

ISER Photo Essay

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The Failing Universal Primary Education (UPE) System in Uganda: State failure to invest in the nation's future



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INITIATIVE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Acknowledgement

This photo essay is a publication of the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) and forms part of the organization’s monitoring and documentation work on social and economic rights in Uganda. Monitoring visits were done in the three districts of Mukono, Kayunga and Apac.

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The Failing Universal Primary Education (UPE) System in Uganda: State failure to invest in the nation's future

Universal access to primary education is essential for realizing the right to education and stimulating human development. Although Uganda is unlikely to reach Millennium Development Goal 3: to achieve universal primary education by 2015, it has made significant strides within the last two decades to ensure that children between the ages of 6-12 are enrolled in school¹. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) system was introduced in Uganda in 1997 and ushered in an influx of pupils attracted by the state's promise to fully fund the system.

An increase in enrollment rates is not reflective of pupil attendance, pupil learning or the conditions of the schools which they attend. Despite UPE's mandated 1:40 teacher-pupil ratio, few UPE classes have 40 pupils or less—while some classes have upwards of 100. Overcrowding exacerbates the need for more teachers and staff, scholastic and co-curricular materials, water and food, classrooms and latrines, and other school necessities.

The School Facilitation Grant (SFG) and Capitation Grants are not adequate to effectively run schools. According to the Ministry of Education and Sports Ministerial Policy Statement for FY2014/15, as of August 2012 the national classroom deficit stood at 39,788. Initially SFG had a budget of shs. 48 bn for classroom construction, but has been reduced to shs.27 bn². Although schools are extremely underfunded, the Budget Proposal for FY 2014/15 included a reduction of the UPE Capitation Grant from 7,560 shs.to 6,860³. It is important to note that schools in poor and rural areas are disproportionately affected by UPE's limited funding, as parents are unable to contribute monetarily to cover schools budget shortfalls.

The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) visited a number of UPE schools in the districts of Mukono, Kayunga and Apac to document school conditions. The most common challenges observed were inadequate structures, lack of supplies and poor sanitation. This photo-essay highlights the conditions of UPE schools; which inhibit Ugandan children from realizing their human right to education. The Ugandan state continuously voices its commitment to UPE without increasing investment in the system, spending less than 4% of national GDP on education⁴. If the state's rhetorical commitment to UPE is not matched by an increase in funding, trained teachers and improvement in the system's monitoring, Ugandan children will continue to fail to reach their full potential.

1 Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Millennium Development Goals Report for Uganda 2013, September 2013

2 Ibid.

3 The Ministry of Education and Sport, Ministerial Policy Statement Financial Year 2014/2015 Presented to Parliament for the Budget Debate

4 World Bank Data, Public spending on education, total (% of GDP), 2010



At Apac Primary School in Apac District, teachers are unable to dedicate individual attention to pupils due to the large size of classes, which contributes to poor pupil performance.



Many UPE schools, including Aroch Primary School in Apac District, do not have the resources to replace broken furniture. Limited and damaged furniture frequently forces pupils to sit on the ground or squeeze into desks past their capacity.



At Awir Primary School in Apac District, pupils are forced to take their exams outside because the school does not have enough classrooms for them to have space to write when inside.



At Aroch Day and Boarding Primary School in Apac District, overcrowding poses a challenge to pupil learning. Many UPE schools suffer from overcrowding due to lack of structures and desks.



Many UPE schools do not have enough classrooms for all of their pupils. At Abalokweri Primary School in Apac District, the school had to innovate and construct the above structures. The School Facilitation Grant from the central government is too small to cater for all the schools in need.



