family and community influences, preschool experiences, school leadership and teacher motivation.

<sup>5</sup> <https://palnetwork.org/>



We see a high need for a focus on children with disabilities and other special educational needs (SEN), although we recognise that this is a challenging research area. Provision for SEN (described as Special Needs Education in Uganda) is limited and is severely under-resourced. Mainstreaming of children with SEN, i.e. their inclusion in regular schools or classes) is socially desirable except in extreme cases or where economies of scale are essential (as in schools for the deaf), but mainstreaming may fail if the support provided is insufficient. For children with disabilities, linkage between the education and health sectors is needed. We will explore if we can help with data requirements and advocacy by mixed-method research: surveys at the school level together with portraits of individual children. We are similarly interested in researching the situations of orphaned and vulnerable children and their support needs for education to ensure these are not left behind.

Similarly, we will explore the relationship between funding and provision for learning at school level. How do primary schools actually use their funding and what is their income from different sources? We will consider adding research through, for example, detailed case studies, on this effect of funding at school level. We will also make provisions for any other small-scale innovative research that addresses contemporary issues, e.g. artificial intelligence (AI) in education.

### PILLAR 3: ENGAGEMENT AND INFLUENCING

We conduct strategic engagements with key stakeholders at international, regional, national, district and community level to positively shift educational policies and practices. We refer to both influencing and engagement, as it is difficult to completely separate the two: greater influence may lead to improved engagement, or better engagement may lead to greater influence. Engagement and influencing is more than a collection of meetings, techniques, and tools. We interact with a wide range of stakeholders and embrace a systemic approach to ensure our evidence is spread and used.

To spread our messages at all levels, we invest in disseminating or sharing content in a form that is appropriate to a specific audience, especially at the national and international level. We make efforts to understand the targeted stakeholder and their needs; translating where necessary, particularly for non-specialist audiences; and packaging and communicating what has been produced in appropriate

ways without compromising its objectivity. Examples include factsheets, research synopses, assessment and research reports, articles, briefing papers, web pages, and presentations. Media houses regularly seek our evidence, analysis and comment to enhance their coverage on a wide range of issues affecting education. Our work under pillar 3 consists of five tracks: (1) fostering an alliance with like-minded CSOs at national level, (2) supporting a Community of Practice for our district partners that conduct engagement and influencing at district level 3) promoting citizen-journalism through social media, 4) engagement and influencing at regional and continental level e.g. East African Community (EAC) and African Union (AU) (5) Engagement and influencing at global level beyond regional.

Our main task as Uwezo Uganda is monitoring educational outcomes at national level and influencing the central government and development partners, which we cannot do alone. Collaborative action is more impactful in influencing policy and practice changes than efforts of a single organisation. We therefore foster a national alliance, consisting of a partnership of equals, by collaborating closely with other non-profit organisations (CSOs) that have a national presence and share our vision and principles. A group of well-informed CSOs at national level, speaking with one voice, is likely to have a strong effect. Our shared mission is to improve education in Uganda and make it work for all children. We start with a limited group that has a strong cohesion, such as those united under the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI) <sup>6</sup>, and expand to other like-minded CSOs along the way. We start by sharing compelling, appropriately packaged and timely disseminated evidence and invite others to do the same. The aim is to coordinate our influencing and engagement efforts to champion quality education for every child.

At district level, our partner organisations play a crucial role in generating and using our evidence for localised engagement and influencing within their districts. We support our partner organisations in using our evidence for engagement and influencing to pursue their own organisational goals with regards to quality education. We continue to invite partners to participate in our assessments and research, support them to develop district-specific policy report cards, organise district dissemination meetings, provide one-on-one advice, and connect them to each other in a new community of practice. Communities of Practice bring practitioners with diverse experiences together around a common purpose. New knowledge gets created, which the members take back out again into their practice.

<sup>6</sup> <https://reliafrica.org/>

The experience of being in the Community of Practice strengthens the sense of shared purpose and values between the partners.

Since our district partner organisations are spread around the country, the Community of Practice will gather through online channels. Our partners will be invited to subscribe to shared guiding principles, and continuing the dialogue around their usefulness. We start small with a group of early adapters, who mobilise others to get on board and drive collective action, such as connecting with the media, shared proposal development, fundraising or creating joint advocacy plans. Over time, local experiences from action can be translated into globally relevant pieces of information that shape global policies, initiatives and funding into the promotion of quality education.

