



**NATURE, CAUSES AND MAGNITUDE OF TEACHER  
ABSENTEEISM IN THE RIGHTS, EDUCATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT (READ) PROJECT SCHOOLS IN  
UGANDA**

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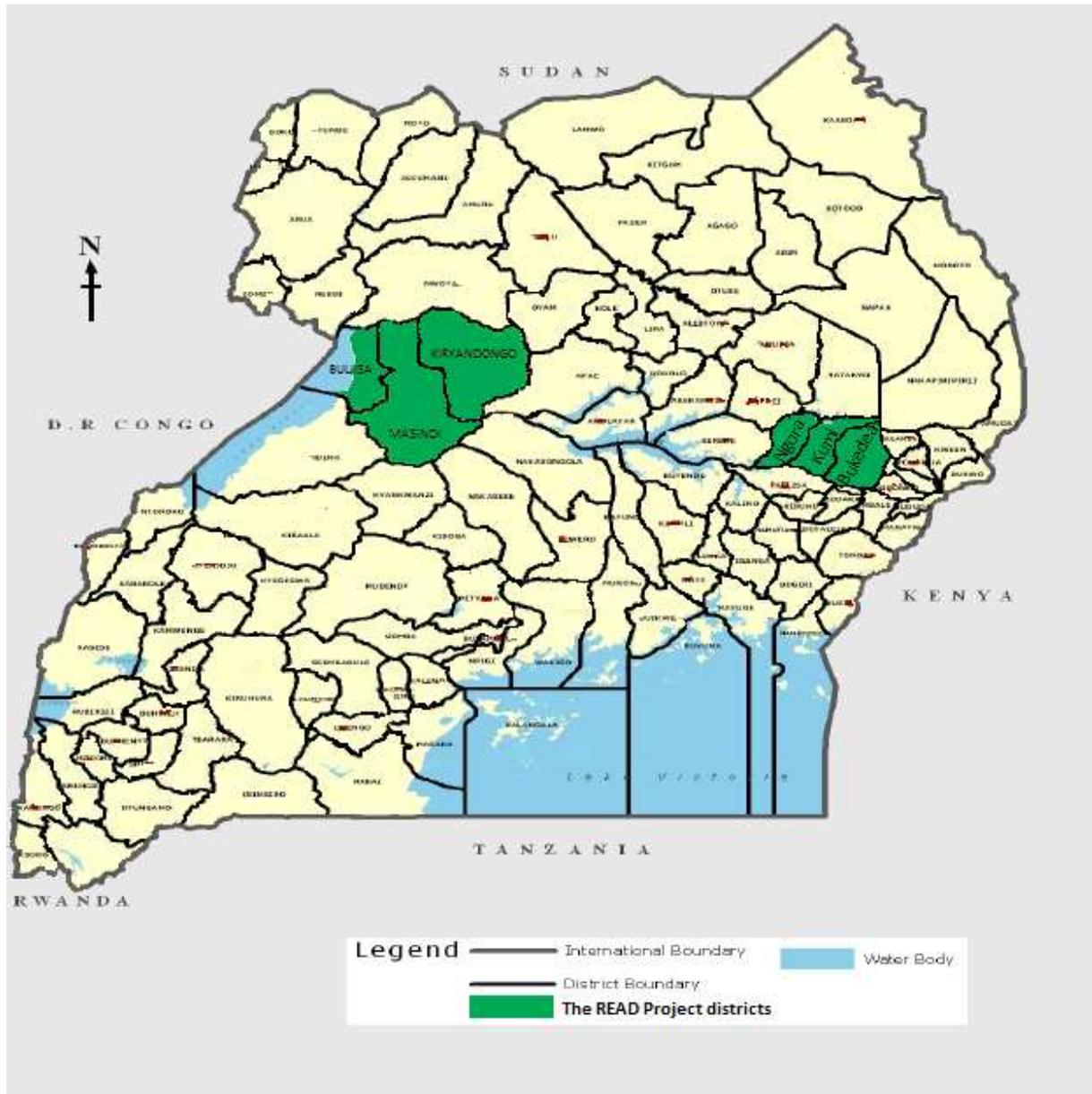
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## ACRONYMS

ACCU	Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda
AET	Africa Education Trust
ANPPCAN	African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
BA	Build Africa
BAU	Build Africa Uganda
BRMS	Basic Requirements Minimum Standards
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CCTs	Coordinating Center Tutors
CDW	Community Development Worker
CODES	Community Driven Education Strategy
DEO	District Education Officer
DES	Directorate of Education Standards
DfID	Department for International Development
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DIS	District Inspector of Schools
DSC	District Service Commission
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
EPRC	Economic Policy Research Center
ESAPR	Education Sector Annual Performance Report
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FBOs	Faith Based Organizations
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GPI	Gender Parity Index
FY	Financial Year
IGG	Inspector General of Government
IIEP	International Institute of Educational Planning
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (the Netherlands)
KII s	Key Informant Interviews
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LACWADO	Lake Albert Children and Women Advocacy and Development
LCD	Link Community Development
LGFAR	Local Government Financial and Accounting Regulations
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MISR	Makerere Institute of Social Research
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoFPED	Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PCR	Pupil Classroom Ratio
PPO	Principal Personnel Officer
PPDA	The Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority
PRDP	Peace Recovery and Development Plan
PS	Primary School
PTAs	Parents Teachers Associations
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
READ	Rights, Education and Development
SDP	School Development Plan

SFG	School Facilities Grant
SMCs	School Management Committees
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TIU	Transparency International Uganda
TORs	Terms of Reference
UG	Uganda Government
UK	United Kingdom
UNATU	Uganda National Teachers' Union
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHS	Uganda National Household Survey
UPHOLD	Uganda Program for Human and Holistic Development
UPE	Universal Primary Education
URN	Uganda Radio Network

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However, the opinions expressed in this report are those of the consultant and their publication does not necessarily constitute an endorsement by Build Africa.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

The report is broadly comprised of:

*Executive summary* which in essence is a microcosm of the entire report;

*Chapter One* provides some contextual information about teacher absenteeism in Uganda as a whole and the project area in particular as it was before the advent of the READ project. The problem, purpose, objectives, methodology and significance of the evaluation are then presented as logical deductions from the preceding background information;

*Chapter Two* presents and discusses the findings of the study relating to the nature, magnitude and duration of teacher absenteeism, the underlying drivers of teacher absences and stakeholder attitudes

*Chapter Three* highlights the existent local arrangements for combating teacher absenteeism, and the recommendations for the way forward.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1.0 Introduction

Teacher absenteeism in Uganda has featured prominently in the discourse relating to deterioration of quality of education service delivery, especially in rural public primary schools. Reducing teacher absenteeism has therefore become an important policy consideration in ongoing efforts to reverse the downturns in access, equity, quality, retention and completion

performance indicators in education. It is within that context that Build Africa's READ project (January 2012 – December 2014) was launched.

## **2.0 Purpose and significance**

The main purpose of this study was to assess and document the nature and magnitude of teacher absenteeism in some selected READ project schools; explore the attributable factors; examine stakeholder attitudes towards teacher absences; and use the information generated to suggest functionally smart mitigation measures. The study findings will, inter alia, feed into the SDP and DDP processes.

## **3.0 Methodology**

The study utilized a multiple participatory data collection approach to engage the informants to tell their own stories and experiences, including face to face interviews, focused group discussions as well as informal exchanges with some stakeholders. In addition, internet search, document reviews, and non-participant observation were all employed in a mutually supportive manner. The structured responses to the structured questions were cast in tabulated frequencies from which percentages were computed. Conversely content analysis was applied on the unstructured responses and the mass data obtained from literature review with the intent to generate relationships and generalizations.

## **4.0 Findings**

### ***4.1 Links between teacher characteristics and teacher absenteeism***

Evidence of possible linkages between the key teacher characteristics and the propensity to absent remained inconclusive. For example, while 'point estimates' for the sample schools in Bunyoro sub-region suggest that, male teachers are absent more often (21.7%) than women teachers (8.3%), teacher absenteeism in Teso sub-region is almost gender neutral (34.5% male, 34.1% female). Theoretically, teachers from the local area might be absent less, because they care more about their students/children or are easier to monitor, but they could also absent more because they have more outside opportunities and are harder to discipline with sanctions (Chaudhry, 2006). Nor did teacher qualifications, work experience and age appear to be strong predictors of teacher absences.

### ***4.2 Nature, magnitude and length of teacher absenteeism***

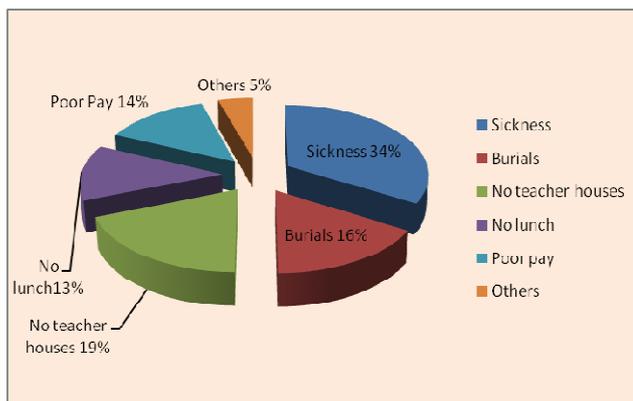
Overall the sample schools within the Masindi program area had a nominal teacher absenteeism rate of 19% (17% Masindi, 19% Buliisa and 21% Kiryandongo) which compares favorably with the western region's average of 20.49% and the national estimate of 21% (UBOS, 2009/10). It means, a teacher in the Bunyoro cluster of the READ project schools is likely to miss his/her class once every 5 days or 6 days per month – which roughly translates into 54 days per annum. However, school specific estimates made on the days the study team would visit a school ranged from 0% (i.e. no teacher absentees) in Kiigya, Kooki and Kilima primary schools to 37.5% at Miramura and Waiga II – exceeding the national average by 16.5 percentage points.

Teso sub-region presented somewhat different scenario with teacher absenteeism standing at 36% - 16 percentage points over above the Bunyoro average, 15 points beyond the national average of 21% and it exceeds the Eastern region’s absenteeism rate of 15.85% by 20.15 percentage points (UBOS, 2010). However, the district monitoring reports themselves indicated much lower teacher absenteeism rates of 17% for Ngora, 18% for Kumi and 20% for Bukedea. The vast discrepancy between the study findings and official records can probably be associated with the “hesitative” after effect of the two days’ nationwide strike that had earlier been declared by the primary school teachers on the would be respondents. Teacher absences were highest at Agaria Alukat primary school where only 3 (2 men, 1 woman) out of 8 (7 male, 1 female) had reported for work – representing a stay away rate of 62.5%! All in all, a teacher within the Kumi program area is likely to absent 2 to 3 days per week, which roughly cumulates to about 72 – 108 days yearly.

With regard to lateness and early departures, this was reported to be a “normal” practice. About 40% of the teaching workforce in the READ schools are culpable of these subtle forms of teacher absenteeism, the incidence of which is conditioned by proximity of teacher’s residence to his/her workplace, means of transport used, climatic conditions and the time management culture of the teacher in question. Teacher housing is definitely an acute problem in nearly all the study schools. There is a demand-supply gap of more than 50% for teacher housing in most of the READ schools. Approximately 23% of sampled teachers in the project schools reside within a radius of more than 5 kms. This invariably leads to late coming and early departures for home.

#### 4.3 Causes of teacher absenteeism

There are a host of causal factors but the most frequently cited ones include sickness which accounts for 34% of teacher absenteeism cases in the study schools; lack of teacher housing 19%, attending burials 16%; poor pay 14%, lack of school lunch 13% and other factors 5%. It is noteworthy that, while teacher sickness is the most overriding reason for teacher absenteeism in the rural schools of the READ type, it only accounts for 13% of teacher absences at national level (UBOS, 2009/10). Generally, teacher absenteeism in the rural areas appears to be conditioned more by the systemic problems of poverty, disease and food insecurity than by the school characteristics.



Generally, teacher absenteeism in the rural areas appears to be conditioned more by the systemic problems of poverty, disease and food insecurity than by the school characteristics.

The other contributory factors to teacher absences in the project schools include lackluster community participation in school affairs, environmental conditions (weather, terrain, etc);

inadequate core school infrastructure (classrooms, separate toilets for boys and girls), administrative lapses including weak inspection/supervision; the collection of salaries from distantly located service points; engagement in income generating activities; moonlighting; attending meetings/seminars/short training courses; competing demands of domestic work and farming activities; lack of teacher mentorship; technical unpreparedness and drunkenness.

#### **4.4 Stakeholder attitudes**

The study findings point to a dangerous divergence of stakeholder attitudes and behavior which is eroding the requisite linkage between the “three classrooms”: home, community and school partnership framework (Anfara, 2008; HSCL, 2005/2006). On the one hand, the infrequency and ineffectiveness of school inspection/supervision has created a power vacuum and more or less a laissez system in which everybody is being allowed to do whatever they like (Kaweesi, 2012). Teachers intimated that, there is a de facto absence of especially the district authorities to stipulate what has to be done and to consistently monitor the teaching personnel on the job. Even when the school inspectors occasionally visit schools, they seem to be more concerned with searching for technical inadequacies of teachers or administrative lapses of the head teachers, rather than bringing out the best in the supervisees (DfID, 2006). This perception by school administrators and inspectors of teachers as being part of the problem rather than part of the solution and their failure to recognize teachers as active players in the school system has demoralized teachers (Edge, 2008; Kaweesi 2012).

