Towards Achieving Universal Secondary Education in Uganda: a Case Study of the Ten Year Public-Private Partnership

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INTRODUCTION

Uganda realised early the need for Education for All, abolishing primary school fees in 1997, and 10 years later becoming the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to launch Universal Secondary Education (USE). During the elections of 2006, President Museveni declared that this policy ambition would become reality in February 2007. Yet there were too many primary school completers to be accommodated in government secondary schools, and additional schools could not be built and staffed quickly or cost-effectively enough. Realising these capacity limitations the government, under President Museveni's leadership, introduced the USE public-private partnership (PPP) which would see the government paying a set capitation grant to private schools, in lieu of school fees paid by parents. By paying for students to attend private schools, capacity would be increased where government schools were not available, far from students' homes, or where they were already over-crowded.

Yet by the end of 2013 the President expressed the intention that the PPP should come to an end via a phasing out, one graduating class at a time. While many more students transitioned to secondary school during the period, the PPP was ultimately viewed as a stop-gap measure before focus would return to provision through government schools. This follows the practice of the government during the introduction of fee-free primary education, when there was a similar partnership arrangement with private schools for the first four years post-fee abolition (Kisira, 2008).

The top management of the Ministry of Education resolved to start the phase-out in 2018, when the first cohort of Senior 1 students started their secondary education without the benefit of the USE capitation grant. The government intends to refocus investment in government secondary schools, and so the current time is a suitable point at which government and all stakeholders can take stock of achievements and challenges in order to build on progress already made.

This case study of the Ugandan PPP is therefore a stock-taking, exploring what has worked well, and what has not worked so well, drawing on academic studies, political economy analyses, evaluation reports, and other sources. The first section examines the background to the programme and the policy environment before examining the design of the PPP. The subsequent section considers how well the policy has been implemented, and the fourth main section discusses the challenges faced during implementation. The fifth section considers the way forward and makes recommendations regarding any future partnership arrangement. The final section concludes.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE PPP

The country context: Uganda is a lower-middle income country and has been experiencing good economic growth since the 1990s; however the country has a very high population growth rate, making the goal of universal quality education ever harder to achieve. The secondary school-aged population of 13-19 year-olds is growing quickly, at over 4% in 2017 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017). While spending on education would ideally keep up with inflation and expand in accordance with the growing population, spending has actually dropped from 4.2% of GDP to 3.3%, which is below the average of 3.9% for lower-middle income countries (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2014).

Despite early efforts to achieve Universal Primary Education, the primary education system faces several considerable challenges that have ramifications for the secondary education system. These include overage enrolment due to late initial enrolment and high repetition rates; this repetition is caused by low levels of learning due to poor quality schooling (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2014). Primary completion is still low, with only 63% of children who enrol in primary 1 reaching primary 7. Fewer than half (49%) of primary 1 entrants make the transition to lower-secondary school Senior 1, and only 10% reach Senior 6, the final year of upper-secondary school.

The policy environment: In 2007, Uganda's secondary level gross enrolment ratio was at a low 18%, indicating the size of the challenge faced. Despite the country's growing economic strength, its international development partners who made up the Education Funding Agencies Group (the World Bank, the African Development Bank, UK DFID and Irish Aid) were continuing to play a significant role in influencing policy formation. The Government of Uganda and the World Bank had a close relationship, with the latter proving the most active of the education funders. When the President announced USE in 2006, donors' advice was sought, and the World Bank conducted a 'situational analysis', in which PPPs were suggested as an option to quickly and cost-effectively scale up supply (Brans, 2011; Bukenya, 2017). There was already experience with having used a similar PPP arrangement for a period of four years from the start of Universal Primary School in 1997, for expanding access to primary schooling (Kisira, 2008).

Yet, in the mid-2000s 'partnership' in public services was still not a common notion; community initiatives were one thing, but government services were generally expected to be government built, managed and run (if not fully funded also) (Brans, 2011). In 2007, education stakeholders reportedly viewed the PPP idea as a foreign concept promoted by donors and urban elites (Brans, 2011; Bukenya, 2017). However, the PPP did eventually gain traction, with stakeholders coming around to viewing some type of partnership with the private sector as being essential to the achievement of USE.

Key informants at the Ministry of Education and Sports eventually became convinced that there was no alternative in the medium term to partnership. Some of the most vocal critics, the community organisations, held concerns based in the belief that the PPP had embraced many schools that were not up to the stipulated standards, and so the PPP was consigning the less well-off to bad quality schools. These organisations continued throughout the PPP period to promote partnership with only high-quality providers, and to call for effective quality assurance and monitoring (Bukenya, 2017). Some local government officials were concerned that if their area was home to a PPP school, then this would mean less government investment in developing government schools locally (Bukenya, 2017).

The donor community (including DFID and the African Development Bank, not just the World Bank) supported the PPP based on the belief that it would allow many additional students to transition to secondary level, and based on the belief that markets bring lower unit costs and greater efficiency. For-profit providers were explicitly allowed in order for the broadest possible range of non-state schools to be included, based on the belief that for-profits would be even more efficient than other non-state providers.

Defining PPPs

PPPs can be designed in a variety of ways, to meet different needs, but always aim to meet a public service delivery need that the government faces challenges with. The PPP Knowledge Lab (PPP Knowledge Lab, 2018) states that there is no universally accepted definition of a PPP but suggests that they entail:

A long-term contract between a private party and a government entity, for providing a public asset or service, in which the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility and remuneration is linked to performance.