We also intend to promote citizen-journalism ‘of the people, by the people, for the people’ using social media such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and YouTube. We want to create a movement of citizens and volunteers who produce real-time news on education in their

local communities and have these shared widely. This way, education reporting ceases to be the work for professionals and mainstream media only. In all this, we emphasise ethical and truthful reporting guided by our shared principles.

At the same time, we make deliberate efforts to ensure that our evidence is utilised to champion and influence the education agenda at regional and global/international levels. We do this through organising education forums and conferences with partners in collectives such as RELI, PAL Network, ALiVE, and other like-minded CSOs. We also make ourselves available as much as possible in case regional and international CSOs and research institutions reach out to us for our participation in conferences, request our expertise as advisors, peer reviewers or as contributors to articles or publications.



## 6. SHARED GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We are committed to producing the best quality evidence possible through our assessments and research. We have learned that to make change happen it is not enough to simply publish our evidence, in the hope that it will be picked up and used. That is why we put effort into engagement and influencing at all levels (our third pillar): by ad-hoc engagements at international level, forming an alliance with like-minded CSOs at national level, supporting a Community of Practice for our district partners that conduct engagement and influencing at local level and encouraging citizen-journalism.

Our like-minded CSOs at national level and our partner organisations in the districts play a crucial role in ensuring the uptake of our evidence and insights. That is why we have jointly developed shared principles<sup>7</sup> that translate our shared values into practical guidelines for the effective use of Uwezo evidence for engagement and influencing at all levels. The following principles are meant for us and Uwezo evidence users to provide guidance in taking strategic and intentional decisions about how to use Uwezo insights effectively for engagement and influencing.

1. **Treat all children as equal:** Aim to unlock the learning potential of ALL children without distinction as to sex, race, language, religion, disability, geographical location, etc. Focus particularly on reaching those children who are missing out most on learning and education, including those affected by emergencies/displacement and those in hard-to-reach areas.
2. **Understand the context:** Be aware of the agendas and motivations of different actors, who is influencing whom. Keep your eyes open for any new opportunities for getting your messages across – rather than sticking to targeting a few acquainted stakeholders.
3. **Prioritise lasting practical changes:** Prioritise advocating for policy and practice change. Policies influence practice. A lack of policy can make it more difficult to prevent undesirable practices. Simultaneously, aim for lasting widespread and structural change, over small-scale or incidental change.
4. **Work evidence-based:** Select messages from the available evidence that is aligned with the problem(s) at hand, rather than advocating for issues based on

opinion or hear-say.

5. **Develop appropriate content:** Adapt the presentation of evidence to suit different audiences – international, national or local, specialist and non-specialist.
6. **Be prepared to adapt:** Remain adaptable in your engagement and influencing approach when the environment around you changes, instead of relying on a linear planning model. Put learning and adaptation at the centre of your approach.
7. **Collaborate based on trust and mutual respect:** Collaborate with other partners and stakeholders based on trust, mutual respect and reciprocity. Share your experiences generously and help each other where you can.

### TREAT ALL CHILDREN AS EQUAL

We believe that every child should be treated with dignity and as a unique and valuable human being with an individual personality, distinct needs, interests and privacy. We have a strong conviction that the school system should be responsive to the unique needs of every child. This first Uwezo principle is meant to ensure that we advocate for a fair distribution of benefits and opportunities and initiatives that promote quality education for every child. It is aligned with SDG 4 that aspires for quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

### UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

To monitor the context, try to sense changes in policy, politics, environment, economics and society related to your engagement and influencing efforts. How is the political, economic or organisational context changing? To what extent will these changes affect your initiative? Understanding the context will entail knowing about the people in charge of the policy area and their incentives. Be aware of changing perceptions of our evidence, as well as the wider system of stakeholders. Avoid sticking to targeting a few acquainted stakeholders.

### PRIORITISE LASTING CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Successful policy implementation advances sustainable outcomes. However, in Uganda and the world over, many policies fail to achieve their intended objectives, as efforts towards policy implementation are not prioritised. This third Uwezo principle points to the need for the implementation of policies and advocates

<sup>7</sup> Principles are all around us, but often misunderstood in their purpose. In our view, principles guide our thinking and behaviour toward achieving outcomes and are especially useful for complex, dynamic systems such as initiatives that strive for systems change like ours. According to Patton (2018), “A good principle provides guidance for making choices and decisions, is useful in setting priorities, inspires and supports ongoing development and adaptation” (p. 9).



for increased attention and support for changes that have an effect on practice. Simultaneously, this practice change should not be incidental, meaning that its effect might disappear over time. Nor should this practice change be small-scale, such as affecting only a single school. That is why this principle aims for lasting system-wide and structural change to increase the changes for maximum impact.