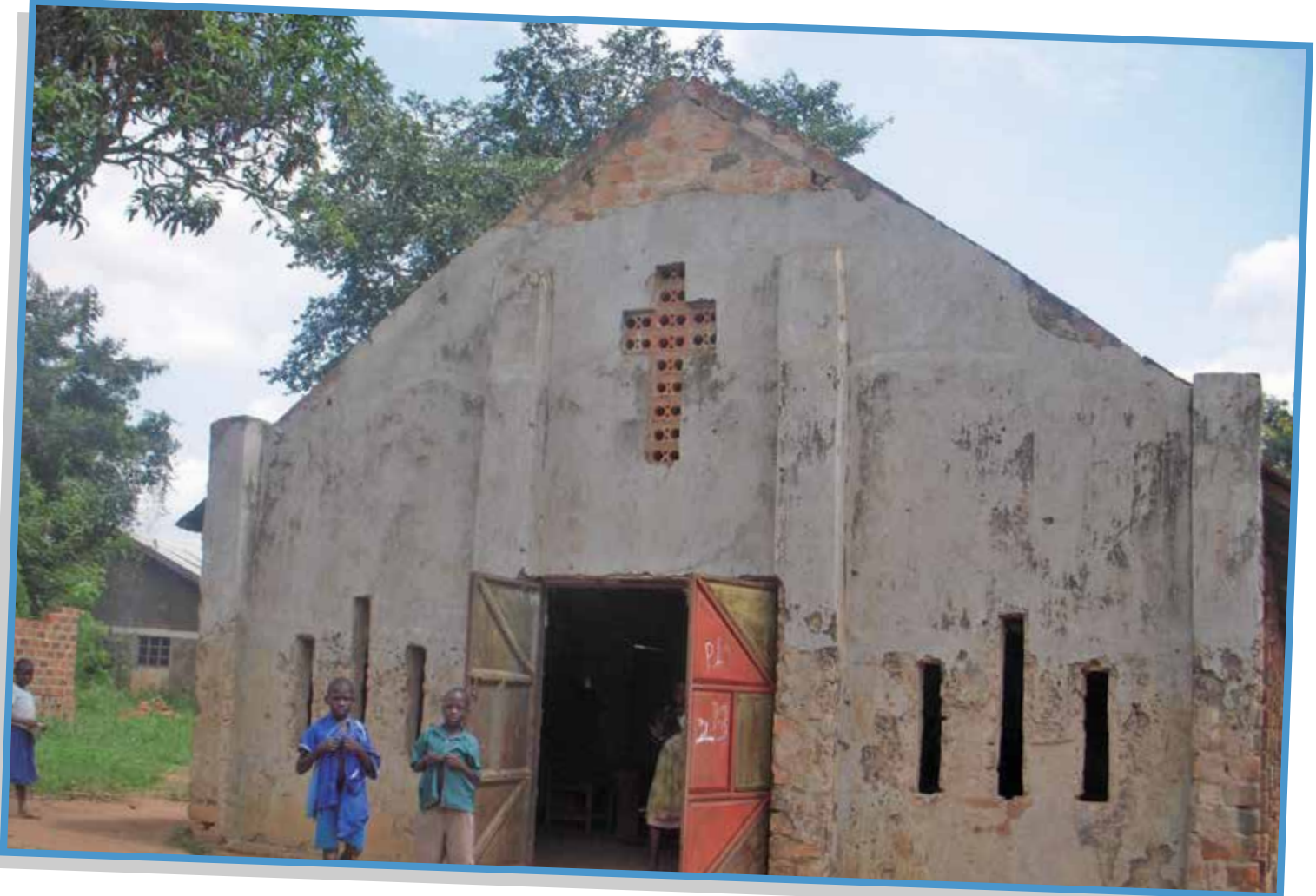
At Bbajjo Primary School in Mukono District, school structures were left incomplete due to lack of funds to finish construction. Incomplete structures not only disturb child learning but also compromise pupil safety.



The floor of a classroom is covered with cow dung at Nakagere UMEA Primary School in Mukono District. UPE schools without access to construction materials improvise in manners that compromise pupil safety and health.



The roof of a structure at Alwal Primary School in Apac District was blown off during a storm four years ago. Lack of funds has rendered the school unable to pay for its replacement.



Children at St. Jude Primary School in Kayunga District attend classes inside St. Jude Catholic Church because their school does not have enough classrooms for all of its pupils.



A shack constructed of tin sheets and tree branches serves as a staff room at Nakagere UMEA Primary School in Mukono District. Just as their pupils, teachers are also affected by the inadequate infrastructure at UPE schools.