This definition:

- *Encompasses PPPs that provide for both new and existing assets and related services;*
- *Includes PPPs in which the private party is paid entirely by service users, and those in which a government agency makes some or all payments;*
- *Encompasses contracts in many sectors and for many services, provided there is a public interest in the provision of these services and the project involves long-life assets linked to the long-term nature of the PPP contract.*

A key World Bank publication focuses on 'PPPs in which the government guides policy and provides financing while the private sector delivers education services to students. In particular, governments contract out private providers to supply a specified service of a defined quantity and quality at an agreed price for a specified period of time. These contracts contain rewards and sanctions for non-performance and include situations in which the private sector shares the financial risk in the delivery of public services… the services provided can range from the construction, management, or maintenance of infrastructure (often referred to as a private finance initiative) to the provision of education services and operations, as in voucher schemes or charter schools' (Patrinos et al, 2009, p.1). Uganda's USE PPP can be described as a contracting-out model, as per this description.

THE PPP DESIGN

Before the PPP started, there were 'regular' government schools that charged fees, and highly selective elite government schools (also charging fees). There were also private schools that charged low to very high fees. With the advent of USE and the PPP, elite government and private schools continued to operate as before, unaffected by the PPP in which they chose not to participate. The 'regular' government schools (which will hereafter be called USE government schools) were to stop charging fees, the income from which would be replaced with a capitation grant from the government of UGX 41,000 per child per term.

The PPP for achieving USE involved private schools, which were free to apply to join the PPP or not, and those that were accepted (hereafter referred to as PPP schools) were also allowed to continue to take non-grant receiving students (meaning those that had not scored highly enough to be included in the PPP), who would continue to pay tuition and other fees. USE government schools continued to have their teaching staff deployed and paid directly by the government rather than at the school level, while private schools would continue to be responsible for recruiting and paying their own teachers. For this reason the private school capitation grant is higher than at government USE schools, at UGX 47,000 – however this 15% larger sum was not enough to compensate effectively for the extra cost on private schools of paying salaries out of funds at the school level. PPP schools would also be eligible to receive textbooks and other teaching-learning materials from the government but this was on a discretionary basis (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2016).

The PPP could more precisely be described as a contracting-out arrangement as per Patrinos et al (2009). This programme instigated by government represents an acknowledgement that there might be faster, cheaper and more flexible ways of getting to a desired outcome than would be the case following traditional government service delivery mechanisms. The reward for the private actor was the value of the capitation grant per student, and it was up to the school to attract students to enrol.

USE/PPP schools were required under the terms of USE to stop charging tuition fees only. Parents were still expected to pay registration fees, boarding fees (if applicable), and other costs outside of the schools, such as for textbooks, other materials, uniforms and lunch. Indeed the model of partnership was envisaged to involve parents and other community members considerably, firstly through their having a role on school Boards of Governors, and secondly as funders (or at least funders in kind), with schools drawing on communities for labour and materials for school construction and maintenance. This latter form of partnership draws on a long tradition of community self-help and pulling together in East Africa (Bukenya, 2017).

The designers of the PPP had been mindful of the importance of accountability in contracting out for the provision of this public service. It was envisaged that the authorities would inspect and ask for school improvement, while communities would be involved from the start, in schools' decisions to join the PPP, and in monitoring performance. Effective and engaged Boards of Governors were intended to have contributed strongly to the quality of education and to have played a significant role in holding school management to account. However, transparency and accountability were compromised as there were no defined quality standards that providers would have to maintain, and there was no specified period of time for which a provider could participate in the PPP before their performance would be reviewed and their continuation as partners decided. There were no real sanctions and no clarity regarding what breaches (if any) would lead to termination of the partnership.

There was a set procedure officially established by the government for schools wanting to participate in the PPP, with schools being required to follow the *USE Implementation Guidelines*. The intention was that PPPs would be entered into with private schools in sub-counties where (i) there were no USE government schools, (ii) USE government schools were over-crowded, or (iii) the size of the sub-county was very large, meaning long distances to travel to school (Barrera-Osorio et al; Barungi et al, 2015; Crawfurd, 2017; O'Donoghue et al, 2018).

- Schools would apply to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to become partners in the PPP. Applicants should:
    - Be registered schools
    - Charge low fees (up to UGX 75,000 per term without the USE grants) and would not charge any other non-boarding fees. In addition, schools were not allowed to charge 'top-up' tuition fees on top of the capitation grant amount
    - Have 'adequate' facilities and qualified teachers
- A Board of Governors had to be constituted (including representation of government officials and parents) and was to be operational, to manage the school in such a manner as to ensure learning, and also the health and safety of the students and staff. As part of this, the PPP called for a maximum of 60 students per class. In addition, schools had to show demonstrated support from locally elected officials, and education officials specifically.
- If accepted to participate in the PPP, MoES and the school proprietor would sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that would govern the partnership, including sanctions for schools that failed to live up to their agreed responsibilities – these latter

points were to be covered in a 'performance agreement' agreed to separately by the Government and the school. Compliance with the performance agreement would be reviewed every two years.

- Schools were required to open a bank account for the receipt and utilisation of the grant funding, which was received in a quarterly lump-sum, determined by the number of USE students enrolled. This account was to be managed by the school head teacher and Chairperson of the Board of Governors.
    - Only up to 20% of the capitation grant was to be spent on teacher salaries
    - Schools were to display on their notice boards the amount of funding received and on what it was spent
    - Funds were to be spent on covering the tuition of the relevant student (not all fees and costs, such as registration fees, which would still be charged)
- Schools were to provide documentation to the MoES to show how the funds had been used, and had to secure from the MoES a Certificate of Accountability every year.
- Schools were required to admit, as USE students, only eligible candidates (which was defined as those that scored 28 aggregate score or better on the Primary Leaving Examination). PPP schools could continue to admit non-USE students on a fee-paying basis.
- Schools agreed to submit to twice-yearly monitoring by key stakeholders in the school, which would result in reports as feedback to the school, including recommendations for improvement. Schools were also to submit progress reports to government including performance data on a range of agreed indicators.