## **BASE ADVOCACY ON EVIDENCE**

Evidence-based engagement and influencing means using the best available knowledge when advocating for a goal. Our core activity is generating rigorous large-scale evidence and insights. We collect and curate large volumes of data and use it in our shared engagement and influencing efforts. Realise that research findings do not in a direct way translate into government policies or for donor funding. Select messages from the available evidence and explain what this means for current policy and practice (Booth, 2011).

## **DEVELOP APPROPRIATE CONTENT**

Developing appropriate content helps stakeholders to connect with the priority problem in their context on a deeper level and improves their likelihood to participate in solving it. It is about understanding the nuances of different (local) cultures and how your content will be received by your stakeholders. Appropriate content is the key to catching your stakeholders' attention, at international, national and local level. For a local context, consider translating the evidence into the local language.

Examples include factsheets, research synopses, briefs for policymakers, project reports, articles, briefing papers, web pages, presentations, animations.

## **BE PREPARED TO ADAPT**

Change is inevitable. Being prepared to react to change is the essence of adaptive programming (Valters et al, 2016). We need to be prepared to respond to changes in the (local) political and socio-economic environment. This might seem obvious, but much development practice happens according to linear planning models which discourage adaptation. Adaptation and learning are two sides of the same coin. Put learning at the centre and focus on how information and knowledge can inform adaptations in your approach.

## **COLLABORATE BASED ON TRUST AND MUTUAL RESPECT**

There is power in working with, and learning with and from others. Policy engagement and influencing is an inherently collaborative exercise. Collaboration triggers new relationships, new knowledge, and new initiatives. Local initiatives across different regions that use Uwezo evidence for engagement and influencing can feed into national and global initiatives and vice versa. We encourage Uwezo evidence users to come together to work toward change in the educational sector at a systems level. This collaboration is based on trust, mutual respect and reciprocity. Be generous in sharing your experiences.

## 7. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

### FOCUS ON LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

In this section we lay out a tailored, suitable and comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approach. We turn this into detailed, practical MEL guidelines that builds reflective and evaluative practice into our work of conducting assessments and research, engagement and influencing, to support decision making and demonstrate progress.

Traditional monitoring and evaluation approaches – which rely on a simple feedback model with predefined indicators, and assessing progress towards pre-set objectives – are inadequate in the context of research uptake and policy-influencing interventions such as ours. We will instead compose a MEL approach suitable for learning and adaptation, whereby the solid problem definition and context analysis, a comprehensive Theory of Change and shared guiding principles that are presented in this strategy are essential ingredients.

### OBJECTIVES OF OUR MEL APPROACH

The overall purpose of our MEL approach is for Uwezo to become a principle-focussed adaptive initiative that influences the education system. We have formulated three specific objectives for our MEL approach: 1) we want to find ways to improve our operations, 2) we want to continuously improve our contextual knowledge, and 3) we want to adjust our strategies in order to improve our effectiveness.

#### Improving operations

We want to continuously review emerging lessons from implementation and adjust activities and outputs to achieve more and make better use of resources. Does our methodology need improvement? Are activities being implemented according to plan? Did we produce them in a timely manner? Is there a need for improving or adjusting activities? In order to be adaptable, we need information on the quality and quantity of outputs and information on the research uptake that are the result of our core areas of work.

#### Improving our contextual knowledge

To monitor the context, we will be sensing changes in policy, politics, environment, economics and society related to education. Understanding the context will entail knowing about the people in charge of the policy area and their incentives. We need to know about the shifting politics in the field of education: the agendas and motivations of different actors, who is influencing

whom and any new opportunities for getting messages across. We need to be aware of changing ways our evidence is used, as well as the wider system of stakeholders. We will do this together with our allies in our national alliance of like-minded CSOs as well as in our Community of Practice consisting of our district partner organisations.

#### Improving our effectiveness and adjusting our strategies

To improve our effectiveness, we will be questioning our theory of change to readjust our strategy - are our core areas of work leading to research uptake and our desired outcomes? At what level did the outcomes happen: community, district, national, or international? How effective are our core areas of work in terms of knowledge sharing and developing collective initiatives? Were the shared guiding principles found meaningful, were they adhered to, and did they help in influencing outcomes? In order to answer these questions, we need information on our joint outcomes that we will be linking to the theory of change presented in this strategy.