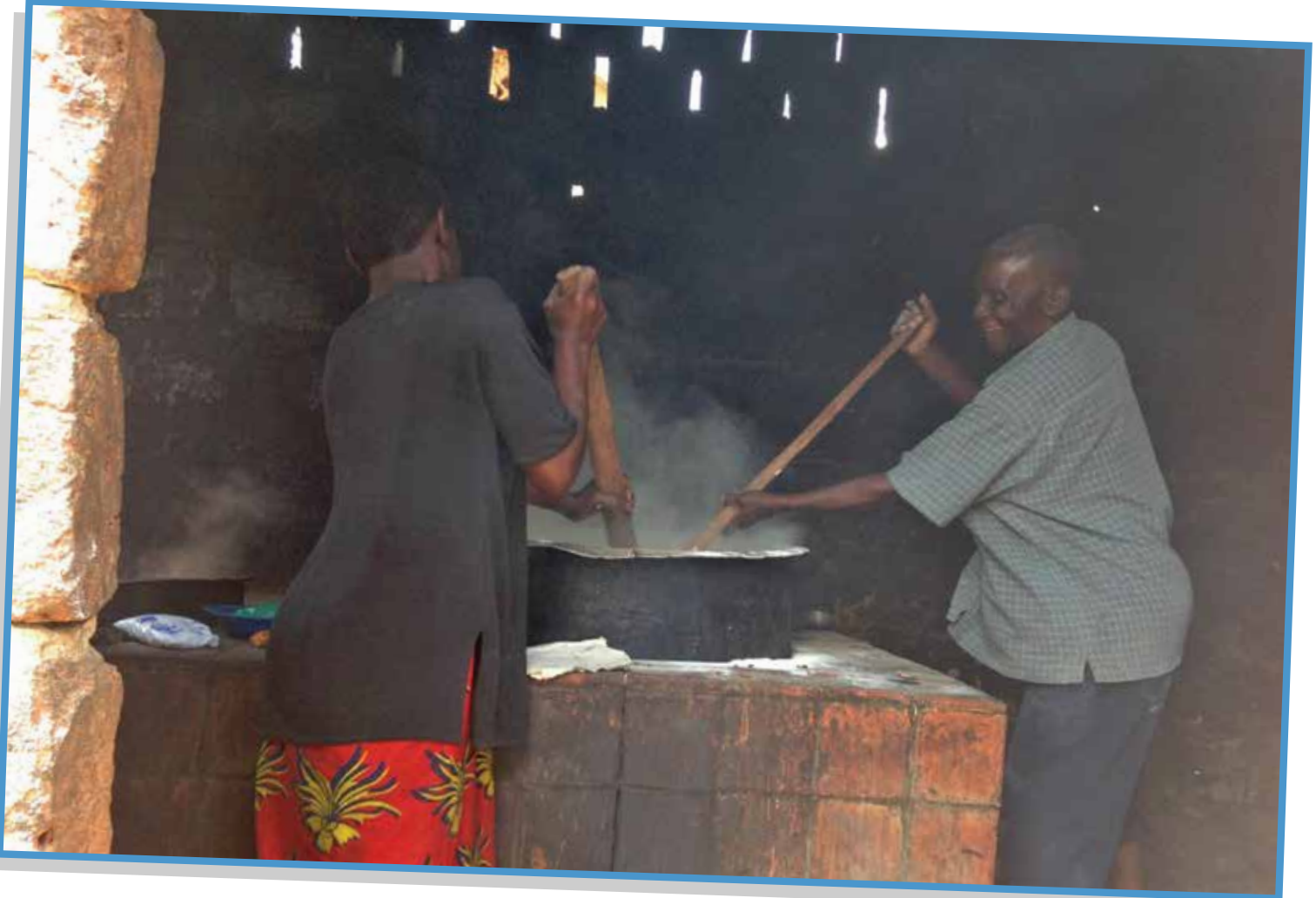
At Olelpek Primary School in Apac District, teachers meet under a tree due to lack of a staffroom.



Unsanitary latrines expose pupils at Arocha Primary School in Apac District to illnesses, especially those who attend without shoes.



Poor sanitation is also contributed to by lack of adequate rubbish disposal. Rubbish at Aroch Primary School is collected and burned on school ground which endangers pupil health.



Cooks mix posho (cornmeal) in preparation for lunch at Bishop Central Primary School in Mukono District. Many pupils cannot afford the fees UPE schools solicit and are not permitted to eat food prepared by the school which affects pupil attendance and performance.



Food at UPE schools is frequently prepared in unsanitary conditions, as observed at Lugasa Primary School in Kayunga District.