Any 'low-fee' non-state school was welcomed to apply to join the PPP, provided they could meet the requirements detailed above. PPP schools included:

- Individually-owned schools
- Networks of schools run by faith-based organisations, most commonly Christian missions
- Networks of NGO-owned and operated schools
- For-profit and not-for-profit schools
- Community-owned and operated schools

IMPLEMENTING THE USE PPP

As the first country in SSA to announce USE, the research community has been studying the policy's rollout in Uganda since the beginning, and this section discusses the evidence on PPP implementation. The challenges faced are discussed in the next main sections of the report.

Implementation of the programme: access, equity and quality

The types of schools choosing to participate: PPP participating schools were typically low-fee private schools, as required by the policy, charging an average of UGX 69,000 per term. They were also predominantly rural, and often schools that were established by local communities or entrepreneurs in response to the lack of government schools (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2016). Some schools were for-profit, and so were likely seek to run on low input levels in order to make a profit, with potential implications for education quality. The more well to do schools charging higher fees and investing more in school quality chose not to participate in the PPP due to the relatively low value of the capitation grant to these schools.

Participation in secondary schooling increased: USE was phased in one grade level at a time, starting with the Senior 1 cohort in February 2007 (i.e. term 1 of the school year). In 2011, to meet the needs of the original USE cohort to progress to the upper-secondary level, the Government of Uganda introduced the Universal Post O-Level Education and Training (UPOLET) programme. Through this extension of the PPP, students who successfully completed and passed their Uganda Certificate of Education examination would be eligible for capitation grants for Senior 5 and Senior 6 (upper secondary school), of UGX 80,000 or UGX 85,000 at USE government and PPP schools, respectively (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016).

The government undertook 'headcounts' to ensure that only 'target beneficiaries' were served. The last such headcount (for which data are publicly available) took place in July 2016 as part of the Comprehensive Education and Sports data collection exercise (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016). With regard to the numbers of students starting Senior 1, it showed a steady increase over the course of the PPP period, from 2007 when there were 363 PPP schools serving 161,396 Senior 1 students, to 840 PPP schools serving 277,731 Senior 1 students in 2016. The figures in table 1 indicate that PPP schools served 46% of all USE lower-secondary level students, close to the end of the programme, and 45% of the 1,027,302 total USE/UPOLET students, meaning that they were playing a significant role in providing secondary schooling opportunities, as found by Barerra-Osorio et al (2016).

Table 1: July 2016 Headcount data

	USE government	PPP private	Totals
USE grant amount	UGX 41,000	UGX 47,000	
UPOLET grant amount	UGX 80,000	UGX 85,000	
Number of schools	983	840	1,823
USE students served	516,881	435,762	952,643
UPOLET students served	49,951	24,708	74,659
Total secondary students	566,832	460,470	1,027,302

Source: Ministry of Education and Sports (2016)

The provision of subsidised, if not truly free, places at private schools led to enrolment at the secondary level growing over the PPP period, as shown in table 2. Numbers have grown, as has the population; yet still we see that the gross enrolment ratio rose from 18% to 23% showing progress, albeit from a very low starting level. The numbers of students served specifically in PPP schools increased, with the Senior 1 intake in 2016 being 72% larger than in 2007.

Table 2: Growing enrolment in lower- and upper-secondary schooling, USE and non-USE schools

	2006	2015
Total enrolment in all secondary education	760,000	1,284,000
% female	44%	47%
Gross enrolment ratio	18%	23%

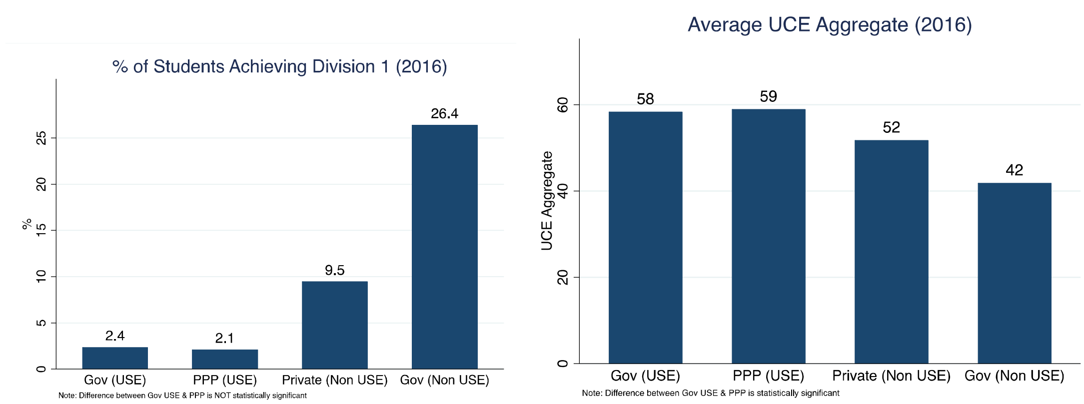
Sources: UNESCO, 2009; UNESCO, 2017. Note, 2015 is the latest year for which UNESCO has published these figures, and for reliability of comparability, numbers from the same source are used.