The teachers on their part are perceiving teacher absenteeism as a legitimate response imposed on them by a system that marginalizes and underpays them (Ejere, 2010; Rogers and Emiliana, 2009). About 80% of the teacher interviewees see teacher absences as an inevitable outcome of the poor terms and conditions of a teacher’s work; and 46% looked unbothered about the teachers’ code of conduct and other MoES guidelines. This in turn, sends wrong signals to pupils about the low value attached by their teachers to education activities and they too start to absent themselves (Chaudry, 2006; Ivatts, 2010). The situation gets compounded by community attitudes that are reminiscent of powerlessness and ambivalence. Ambivalence, partly arising from the wrong mindset created through a political definition of “free” UPE; and powerlessness because most parents and SMCs/PTAs at the grassroots level lack the capacity and adequate understanding of the essence of supervision and monitoring of teachers. This together with the “localization” of the teacher recruitment process makes it hard for school administrators to sanction errant “sons and daughters of the soil” if and when the need to do so arises. Cases of head teachers, community members and pupils consciously shielding absentee teachers are not uncommon (Alhassan, 2010).

### **5.0 Recommendations**

#### *5.1 Existing initiatives*

- Decision to co-opt area CCTs and head teachers to strengthen quality monitoring of schools;
- Engagement of “associate assessors” to enhance school supervision at the district level;
- The decision in 2009/10 by the MoFPED to be remitting funds earmarked for school inspection directly to the district inspectors of schools so as to cut down delays in funds disbursements;
- Capacity building initiatives in the READ project schools aimed at empowering all the stakeholders using the CODES and SDP processes;
- Mandatory endorsement of the teachers’ attendance book

### 5.2 *Key advocacy issues*

- Increase teacher motivation using a non-monetary performance-based incentive scheme;
- Empower the pupils to view their education as a right and to demand for accountability;
- Focus more on support supervision as opposed to “witch- hunting”
- Work to change the community mindset of a “free” UPE to encourage their greater participation in education especially as far as teacher housing and school lunches are concerned
- Make teacher absenteeism costly by punishing the absentees;
- Make the learning environment teacher-friendly, partly through infrastructure provision and participatory leadership styles;
- Revisit the power hierarchy in the decentralized model to increase the powers of the DEOs and SMCs to hire and fire non-performing teachers.

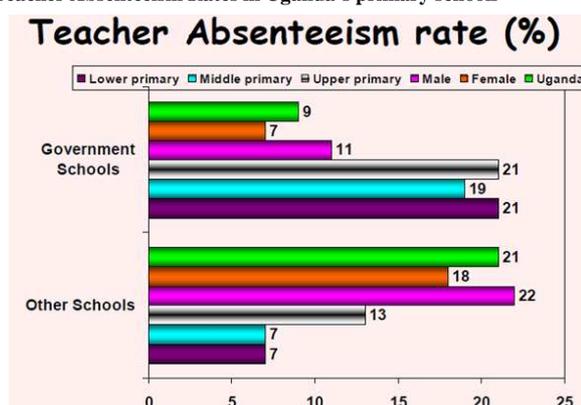
## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### *1.1 Overview of teacher absenteeism in Uganda*

Teacher absenteeism in Uganda is widespread and unpredictable; widespread because, absences are not just concentrated among a few “ghost teachers”; and unpredictable because, they are as likely on Wednesday as on Friday (Banerjee, et al 2004). Widespread absenteeism implies that, the supervisors/school inspectors, who’s brief is to enforce school compliance with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES)/Directorate of Education Standards (DES) Basic Requirements Minimum Standards (BRMS) are either unable or unwilling to combat absenteeism. It is also indicative of the failure of the government policies and interventions designed to make teachers accountable (MoES/IOB, 2008). Few teachers, if any, face a serious threat of dismissal from service on account of excessive absenteeism and they continue to be paid full salary irrespective of whether they showed up at school or not (IGG, 2011).

**Figure 1: Teacher Absenteeism Rates in Uganda’s primary schools**

The results of 2010 Uganda National Panel Survey (UNPS) were, as shown in Figure 1, probably more informative as they had less aggregative data and included important nuances and contextual factors (UBOS, 2010). In overall, 2009/2010 data from the UNPS reveals that teacher absenteeism at government primary schools, remains high at approximately 21%, more than two times higher than that reported in non-government operated schools (8.45%) – non-government schools include private, NGO, and religious schools. The data suggests that, one in five government primary school classrooms experience teacher absenteeism, indicating that, in these schools teachers work less time than contracted for with little or no repercussions on their salary earnings (i.e. no value for money service).



The survey findings further revealed striking variations in teacher absenteeism along gender, school ownership and grade or class divides. For example, while in government schools, teacher absenteeism stood at a high 21% for lower primary (P1-P2); 19% for middle primary (P3-P5) and 21% for upper primary (P6-P7), the corresponding figures for the non-government schools were at 7%, 7% and 13% respectively. The Panel survey also found teacher absenteeism to be generally higher among the male teachers than it is among their female counterparts. While the national average teacher absenteeism rate in government primary schools was at 9% (11% for males; 7% for females), the non-government schools posted a much higher absenteeism measure of 21% (22% for males; 19% for females).

Statistics on teacher absenteeism in government-run primary schools by region reveal that, the northern region primary school classroom has the highest level of teacher absenteeism at 27.75% with the central region having the least percentage at 15.44% (Table 1).

**Table 1: Teacher Absenteeism in Primary Schools by Region (%)**

Region	Teacher absenteeism	
	Government-run primary schools	Non-government-run primary schools
Western	20.49	17.88
Northern	27.75	-
Eastern	15.85	9.21
Central	15.44	7.41

*Source: UBOS/unps 2009/2010*

The findings from an earlier nation-wide survey titled “*The efficiency of public education in Uganda*” that was jointly conducted by the World Bank and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in 2007 painted even a bleaker picture. At the time of the enumerators’ visit, 34.2% of the teachers were in school but not in class; 19.2% were not at school at all; only 18.2% were in class teaching; 17.6% were out of class for break time; 8.1% were in school but involved in administrative work; and 2.4% were in class but not actively teaching. Among other things, the survey concluded that, teacher absenteeism alone constituted a resource leakage of up to UG X 53 billion or 19% of the MoES wage bill – money expended annually for services that are not delivered! Notwithstanding these high wastage rates, only 9% of the participating parents reported teacher absenteeism as one of the common problems plaguing Uganda’s education system, and of these, 57.3% followed it up with an official complaint (URN, 2010). This probably suggests that, teacher absenteeism is a widely tolerated, if not, socially condoned behavior in Uganda.

### ***1.2 The rationale for focus on teacher absenteeism***

The pivotal focus of this study on teacher absenteeism is warranted for several reasons. First, by virtue of the mandates entrusted to them, teachers are the frontline transmitters of premium knowledge, attitudes, skills and core values to the beneficiary pupils (Ivatts, 2010; Alhassan & Mensah, 2010). Teacher absenteeism can thus directly affect the overall quality of education and pupils’ learning achievement by reducing instructional time (time on task). A fairly recent study in Zambia showed that a 5% increase in teacher absentee rates reduces learning by 4 to 8% of average gains in a given academic year in English and mathematics (Das, et al, 2005).

Second, pupil achievement could be negatively impacted through the creation of discontinuities of instruction, the disruption of regular routines and procedures of the classroom (Rundall,

1986). Pupils may have difficulty forming meaningful relationships with substitute teachers (Adeyemi and Akpotu, 2009).

Third, because education is a labor intensive industry employing the largest number of highly trained human resources (teachers), teacher compensation costs (teacher wages/salaries) inevitably account for a large share of most public sector education budgets (Rogers & Emiliana, 2009; UNESCO, 2011). In the case of Uganda, teacher salaries constitute approximately 75% of the total sector budget (UBOS, 2010). High rate of teacher absenteeism is therefore a huge resource wastage that exerts an upward pressure on education costs. This big leakage on the education budget tantamount to a prima facie misuse of public resources in that, services that have been paid for are not delivered (MoES & World Bank, 2007). What is more, this de facto “corruption” hurts the majority poor most, because they are vulnerable and heavily dependent on government services and public systems to satisfy their basic needs (Africa Indicators Report, 2010).

All in all, teacher absences damage the school reputation and induce parallel pupil absenteeism while simultaneously denying learners the good mentor/role model image of a teacher (UNPS, 2010; Ejere, 2010). It is the long term implications of these on the future individual and national development prospects that make teacher absenteeism a particularly pervasive phenomenon. The management of teacher absences therefore ought to be a major entry point for any meaningful education reform program (Emiliana, 2009).

### ***1.3 The response***

According to Albert Byamugisha (2010), the then Assistant Commissioner in charge of statistics, monitoring and evaluation at the MoES, the recent reduction in teacher absenteeism rates from 30% in 2009 to about 23% in 2010 is attributable to the following drastic measures taken by the ministry:

- Strengthening of the Inspectorate Directorate through allocation of more funds. For example, in 2009/2010, U Shs 2.5 billion was allocated for inspection of schools.
- Effecting a 100% increment in teacher salaries from U Shs. 130,000= in 2004 to U Shs. 273,000= by 2009 to boost teacher morale and reduce teacher turnover. However, the salary is still insufficient for an average Ugandan family of seven children and a large number of dependants. And, with two thirds of the population, below 18 years, Uganda has one of the highest numbers of dependants in the world, placing a huge burden on the working class, including primary school teachers (UBOS, 2010). Yet, future hopes for getting teacher salaries substantially raised beyond that threshold do not look very promising since the percentage share of the national budget for education has declined from 17% in FY 2007/08 to 14% for FY 2012/13 (MoFPED, 2012).
- Construction of teachers’ houses to ease the problem of teachers walking long distances to school especially in hard-to-reach areas. Teachers working in those areas are also supposed to get an extra 30% of their basic salary.

- Introduction of a policy guideline in 2009 requiring head teachers to closely track teachers' attendance records. Teachers were obliged to sign an attendance form whenever they are reporting to and leaving school.
- Introduction of performance targets for head teachers and deputy head teachers, among which teacher attendance is one of the core performance indicators. The head teachers are assessed towards the end of the year and a head teacher is deemed to be under performing if he/she registers high absenteeism rates (Byamugisha, 2009)

Above all, the 1970 Education Act, and the teachers' code of conduct consider unauthorized teachers' absence as an aspect of professional misconduct, which when verified warrants suspension or dismissal of the errant teacher from service. Notwithstanding all these checks in the system, teacher absenteeism continues to undermine the quality of education in especially rural areas (Muyingo, 2012; Wandega, 2010).

The big magnitude and pervasive nature of the problem of teacher absenteeism as described above dictates the need for a collaborative multi-stakeholder response, which cannot be left to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) alone. It is for this reason that numerous non-government service providers, including private firms, NGOs, civil society organizations (CSOs), community based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs) and international agencies are coming in to supplement government efforts. Build Africa (BA) – a philanthropist outfit – is one such non-state development actor in Uganda's education sector. Among the newly packaged educational projects which Build Africa has designed to help in combating teacher absenteeism is the three-year cycle Rights, Education and Development (READ, 2012-2014) initiative.

#### ***1.4 Project profile***

The READ project is a culmination of a multi-stakeholder consultative process which began way back in January 2010. It involved School Management Committee (SMC) members, teachers, pupils, parents, community members, local leaders, local authority members, Build Africa Uganda (BAU) and other partner local NGOs (e.g. Africa Educational Trust - AET) and CBOs (e.g. Lake Albert Children and Women Advocacy and Development Organization - LACWADO) representatives. This participatory process triangulated school mapping, school development planning (SDP), baseline surveys and other community engagement techniques to identify 40 marginalised primary schools for selective resource targeting. And, it also led to the singling out of the following three significant correlates of low school retention and completion rates in the project area:

***1.4.1 Low community participation*** – Willms J.D (2001) considers school effectiveness to be a function of local community participation and stakeholder commitment. These positively impact educational outcomes including academic performance, attendance, dropout and truancy rates as parents are more likely ensure regular school attendance of their children (Wells A 2010). However, there is still limited community engagement within the targeted schools as most community members perceive school development to be the government's responsibility.

Illiterate or under educated parents are unaware of their educational rights and fail to participate in decision-making or effectively engage with or hold SMCs, teachers and authorities accountable for education quality and resource allocation (MoES/IOB 2008). In Masindi District for example, more than 50% of schools experience significant community involvement problems (BAU/LCD, 2008).

The READ process is, in the long run, expected to lead to a 10% rise in retention amongst girls and 8% amongst boys after executing its community mobilization activities. This will, in turn, lead to at least a 14% increase in completion amongst boys and 19% amongst girls.

**1.4.2 Weak school management and governance** – Investing in school management is one of the most cost effective means of school development (LCD, 2010; FAWE, 2005). Within targeted schools however poor leadership and weak management are rife. For example, 90% of schools in Masindi District experience teacher absenteeism and 64% endure problems relating to record keeping (BAU/LCD). While SMC structures, consisting of parents, teachers and community members, do exist in schools, members often do not understand their roles in terms of management and governance, such as defining school needs, allocating and monitoring funds, fundraising for activities, liaising with parents and the government and monitoring teachers' performance. SMC members often lack key skills which would enable them to fulfill their mandates, including effectively engaging with school communities (Ejangu, 2004). It is hoped that the READ will help to increase the proportion of parents who are satisfied with the performance of their SMCs by 25%.

**1.4.3 Gender specific barriers** – investing in gender at rural schools can halve girls' absenteeism rates and increase girl's confidence and self-esteem (Kakuru 2006). However, in the targeted districts, approximately 85% of female pupils drop out before reaching primary seven (BA KPI data, 2010). The reasons for this are varied but include cultural beliefs regarding early marriage, the value of educating boys, the need for children to provide for their families and poor menstrual management, including the lack of availability of sanitary protection (AET, 2010; UNGEI, 2010 ). The number of 11 to 13 year old girls dropping out has therefore been strongly linked to the beginning of the menstruation cycle and its associated challenges (FAWE, 2009) such as gender discrimination, early marriage, pregnancy and caring for younger siblings.