### METHODS FOR LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

To achieve our three objectives for our MEL approach outlined above, we apply a range of different methods: Reflection points, Research uptake and Media monitoring, After Action Reviews, Principles-focused evaluation, Participatory Outcome Harvesting, and Story-telling.

#### Reflection points

We will continue to integrate reflection points in the planning of our work to focus intently on learning and adaptation. We organise regular weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual reflection meetings, during which we review the problems affecting our program work and operations, update our context analysis, monitor our research uptake and media data, and any other data coming out of our MEL approach to adapt our core areas of work as required. These sessions will also be used to identify new trends or topics that we could take up.

#### Research uptake and Media monitoring

We keep track of web analytics to collect information about the use of our web services: what is being seen, shared and downloaded, when and by whom. We search for where our work is mentioned – for example newspapers, broadcast media, training manuals, international standards and operational guidelines, government policy and programme documents, websites, blogs and social media. We will save this information in logs. We will use a particular inbox to which staff can send emails containing information that



needs to be logged. This unstructured approach makes it easy to submit and store evidence of uptake of research outputs and media expressions.

### After Action Reviews

After an activity has taken place, we organise an After-Action Review. We bring together the team to reflect on three simple questions: what was supposed to happen, what actually happened and why were there differences? After Action Reviews are designed to be quick and light – not requiring a facilitator, an agenda or too much time – and collect any information that might otherwise be forgotten and lost once the activity passes. Therefore, we include them as part of the activity itself and schedule them right at the end. We will capture the notes from the meeting in a shared document and bring them out at the next reflection point.

### Principles-focused evaluation

Principles-focused evaluation is an innovative method that is organised around principles, not goals or compliance with processes. In this strategy we present our shared guiding principles. We will evaluate them in terms of how well they are understood by Uwezo evidence users including our staff and partner organisations, whether our practice is consistent with them, and whether they are leading to the desired outcomes as formulated in our theory of change. Together with Outcome Harvesting, we will conduct a principle-focused evaluation at mid-term and end-term of this strategy.

### Participatory Outcome Harvesting

To explore outcome-level changes we will use participatory Outcome Harvesting (Wilson-Grau, 2018). Together with our like-minded CSOs at national level

and partner organisations at district level we will use this method to identify, formulate and make sense of outcomes. Outcome Harvesting is useful when the aim is to understand the process of change as formulated in our ToC and how each outcome contributes to this change, rather than simply to accumulate a list of results. We will conduct Outcome Harvesting in a participatory manner, such as in face-to-face workshops, at mid-term and end-term of this strategy to review our ToC, and possibly adjust our ToC and core areas of work accordingly. We will simultaneously evaluate our effectiveness principles.

### Story-telling with Sprockler

Sprockler provides an innovative combination of quantitative and qualitative data<sup>8</sup>. Most evaluation methods combine surveys (quantitative data) with focus groups (qualitative data), while Sprockler captures both in one effort. A Sprockler inquiry starts with an open question to capture a short story, and then continues with regular survey questions to unpack the story (single choice, multi choice, etc). Sprockler is a useful method to capture matters that are important to stakeholders, and enable us to listen to both expected and unexpected feedback from a diverse set of people, such as community members and policy stakeholders at different levels. We will apply Sprockler in those cases where we want to examine a single learning question. For example, after one year of implementation of the Community of Practice we want to monitor how it's going by asking participating Uwezo evidence users to share a short story on their most significant learning moment in the CoP, and answer some additional signifying questions.

8 <https://sprockler.com/>



## 8. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During our first strategy period as an independent organisation (2020-2023), we developed structures and modes of organisation that are likely to remain fairly stable over the second strategy period. The main features are summarised as follows:

### A) THE SECRETARIAT

Our organisational core is a lean secretariat, with 10 members on long-term employment, led by an Executive Director (refer to Annex 1 for the organogram). The core members of staff are committed and versatile, able to contribute to a wide range of activities. They are assisted for specific activities by short-term associates, interns and consultants. This general approach enables us to adapt to changing situations with manageable risks.