The programme seems to have had a **positive impact on access for girls** to a limited extent, improving the gender balance (Asankha and Takashi, 2011). The proportion of girls starting their secondary education rose from 43% in 2007 to 48% in 2016 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016), yet in terms of actual completion, data from 2012 shows that boys' completion rates were on the rise, while the rate for girls was plateauing (Barungi et al, 2015).

Learning outcomes: At the macro level, it appears that the PPP's effect on education quality was neutral; no harm was done. One study documented PPP schools delivering somewhat better quality education, leading to higher learning outcomes, at a lower cost, based on teacher salaries being around 25% less than at government schools. This saving comes with teachers being less experienced and qualified than USE government school teachers (O'Donoghue et al, 2018). Another evaluation carried out by World Bank staff found that the PPP was effective in improving access to and quality of private schools, and that students performed better in PPP schools. School staff were found to be relatively similar across school types, but PPP school teachers were more often present in class while in non-PPP schools, teachers were 21% more likely to be absent (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2016).

The 2018 evaluation found that learning levels were poor at all USE and PPP schools[1], but that PPP schools deliver a slightly better level of quality than USE government schools[2]. The evaluation compared standardized national test scores on the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) which takes place at the end of the 4th year of secondary school (S4; see figure 1). Scores were similar in government USE (average UCE aggregate score being 58[3]) and PPP schools (average UCE aggregate being 59). Better scores were obtained by students in private non-USE schools (average UCE aggregate of 52) and elite government non-USE schools (average UCE aggregate of 42) (O'Donoghue et al, 2018, p.19).

Figure 1: Student test scores



Source: EMIS 2016 and UNEB Exam Results 2016 (O'Donoghue et al, 2018, p.20)

[1] Non-USE/non-PPP private and elite government schools did far better in terms of Uganda Certificate of Education examination results.

[2] This finding was based on a 'value-added' quality measure that captures the progress of all students within a school, rather than on raw test scores.

[3] The lower the aggregate score, the better the result.

PEAS schools and the importance of school management: A key area to examine is how schools were managed, and whether management was orientated towards achieving high quality education. The importance of school management, led in most cases by head teachers, cannot be over-stated. The 2018 evaluation (Donoghue et al, 2018), as well as the three-year evaluation of the PEAS schools, found that, with similar input levels, the key factor in better quality schools was better school management.

Schools with higher scores on a management quality index achieved better learning outcomes for their students, but the 2018 evaluation and the PEAS evaluation show that this better management did not result from schools being managed as private entities, functioning in a 'market'. The 2018 evaluation did not find any evidence that school management approaches varied according to school ownership types and this was echoed in other studies (Crawfurd, 2017; EPRC, 2018; O'Donoghue et al, 2018). Rather, it was down to individual schools or, in the case of PEAS, a network of schools, to make sure that management was working to support teachers towards the goal of better student learning.

What has been established is that the PEAS network of schools, guided by a clear mission and vision underpinned by systematic training and support to schools (both for teachers and specifically for head teachers to develop them into effective and inspirational school leaders) has resulted in a significant learning advantage, and the ability to help lower-achieving students catch up. This was achieved with teachers who were not systematically different to those teaching at other USE/PPP schools (Crawfurd, 2017; EPRC, 2018; O'Donoghue et al, 2018). It appears also that networks of religious mission-established and run schools did a somewhat similar (better) job of effectively running schools according to higher standards, most likely due to their own particular vision and sense of responsibility and purpose (Bukenya, 2017).

Implementation of the programme: the legal framework and holding providers to account

In terms of implementation of the legal framework, schools did enter into memoranda of understanding with government, however the exact legal status of these documents was unclear. Schools were monitored by the government during the PPP, and did receive inspection reports as feedback, with one evaluation study finding that USE government and PPP schools were receiving more than two inspection visits per year (EPRC, 2018). However, it is likely that schools that reported more than one visit in a year had reported more casual visits by government staff in their reporting on monitoring visits.

As per the PPP guidelines, many schools did establish Boards of Governors, and some schools reportedly did discuss with their communities whether to apply to become part of the PPP (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015). The majority (75%) of head teachers interviewed for one 2013 study reported that stakeholders had influence on USE policy implementation: community members were actively engaged and provided input into school decision making. Two-thirds stated that teachers and parents have taken their own initiative in monitoring and evaluating PPP schools (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015). In one study these head teacher reports are corroborated by parents' own reports that 68% of those whose children attended PPP schools, and 71% of those using USE government schools felt they had some influence in how the schools were run. This was lower at purely private schools, at only 60% of parents (EPRC, 2018, p.31).

Another study found that while most schools (97%) had formally constituted their Board of Governors, 62% of respondents reported that the Board had met once or not at all in the last six months (Barrera-Osorio, 2016, p.8), indicating that while many schools had formally created their Boards and they were working to some extent, in many other cases the involvement of the Board was less than initially envisaged.