The targeted schools are marginalized from existing government or NGO services or initiatives due to their remote, rural locations.

The target areas were chosen for their high poverty levels, poor education performance and low retention and completion rates. Both Buliisa and Bukedea Districts are amongst the worst 12 performing districts in Uganda (New Vision, March 2010) whilst completion rates remain low. For example, in Kumi the completion rate is approximately 16% (Ezati, 2010), limiting progress towards MDG Two.

### ***1.5 Purpose of READ project***

The READ process is specially crafted to contribute to overall improvement in school retention and completion rates in 40 selected and largely hard- to-reach rural primary schools within the resource poor districts of Masindi, Buliisa, Kiryandongo, Kumi, Bukedea and Ngora. This is to be achieved through a multi-stakeholder empowerment strategy involving mainly the client communities and school management committees (SMCs) to promote their sustainable participation in School Development processes.

Altogether, the project has a planned service reach of 23,662 “inner circle” beneficiaries (13,981 6-15 year olds [6909 boys, 7072 girls], 520 SMC members, 8,841 parents, 283 teachers, 25 local authority staff and 12 local partner staff). In addition, there will also be 201,250 indirect or “outer circle” beneficiaries comprised of 26, 523 local community members, 1250 local leaders and a radio listenership of 173,477 people.

### ***1.6 READ’s implementation strategy and expected results***

READ’s “educational software” investment approach is a triangulation of various activities that are expected to yield multiple impacts as summarized in the schema below:

<b>Planned outputs</b>	<b>Planned activities</b>	<b>Anticipated impacts</b>
<b>Output 1:</b> Increased community participation (CODES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development, implementation and review of SDPs</li> <li>• Community training sessions</li> <li>• Radio advocacy</li> <li>• Education dialogues</li> <li>• Partner profiling and capacity-building</li> <li>• Distribution of educational materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental involvement in school development to increase by 35%</li> <li>• Increased awareness about the importance of education</li> <li>• Effective school management and governance</li> <li>• Increased pupil attendance and completion</li> <li>• Better recognition of the importance of education as a means for improving living standards and tackling poverty</li> </ul>
<b>Output 2:</b> Strengthened school management and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SMCs audits</li> <li>• SMC training</li> <li>• SMC Study visits and mentorship</li> <li>• Addressing teacher absenteeism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of parents satisfied with SMC performance to increase by 25%</li> <li>• SMCs empowered to assume lead role in SDP process</li> <li>• SMCs enabled to hold teachers accountable for their attendance</li> <li>• SMCs capable of ensuring transparency and efficiency in resource utilization</li> <li>• SMCs will have skills to engage with local authorities, provide feedback on policy and bye-laws and holding authorities accountable</li> <li>• SMCs will be able to impact the design of the DDPs</li> </ul>
<b>Output 3:</b> Improved gender responsiveness of SDPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher and parent training</li> <li>• Radio programs</li> <li>• Identifying, introducing and promoting appropriate sanitary towels technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proportion of gender sensitive SDPs will rise by 33%</li> <li>• Parents will be more aware of the value of educating girls</li> <li>• Parents will have the skills to positively influence girls’ retention at school</li> <li>• Girls will have increased confidence and self esteem to constructively participate in the SDP process</li> <li>• Female retention and completion rates to rise to at least 85% and 32%</li> <li>• Enhanced girls’ potential to achieve better standards of living and freedom from discriminatory and harmful traditional practices</li> </ul>

This study was however singularly concerned with the project’s intent to address the thorny issue of teacher absenteeism as indicated under Output 2.

### ***1.7 The problem***

The solution to any development problem is usually predicated on proper diagnosis of that problem in order to be able to generate evidence-based policy prescriptions. One difficulty in studying teacher absence in especially rural Uganda is that administrative records of teachers’ attendance are commonly inaccurate (Winkler and Sondergaard, 2008; Rogers and Emiliana, 2009). However, inaccuracies are possible even in well - run school systems. For example, a

teacher could come to school but may have to leave early to deal with, say, a family emergency. This early departure from school by a teacher (one variant of absence) is not likely to get recorded by the head teacher in the attendance register. And, in circumstances such as in rural Uganda, where a head teacher knows, for sure, that there are very few or no spot checks made by the area inspectors of schools on the accuracy of attendance records; or knows that, no action will be taken against him/her even when inspectors find discrepancies, the head teachers have little incentive to closely track teacher absenteeism and manage records well (IGG, 2011). So, administrative records are poor not necessarily because head teachers may be trying to cover up their absenting teachers, but due to weak accountability mechanisms and institutional inadequacies. The teachers themselves have little incentive to attend school in environments of weak institutional capacity and accountability. In short, the problem of teacher absenteeism in particularly rural primary schools of the “READ” type may be grossly underreported and the figures reflected in official records are likely to have serious inaccuracies (Wandega, 2010; Ejere, 2010).

Inaccurate estimates of teacher absences deny the school managers as well the district and national level educational policy makers the correct contextual perspective required for effective school development planning; for ascertaining the current policy and/or procedural gaps; and for suggesting more pragmatic interventions for mitigation purposes.

This study set out to bypass the problem of faulty administrative records by instead measuring teacher absenteeism through direct enumeration of absentee teachers during surprise visits to the selected READ primary schools.

### ***1.8 The purpose of the study***

This investigation sought to ascertain the magnitude of teacher absenteeism in the project schools, identify and analyze both the “open” and “hidden” dimensions of teacher absenteeism in those schools, gauge the average length of time of absence taken by the absentee teacher and solicit stakeholder perceptions regarding teacher absenteeism – all with a view to coming up with financially, materially and technically feasible measures for mitigation.

### ***1.9 Objectives***

The specific concerns of this baseline inquiry were guided by the following Terms of Reference (TORs):

1. Assessment of the extent (percentage number of teachers not in class at any one time, etc), the type (i.e. teachers are in school but not in class and therefore not teaching or teachers not in school at all, etc) and lengths of time of absenteeism encountered at the project schools, and examine how these relate with the district and/ or national levels;
2. Assessment of the reasons behind absenteeism encountered or experienced at the READ project schools, and examine how these relate with the district and/or national level assessments;

3. Assessment of the stakeholders' (including parents, teachers, pupils and education officials) attitudes towards teacher absenteeism;
4. To suggest strategies – as proposed by different groups of stakeholders and the consultant – to tackle the problem of teacher absenteeism but within the context of the existing Ministry of Education policies and guidelines;
5. Provide a brief analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the suggested strategies; and
6. Provide a brief overview of the resource implications of each suggested strategy.

## ***Methodology***

### **1.10.1 Design and Sampling**

A survey research strategy using unannounced spot check school visits was adopted for the assessment of teacher absences in the six “READ project districts” (districts where Build Africa is currently implementing the READ project interventions) of Masindi, Kiryandongo and Buliisa in the Bunyoro sub-region in western Uganda; and Kumi, Bukedea and Ngora districts within the Teso sub-region to the north eastern corner of the country.

Purposive sampling approach was employed to select 20 “READ primary schools” from the six districts. By virtue of the offices they occupy, all the District Education Officers (DEOs) and District Inspectors of Schools (DISs) or CCTs from the six project districts were engaged in this study. Similarly, all the 20 chairpersons of the school management committees (SMCs), 20 head teachers and approximately 200 (about 10 per school) teachers of the sampled schools automatically became key informants in this assessment exercise. And for purposes of cross-checking the authenticity of the responses of the school officials, the opinions of 10 purposively selected P6 and P7 pupils (5 boys, 5 girls) and 5 parents/school community members per school were tapped

### **1.10.2 Data collection methods and tools**

Actual data collection was largely pursued along two triangulated fronts, namely:

1. *Secondary data sources*: This involved a thorough perusal and synthesis of the contents in the relevant documentation including the official school attendance records, the district and national EMIS data, Build Africa’s project progress reports, the relevant education sector policy documents, the National Development Plan (NDP 2009-2014), the 2011 Second Report on Corruption Trends in Uganda; among others.
2. *Primary data sources*: Direct field-based sourcing of information through interactive on-site key informant interviews (KIIs) with the teachers, head teachers, chairpersons of SMCs, DISs/CCTs, DEOs as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the target pupils and parents/community members were carried out. Simple user-friendly KII schedules and FGD guides were developed by the consultant in close consultation with

the responsible Build Africa officials. Although the interview schedules contained a few open ended questions, most of the items were closed ended to allow for expedited data collection, tabulation and analysis of the results. The main thrust of the questions was directed at gaining an understanding of the extent, types and duration of teacher absences; reasons why teachers are absent; stakeholder attitudes towards teacher absenteeism; and the possible corrective measures.

### **1.10.3 Data analysis**

A two pronged data analytical approach was preferred. First, content analysis technique was applied on the mass of qualitative data collected from FGDs and from the responses to the open ended questions in the interview questionnaires. This involves continual perusal and comparison of discrete and unstructured responses while checking on its completeness, accuracy and consistency. The edited material was then coded or classified in accordance with the variables being investigated and compared with a view to generate relationships and generalizations.

Second, The KII questionnaires primarily consisted of structured items requiring structured responses that were cast in frequencies from which percentages and averages were computed. Summary tables showing the frequency distribution of the responses and the computed percentages were developed to provide snapshot representations of the results, ease comprehension and facilitate comparative analysis.

### ***1.11 Significance of the study***

The findings of this assessment are meant to close both the known and yet unknown knowledge deficits regarding teacher absenteeism in the READ project schools and provides a platform for the reformulation and adoption of a modified READ process as a more tailor-made and cost efficient response.

The detailed information so generated will be used to improve future programming, accelerate progress towards EFA and MDGs; provide additional dimensions for evidence-based READ interventions; promote good public relations and institutional buy-in, widen the scope for fundraising, stimulate further research and documentation of good practices for the containment of teacher absenteeism

## CHAPTER TWO: THE STUDY FINDINGS

### 2.0 Introduction

This section opens with a brief description of the key elements of the bio-data relating to the teachers who were the elite informants in this study. It then provides a summary description of the nature and magnitude of teacher absenteeism in the project schools as well as the length or duration of such absences. The results of the study showed that, the average number of days a teacher stayed away from school per year was 45 for the project schools in Bunyoro sub-region, and 72-108 days for the study schools in Teso sub-region but with wide inter school variations. The results also reveal that most school-specific absence rates surpass both the district and national teacher absenteeism rates.

### 2.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of sampled teachers

Table 2 below shows the sex and age composition of the teacher respondents who were the key informants in the study. Overall, the male teachers make up approximately 60% (i.e. 70/112 x 100) of the teacher sample and 59% (i.e. 66/112 x 100) of them fall within the 26-35 years age bracket. There are however fairly striking sub-regional disparities: a little more than 79% of the teaching workforce in the sample schools from Bunyoro sub-region is male. This converts into a highly inequitable gender parity index among the teachers of 0.3 with serious implications on the protection, mentorship, lesson uptake, attendance, retention and completion of the girl-child. Conversely, the sample teaching staffs in the READ schools within the Teso sub-region is significantly gender balanced with females constituting 44% or a GPI of 0.8

**Table 2: Characteristics of the teacher respondents**

Age	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
18 – 25 years	9	6	15
26 – 35 years	40	26	66
36 – 49 years	16	10	26
50+ years	5	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Qualification</b>			
Grade III	49	30	79
Grade V	11	10	21
Graduate	1	0	1
Untrained	9	2	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Work experience</b>			
0 – 5 years	20	10	30
6 – 15 years	36	26	62
16 – 25 years	8	4	12
26+ years	6	2	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>112</b>

Source: Field survey, 2012.

With regards to qualifications and technical expertise, the biggest bulk (70.5%) of the teachers staffing the study schools are Grade III certificate holders, while nearly 10% are untrained. It is also noteworthy that 21 (11 male, 10 female) out of 112 (70 male, 42 female) or 18.8% are diploma holders. Only one graduate teacher participated in the study. These teacher characteristics could have important implications on the behaviour and actions of teachers, including teacher absenteeism. For example, some teachers claimed that, older higher - ranking

teachers tend to be more absent because they are harder to hold accountable. In the same way, absenteeism rates tend to be higher among male than female teachers (Ejere 2010; Wandega, 2010). And in a meta-analysis that focused on empirical studies of teacher quality and qualification, Betts, et al (2003) found five-broad categories of teacher attributes that appear to contribute to teacher quality. According to the author teaching experience, degree obtained/type of certification help to predict the behaviours of teachers including positive attitude, sense of humour, regular attendance, punctuality, absenteeism, lateness and time-on-task.

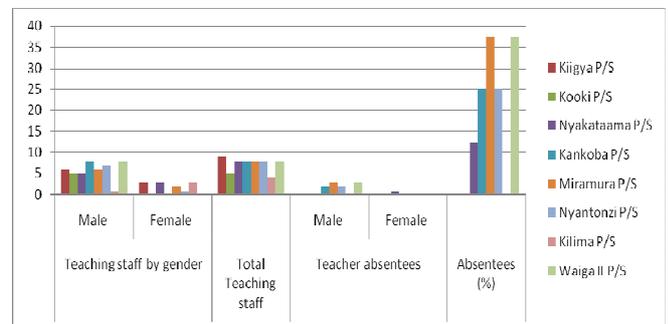
## 2.2 Nature, magnitude of teacher absenteeism

Table 3 and Figure 2 illustrate the on-spot magnitude of teacher absenteeism in the 8 READ schools visited in the Bunyoro sub-region.