### B) GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADVISORY STRUCTURES

General oversight and guidance is provided by a Board of Directors, consisting of up to nine experienced and distinguished Ugandan professionals. The plans and major activities of the Secretariat are subject to the approval of the Board. Guidance is also provided by a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), consisting of up to 13 accomplished educators from Uganda and elsewhere. The TAC provides feedback on plans for assessment and research initiatives.

### C) VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF SHORT-TERM ASSOCIATES

The major categories of short-term associates are consultants, trainers, district coordinators, village coordinators, community volunteers and interns. Consultants with relevant expertise are engaged to assist in specific activities such as strategy development, assessment, research and data management.

The team of 'trainers' consists of about 10 individuals who frequently assist in organising field work, both for assessments and for research undertakings. They make useful input to the planning of research and the analysis of data, in addition to their core task of organising data collection.

District coordinators, village coordinators and community volunteers are recruited for short periods by civil society organisations (CSOs) at district level that are collaborating with us. They coordinate and carry out citizen assessments of children's learning and data collection for research undertakings.

The Secretariat frequently hosts up to three interns for six-months periods. The interns are young people, normally degree-holders, who are interested in our work and wish to gain experience in the non-profit sector.

### D) FUNDERS

Uwezo Uganda's work is mainly funded by private foundations either directly or through partnership programmes such as PAL Network and ALiVE. At present the foundations include Echidna Giving, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Lego Foundation, Porticus and Imaginable futures. Prior the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects, our work was also funded by bilateral agencies such as FCDO. In addition, some of our research and assessment initiatives are funded on a contractual basis by other organisations.

### E) INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL PARTNERS

International organisations with which we have collaborated in various ways include the People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network, the Regional Education and Learning Initiative (RELI) and Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) Uwezo Uganda being a member in all three cases. Other organisations include, among others, the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) with which we partnered to undertake the spotlight on foundational learning in Uganda in 2023.

At the national level we have partnered and worked on various issues with government and non-government organisations such as the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), Kyambogo University, Makerere University and Muteesa I Royal University, the Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU), the Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda (FENU), the Education Advocacy Network (EAN), the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and Luigi Giussani Foundation (LGF), among others. There is scope now for us to develop a more cohesive 'community of practice' for quality education, as mentioned earlier in this strategy. In this we must work with other civil society organisations that share our values.

### F) PARTNERS AT DISTRICT LEVEL

Through collaboration to carry out the various Uwezo Assessments and research, we have developed links with CSOs in all parts of Uganda that work at district or sub-national levels. An online survey that we conducted in 2020 showed a strong interest among these CSOs in continued collaboration with Uwezo Uganda in assessment and research and in being guided on resource mobilisation and research (Uwezo, 2020a). Joint advocacy on specific issues is another possible benefit of such collaboration, which will continue in the period of this strategy.



## 9. UWEZO UGANDA RISK MAP

Risk identification, assessment and management has helped us tremendously in the past, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic. We realise it is not possible to compress all risks out of a programme, which is why we constantly update our risk map so that we can effectively manage our internal and external risks. Risk management is fundamental to the management and successful delivery of this strategy.

We practise risk management as a continuous process of gathering information from multiple sources, reviewing the risk map in our team on a quarterly basis and implementing preventive and responsive mitigation strategies. We rely on information management, not only from partner organisations and communities, but also government platforms, in addition to other formal

and informal networks in Uganda, which includes media outlets, local and national government, UN agencies or other international institutes, donor agencies, or information from local CSOs.

We estimate the likelihood of occurrence of the risk as well as its potential impact. The likelihood is estimated on a 5-point scale: Very unlikely, Unlikely, Possible, Likely, Very likely. The 5-point scale of the potential impact is as follows: Negligible, Minor, Moderate, Significant, Severe. Certain events may be less likely to occur but have the potential to critically endanger the entire organisation, while others are more likely to occur but have less impact should they occur. The risks that are likely or very likely to occur and have a significant or severe potential impact are the most important to identify and manage.

The risk map presented below in Table 1, is a summary of the risk register we will use in our work during the new strategic period.