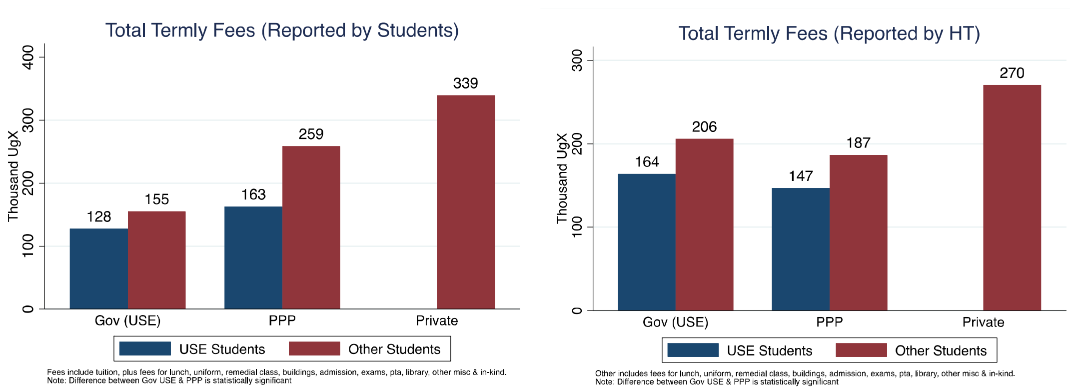
Implementation of the programme: financing

Implementing USE overstretched government resources; yet schools valued the payments, as evidenced by their willingness to participate in the programme despite the cap on the amount received per student. Respondents stated that it was positive to receive the predictable quarterly (and then later, termly) lump sums, allowing for various projects to be carried out. Respondents also valued the capitation grants as it meant not having to chase parents to pay the main school fees, despite government payments often arriving late. Respondents also reported having to work less hard to find and attract students (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015). One study found that the grant amount was suitable for rural schools, where teacher salaries were lower, meaning that the grant amount covered more of a school's costs (Bukenya, 2017).

It remained an unresolved question for many as to whether or not parents were to continue to provide or pay for anything (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015), and the government in practice took a flexible approach to schools' continuing to raise additional funds from households. One researcher found that government officials had accepted the fact that PPP schools would not be able to function on the grant amount alone, and so raised funds from families; they recognised that being 'rigid' regarding the fees policy would lead to the collapse of PPP schools (Brans, 2011). One district official in northern Uganda stated that there was no real intention that USE would mean free of cost, asking 'if it's free, then why is government only paying 47,000?' (Omoeva and Gale, 2016, p.41). Indeed, flexibility on the issue of household contributions was clearly essential, where schools were charging an average of UGX 69,000 per term before becoming PPP schools, and after joining the PPP received UGX 47,000 per student.

The continuing additional associated costs of secondary schooling still amounted to a significant sum that could prove prohibitive to poor households. The 2018 evaluation provides information on these costs (figure 2), including tuition, lunch, uniforms, remedial classes, buildings fees, admissions, parent-teacher associations, exams fees, library fees, and any other cash or in-kind contribution, for USE students and other students not benefitting from USE grants (O'Donoghue et al, 2018, p.22).

Figure 2: Fees as reported by students and head teachers



Source: 2017 Secondary School Survey (O'Donoghue et al, 2018, p.23)

The PPP impacted positively on poor students: From the perspective of students, despite these ongoing costs, the grants undoubtedly helped many poor – though most likely very few of the poorest of the poor – to access secondary education for the first time. Raw household expenditure data shows students benefitting from a PPP capitation grant spent 60% less than those who did not (Omoeva and Gale, 2016, p.41). This lower expenditure disproportionately impacted (positively) on poorer households, with 49% of grant-receiving students coming from the poorest two quintiles of wealth, while 20% were drawn from the richest quintile.

CHALLENGES FACED DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE USE PPP

Many aspects of the PPP were not implemented fully, sometimes due to genuine challenges faced, others due only to lack of effective monitoring of the programme; and schools largely faced no consequences for not meeting expectations. Most of the challenges discussed in this section were experienced across the secondary schooling system, the one exception being to do with the issues surrounding designing a legal framework for a contracting-out arrangement; accepting and assessing applications from would-be partner schools; and managing the contract and terminating it if and when necessary. The other issues were systemic and not specific to the PPP. These were to do with locations of schools to reach under-served communities; the insufficiency of resources and problems with access and affordability for the poor, and issues with education quality, which all applied to government schools as well as PPP schools.

Challenges regarding access, equity and quality

PPP schools did not appear in specifically under-privileged and under-served areas: As already noted above, one of the aims of the PPP was that students in under-served areas of the country would gain access. Areas without a government secondary school; areas served by an already over-crowded secondary school; and areas where the school was too far from home for many students were the types of locations envisaged. However, to put this intention into effect would have required the exercise of discretion on the part of those officials accepting applications from schools to participate in the PPP, to assess applications based at least in part on mapping of need and existing provision. This would have helped to ensure that precious government resources were used more effectively in addressing equity in access. Reportedly however, this type of planning process did not take place, with many respondents reporting that acceptance into the PPP was simply a matter of filling in forms (Bukenya, 2017). As a result, many under-privileged areas of the country continued throughout the PPP to lack schools.

One qualitative study found that access was not increased in an equitable way geographically, and also for particular groups of vulnerable students (ISER, 2016); similarly the 2018 evaluation documented the continuing need in many sub-counties without a government-funded secondary school, or any secondary school at all. It appears therefore that the size of subsidy offered did not prove a large enough incentive for non-state providers to choose to establish in more remote areas (O'Donoghue et al, 2018).

As already noted, participation did increase during the PPP, however the significant gender gap at the secondary level at the start of the PPP continued throughout the period. The percentage of girls in Senior 1 cohorts did increase, but the completion rate for girls hardly improved; it had increased in 2007 as compared with 2006, but this improvement was unrelated to the PPP. There was no discernible difference in lower-secondary completion for the first USE cohort in 2011. Indeed the completion rate data indicate a growing, rather than shrinking gender gap, as more and more boys completed while girls' completion stagnated (Barungi et al, 2015).