Table 3: Teacher absenteeism in selected schools in Bunyoro

School	Teaching staff by gender		Total Teaching staff	Teacher absentees		Absentees (%)
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
Kiigya P/S	6	3	9	0	0	0
Kooki P/S	5	0	5	0	0	0
Nyakataama P/S	5	3	8	0	1	12.5
Kankoba P/S	8	0	8	2	0	25
Miramura P/S	6	2	8	3	0	37.5
Nyantanzi P/S	7	1	8	2	0	25
Kilima P/S	1	3	4	0	0	0
Waiga II P/S	8	0	8	3	0	37.5

Figure 2: Teacher absenteeism in selected schools in Bunyoro



The data in the Table above depicts wide variations in the levels of teacher absence when the team made unannounced visits. Out of the total teaching staff of 58 (46 male, 12 female) for the 8 study schools within the Bunyoro sub-region, only 47 (36 men, 11 women) or 81% had reported for work – which nominally translates into an absence rate of 19%. Other things remaining constant, this can be interpreted to mean that, a classroom in the Bunyoro sub-region is likely to be missing a teacher once every 5 days or 6 days monthly or 18 days termly. Therefore, out of an average 246 scheduled school days, a primary school pupil in the sub-region stands to lose 54 (22%) days of classroom instruction per year.

It can also be deduced from the tabulated statistics that, the propensity for teacher absenteeism is much higher among the male teachers (21.7% i.e.  $10/46 \times 100$ ) than among their female counterparts (8.3% i.e.  $1/11 \times 100$ ). Teacher absences were highest at Miramura (Masindi district) and Waiga II (Buliisa district) primary schools at 37.5% each – 16.5 percentage points over the national average of 21%. This was followed by Nyantanzi and Kankoba with teacher stay away rates of 25% each – 6 points in excess of the national average. Nyakataama, with a teacher absence rate of 12.5% was unique in the sense that, it was the only visited school that registered a female teacher absentee. There were no teacher absentees in Kiigya, Kooki and Kilima primary schools at all on the day of the visit.

Recent district monitoring reports estimated teacher absenteeism rates for Masindi, Buliisa and Kiryandongo at 17%, 19% and 21% respectively. It implies that, teacher absence rate for Miramura P/S exceeded the district average by 18.5 percentage points, Waiga II by 18.5,

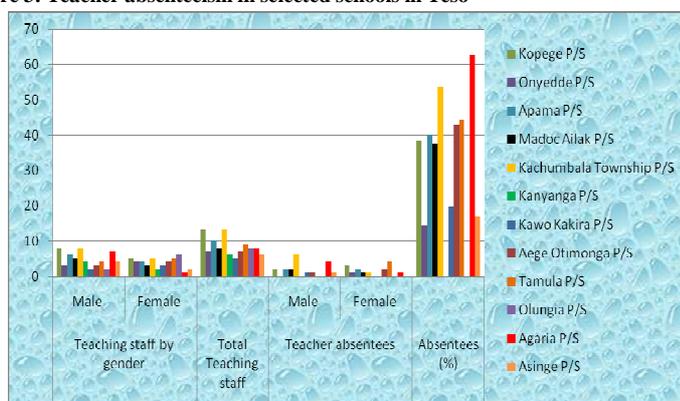
Kankoba by 4, Nyantonzi by 8 while Nyakataama’s rate is 8.5 percentage points lower than the district average.

On the other hand, teacher absenteeism is, as showed in Table 4 and Figure 3 below, a more serious problem in the Teso sub-region. Of the 100 teachers on the staff lists of the sample 12 schools in the sub-region, only 64 (37 male, 29 female) or 64% had reported for duty on the day of the visit. This represents a teacher absence rate of 36% in the region – 17% points over and above the rate for Bunyoro sub-region. The probability of a classroom in the Teso-sub-region going without a teacher nearly doubles that for Bunyoro i.e. almost once in every three days or 10 days per month or 30 days every school term. Thus, on average, a classroom in the Teso sub-region is expected to go without a teacher for 90 days annually.

**Table 4: Teacher absenteeism in selected schools in Teso**

**Figure 3: Teacher absenteeism in selected schools in Teso**

School	Teaching staff by gender		Total Teaching staff	Teacher absentees		Absentees (%)
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
Kopege P/S	8	5	13	2	3	38.5
Onyedde P/S	3	4	7	0	1	14.3
Apama P/S	6	4	10	2	2	40
Madoc Ailak P/S	5	3	8	2	1	37.5
Kachumbala Township P/S	8	5	13	6	1	53.8
Kanyanga P/S	4	2	6	0	0	0
Kawo Kakira P/S	2	3	5	1	0	20
Aege Otimonga P/S	3	4	7	1	2	42.9
Tamula P/S	4	5	9	0	4	44.4
Olungia P/S	2	6	8	0	0	0
Agaria P/S	7	1	8	2	1	62.5
Asinge P/S	4	2	6	1	0	16.7



Interestingly, there was more or less no difference in absenteeism rates between the male and female teachers (34.5% or  $19/56 \times 100$  for men, 34.1% or  $15/44 \times 100$  for female). The worst performing school on the day of the visit was Agaria P/S where only 5 (4 male, 1 female) out of the expected 8 (7 male, 1 female) teachers were at the school. By inference, a classroom in this school runs the risk of lacking a teacher once every one and half days or 20 days every month! Although it will be erroneous to draw conclusions basing on the findings of one visit to the schools, this indicative rate is suggestive of a teacher absenteeism problem of epidemic proportions. This was also however the time when the country was just emerging out of a two days nationwide teachers’ strike. It is therefore possible this abnormally high rate of absenteeism was simply a “carry forward effect” of the strike.

Teacher absences were also high at Kachumbala Township (53.8%), Tamula (44.4%), Aege Otimonga (42.9%), Apama (40%), Kopege (38.5%), and Madoc Ailak (37.5%) - all of which lay over the district average estimated rates of 17%, 19% and 20% for Ngora, Kumi and Bukedea respectively (district inspection reports, 2012). However, unlike in Bunyoro sub-region where gender seemed to have a strong predictive value in as far teacher absenteeism is concerned, evidence of its influence on absences appeared less conclusive in the Teso sub-region. For example, while all the 4 recorded absences in Tamula P/S as well as the single absence noted at Onyedde P/S are associated with the women teachers, absence rate at Kachumbala Township was disproportionately high among the male teachers (75% i.e.  $6/8 \times 100$ ) vis-à-vis for the lady teachers (20% i.e.  $1/5 \times 100$ ).

### 2.3 Different forms/variants of teacher absenteeism

Table 5 gives indicative stakeholder (head teachers, teachers and chairpersons of SMCs) assessments of the frequency with which different forms of teacher absenteeism occur in the READ schools.

**Table 5: Frequency of occurrence of the various forms of teacher absenteeism in selected READ schools**

School	Whole day absence			Coming late			Leaving early		
	Common	Rare	Never	Common	Rare	Never	Common	Rare	Never
Kiigya P/S	2	9	0	4	7	0	2	8	1
Kooki P/S	1	4	0	1	3	1	2	3	0
Nyakataama P/S	1	6	1	2	6	0	1	7	0
Kankoba P/S	0	8	0	1	7	0	0	8	0
Miramura P/S	1	5	0	0	6	0	1	5	0
Nyantanzi P/S	0	6	1	1	5	1	1	5	1
Kilima P/S	1	3	0	1	3	0	0	4	0
Waiga II P/S	1	7	0	2	6	0	3	5	0
<b>Subtotal</b>									
Kopege P/S	2	11	1	4	9	0	3	9	1
Onyedde P/S	1	6	0	2	5	0	1	6	0
Apama P/S	1	8	1	3	7	0	1	7	0
Madoc Ailak P/S	0	8	0	1	7	0	1	6	1
Kachumbala Township P/S	2	10	1	5	7	1	2	11	0
Kanyanga P/S	0	6	0	1	5	0	1	4	1
Kawo Kakira P/S	1	3	1	0	5	0	1	4	0
AegeOtimonga P/S	2	5	0	1	6	0	0	5	1
Tamula P/S	1	7	1	2	6	1	1	7	1
Olungia P/S	1	7	0	3	4	1	0	8	0
Agaria P/S	0	8	0	4	4	0	1	6	1
Asinge P/S	1	5	0	3	3	0	2	4	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>17 (11%)</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>41 (27%)</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>24 (16%)</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>8</b>

About 27% (i.e.  $41/150 \times 100$ ) of the respondents indicated late coming as the commonest form of hidden teacher absenteeism, compared to 16% ( $24/150 \times 100$ ) for early departures and 11% ( $17/150 \times 100$ ) for whole day's absences. The frequency counts in the Table indicate disparity in the incidence of these forms of teacher misconduct between the study schools. For example, 4 out of 8 or 50% of the interviewees in Agaria P/S, 4 out of the 11 or 36% in Kiigya P/S, 5 out of 13 or 38% in Kachumbala P/S identify late coming to be a common problem in their schools. And while leaving early (early departures) is not that rampant, it is a significant challenge in Kooki P/S where 2 of the 5 or 40% respondents, 3 out of 8 or 37.5% in Waiga II and 2 out of 6 or 33% in Asinge P/S singled it out as a common practice among the teachers.

According to government regulations, the official reporting time to the workplace for public officials, school teachers inclusive, is before or at 8.00 am whereas the time for departure from office is 5:00 pm (Wandega, 2010). Not surprisingly, all the sample schools had cases of teachers either reporting after the official time or closing before the official end of school day time or both. Generally, about 40% of teachers practice lateness and absenteeism in all sampled districts (FGDs with pupils, 2012). The average number of days per week sampled teachers are late or depart early is 3 days. Lateness and early departure from school by teachers, are said to be more common among teachers who live outside the school community (40%) and are responsible for approximately 55% of the lateness/early departure (DEOs' indicative figures).

And, although it was difficult to get verifiable statistical information, anecdotal evidence derived from the FGDs held with the parents and the pupils shows that, about 50% of such late comings

and early departures – what Boshego (2012) refers to as “partial teacher absenteeism” - go unnoticed and are therefore more difficult to identify, quantify and control (DIS Ngora, 2012). Yet, the summative effect of these usually unauthorized or illegitimately taken leaves on the net “time on task” can be quite considerable (Wandega, 2010).

According to the head teacher of Nyakataama PS, early departures tend to be more common in the afternoons and especially Friday afternoons and on market days, while late coming is influenced more by seasonal/climatic changes, the demands of household/farm work or other side business, and the teacher “residence to school” distance as well as means of transport used (bicycle, taxi, motor cycle or walking).

Unauthorized whole week’s absences are common at the beginning and end of school terms, while whole day’s absences tend to be more frequent on local market days and towards the weekends. A teacher in Aege Otimonga actually confided that, it is now almost an agreed but unwritten practice for a teacher to stay away during the first and sometimes the second week of a school term, as well as the last one or two weeks of every school term.

#### **2.4 Time-on-task**

According to John Carroll’ model of school of learning, school learning is a function of time (Huitt W, 2006; Al-hassan, 2009). To be more specific, Carroll proposed that:

$$\textit{School Learning} = f(\textit{time spent/time needed})$$

Carroll defined *time spent* as a function of (i.e. resulting from or composed of) *opportunity* and *perseverance*. The measure that Carroll proposed for *opportunity* was **allocated time** or the amount of time the classroom teacher made available for school learning i.e. the usual 40-45 minutes per lesson in most Ugandan schools. The measure which he proposed for *perseverance* was **engagement rate** or the percentage of the **allocated time** that students were actually “on task” i.e. directly involved in activities aimed at helping in the attainment of the planned lesson objectives. **Allocated time** was multiplied by **engagement rate** to produce **engagement time** or **time on task** which is defined as the number of minutes per school day that students were actually engaged in school work. For example, if in the course of delivering a 40 minutes lesson a teacher loses half (i.e.50%) of that scheduled time by getting diverted into activities not directly linked to the intended lesson outcomes, then his/her actual *time on task (engagement time)* with regard to that particular lesson is  $40 \times 50\% = 20$  minutes. If therefore this teacher has a teaching load of 10 lessons per day, his/her time on task will be 200 minutes instead of the allocated 400 minutes per day.

In the context of the READ project schools, the respondents pointed out several factors that undermine the actual time a teacher devotes to lesson delivery. They include; the unfavourable weather conditions (the prohibitively hot afternoons, rain storms, etc), time lost in attending to nature calls, engagement in some school administrative duties (e.g. chasing fees defaulters, roll calling, administering tests/examinations, minuting meetings, collating pupils’ reports, stock taking, record-keeping and filing), breastfeeding children, or time lost in making and receiving phone calls. The teacher interviewees estimated the time lost in this way to be in the range of 30

- 45% of the officially scheduled teaching time. Such a high rate of “time leakage” highlights the fact that, while teacher presence in school or classroom is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition for adequate and effective pupils’ learning.

### 2.5 Reasons for teacher absenteeism

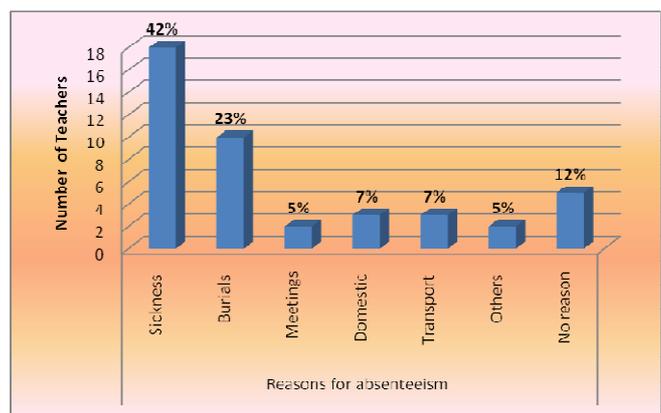
From the results of this study, absenteeism is a consequence of a complex combination of factors, some of which are directly attributable to the individual teachers, while others are of a systemic nature – and therefore, not the making of the individual teachers. Table 6 and Figure 3 are consolidated illustrations of the lead reasons given by the absentee teachers to their head teachers.