**TABLE 1: UWEZO UGANDA RISK MAPPING**

RISK	RISK CATEGORY	STRATEGIC PILLAR / STRAND	LIKELIHOOD	IMPACT	PREVENTIVE MITIGATION MEASURES	RESPONSIVE MITIGATION MEASURES
Funders change their priorities resulting in reduced funding for education globally (not just for Uwezo, but for education in general)	Financial	Organisational Development	Likely	Significant	Keep donors informed of our findings to ensure that relevance for quality education is felt	Intensify our engagement and influencing efforts towards funders  Engage with experts who can influence funders
Increased insecurity (regional conflicts) endangers staff and / or partners	Political	Assessment  Research	Likely	Significant	Monitor the security situation in the areas in which we work	Establish criteria for deciding when staff or partners will not travel to regions  Take safety measures to not endanger our staff and associates
Narrowing of civic space	Political	Engagement and Influencing	Likely	Severe	Engage in planning with relevant authorities  Avoid involvement in party politics	Engage with experts who can influence funders and authorities
Failure to sustain operations due to high dependence on limited restricted funds.	Operational and Financial	Organisational Development	Possible	Severe	Develop and implement fundraising and resource mobilisation strategy that targets diverse funding sources  Budget based on secured funding  Hire fundraising and engagement expertise	Adjust budget solely based on secured funding and adjust our programmes accordingly  Adapt fundraising and resource mobilisation strategy  Make more resources and staff time available for increased fundraising efforts

RISK	RISK CATEGORY	STRATEGIC PILLAR / STRAND	LIKELIHOOD	IMPACT	PREVENTIVE MITIGATION MEASURES	RESPONSIVE MITIGATION MEASURES
Failure to meet deadlines due to workload of staff being too high	Organisational	Assessment Research Engagement Organisational Development	Very likely	Significant	Maintain a list of reliable experts and consultants who can be called upon if needed  Improve the sequencing of activities  Promote rest and prioritise staff wellbeing	Temporarily hire external experts or consultants to reduce the workload of staff  Plan ahead and communicate well
Human resource attrition. Staff seek other opportunities.	Organisational	Organisational Development	Possible	Moderate	Put in place motivation measures  Strengthen capacity  Provide opportunities for growth	Adhere to staffing policy  Allow people to take on new challenges  Seek support from partners and networks
Over reliance on a narrow range of funding bodies.	Organisational	Organisational Development	Possible	Severe	Ensure a wide range of partners is involved in our activities  Develop and implement fundraising and resource mobilisation strategy to ensure a wide range of partners can be taken on board	Find new partners to involve in our activities
Abuse of children/ respondents by any of our partners or representatives during Uwezo work	Operational and reputational	Assessment Research Organisational Development	Likely	Significant	Make use of the available child protection and safeguarding policy, orient and share with respective partners  Conduct rigorous due diligence assessment of our partners  Safeguarding issues incorporated in the training manuals and actual training of our partners and volunteers	Take measures as described in our safeguarding policy without hesitation
Fraud / bribery / corruption / money laundering	Operational and reputational	Organisational Development	Likely	Severe	Employee screening through reference-checks  Zero-tolerance notices pinned in office  Electronic financial management system in place  Online banking Whistleblowing policy in place  Protection of whistle blowers	Take measures as prescribed in our financial, procurement, governance and HR policies without hesitation

## 10. UWEZO UGANDA BUDGET FOR 2025-2028

Execution of our strategic objectives and delivery on our mission and vision in the next four years will require approximately \$6,783,621. Mobilising the required resources is a key activity under the organisational development strand. A summary budget is outlined in Table 2, below.

TABLE 2: UWEZO UGANDA 4-YEAR BUDGET

UWEZO UGANDA BUDGET, 2025 - 2028					
DETAILS	2025	2026	2027	2028	GRAND TOTAL
	USD	USD	USD	USD	USD
<b>Pillar 1: Assessments</b>	739,605	715,850	823,580	469,350	2,663,035
Human resource costs – Assessment	180,320	195,378	195,378	195,378	781,510
<b>Total Pillar 1</b>	<b>919,926</b>	<b>911,228</b>	<b>1,018,958</b>	<b>664,728</b>	<b>3,444,546</b>
<b>Pillar 2: Research</b>	75,000	94,100	117,700	154,100	467,000
Human resource costs - Research and Experimentation	90,018	96,659	96,659	96,659	386,637
<b>Total Pillar 2</b>	<b>165,018</b>	<b>190,759</b>	<b>214,359</b>	<b>250,759</b>	<b>853,637</b>
<b>Pillar 3: Engagement &amp; Influencing</b>	183,725	126,500	116,500	171,225	585,450
Human resource costs – Public and Policy Engagements	82,100	85,967	85,967	85,967	343,869
<b>Total Pillar 3</b>	<b>265,825</b>	<b>212,467</b>	<b>202,467</b>	<b>257,192</b>	<b>929,319</b>
<b>Cross-cutting Strand 1: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)</b>	40,700	49,500	46,000	50,000	195,500
<b>Total Cross-cutting strand 1</b>	<b>40,700</b>	<b>49,500</b>	<b>46,000</b>	<b>50,000</b>	<b>195,500</b>
<b>Cross-cutting Strand 2: Organisational Development</b>					
Strengthening organisational systems and governance structures	68,270	67,320	67,320	114,320	338,280
Strengthen policies, standards and procedures on staffing	79,354	82,393	81,513	86,793	337,492
Establishment and maintenance of partnerships with relevant stakeholders from the village to the global level to support achievement and sustenance of Uwezo mission.	6,000	20,000	20,000	12,000	64,000
Human resource costs - Organisational Development	152,975	155,159	155,159	155,159	620,636
<b>Total Cross-cutting strand 2</b>	<b>306,599</b>	<b>324,872</b>	<b>323,992</b>	<b>368,272</b>	<b>1,360,408</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>1,698,068</b>	<b>1,688,826</b>	<b>1,805,776</b>	<b>1,590,951</b>	<b>6,783,621</b>