Education quality: The PPP has had little impact on the quality of secondary education in general (as illustrated above in figure 1), meaning that more students gained access to secondary schools, without significant change to the type of education on offer. This also may have resulted from a lack of scrutiny on the part of government officials appraising applications from schools wishing to participate. One Ministry official stated that 'when we entered this partnership, we did not do effective due diligence on schools. Some did not meet the minimum bar', meaning that quality standards were lacking (O'Donoghue et al, 2018, p.58). One qualitative study found that government respondents acknowledged that many PPP schools were of poor quality, lacking classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and were under-paying staff (all inputs used as proxies for education quality); but to invest more, schools would have had to raise more funds from parents, adversely impacting on equity. Head teachers reported not receiving any help or training to prepare them for USE; they also expressed concern about growing workloads, and that funding for implementation was inadequate. These same respondents had anticipated that a major expansion in access without a concomitant increase in resources would lead to a similar magnitude of challenge as Universal Primary Education did (Chapman et al, 2010).

For-profit providers and schooling quality: There were concerns regarding for-profit models of schooling and the inclusion of such schools in the PPP, in that the drive to achieve a profit margin might also mean lower investment in education quality (O'Donoghue et al, 2018). Private providers, and for-profit ones in particular, had incentives to employ cheaper teachers, rather than the most experienced or qualified. Many rural science and mathematics teachers at PPP schools were found not to be qualified, with rural teachers in general reportedly being relatively low skilled, likely a result of insufficient salaries and incentives from PPP school providers to relocate to more challenging parts of the country. In addition, there was evidence that the quest for profit incentivised some degree of over-crowding, as more students for every teacher on staff allowed for greater earnings (Brans, 2011). Lastly, with supply still insufficient to meet demand for secondary school places, competitive pressures on providers are likely to have been reduced.

Challenges regarding the legal framework and holding providers to account

Weakness in the legal framework, contract enforcement and monitoring: Research on the implementation of the PPP found that planning based on where PPP schools were needed, and appraisal of schools applying to participate in the PPP, and then contract enforcement and holding schools to account with regard to quality standards, were all weak during the entire PPP period. For a contracting out model to work, clear terms and conditions as part of the contract are required, and criteria to underpin oversight are needed. The PPP was founded in a legal agreement between the government and many private (or non-state) providers. However, the precise legal status of PPP schools was unclear, with ramifications for accountability mechanisms. The tools and processes, which the MoUs made provision for, and which would help to hold schools accountable, were for the most part not utilised. Further, the memorandum of understanding was not a part of the final PPP legal framework (O'Donoghue et al, 2018).

From the beginning stage of selection of schools and organisations to partner with, key informants reported that there was no selectivity or vetting of potential partner schools, 'when they were registering PPP schools, it was just a matter of filling up forms with no verification or evaluation exercise at all', according to a community organisation representative (Bukenya, 2017, p. 11). This lack of monitoring pressure was evidently felt at schools: one study found that only one out of 61 schools surveyed had a physical copy of the PPP implementation guidelines, meaning low levels of awareness regarding regulations (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015).

The Ministry of Education and Sports lacked sufficient resources to conduct monitoring and quality assurance as well as they would have liked. Monitoring of schools was handled centrally, and key informants stated that they were vastly under-resourced for the job. There was no officer at the Ministry of Education and Sports in charge of the monitoring of PPP schools' compliance with the guidelines, and the officers in charge of private schools did not tailor their work towards establishing compliance of PPP schools, separately from their routine work of inspection of purely private schools. Those officers in charge of monitoring secondary school quality reportedly focused mainly on government schools.

While PPP schools were visited by education authorities, and did receive inspection reports as feedback, there was little to no follow up on reports and recommendations given to check for implementation (EPRC, 2018). The reports were for the most part simply shelved, and even actionable recommendations were not put into practice (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015). In some cases the feedback was not detailed enough to provide the basis for constructive change (O'Donoghue et al, 2018); but ultimately a system of sanctions for not following the guidelines, and for not implementing monitoring report recommendations, was not put into effect (Brans, 2011 and O'Donoghue et al, 2018). No respondent during the 2018 evaluation reported knowledge of any school having had its MoU terminated by government for poor performance, or of the Ministry of Education and Sports using any means whatsoever to sanction schools (O'Donoghue et al, 2018).

With regard to accountability to the community, as noted above, all schools were required to establish a Board of Governors that would draw on a range of different stakeholders from across the school community, and consultation was meant to begin before a school entered into an MoU with the government. However, the onus was left to schools to get their Boards up and running, and many neglected to do so. While some schools reportedly did discuss with their communities whether to apply to become part of the PPP, many did not, and only informed local stakeholders after having signed the MoU with the government (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015).

Challenges regarding the financing of the PPP

The capitation grant was insufficient: Implementing USE policy through government schools and the PPP was hampered by a lack of resources, and yet the government has been scaling back investment in education, despite ever more resources being needed to meet demand. In addition, 'free', 'universal' secondary education led many to believe that there would be nothing for parents to pay, however this was not the case in practice due to the limited size of the capitation grant.

Financial hardship resulted from the PPP grant amount of UGX 47,000 remaining unchanged over the ten-year period. The amount declined dramatically in real terms due to inflation: in the first year of the programme alone, inflation was at 7.8%, but by 2011/2012 this had reached 23.5% (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015, p.4). It is estimated that the real-terms value of the subsidy dropped to UGX 30,919 by 2017, leaving few schools able to break even (CSBAG, 2017, cited in Bukenya, 2017, p.32). USE government schools had the advantage that their teachers' salaries were paid directly through civil service structures, whereas the erosion of the purchasing power of the grant to PPP schools was felt more keenly as these schools had to pay their teachers out of school funds.