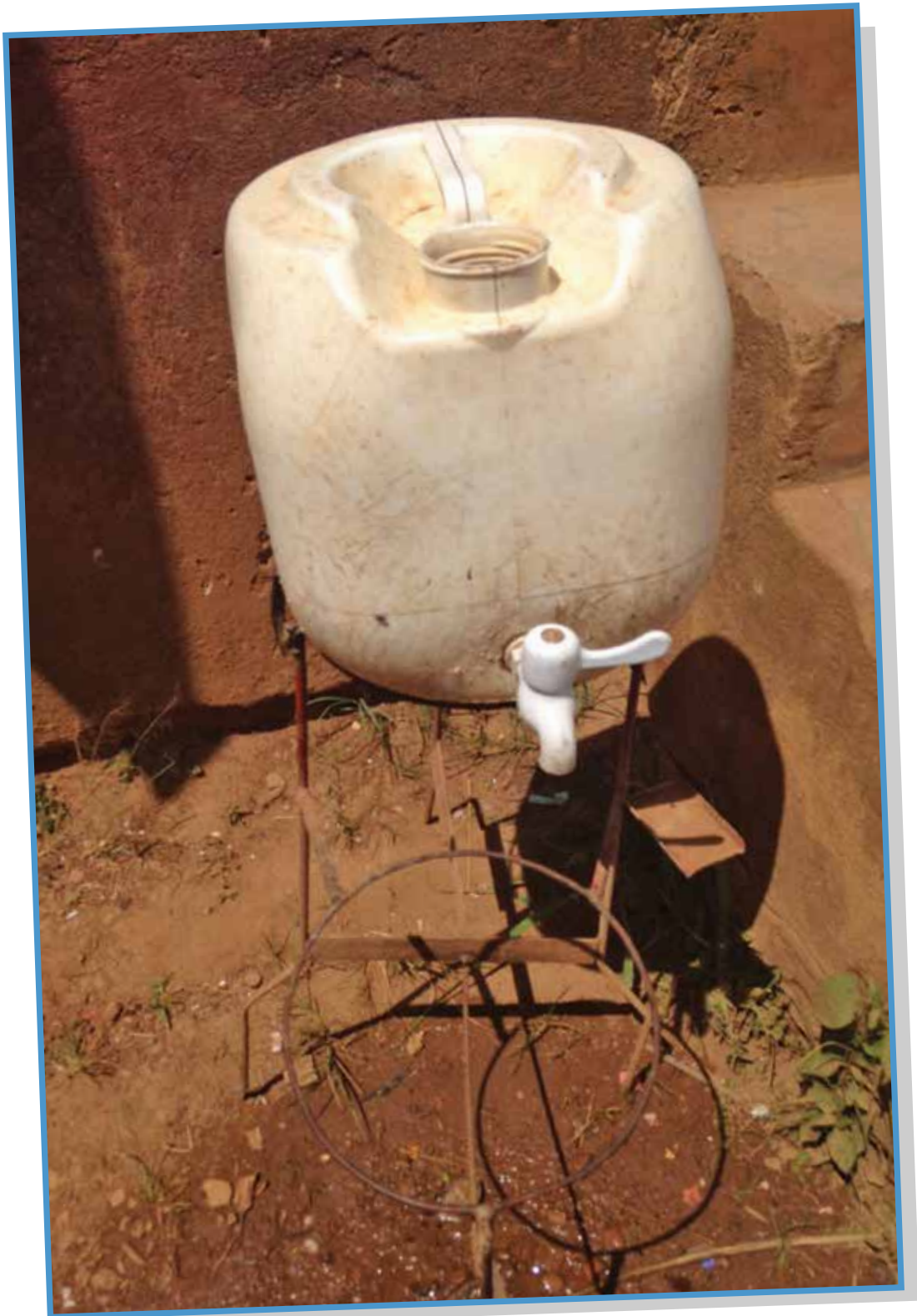
A pupil at Olelpek Primary School in Apac District holds her lunch of cassava and beans. In rural areas it is common practice for UPE schools to require families to make in-kind donations of foodstuffs for their children to be permitted to eat lunch at school.



Pupils at Lugasa Primary School in Kayunga District return from collecting water. The collection of water frequently takes significant time away from pupils' learning.



A pupil at Olelpek Primary School in Apac District drinks directly from a jerry can after collecting water. The unsanitary condition of jerry cans has the potential to contaminate clean water and drinking from communal jerry cans also contributes to the spread of illnesses.



As was observed at Bishop West Primary School in Mukono District, adequate hand washing facilities are scarcer than clean latrines. Lack of adequate sanitation leaves children vulnerable to waterborne and bacterial illnesses.



UPE schools rarely have access to piped water. Some schools are fortunate to have tanks to collect rain water during the rainy season. However, as was observed at Olelpek Primary School in Apac District, their inability to maintain large tanks often leads to their deterioration as can be seen in the picture above.



Latrines at Bukerere R/C Primary School in Mukono District are in a poor state due to lack of resources for maintenance. Poor maintenance of latrines compromises pupils' privacy and increases incidences of contagious illnesses.



At Olelepek Primary School in Apac District, girl pupils bathe in a makeshift shower with little privacy. The lack of adequate sanitation compromises pupils' human right to health and dignity.



At Abelokweri Primary School in Apac District, inadequate latrines contribute to the spread of water borne and bacterial infections and offer pupils no privacy, which is especially important to girl pupils during menstruation.



Bishop West Primary School in Mukono District has urinals to help alleviate waiting at the schools small number of pit latrines. As at Bishop West, urinals frequently empty into the surrounding area instead of into a sewage system which violates the right to a clean and healthy environment.

About the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER)

The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) is a registered national not-for-profit human rights non – governmental organization (NGO) in Uganda. ISER was founded in February 2012 to ensure full recognition, accountability and realization of social and economic rights primarily in Uganda but also within the East African Region.

Contact information:

Plot 60, Valley Drive, Ministers Village, Ntinda
P.O. Box 73646 Clock Tower, Kampala-Uganda

Tel: +256 414 581 041

Email: info@iser-uganda.org.

Website www.iser-uganda.org



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