**Table 6: Reasons given by head teachers for teacher absences registered on the dates of the visits to the selected schools**

District	School	Total teaching staff	Teacher absentees on day of the visit	Reasons for absenteeism						No reason
				Sickness	Burials	Meetings	Domestic	Transport	Others	
Kumi	Olungia	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Agaria	8	5	2	1	0	0	0	1	1
	Asinge	8	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bukedea	Kachumbala	13	7	2	2	1	1	0	0	1
	Aege O	7	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Tamula	9	4	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Kanyanga	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Kawo K	5	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Ngora	Madoch A	8	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Apama	10	4	2	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Onyedde	7	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Kopege	13	5	2	1	0	1	0	0	1
Masindi	Nyantanzi	8	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
	Miramura	8	3	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
Buliisa	Waiga II	8	3	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
	Kilima	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kiryandongo	Kooki	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Kankoba	8	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
	Kiigya	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Nyakataama	8	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>			<b>45</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>

Source: Field survey notes, 2012

**Figure 3: Major Reasons for teacher absenteeism in READ schools**



Going by the face value explanations given to the head teachers, 18 out of the 45 or 42% of the teacher absentees did not report to duty due to sickness; 23% had gone for burials; 5% were attending meetings or training workshops/courses; 7% had domestic issues to sort out; another 7% had transport complications, while 5% were held back by some other factors. The “other reasons” here is a reference to a variety of possible correlates of teacher absenteeism including technical unpreparedness of the teacher, dissatisfaction with the performance of the school administration, poor pay, weak community support, lack of teacher houses, engagement in income generating activities, weak school inspection, moonlighting, lack of school lunch and unfavorable weather

conditions. Interestingly, the “no reason” column implies that, about 12% of the teacher absentees did not bother to furnish their head teachers with information regarding their whereabouts! This is indicative of insubordinate conduct of teachers and an inherent weakness in school management and governance.

However, during the interviews with the teachers who had reported for duty, a slightly different picture emerged which was suggestive of a dichotomy between the official and unofficial explanation for teacher absenteeism. A summary of the major reasons identified by the teachers interviewed is presented illustrated in Table 7 and Figure 4.

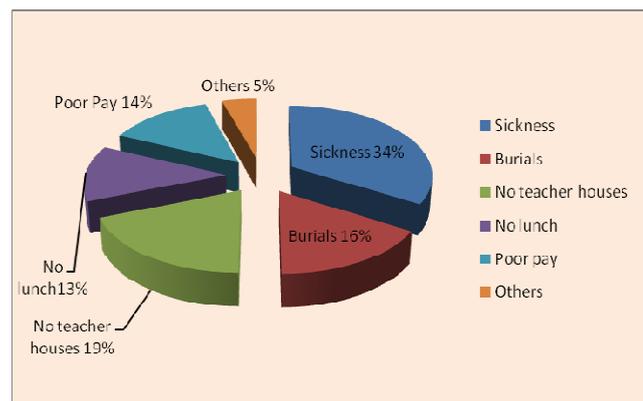
**Table 7: Key reasons given for teacher absences in selected READ schools in Bunyoro and Teso sub-regions, 2012**

District	School	Teacher interviewees	Key reasons for absenteeism					
			Sickness	Burials	No teacher houses	No lunch	Poor pay	Others
Kumi	Olungia	9	3	1	1	1	2	1
	Agaria	3	2	1	0	0	0	0
	Asinge	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Bukedea	Kachumbala	6	2	1	1	1	1	0
	Aege O	4	1	1	1	1	0	0
	Tamula	5	2	1	1	1	0	0
	Kanyanga	6	2	0	2	2	0	0
	Kawo K	4	1	1	0	1	1	0
Ngora	Madoch A	5	2	1	1	0	0	1
	Apama	6	2	1	1	1	1	0
	Onyedde	6	2	1	1	1	0	0
	Kopege	8	3	2	2	1	1	0
Masindi	Nyantanzi	6	2	1	1	1	1	0
	Miramura	5	1	1	1	0	1	1
Buliisa	Waiga II	5	2	1	1	0	1	0
	Kilima	4	2	0	1	0	1	0
Kiryandongo	Kooki	5	2	1	1	0	1	0
	Kankoba	6	1	1	3	0	1	0
	Kiigya	9	2	1	1	2	2	1
	Nyakataama	7	2	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Totals</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>

Source: Field survey notes, 2012

**Figure 4: Key reasons for teacher absences in the project schools**

While in the official version of the reasons given, teacher sickness accounts for 42% of teacher absences, the teacher interviewees give it a contributory influence of 34%. The teacher housing problem which is not projected in the official records accounts for 19%; followed by attendance of burials at 16%, poor pay at 14%, lack of lunch at school 13%, and others at 5%.



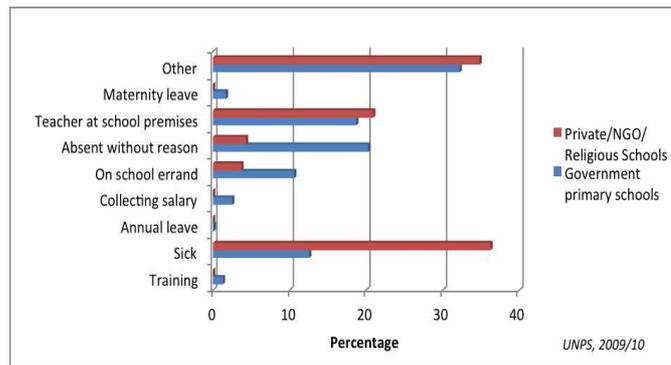
All in all, the unofficial interpretation of the reasons for teacher absenteeism is more holistic as it encompasses both the in-school and out of school factors, as opposed to the official version which tends to downplay the effect of in-school forces such as shortage of instructional materials or inadequate school infrastructural facilities leading to overcrowded classrooms and

high pupil teacher ratios. It is noteworthy that, the respondents do not see weak community participation in school affairs as a predictor of teacher behavior and actions.

Disparities in inter-district assessments are also observable from the data in Table 7. For example, while in Kumi district, teacher sickness accounts for 46% of all the teacher absences in the selected project schools, the corresponding statistic is 32% for Bukedea, 36% in Ngora, 27% for Masindi, 44% for Buliisa and 26% for Kiryandongo (all computations based on the data in Table 7). It means, roughly 1 in every 4 teacher absentees in Ngora and Buliisa attributes his/her staying out of school to sickness, while in Kumi, it is 1 out of every 2 two absences!

The total average for sickness as a predictor of teacher absenteeism in the study schools is thus 35% - about 22 percentage points in excess of the national rating of sickness as a causal factor at 13% (see Figure 5). Burials account for 16% of teacher absences in the project schools, followed by the problem of teacher housing at 18%, poor pay 15%, lack of school lunch 11% and other factors 5%.

Figure 5: Reasons for teacher absenteeism in primary schools (%)



A more elaborate explanation of the determinants of teacher absenteeism as perceived by the informants is as follows:

### 2.3.1 Sickness of self and family members

The health status of the teacher and that of his/her family members is, almost invariably, cited by the respondents as a lead explanation for teachers' absence and non-punctuality in all the schools visited.

The need by a physically indisposed teacher to attend hospital is taken to be the justification for staying away from school. Pupils and parents corroborated this in the FGDs when they indicated sickness as the "normal" reason for teacher "stay aways" and/or late coming. About half of the sicknesses affecting teachers are malaria-related. Pregnancy and childcare reasons are mainly associated with the female teachers. Besides sickness of self as a causal factor in teacher absenteeism, both male and female teachers also attributed some of their school absences to the need to attend to sick family members/relatives.

Although illness is a valid reason for absenteeism, it is not clear why teachers would appear to be more absent than other workers in the country. There is also probably some reason to doubt the authenticity of the reasons advanced by the interviewees. Roughly, 40% of the community members who were interviewed indicated that, most teachers fake illnesses and can be seen roaming about the villages. Others take advantage of head teachers' absences especially on Fridays to also absent themselves.

### 2.3.2 Attending burials

Another commonly cited reason relates to attendance of social activities such as funerals and marriages as causes of teacher absenteeism. When a community member dies, teachers, like any other person is culturally obliged to attend in person. In Teso sub-region, mourning the death of a family member can take a teacher anywhere from three to seven days, or longer. This cultural responsibility is taken seriously in the communities hosting the project schools.

### 2.3.3 Inadequate school infrastructure including teachers' houses

At the time of conducting this study, the pupil classroom ratios (PCRs) for the sample schools in the mid western region of the country stood at 1:97 for Nyantonzi; 1:96 for Kiigya; 1:73 for Kilima; 1:62 for Nyakataama; 1:60 for Kankoba; 1:59 for Waiga II; 1:47 for Kooki; and 1:47 for Miramura. Save for Kooki and Miramura primary schools, the PCR values in these schools exceed the recommended PCR of 1:50 by a margin of 47 points in both Nyantonzi and Kiigya, 23 points in Kilima, 12 points in Nyakataama, 10 points in Kankoba and 9 points in Waiga II (computations based on the data in Table 8).

**Table 8: Teachers in Bunyoro Sub-region, by gender 2012**

School Name	Enrolment			classrooms	PCR (%)	Teachers			PTR (%)
	Male	Female	Total			Male	Female	Total	
Nyakataama P/S	259	240	499	8	62	3	4	7	71
Kankoba P/S	244	237	481	8	60	8	0	8	60
Kooki P/S	120	117	237	5	47	4	1	5	47
Miramura P/S	151	133	284	6	47	6	2	8	35
Kilima P/S	122	98	220	3	73	3	1	4	55
Kigya P/s	335	338	673	7	96	7	1	8	84
Nyantanzi P/S	361	413	774	8	97	7	1	8	97
Waiga II	237	238	475	8	59	8	0	7	68

Basing on the recommended PCR, it means Nyantanzi P/S still needs an extra 7 classrooms while Kiigya needs an additional 6 classrooms! Kooki and Kilima are essentially one classroom block (permanent) schools. The demand-supply gap as far as the core school infrastructure (classrooms) needs are concerned is simply enormous.

A comparatively worse situation obtains in the project schools in the Teso sub-region as illustrated in the Table below. Here too, the pace of classroom construction and teacher recruitment is being outstripped by the rate of enrolment growth. Consequently, both the PCRs and PTRs are too high.

**Table 9: Teachers in Teso Sub-region, by gender 2012**

School Name	Enrolment			classrooms	PCR (%)	Teachers			PTR (%)
	Male	Female	Total			Male	Female	Total	
Kachumbala Township PS	437	473	910	7	130	8	5	13	70
Tamula PS	190	172	362	6	60	4	5	9	40
Olungia PS	280	250	530	7	76	3	5	8	66
Onyedde PS	172	178	350	6	58	3	4	7	50
Kawo Kakira PS	197	182	379	7	54	3	2	5	76
Apama PS	362	351	713	6	119	6	4	10	71
Aege Otimonga PS	192	178	370	6	62	3	4	7	53
Kanyanga PS	236	219	455	4	114	2	2	4	114
Madoch Ailak PS	261	249	510	4	128	5	3	8	64
Kopege PS	316	355	671	9	75	9	4	13	52
Agaria Alukat PS	224	229	453	4	113	7	1	8	57
Asinge PS	193	225	418	4	105	4	2	6	70

Going by the preferred PCR of 1:50, Kachumbala Township PS would require an additional 11 classrooms; Tamula Muslim PS an extra 1 classroom; Olungia PS another 4 classrooms; Onyedde PS an extra 1 classroom; Kawo Kakira PS an additional 1 classroom; Apama PS another 7 classrooms; Aege Otimonga will need 1 more classroom; Kanyanga PS another 5 classrooms; Madoch Ailak PS will require 6 other classrooms; while Kopege, Agaria Alukat and Asinge primary schools will each need another 4, 5 and 4 classrooms respectively. In the meantime, the teachers in these schools have to put up with overcrowded classrooms.

Yet, effective implementation of child-centered instructional approaches calls for sufficient classroom space. According to Winkler, Donald, (2007), the larger the number of pupils in class:

- The greater the teacher's workload;
- The greater the amount of time devoted to classroom management rather than instruction and the more difficult it is for a teacher to identify and forestall potential disciplinary problems;
- The lesser the time a teacher has to participate in continuous professional development programs;
- The lesser the morale of the teacher; and
- The greater the stress and frustration.

More importantly, there is a severe shortage of teacher's houses in nearly all the READ schools visited. At least half of the teachers interviewed are not housed in their schools, and lack of teacher housing accounts for 19% of teacher absences and late coming/early departures. While this is not a problem peculiar to the READ schools only, the location of these schools in some of the most underserved areas of the country often implies lack of alternative accommodation for teachers within the immediate neighborhood. Kankoba P/S (towards the lake) and Kooki P/S are a case in point. Although the local school communities are trying to make up for the shortfalls in teacher houses by putting up temporal structures, only about one thirds of the teachers serving in the READ project schools are accommodated within their school compounds (DEO, Kiryandongo). Tamula Muslim PS does not have even a single teacher's house!

As a result, most of the teachers in the project schools have to trek or ride from their distant homes to school daily – moreover, on access roads/paths that become virtually impassable during the rainy season.

A teacher in Kankoba P/S estimated the average teacher residence- school distance to be in the range of 7 km! Seasonal inaccessibility of schools is a problem faced by about two thirds of the BAU-supported schools in the Masindi program area (Teacher, Nyantonzi, 2012). The head teacher of Kankoba P/S conceded that, in such circumstances, it becomes morally difficult for them to enforce compliance or discipline teachers for late coming or even absenteeism. Teacher absenteeism begets pupil absenteeism and eventual dropout (Wright, 2008; Kakuru, 2006).