Three-quarters of PPP school head teachers in one survey stated that the capitation grant was insufficient; many schools were forced to disregard spending guidelines that said that only 20% of the grant should be spent on teacher salaries. For this rule to be observed, schools would need to enrol many non-USE students whose fees could be used for the monthly salary bill, or large 'non-tuition fees' would need to be charged; both of these avenues for revenue generation detracted from the opening of access to the poor. Many urban schools were not interested in the programme because there were many parents willing to pay much higher fees than the capitation grant (Bukenya, 2017).

Due to the insufficiency of the grant amount, parents did continue to pay substantial costs at both USE government and PPP schools; 'free, universal secondary education was neither universal nor free' (Chapman et al, 2010, p.78). In terms of quantifying the costs, in addition to the details provided in figure 2 above, another study reported the median annual expenditure on school fees of all kinds per child was UGX 360,000 for PPP schools and UGX 150,000 at government schools. In addition to these amounts paid to schools, parents would have to supply books, materials and uniforms, bought outside of the school (Crawfurd, 2017, p.13). A recent evaluation of PEAS schools, a non-profit network of schools participating in the PPP, found that families were paying an average of UGX 178,552 per year at USE government schools, and UGX 215,318 at PPP schools – these amounts included all books and materials. PEAS students were found to be paying the least, at UGX 156,620. The costs for the upper-secondary level were much higher (EPRC, 2018, p.105). In addition to some cash contributions, parents were also found to be contributing to the purchase of laboratory equipment and chemicals as well as towards construction projects at PPP schools (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015).

Some PPP schools faced additional challenges. For example, some head teachers reported that the school proprietor had 'hijacked' school funds rather than allowing the head teacher and the Chairperson of the Board of Governors to manage the funds, as per the guidelines. In addition, some schools failed to display how funds were used on their public noticeboards, as required in the guidelines as another accountability measure (it is not clear if this was the fault of the head teacher or the proprietor). Despite these issues, most head teachers were nevertheless able to secure the Certificates of Accountability from the Ministry of Education and Sports to certify that all funds provided had been duly accounted for (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015).

Lastly, transfers were slow; sometimes not the full amount that should have been received; and often very late (Barrera-Osorio et al, 2016). In certain instances, this led schools to take loans at high interest rates out of necessity, to meet their obligations (Barungi and Kasirye, 2015). The 2018 evaluation documented that only 38 percent of head teachers reported receiving their last disbursement in full, and only 57 percent received it on time (O'Donoghue et al, 2018).

The cost barrier to the poorest: While more low-income families were accessing USE school places, the costs that families still had to pay to access secondary school accounted for a much larger percentage of complete household expenditure in poor and rural households, than in richer households (Omoeva and Gale, 2016). Despite the savings to PPP students' parents, even the reduced costs they had to bear continued to be the key driver behind great disparities in attendance rates by wealth – over the period 2005-2011, youth in the wealthiest quintile had a net attendance rate of 40%, while for this poorest group it remained at roughly 5% (Omoeva and Gale, 2016, p.45).

As part of the PEAS evaluation, it was established that the relatively high levels of drop out were predominantly caused by the costs of schooling, despite PEAS keeping their costs as low as possible in order to serve more disadvantaged children. Indeed, the higher degree of drop-out was connected with the fact that PEAS schools specifically try to enrol more disadvantaged students who struggled to pay even these lower costs. This finding is echoed in other research (EPRC, 2018; Masuda and Yamauchi, 2016); of note, one survey found that of those students who completed one of the first 3 years of secondary school but did not go on to take the Uganda Certificate of Education, 69% reported that they left school due to the inability to pay fees, while only 1% reported leaving due to poor academic progress (World Bank, 2012).

Bringing the PPP to a close

The PPP was originally intended as a temporary measure and ultimately the President has not been satisfied with its results, citing suspicions of misuse of funds. The government has now chosen to allocate funds to the construction of public schools instead of private schools (Bukenya, 2017). The 'saving' of the PPP funds would enable the building of additional government schools instead, and the goal is for there to be at least one government school in every sub-county. The first post-PPP Senior 1 cohort has started the academic year (at the start of 2018) without the aid of the capitation grant at private schools. It is too soon to tell what the impact of the phase out will be; Ark's preliminary survey of 30 PPP schools in the first term of 2018 found a small drop in average S1 enrolment from 2017 to 2018 across the schools, however the drop does not appear to be significant. However, this may be because of late and inadequate communication to schools and communities regarding the ending of the PPP. Several of the 30 schools' staff responded that they had not been officially notified as yet, and that they would continue as normal until an official letter arrived. The responses across these 30 schools made it clear that as of term 1, 2018, whatever the full impact might be, it was not yet apparent[4].

Any future for partnership? The majority of stakeholders interviewed for the 2018 evaluation of the PPP seemed to agree that some form of PPP is necessary to allow the widest access possible, as government is unlikely to be able to spend the sums required to expand the government system sufficiently, and that expansion is likely to take a relatively long time. Whatever avenue is pursued, funding would likely need to increase if Uganda is to increase its low gross enrolment ratio of 23% (UNESCO, 2017). Despite the flawed implementation, many stakeholders reported that government should continue partnering in some form because it is unlikely that government systems can scale up quickly enough to meet current and future demand. Some tentative conclusions can be arrived at:

- The numbers of young people making the transition to Senior 1 increased over the period.
- There appear to have been no *improvements* in school quality due to the PPP; however some studies find PPP schools provide somewhat better learning at a lower unit cost.
- The capitation grant was too small to catalyse the creation of new schools in under-served areas and too small to mean the poorest could now afford to attend secondary school.
- There appears overall to have been no harm done via the PPP, while participation in secondary schooling certainly increased.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LAST TEN YEARS OF PPP

This section makes some recommendations based on the research to date, with a view to informing PPPs in other contexts, as well as any future PPP initiatives in Uganda.