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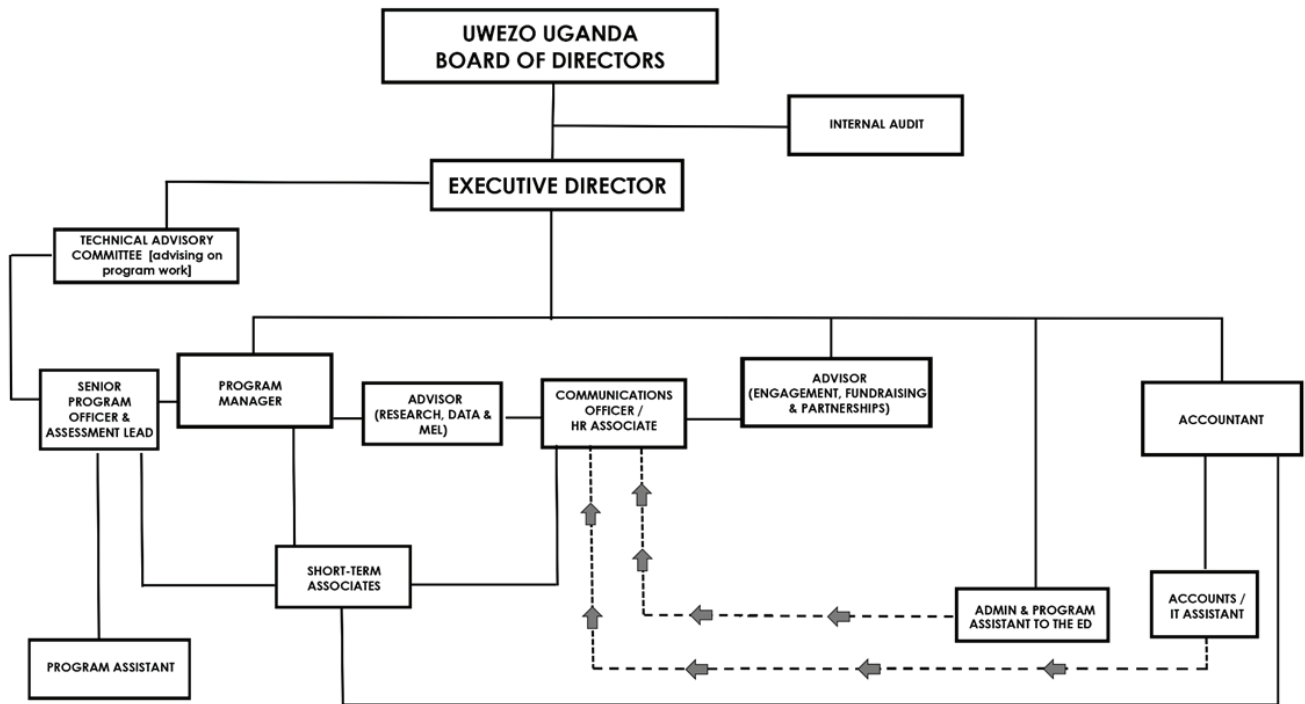
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# ANNEX 1: UWEZO UGANDA ORGANOGRAM

## UWEZO UGANDA ORGANOGRAM (2025 - 2028)



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