Lack of teacher housing, automatically means lack of individual family toilets for teachers while at school. They therefore sometimes have to share toilets with their pupils, especially where the school has no separate toilets for its staff members. Thus, inadequate provisioning of separate and clean toilets for boys and girls also negatively affects teachers’ attendance (Kaluba, 2009). Taken together, the 8 study schools, have an approximated pupil latrine stance ratio (PLR) of 50:1(EQUIP KPIs, 2010). Although this PLR is below the national average of 66:1, it is higher than the recommended PLR of 40:1. And this average masks a lot of school specific disparities in infrastructure availabilities. Kankoba P/S, for instance, is acutely lacking in this respect and would ideally need two toilet blocks of 6 stances each to serve its total enrolment size of 481(244 boys, 237 girls).

However, the teacher housing predicament being experienced in the READ project schools has to be appreciated as a microcosm of a countrywide teacher housing crisis. The annual school census conducted by the MoES in 2012 revealed a demand-supply gap of more than 70,000 teachers’ houses!

### 2.3.4 Transport problems

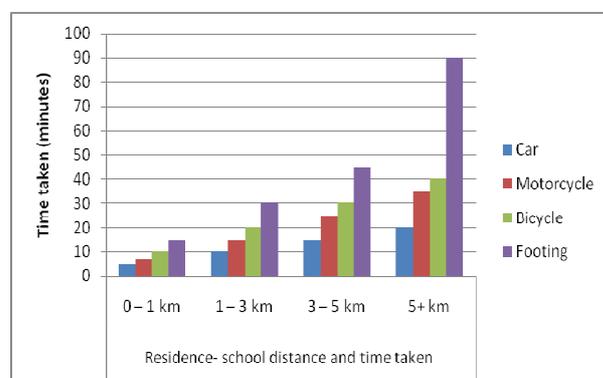
Teachers in rural schools such as those being supported under the READ project typically have a lesser working time than their counterparts in urban areas. Any trip away from the rural area, to visit a doctor, to collect pay, to engage in in-service training, or to visit family may involve long journeys and involve more missed school days (Ejere, 2010; Wandega 2010). For example, a teacher from Agaria Alukat PS (located about 35 kms away from Kumi Town) intimated that, for him and his colleagues, a visit to Kumi Town which has the nearest ATM machine to collect the monthly salary could, because of the long queues, compel a teacher to absent for as long as 2 – 3 days. In addition, where, because of shortage of teachers’ houses, teachers walk long distances to school daily, they may tend to start late, and finish early (World Bank, 2008). Table 10 and Figure 6 below are summary depictions of teacher residence-school distances, the means of transport usually used by the teacher to go to school, and the time taken.

**Table 10: Teacher’s transport to school and time taken**

Means of transport	Residence- school distance and time taken								Total number of users
	0 – 1 km		1 – 3 km		3 – 5 km		5+ km		
	No.	Time	No.	Time	No.	Time	No.	Time	
Car	0	5	0	10	1	15	0	20	1
Motorcycle	0	7	0	15	3	25	4	35	7
Bicycle	1	10	2	20	3	30	19	40	25
Footing	11	15	24	30	18	45	27	90	80
	12		26		22		50		113

About 44% of sampled teachers stay more than 5 km away from their respective schools and take about 90 minutes to walk to school as compared to 40 minutes

**Figure 6: Teacher’s transport to school and time taken**



when riding a bicycle or 35 minutes on motor cycle taxi (particularly during the wet season). Roughly 19.5 % of the teachers reside within a radius of 3-5 km and this costs them an average 45 minutes' walk to school. Another 23% of them stay within a 1-3 km range while the other 10.6 % are only 1 km or less from their work stations. Those within the 1-3 km distance bracket take only 30, 20, and 10 minutes to walk, ride or drive to school respectively. The 10.6% being referred to here includes the 4% of the interviewees who are housed within the school compounds. Out of the 113 respondents, 80 or 71% walk to school, with about 23% of them covering a one way distance of 5 or more kilometres, 16% doing 3-5 km, 21% trekking 1 – 3 km and the fortunate 10% walking 0-1 km. Only 1 teacher drives a car to school, with 6.2% using motorcycles; and 22.1% riding bicycles.

### 2.3.5 Environmental factors (weather, terrain, etc)

Closely linked with the issue of transport is the seasonal inaccessibility of the project schools - an issue which was highlighted especially by the teachers in the Bunyoro sub-region. Most of the teachers find it difficult to get to the school during the rainy season because they will be required to cross a stream/river before getting to the school. This of course affects their presence at the school both in terms of whole day's absenteeism, as well as lateness and early departure. The geographical remoteness and rugged terrain in some parts of Bunyoro partially explain the inadequacy in the supply of some basic utilities (electricity, piped water, etc) and the attendant lack of entertainment spots. All these contribute to the lukewarm attitude of teachers towards staying in such remote locations.

### 2.3.6 Weak school inspection

The intensity of school inspection is low countrywide. For example, in 2009, only 9,013 out of the 14,179 primary schools in the whole country were inspected at least once in a term (Ministry of Education and Sports-Sector Review Report, 2009).

The Table below provides a summary of the number of times the sample teachers had received support services of an inspector.

**Table 11: Number of times teachers in the sample schools received support services from the school inspectors since January 2012**

School	Visited once		Visited twice		Visited thrice		Not seen
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Kiigya P/S	3	2	0	1	0	0	3
Kooki P/S	2	0	1	0	0	0	2
Nyakataama P/S	3	2	1	0	0	0	1
Kankoba P/S	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Miramura P/S	1	2	1	0	0	0	1
Nyantanzi P/S	3	1	0	0	0	0	2
Kilima P/S	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Waiga II P/S	3	0	1	0	0	0	1
Kopege P/S	2	1	2	1	0	0	2
Onyedde P/S	2	2	1	1	0	0	1
Apama P/S	2	2	0	1	0	0	1
Madoc Ailak P/S	2	1	1	0	0	0	1
Kachumbala Township P/S	1	3	1	0	0	0	1
Kanyanga P/S	2	1	0	1	0	0	1
Kawo Kakira P/S	1	2	0	1	0	0	0

Aege Otimonga P/S	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Tamula P/S	4	1	0	0	0	0	0
Olungia P/S	2	4	1	0	0	0	1
Agaria P/S	3	0	0	0	0	0	2
Asinge P/S	2	1	1	0	0	0	1

The data in the Table clearly shows that, a vast majority of teacher interviewees – more especially in the Bunyoro sub-region - are either under seen (visited once) or have not been seen at all since the beginning of the year. All in all, only 25 out of the 47 or 54% of the teacher interviewees had, by the time the research team visited, been seen once; 5 or 11% had been seen twice; none had been seen thrice; while 17 or 36% had not yet received any kind of professional support from the inspectors/supervisors.

A school by school analysis reveals glaring disparities in the in inspectors' service coverage. For example, 3 out of the 9 (33%) teacher participants in Kiigya PS have never been given any professional support by the mandated district officials this year; 4 out 6 (67%) have suffered a similar fate in Kankoba PS; 3 out of 4 (75%) in Kilima PS; 2 out of 5 (40%) in Kooki; and 2 out of 6 (33%) in Nyantonzi PS.

The reasons advanced to explain this poor service reach include, the shortage of supervisory staff; the long distances separating the schools from the head quarters; the work overload for the supervision staff, particularly administrative work and preparing replies to requests from the ministry headquarters; and the lack of adequate resources and logistics to carry out the visits (DIS, Ngora, 2012).

There is some correlation between the frequency of inspectors/supervisors' visits and the distance of the schools from the district headquarters. The longer the distance the lower the frequency of such visits. Hence, the teachers in the more distantly located primary schools such as Kankoba, Kooki and Kilima are more disadvantaged compared to their colleagues in the more accessible Nyakataama PS. By the time of the visit, 5 (3 males, 2 females) out of 7 (5 men, 2 women) or 71% of the teacher interviewees in Nyakataama PS had already been visited by an inspector. One teacher had been seen twice, and only 1 out of the 7 or 14.3% was yet to be seen.

The project schools in the Teso sub-region which are comparatively more accessible than those in the Albertine region receive much better coverage by the inspectors (see Table 11). For instance, all the teacher interviewees in Tamula and Kawo Kakira primary schools had, by the time of our visit, hosted the area inspector of schools. Similarly, 6 out of 8 or 75% of the teacher interviewees in Kopege primary school had already been seen: 3 (2 male, 1 female) or 37.5% once; another 3 (2 male, 1 female) or 37.5% twice, with only 2 or 25% unseen cases. Inspection coverage among the teacher interviewees in the other participating schools stood at 85.7% at Onyedde, Olungia 85.7%, Kachumbala Township 83.3%, Apama 83.3%, Madoc Ailak 80%, Kanyanga 80%, Asinge 80%, Agaria Alukat 60% and Aege Otimonga 50%. In all these cases, the frequency of inspection is inversely related to the distance of the school from the district head quarters.

However, even when teachers may be regularly visited by the quality monitoring personnel, the probability of them getting adequate professional back up from such inspectors of schools is

limited. This is partly because, inspectors are, for purposes of consistency supposed to use guidelines put in place by the Directorate of Education Standards (DES) at the national level. The guidelines take into consideration a wide range of issues (DIS Buliisa, 2012). These include: teacher and pupil attendance, classroom teaching, lesson preparation by teachers, school feeding arrangements, community participation, adherence to the teachers' code of conduct, teaching and learning environment, school academic performance, school infrastructure facilities, support and supervision of teachers, resource management and administration, gender-sensitive sanitation facilities, support and supervision of teachers, availability and use of safe drinking water, implementation of teacher scheme of service, support and supervision of head teachers, provision of physical education and sports, and identifying schools qualifying for becoming Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) centers. The fact that the "inspection issues" are many means that, not all of them are ever addressed by an inspector at any one visit to a particular school (World Bank, 2008).

Furthermore, the inspectors of schools feel demoralized with lack of follow-up on the reports they produce after each supervisory visit and their inability to punish errant teachers (DIS, Kiryandongo 2012).

The inherent weakness in this mandatory accountability mechanism becomes a permissive factor driving teacher absenteeism in public educational institutions. A plausible explanation for better teacher attendance in private schools is that, the teachers in the latter category of institutions are closely monitored and can be fired for non-performance (UBOS, 2010).

### **2.3.7 Weak community participation**

Community mobilization and empowerment to hold service providers accountable is taken to be a linchpin policy for the improvement of service delivery (MoGLSD 2006; Ackerman J 2004). Where service recipients may be unaware of the quality of the services they are receiving, or of the available opportunities for improvement, information and mobilization campaigns targeted at the intended beneficiary communities is what may be needed to improve service delivery (Grabman, 2007).

It is within this context that Bjorkman and Svensson (2007) consider community participation and support as an indispensability for the advancement of all school development projects. They noted, from their analysis of the Citizen Report Card program in Uganda that, higher teacher absence appears to be correlated with schools in communities where the majority of pupils' parents are less educated, more conservative, ambivalent, non-achievement oriented, and less inclined to provide active oversight and oblige teachers to be accountable.

However, the informants in the study appeared to have contradicting positions regarding the current extent of community involvement in school activities. On the one hand, the SMCs praised the existent close partnership between the school administration and the local communities as a necessary condition for the containment of teacher absenteeism. This partnership is already manifest in:

- The mutual respect and tolerance between the two parties;
- The regular meetings, visits and discussions held;

- The transparency in school administrative matters, particularly those concerning school finance;
- Efforts to clarify the roles and responsibilities of SMCs/PTAs;
- Clarification of the rules governing teachers' conduct to the SMCs, while underscoring the need for communities to be partners in the supervision of teachers and vice versa (SMC, Waiga II PS, 2012).

On the other, over 77% of the head teacher, teacher, DEO and DIS respondents have reservations regarding the role of the local school community in curbing the problem of teacher absenteeism. They intimated that, a policy which seeks to make service providers (teachers) more accountable by simply making communities more active, but without actually changing who hires and fires the teachers, is bound to be ineffective. And, apart from the coordination and free-riding challenges to collective action of this kind, community members in the project area are usually poorer, less educated, and less connected than the teachers. In other words, they have less power (Brinkerhoff and Azfar, 2006). Mobilizing the community members to complain without giving them the power to take decisive action, may not always work (Ackerman, 2004).

Nor can community mobilization and empowerment per se be expected to yield results against the backdrop of the current weak monitoring, evaluation and support supervision; weak inter and intra sector linkages; inadequate staffing of community development workers (CDWs); low levels of funding for community mobilization/empowerment activities; and poor harmonization of the approaches and methodologies used by different development actors (MoGLSD, 2006).

### **2.3.8 Poor pay**

This is the one issue on which the district officials, head teachers, SMCs, parents and the teachers themselves were agreed. Low pay (Ug Shs 273,000=) coupled with a high family dependence ratio for the rural population of 126 (9 points above the national average of 117) together with an average family size of 7 persons (UNHS, 2009/10) is a recipe for teacher absenteeism as most of the teachers are forced to look for alternative engagements to supplement their incomes. Among the teachers interviewed, 26.7% were living with one other person in their family, 37.3% with two and 36% with three or more dependants. And, about 73.4% of the sample teachers are sole breadwinners in their households, with the other 26.6% of them having spousal bread winner back up.

In addition to promoting a lackadaisical attitude of teachers towards their work, low monthly salary inspires primary teachers to engage in off-classroom business activities (Poisson M, 2009; Winkler and Sondergaard, 2010). Since there are very few opportunities for “moonlighting” in the rural setting of the READ schools, over 70% of the teachers go to their gardens first before showing up at school to teach (Head teacher, Nyantonzi PS). *In the face of double digit inflation in the country, this appears to be a perfectly objective decision.....these people also have families to feed and children to educate* commented one parent of Kankoba primary school.