Plan more strategically (and inclusively), and make sure underserved areas are prioritised: Education stakeholders in Uganda reported that, in the context of scarce resources, the capitation grants may be better used if targeted at poorer and marginalised students and regions of the country (O'Donoghue et al, 2018). Means-testing can prove overly demanding from an administrative perspective; however **using planning tools to assess demand and need across the**

[4] This survey is unpublished; information was provided by Ark, May 2018.

country would help to establish which communities are in greatest need of schools – resources will be used more efficiently if, for example, multiple school applications from one community or region are refused under a PPP arrangement, in favour of ensuring that communities that are more in-need are served instead, or served first. This recommendation need not be PPP-specific and is not Uganda-specific – proper planning and prioritisation of areas with highest need for immediate action are necessary in expansion of government systems and for planning where to set up partnerships with private sector providers, in Uganda and beyond.

Processes of expansion of the secondary school system should draw on key stakeholders, especially local levels of government to get their buy-in, and should call on their local knowledge. While the interests of Ugandan local government officials were geared towards traditional government schooling, more careful design and planning for areas most in need could mitigate this challenge. Any initiative for expansion of secondary schooling, and particularly using a PPP approach, will benefit from earning the support of these stakeholders:

- Community-based organisations (which will require sufficient attention paid to the quality of education on offer)
- Local government (and local education officials in particular)
- Implementing and oversight staff at the Ministries of Education and Sports, and Finance (who should work more closely with local government)

Managing the PPP effectively, with clear terms and conditions in contract form: Firstly, it should be born in mind that managing a contracting-out arrangement such as Uganda's USE PPP may not be significantly easier or less demanding, if done well, than managing a government school system well. However, the PPP can help to achieve expansion of access at a lower unit cost. The legal framework for any future PPP should be clearer than that used under the ten year PPP now being phased out. **The contract between the school and the government should have 'teeth', with clear sanctions for schools that are not living up to the terms of the agreement**. Where inspections are being carried out, there is no extra cost involved in inspectors following up on recommendations previously made to see what actions have been taken based on past inspection reports; inspectors should endeavour to provide concrete, actionable advice and suggestions for improvement, bearing in mind the limited resources at a school's disposal. Where schools are found to be continually failing (in the context of what resources they have available to them to improve), then the partnership should be terminated and the terms in the contract or MoU based on which this would happen should be clear (from the outset).

Lessons should be learned from the more successful networks of non-state providers, hitherto participants in the PPP, to draw on their more successful ways of working. This finding also need not be PPP-specific, or Uganda specific. However, if any PPP is considered in the future, greater scrutiny should be given to which schools would be suitable partners, particularly in areas where multiple schools are applying to participate in the partnership. Ideally, partner schools should be mission-aligned with government towards equitable provision of good-quality education.

Invest in school leadership training for all USE government schools and PPP schools: The example from the PEAS programme suggests that active support to head teachers to become effective school leaders may be one of the most cost-effective quality investments possible. It is recognised that this is not a cheap solution and requires considerable staffing, with the training, resources, and authority necessary to carry out their work to full effect. However PEAS schools spent no more than government schools, factoring in all of the support and training offered by the PEAS organisation.

This recommendation is applicable to all schools in all contexts, as there is considerable research on the role played by effective school leaders in supporting teachers to succeed.

Related to the point above regarding inspections and recommendations for school improvement, **the size of the grant should be large enough to allow for schools to hire teachers of acceptable quality**, even if this means the number of schools partnered with, and the number of students supported, are limited. If the government expects PPP schools not to charge 'top-up fees', and to be able to provide an acceptable level of quality of education, then the size of the grant must reflect private schools' need to pay teacher salaries out of school funds.

CONCLUSIONS

Uganda's USE PPP was used as a temporary means of quickly scaling up provision of secondary school places, within a limited budget envelope from the government. The PPP was successful in getting more young people into secondary school, although with continued costs for households to bear, there were ongoing challenges to do with completion rates, particularly for girls. While the poorest are still unlikely to be able to afford to participate, the capitation grant has been helpful to families in reducing by 60% their spending on secondary schooling, and this positive impact has been experienced much more by relatively poor families as compared to the relatively wealthy.

Research has found the PPP did no harm in terms of quality, with some studies finding that PPP schools provided similar or slightly better levels of quality of education (as measured through tests of student learning), at a lower unit cost. Implementation was flawed however, with insufficient planning to ensure a more equitable geographical spread of partnership schools; the legal framework was not clear enough, and never provided the basis for sanctions to be taken against less effective PPP schools. Other challenges were for the most part systemic in nature: all schools require better quality-assurance, support to school leadership, teacher training, and greater resourcing.

Future PPPs in Uganda or other contexts should draw upon these lessons and should involve careful planning about where partnerships should be entered into, and with whom; appropriate legal frameworks and contracts with providers under these frameworks (and the demands and difficulties of oversight of contracting-out arrangements should not be under-estimated); and ongoing monitoring and quality assurance to ensure accountability. Uganda's ten years of PPP has proven a step in the right direction of raising the country's low level of participation in secondary schooling.

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