



Link Education Uganda 2020 Annual Update



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Welcome



Ms Frances Atima
Board Chair, Link Education Uganda

Hello fellow countrymen
and countrywomen.

This is Link Education Uganda,
welcome to our 2020 annual
updates.

In March 2020, Uganda joined
the rest of the world in curbing
the spread of Covid 19, schools
were closed, public gatherings
suspended, movements
restricted and this had a huge
bearing on our programmes. In
response, we joined the
national Home Learning Task
team to coordinate the
education efforts during Covid-
19 school closures.

I never thought it would be possible for us to accomplish much over the
last 12 months (January–December 2020), but thanks to our dedicated
frontline team at the secretariat and those in the field offices for
making it possible, your ability to adapt to the new normal was
outstanding. To our donor The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation,
thank you!

I now want to encourage you to spare your valuable time to read
through this year's updates.

Sincerely,
Frances Atima

Board Chair
Link Education Uganda

How we make a difference



Unlocking the barriers to accountability in education

You just can't imagine the frustration most parents have about their children's education, knowing your only option is to take your child to a public school. Aware that in such a school, most teachers do not plan to teach, do not assess children's performance as required and do not consider equity and inclusion. That your child's teacher has to simultaneously balance his alternative livelihood businesses (such as boda-boda cycling, retail shop) as well as being in class to teach your child. These are daily realities most public schools in Bunyoro deal with.



Kikuube District Technical Planning Committee members adopt SPR recommendations

The last 12 months of the STEAR II project implementation has seen a number of such blockages unearthed, and stronger community-led accountability mechanisms instituted. More valid planning data and accurate contextual analysis of the education situation in Hoima, Kikuube and Buliisa has been done through the SPR report. This was timely, the districts have since included the education issues as a priority to be addressed in the District Development Plan over the next 5 years. Our thanks to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for providing financial support.

Link remains active in the three districts and our participation in education departmental activities has not gone unnoticed; we were incorporated into the district technical planning committee to advise on education matters in the three districts.

We are supporting both the inspection department to strengthen supervision, and the sub-county chiefs to hold headteachers accountable for education service delivery as well as supporting respective teachers to deliver on their mandates.

How our model works to unlock accountability blockages

Besides working with inspectors and the education officers, our engagement with the sub-county chiefs who supervise and appraise the headteachers is helping them set realistic performance targets and manage the performance process better.

Working closely with Bulera Core primary teachers college, we have brought to light the gaps in classroom practices that require continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers beyond colleges.

Different line departments charged with monitoring service delivery have gained interest in our work; in Kikuube the office of the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) who initially didn't know what to look for during monitoring now knows important indicators to assess whenever he visits a school.

We are part of the district technical planning committee meetings, we access the district executive committee and we have a central role in the programme working group in Hoima district.



National level networks

Amidst the pandemic, we have been active in most national education networks in the country. We sit at the Ministry and share the same facility with the Directorate of Education Standards in the country.

We are a member of the Basic Education Working Group (BEWG) and, despite COVID-19, we managed to participate in two virtual meetings.

We are a member of the Civil Society Budget advocacy group coalition, contributing expertise on education service monitoring and tracking.

We joined the national COVID-19 task team sitting at the committee in charge of home learning.

We are positive on partnership and we welcome collaboration and networks with like-minded actors in education.

National level engagement with the Ministry of Education and Sport

After nearly 11 months of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there are positive signs that schools may re-open across the country in the new year. According to the Commissioner for Basic Education at the Directorate of Education Standards, the Ministry is finishing up the national school inspection report which will be presented to cabinet by top management to guide the government on how to re-open schools safely.

This sends a ray of hope across the country, especially among the non-candidate classes in rural communities of Buliisa, Hoima and Kikuube whose children still struggle to cope with online teaching.

Working directly with the Ministry of Education and Sport (Directorate of Education Standards), we brought to light the critical gaps and issues affecting efficacy of teaching and learning in most schools in Bunyoro. This includes the leadership and management gaps, and the critical governance issues in 100 public primary schools in Hoima, Kikuube and Buliisa through our unique School Performance Review Model.

We are now a member of the Basic Education Working Group (BEWG) at the Ministry of Education, and are an active member of the national home learning task team – a COVID-19 task team established to monitor and support home learning during the pandemic.

With high hopes that schools will re-open soon, we have started national consultation on how to review the School Management Committee (SMC) guidelines, aligning some of its provision to the National Education Act 2008. This should be accomplished in the coming quarters.



DES Regional Officer, Ms. Jolly Acaba, with Education Officers in Kikuube Districts during school leader training

Participatory school performance monitoring

School Management Committees (SMCs), District Inspectors of Schools (DIS), Sub-county chiefs (SAS) and Resident District Commissioners (RDC) are some of the key structures mandated to monitor decentralized education service delivery at district levels. Most times, these structures, especially SMCs, are faced with limited capacity to comprehend the monitoring functions and tools, while other offices face limited fuel and resource facilitation to monitor schools.

If it is not for some few outstanding personalities and occupants of such offices, willing to sacrifice their time and little resources to monitor schools, the majority of primary schools in Buliisa, Hoima and Kikuube would go uninspected for years which would directly impact on the quality of teaching and learning in most schools.