Worse still, an estimated 3% of project schools' teachers spend part of their allocated time to make follow ups to the district headquarters to ensure normalisation of the discrepancies in their salary payments (e.g., non-payment of salary, illegal deductions, deletions from the payroll, etc).

However, if the poor pay argument were plausible, then absenteeism rates would be highest among the least paid teachers. There is actually evidence to suggest that, the highest ranked teachers – the head teachers and their deputies – tend to be more absent than the ordinary classroom teachers (Winkler and Sondergaard, 2010). And in some cases, teachers who are more highly educated, and hence better paid, are also more likely to be absent (World Bank, 2008).

### 2.3.9 Lack of lunch for teachers at school

Just like their pupils, the majority of primary school teachers in the READ schools do without lunch since their places of abode are distantly located from their workplaces. When asked to gauge the extent to which lack of school lunch impacts teacher attendance, the responses obtained from the teachers were as summarized in the Table below:

**Table 12: Lack of school lunch and teachers’ attendance**

Form of teacher absence	Degree to which lack of school lunch impacts teacher absence		
	Large extent	Small extent	Not at all
Late coming	89 (80.9%)	21 (19.1%)	0
Early departures	100 (90.9%)	10 (9.1%)	0
Whole day’s absence	25 (22.7%)	85 (77.3%)	0

*Source: Field returns*

Over 90% and 80.9% of the sample teachers see early departures and late coming by teachers respectively as a knock-on effect of the failure to provide teachers with midday meals at school. These findings resonate with Ninsiima’s (2011) contention that, lack of school feeding affects both teachers’ and pupils’ incentive to attend school. Most of the early departures in the afternoons by teachers can be linked to lack of school lunches (Teacher, Kiigya PS 2012).

### 2.3.10 Domestic issues

Female teacher absenteeism, lateness and early departure from school are commonly associated with competing demands of the household responsibilities (EPRC, 2011; ANPPCAN, 2010). Unlike their male counterparts, female teachers have to always wake up very early to prepare their children to go to school, prepare breakfast for their families and clean their kitchens and compounds before getting prepared for school (ACCU, 2011). At the time of this study, there were two breastfeeding women teachers in Kachumbala P/S who had to frequently take some time off to feed their babies, leading to a reduction in time-on-task. The common activities that contributed to lateness to school and early departure from school on the part of women include cooking, fetching of water, and attending community meetings.

### 2.3.11 Other causes of teacher absenteeism

1. Drunkenness: In many of the project schools, drunkenness is a major cause of absenteeism. An estimated 5% of the teachers in these schools are alcoholics. There is a teacher in Olugia P/S who was reported during the FGD with parents to be spending most of his time-on-task (30%).

2. Administrative lapses i.e. poor supervision and leadership: The study reveals that poor attendance of teachers in some schools is due to administrative inefficiencies in schools. Head teachers who absent themselves from school, lack the moral ground to supervise their colleagues and enforce compliance with the statutory guidelines on teacher absenteeism.
3. Related to poor supervision and monitoring is the issue of teacher transfers or teachers taking study, maternity, or sickness leave without making a timely replacement.
4. Lack of teacher mentorship programmes in schools.
5. Poor time management by teachers.
6. Engagement in “other official duties”, such as election monitoring and public health campaigns, appear to be a minor reason for absence even in the project schools.
7. Technical challenge: The findings reveal that a few teachers do not regularly prepare lesson plans for several reasons including low motivation (23%), busy housework schedule (21%), have difficulty in preparing lesson plans (11%) and limited time and laziness (19%). The untrained teachers in particular do not know how to prepare lesson plans. The lack of lesson notes weakens the confidence level of the teacher thereby invariably compelling him/her to give excuses for staying out of school.

## **2.4 Stakeholder attitudes**

### **2.4.1 Contextual information**

Stakeholders’ beliefs, practices and attitudes are important for understanding and improving educational processes. Such perceptions shape children’s learning environment, motivation and achievement. They can also be expected to mediate the effects of educational policies on student learning and teacher performance (Poisson, 2010; War Child UK, 2010; Marphatia, 2010).

From the interactions held with the key informants of this study, stakeholder attitudes towards the problem of teacher absenteeism appear to be largely a function of the deplorable terms and conditions of service. In particular, the participants reinforced the well documented fact that:

- Compared to other professionals, teachers in the rural areas are not offered any fringe benefits such as transport, lunch, house or medical allowances, among others (Hanushek and Rivkin, 2007; Atkinson, 2010; Babirye 2011);
- Related to this is the failure by the districts to promote teachers who go for further studies and obtain higher qualifications. This is very demotivating (UNATU, 2010; Lumu 2010);
- Teachers, like their pupils are not served lunch at school. One head teacher narrated how it is becoming increasingly hard for him to force hungry teachers to teach hungry pupils. He said: *A hungry teacher, like a hungry child, cannot deliver/perform to the expected standards. Many of the children in Ugandan schools are hungry.* The UPE policy guidelines for children’s feeding, which demand the carrying of food to school, are not being implemented in the endemically food-insecure rural areas. Over 80% of primary school children do not regularly eat lunch at school (Wandega, 2010);
- Unlike their counterparts in private schools who are given free accommodation, many teachers in UPE schools don’t enjoy that privilege. They have to move long distances on

foot back to their homes, which delays their arrival to school (Edwards, 2010; UNATU, 2010);

- When one attains the age of retirement at 55, they have to endure the arduously long process of accessing their retirement benefits, and many have died before receiving any such payments (UNATU, 2010).
- The uneven distribution of teachers in the country disadvantages the rural areas where teachers suffer with big workloads in overcrowded dilapidated classroom structures (World Bank, 2008); and
- A large number of teachers are not on the government payroll. Deployment, management and supervision of the teaching workforce leave a lot to be desired.

Various stakeholders have reacted to this plight of the teachers differently as follows:

#### **2.4.2 Teacher attitudes**

What was discernible from the face to face exchanges with the teachers themselves was that, over 83% of them have generally lost the motivation to exert themselves maximally to the demands of their profession (Teacher, Kopege PS, 2012). Instead, they now view teacher absenteeism as a legitimate coping strategy. Some “pretend” to be sick so that they can attend to their own personal needs (IIEP, 2005; Education International, 2007).

#### **2.4.3 Children’s attitudes**

Children lose interest in formal schooling when they see that their teachers have poor attitudes towards their work as reflected in high rates of teacher absences (Barnerjee et al, 2005). Teacher absenteeism is thus inadvertently breeding pupils’ absenteeism. And, given his/her deplorable socio-economic status, a teacher ceases to be a role model in the eyes of his/her children (Head teacher, Onyedde P/S).

#### **2.4.4 Head teacher attitudes**

Out of the 20 head teachers interviewed, 12 (60%) appreciate the reasons for and thus tacitly “justify” a certain degree of teacher absenteeism. This “sympathetic” posture taken by some head teachers is tempting them to adopt “kid glove” treatment of the teacher absentees and to employ a laissez faire leadership style as a way of accommodating teachers’ frustrations (Nsubuga, 2008). As one head teacher put it: *you cannot order a colleague who is hungry and whose biological children have been sent home from school for non-payment of fees to go and teach. It is simply inhuman* (Head teacher, Waiga II PS).

This rather resigned attitude of head teachers is evident in their behavior and management practices. School heads report to school later than the staff. At least 50% of the sample head teachers were not at their work stations during the impromptu visits made by the data collectors. In addition, the head teachers have tended to take their teachers’ professional and technical expertise for granted and therefore see no immediate need to closely and regularly monitor their classroom performance (Head teacher, Tamula PS, 2012). This has inadvertently created a

situation where teachers act independently: they choose what to teach, how to teach and when to teach and they report to school at will and in most cases very late (DEO Kumi, 2012). As a result, school records rarely show any queries that are issued against errant teachers despite the endemically numerous cases of teacher misconduct. This is creating a serious accountability deficit at the school level (Nsubuga, 2008).

#### **2.4.5 Parents/community members' attitudes**

The parents too, and the local communities at large are, at least partly, contented with the “free” UPE offer by government and either exhibit ambivalence towards teacher absences or are simply incapable of demanding accountability from the teachers (Ekaju, 2011; Saxena et al, 2010). They rub shoulders with absentee teachers, dine and wine with them and rarely protest against open teacher absenteeism (Head teacher, Olungia P/S).

Parents and SMC/PTAs at the grass root level lack the capacity and adequate understanding of the essence of supervision and monitoring of teachers (ACCU/Kiiza, 2010). Worse still, some head teachers, community members and pupils consciously shield teachers who practice absenteeism (MoES, 2010). This situation is probably due to solidarity, ignorance and cultural traits that exist among communities – a net effect of which is the creation of a big accountability gap at the grassroots level (Juuko and Kabonesa, 2007). According to CREATIVE (2011) and War Child UK (2010), it is this ineptitude of the school community which allows teachers not to feel accountable to community members and to misbehave with near impunity.

In most communities, the monitoring of teacher performance at the community levels is deemed to be the exclusive responsibility of the SMC/PTA executives and not the entire community (Parents FGD, Agaria P/S, 2012). Although there are few occasions whereby some teachers are reported by their pupils to parents for consistently absenting themselves, the absence of any mandatory community level regulation or platform for promoting teachers' accountability to parents and the lack of any punitive measures makes such reporting ineffectual ( Pupils of Waiga II PS, 2012; Poisson, 2010; Nsubuga 2008). The high rate of illiteracy and limited awareness of parents about education, its components and regulations regarding teachers job obligations are issues responsible for this ambivalence at the community level (Ekaju, 2011; Wandega, 2010).

#### **2.4.6 School inspectors' attitudes**

Overall, it could be deduced from the interactions with the teachers that, over 55% of the inspectors within the project areas have negative attitudes toward their inspectorial mandates and a decided lack of commitment and positive approach to inspection. It seems that the present system of school inspection is “control-oriented” rather than “service-oriented” and tends to focus on school buildings and administrative issues rather than on teaching and learning(ESAPR, 2008/09; EPRC, 2010). This is reflected in teachers' indications of what they perceive to be the key aspects focused on by school inspectors as depicted in Table 13 below.

**Table 13: Teachers' perceptions about what school inspectors prioritize during their visits**

Aspect of inspection focus	Top priority (tallies)	Not a top priority (tallies)	Percentage share	
			Priority (%)	Not priority (%)
Teacher and pupil attendance	51	61	45	55
Classroom teaching	43	68	38	61
Lesson preparation by teachers	38	74	34	66
School feeding arrangements	11	101	10	90
Community participation	27	85	24	76
Adherence to the teachers' code of conduct	42	70	38	62
Teaching and learning environment	59	53	53	47
School academic performance	62	50	55	45
School infrastructure facilities	69	43	62	38
Support and supervision of teachers	57	55	51	49
Resource management and administration	101	11	90	10
Gender-sensitive sanitation facilities	48	64	43	57
Support and supervision of teachers	54	58	48	52
Availability and use of safe drinking water	18	94	16	84
Implementation of teacher scheme of service	9	103	8	92
Support and supervision of head teachers	59	53	53	47
Provision of physical education and sports	27	95	24	76
Identifying schools qualifying to become PLE centers	46	76	41	59

From the teachers' perspective therefore, it is issues to do with queries on resource management and administration which are prioritized and easily prompt a visit from the area inspectors or sub-county chiefs. So, 90% of the inspectors' visits to schools are prompted by the politically sensitive matters to do with management of UPE funds; followed by the state of school infrastructure (62%), schools' academic performance (55%), and support supervision of head teachers (53%), teaching and learning environment (53%) and support and supervision of teachers (51%). Teacher and pupil absenteeism receives a relatively lower weight of 45% in an inspector's priority list. Efforts to curb teacher absenteeism are only accorded marginal priority and such efforts are seen as just something desirable, not essential.

Teachers argued further that, even when inspectors, head teachers or even the "associate assessors" from the district come specifically to address teachers' issues, the approach employed often implies the need to 'act on' teachers rather than 'act with' them (EPRC, 2010). It might well be that this is the Achilles' heel of all the management approaches often employed. They are all premised on the idea that teachers need to be disciplined by external forces. Very few of these management strategies take the problems, experiences and interpretations of the teachers themselves as the starting point (Nsubuga, 2008). Yet this study also found out that, many teachers are themselves very critical about the behavior, lack of commitment and absenteeism of some of their colleagues. Moreover, they have sensible things to say about the reasons that have made them less motivated (Mooij, 2008). Therefore, what is primarily needed is not a management approach that acts upon teachers, but an attitudinal change, on the part of managers/administrators/supervisors, that regards teachers not only as part of the problem, but also as part of the solution – and thus as one of the essential actors to be involved in the formulation and implementation of any remedy (Guloba et al, 2010).

### **2.4.7 DEOs attitudes**

The DEOs attitudes and motivation to work appear to be partly shaped by the existent teaching staffs' management practices. The management, and in particular the recruitment and deployment, of teachers is a contested domain of decision-making in Uganda. Decisions over the nomination of teachers are an important source of power because of the sheer number of jobs involved (World Bank, 2008; UPHOLD, 2003). From an educational point of view, teachers are the main resource for any school system, and finding the most appropriate management practices is important for the quality of the schools and the system. There are disagreements over who should be the main decision-maker in teacher management – something that makes DEOs and other district education staffs to feel dejected (Acom, 2010).

#### *Recruitment*

DEOs play a minor role in teachers' recruitment in Uganda. In Uganda, the DEO identifies vacant positions, which he/she submits to the CAO, who in turn, makes a submission to the DSC for advertisement, after which successful applicants are shortlisted and invited for interviews. Following the interviews, the DSC forwards the successful candidates to the CAO who, in return, authorizes the personnel officer to appoint (on probation for 2 years) and post on his/her behalf. In all these processes, DEOs have no direct role to play, but they are every now and then called upon to give technical support to the DSC, as and when felt necessary (Saxena et al, 2010; Ekaju, 2011).