To the inspectors and SMCs/PTAs who have battled extreme conditions to deliver, Link Education developed a simplified handbook to help them know what to monitor and how to monitor it.

We have additionally identified and capacitated over 400 citizen groups in 20 sub-counties and town councils under STEAR II to track education services in the three districts of Hoima, Kikuube and Buliisa.

We adapted from the Basic Requirement Minimum Standards (BRMS) a simplified, user friendly monitoring tool, which the 3 districts are now adapting for monitoring education services in schools in their districts. Both the community monitors and other non-education officers can use these tools to conduct basic monitoring in these schools.



What some of the watch dogs say about school monitoring



“For the many times I monitored schools, I concentrated on checking whether pupils have reported in school, the time they reported and whether or not teachers are in school, but with support from Link Education, I now can check whether teachers teaching as per the displayed timetable, the learning environment, school sanitation etc.”

- RDC, Kikuube

“The Education sector monitoring committee exist in our district but are not functional, they only operate as and when funds are available. Monitoring and inspection budget are usually tagged to local revenue which doesn’t always come, so most of our schools are not being monitored as planned and that is why most of our teachers are getting more complacent.”

-School Inspector, Buliisa

“School monitoring reports are not always shared by those who monitor these schools”

- Planner, Hoima

“We are the ones who set for the head teachers their performance targets, but sometimes we ourselves even do not know what exactly we should assess them on”...

- SAS in Kikuube

“When I visit a school, I make sure I sign the visitor’s books at the head teacher’s office to show that I have done monitoring”

- SMC Chairperson, Kikuube

Use of local resources to improve teaching and learning

Due to our engagement with districts, Kikuube District Local Government, through the school performance review report, was able to channel funds to support training of all their headteachers on financial management, school leadership and management, accountability for results and school improvement planning.

Hoima district prioritized recruitment of SNE focal persons to address their low performance on access and equity in the district. This was identified during the school performance review in the district.

Different districts have included the school performance review in their district education plan.

Efforts to strengthen the programme working group as a conduit for strengthening collaboration and coordination of resources and efforts have been adopted by the three districts.

Better local education priorities identified for funding in DDP III at district level

Setting the right education priorities for each district may not be as easy as we think, especially where planning data is scant and unavailable. By the tail end of 2020, Kikuube, Hoima and Buliisa Districts, like most districts in Uganda, had started aligning their District Development Plans (DDP) to the National Development Plan (NDP) III while adopting the programme-based approach, dropping the output based planning.

Lots of parents are expectant of what the district will deliver in the next 5 years (2020/2021 – 2025/2026). More pupils will be hoping for quality education which translates into better performance at national level. But how does the education sector prioritize its resources? We take pride in every little hope based on our constructive engagement and advocacy with the district technical team.

Most districts have started channelling these scarce resources to the most vital sector.



“This morning as I was coming for this meeting, I told someone I was going for a meeting with Link, and he told me, those guys are not just responding to issues but to the most pressing issue in our district, I add that the timing of Link's activities are always the best”


– Education officer, Kikuube



In fact where there is good planning, even the little we have as a district, can produce the results we want.



District LCV Chairperson, Mr. Kazini, during Kikuube District Local Government DDP Planning process



Sustainability and scalability of our approach beyond STEAR II

The STEAR II project end is fast approaching and we are cognizant of the fact that social accountability interventions take time to produce much needed impact.

We are in the second year of implementation of STEAR II but how much of our impact will be practiced in these districts once we exit.

To allay the fears, we have institutionalized the School Performance Review process by having it in the District Development Plan III as well as using the District Education Officers themselves in every process. This, to us, is a huge milestone. We will work with respective districts to ensure they attach financial votes to the process.

We are mindful of the need to leave human capital. Since inception, we have deliberately targeted and built capacity of district education officers, District Inspectors of Schools, Associate Assessors including head teachers and school managers in various disciplines.

We recognize the impact school-based capacity support brings to the school, and all our training of School Management Committees and PTAs targets every member of the SMC, as opposed to selected leaders. These, we believe, will help the districts carry on even after the project has long gone.

Potential constraints and challenges experienced

COVID-19 has been our killer challenge. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, schools have remained closed except for candidate classes and finalists. The closure of schools and suspension of public gatherings in the earlier days of the pandemic meant we could not conduct business as usual, and were forced to adhere to SOPs which were not anywhere in our planning; we had to suspend implementation of all activities that attracted large crowds such as community monitoring meetings and training of school level managers. Most importantly, COVID-19 led to increased implementation costs across different spectrums, the additional challenges of working from home notwithstanding, as the new normal required stringent sanitizing requirements and for masks to be worn as a protective mechanism.

As the country geared towards the general election, increased fear, anxiety and threats from different political camps engulfed the nation. It became quite difficult to separate political and project activity. Most organizations, including Link, suspended their activities to allow room for politics while others adopted a mode of operation, working from home, which came with its own challenges. All this created unprecedented delays in the project and major service providers, including hotels, were not fully operational.

The capacity of district education departments, in terms of infrastructures, staffing, funds utilization, ability and reporting, equally affected timely implementation. Kikuube and Buliisa are understaffed with only three staff in the education department including the District Education Officer. In an attempt to sustain the project intervention, we seek to work with district education officers who are often scarce. Often times, we are forced to wait for their availability to schedule more activities.





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