The district education department therefore has no decision-making power and its influence on the recruitment process depends more on personal characteristics and relationships than on any officially recognized expertise (World Bank, 2008).

Yet the DEOs feel, because they are closer to the schools, they are in a better position to know their needs and allocate adequate staff to them. It is possible for DSC to make wrong selections that would have been avoided had the DEO been involved (MISR/ Nakanyike, 2003). DEOs are convinced that their professional expertise puts them in a stronger position than the non-technical staff in the district administration of the members of the DSC. They feel that, district administrators and DSC members do not have an adequate profile and are not sufficiently aware of educational matters to be responsible for teachers' recruitment (DEO, Masindi).

The decentralization process itself, led to a move away from TSC to a DSC, with staff that is less technical and seemingly more easily influenced by local politics (DEO, Bukedea).

In addition, there is the risk that, DSC will systematically prefer candidates from that district rather than those from outside, even if the latter are better qualified. This "localization" of teacher appointments could lead to lower quality, to disparities between districts (with more remote districts having more difficulty in attracting good teachers) and to a segmentation of the country (World Bank, 2008).

#### *Transfer*

Even for the transfer of teachers, DEOs do not have full autonomy as political interference of local leaders through SMCs is inevitable. Equally important, DEOs cannot make transfer

decisions on their own without consulting the CAOs or the Principal Personnel Officers (PPOs) for approval. Lack of DEOs involvement risks leading to delays in filling up vacant posts. One DEO remarked thus *“We learn from inspection reports that teachers pose problems and we want them to shift but this has to pass through the PPO and a lot of bureaucracy. The same problem is faced with teacher payment. Teachers can be recruited, but it may take a long time before they are paid. Shouldn't this go back to the DEOs' docket?”*

### *Evaluation*

The regular appraisal of teachers is carried out by their direct supervisor, the head teacher. The appraisal process, in principle, involves a discussion between the head teacher and teachers themselves. This is seen as a positive point, as it contributes to raising the morale of teachers and their motivation. The head teacher uses a standardized assessment forms which are forwarded to the district office; and can be used for promotion purposes. Head teachers and DEOs do not have decision-making powers in this regard. It is only when a teacher applies for promotion to headship that the DEO intervenes (UPHOLD, 2003; World Bank, 2008).

Local communities are also asked to evaluate head teachers, and they do this through annual meetings with parents/teachers' associations and board meetings. When a local community does not have a positive image of the head teacher, they usually request the DEO to transfer the head teacher. In such cases the DEO has no option but to effect the transfer (Acom, 2010).

### **2.4.8 Tendencies of the responsible government ministries**

At the central government level, the ministries of Local Government; Education and Sports; Finance, Planning and Economic Development; Public Service; Office of the Prime Minister and Office of the President are supposed to play a mutually reinforcing role in the delivery of primary education service. But, other than the MoES, the other ministries have not offered collective effort in the delivery of UPE (World Bank, 2008). Primary schools in the districts are understood to be under the jurisdiction of Local Governments but ministry of Local Government is not keen on supervising education service delivery in the districts (TIU, 2012). Officials at the MoES headquarters feel constrained and powerless to enforce education policies in Local Governments. These are serious governance issues that require immediate attention.

## **2.5 Existing local efforts to curb absenteeism**

### **2.5.1 Involvement of CCTs and “associate assessors” in quality monitoring**

Mindful of the importance of inspection with regard to quality education and yet having shortage of inspectors to cover all schools, it was found necessary in all districts to engage area CCTs and head teachers in quality monitoring of schools (Odubaker, 2006; UPHOLD 2003). As trainers/mentors of teachers, CCTs have training skills and when they visit schools, they are able to identify teacher training needs, which is something special the CCTs bring to the inspectorate. In addition, because of the small number of inspectors and the proximity of CCTs to schools (one CCT per resource center and one resource center per sub-county), CCTs serve a gap filling purpose. In fact, CCTs are now fully recognized as providing both supportive and quality control services in primary schools falling under their areas of operation (Acom 2010; World Bank, 2008).

In addition to involving CCTs and head teachers in quality monitoring, another alternative intervention pursued by districts is that of “associate assessors”. This is a group of technical people composed of inspectors, retired teachers/tutors, political leaders, etc, who come together to contribute an inspection team for the purpose of enhancing supervision so that every school can be visited at least once a term. All the three supervision initiatives (engagement of CCTs, head teachers and associate assessors) are formally recognized and coordinated by district education departments to which regular inspection reports are submitted, just like the traditional district inspectorate does (Odubaker, 2006; EPRC, 2010).

These initiatives are laudable for two main reasons: (i) to increase the effectiveness of supervision through a separation between the tasks of control and support, and (ii) to bring supervision closer to where the action is taking place, that is to say to the school itself.

However, they are not themselves without challenges. First, specific attention should be given to the profile of these actors and their training: the associate assessors in particular have generally been recruited to play an advisory rather than a supervisory role. Most of them do not have the required profile and qualifications for supervisory work and thus lack legitimacy among school staff (World Bank, 2008).

Second, it is essential that all the actors involved in quality monitoring ought to regularly meet to share information on their visits and activities in schools, so as to prevent any conflicting or confusing situations and prevent overlap. Such joint meetings are rare. Third, because of their involvement in supervisory work, CCTs spend less time on what is supposed to be their core task and the reason for their existence, namely advising and supporting teachers (Hartwell A et al, 2003). It is of little benefit to the education system that these staff numbers give up an important task which they do well, to dedicate time to a task for which they are not well prepared. Finally, these actors will only be able to make an impact if they themselves are provided with the necessary resources to fulfill their tasks (Guloba et al, 2010).

### **2.5.2 Joint peer supervision by head teachers**

Supervision undertaken by head teachers also constitutes a complementary key instrument for quality monitoring. Under this initiative, head teachers undertake joint peer supervision visits (regularity varies between districts) which involve sharing of experiences and learning from each other.

### **2.5.3 Disbursement of funds for school inspection directly to DISs**

For the purposes of facilitating timely inspection visits, the MoFPED started sending funds for school inspection direct to the district inspectors of schools (rather than channeling them through the district administration) beginning the second quarter of financial year 2008/2009. This new approach was intended to cut down bureaucratic delays in disbursing funds to inspectorate units and these are the very funds accessed by associate assessors to undertake team supervisory visits.

### 2.5.4 Initiatives undertaken by head teachers

At the micro a level, head teachers employ a variety of measures in their bid to stem teacher absenteeism. Table 14 below shows the commonest techniques used by the 20 sample head teachers and the extent of their application.

**Table 14: Common techniques used by head teachers to mitigate teacher absenteeism in the sample schools**

Techniques used	Rating the extent of application of different techniques to curb teacher absenteeism					
	To a large extent		To a small extent		Not at all	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Guidance and counseling	5	25	7	35	8	40
Report to relevant authorities for disciplinary action	3	15	5	20	12	60
Directly talking to the teacher absentees	5	25	9	45	6	30
Use of teacher attendance registers	18	90	1	5	1	5
Regular support supervision	7	35	9	45	4	20
Provision of midday meal	1	5	1	5	18	90
Inviting inspector/DEO/DIS to talk to teachers about absenteeism	7	35	2	10	11	55
Warning the teacher	2	10	7	35	11	55

It can be deduced from the Table above that use teacher attendance register is the commonest measure that 90% of the sample head teachers are using to check teacher absences. This is followed by the head teachers' efforts to regularly provide support supervision (35%) and invitation of the officially mandated quality control officials – DEOs, DIS – to come and brief teachers on matters to do with absenteeism. An overwhelming majority of school heads (90%) is unable to offer their teachers midday meals; and 60% have never reported their teacher absentees to the higher authorities for disciplinary action.

## CHAPTER THREE: RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3.1 Introduction

Because of the multiplicity of causal factors, it should be obvious that there is no recipe or simple answer. The best method for combating teacher absence and encouraging better performance in any given school system will depend on the context – including the profiles of teachers, the general quality of school administration/governance, the amount of support and monitoring by the education ministry, and the extent of community involvement in school management.

But the most promising policies for experimentation are almost certainly those that: (1) diversify the criteria for determining teacher salaries and promotions (possibly to include, in part, teacher performance/attendance), not just dependent on qualifications and experience; (2) introduce mechanisms for accountability, for example through greater community involvement in school management; (3) institutionalize the intrinsic and non - pecuniary incentive schemes; and (4) improve the teacher's physical workplace environment. .

### 3.2 School level initiatives

These comprise of those measures that can be immediately implemented with little or no additional resources (financial, human, material). They include the following:

1. **Enforce teacher compliance with existing policies and guidelines.** Strict application of extant rules and regulations regarding teacher absenteeism can be achieved, not only by holding the head teacher himself/herself accountable for teacher absence, but also through raising the absenteeism barrier for teachers to make it less simple for them to report oneself sick or to obtain permission to stay away. For example, requiring teachers to speak directly with their head teacher whenever calling in sick. Thereafter, the head teacher should endeavor to keep in touch with the absent teacher throughout his/her absence. And, the head teacher must insist on speaking personally with the teacher concerned upon his/her return to the classroom. The teacher must also submit proof of medical treatment from a recognized health institution upon return. That will discourage the rather rampant practice by some teachers of faking sickness as reported by some parents during the FGDs.

While such strict enforcement of rules and regulations can elicit immediate compliance, promote worker efficiency, minimize sectarianism, and ensure order, continuity and stability in the school, it calls for too much formality, close supervision and a robust imposition of sanctions against errant teachers. That can limit the cultivation of the much needed spirit of collegiality and mutual trust between the staff and school management as there will be a big social distance between the head teacher and teachers. It can also kill the spirit of initiative and creativity among the staff as it encourages over conformity or submissiveness to the head teachers among the teachers.

Besides, in communal settings like the ones found in the study area, sanctions can be difficult to enforce. The head teacher is typically a member of the village in which the school is located and probably knows each teacher and each family intimately. Often

maintaining good relationships is more important than enforcing policy. Likewise, family obligations such as participation in funerals take precedence over formal work obligations.

The challenge therefore, is for policy makers to align policy with the local cultural norms and practices which can be realized through cultural integration and multi stakeholder engagement of teachers in decision making. A participatory management style will encourage joint sharing and negotiating of beliefs and experiences among all key players – teachers inclusive - on equal terms.

2. ***Empower parents/ communities to hold service providers accountable:*** One popular recommendation for improving services is to mobilize and empower communities to hold providers accountable. Service recipients may be unaware of the quality of the services being extended to them or of available opportunities for improvements. If so, information and mobilization campaigns aimed at empowering them to become partners in quality monitoring could improve service delivery.

This empowerment intent could be achieved through a more intensive and extensive use of the participatory SDP and CODE processes. These processes employ a “Frerian” approach through which the target beneficiaries are encouraged to actively participate in program design, implementation and evaluation. It is this very participation which ultimately leads to the acceptance by the grassroots community members that, their knowledge and experiences are valid and that they merit recognition. In this way, the fears previously held by the community about their “intellectual inadequacy” and inferiority get eliminated. This “revalorization” of popular knowledge is a key factor in the emergence of a few assertive SMCs who are able to articulate and press for their rights and hold service providers accountable.

However, the goal of community monitoring could be too ambitious. This is because it is seeking to make service providers (teachers) more accountable through the conscientization of communities but without actually changing who hires and fires providers. Mobilizing community members to complain without giving them the power to take decisive action, may not always work. Moreover, community members are usually poorer, less educated and less connected than providers whom they are expected to supervise!

And, in the Ugandan context, the situation gets compounded by the treatment of the education sector sometimes as a political battlefield for rival politicians. There are many politically controversial pronouncements that make it very hard for citizens and other education stakeholders to meaningfully participate in education. For example, UPE is referred to as “free education” and many parents/community members understand this to mean that, they have no role in education. Parents’ and/or community’s participation in the education of their children in public schools is very minimal and, at best, passive.

Politicization of education issues is eroding the requisite linkage and harmony between the “three classrooms”: home, community and school.

3. ***Developing a wellness program:*** The identification of sickness as the commonest cause of teacher absenteeism in the READ schools makes obvious the need for a wellness program. A wellness program can be defined as a multifaceted, multidisciplinary workplace care, support and treatment program. It is aimed at benefiting all staff by creating an enabling, caring and supportive working environment. School-based lifestyle education for teachers should be encouraged with emphasis on the following preventive measures:

- Regular medical screening;
- Diet and healthy nutrition prescriptions;
- Regular exercise, relaxation and meditation;
- Regular checking by fellow employees on the sick colleague;
- Safer sex practices to avoid HIV infection, transmission or re-infection;
- Limiting unhealthy practices such as alcohol consumption and smoking; etc

Healthy teachers are less likely to fall sick or report illness. Wellness programs can also incorporate measures to reduce stress including encouraging teachers to always express their feelings/problems instead of bottling them up; to have willingness to compromise; to be more assertive; to be good time managers and to focus more on the bigger picture.

4. ***Introducing a non-monetary/largely budget-neutral incentive scheme.*** Even just simple letters of recognition or recognition in a local newspaper or public recognition in church or community gatherings can be effective or make exemplary attendance a criterion for awarding “teacher of the year” recognition.
5. ***Developing an effective data collection and reporting system/a comprehensive attendance record system*** for both pupils and staff. For example, as part of the morning routine, teachers might be required to sign in prior to going to their classrooms. The sign-in sheet is kept on file and used by the head teacher for quarterly reviews or compilation of confidential reports. All these should be backed up by a comprehensive attendance record system and the provision of special counseling for teachers with high absentee rates.
6. Encouraging teachers, to ***propose their own solutions*** to the problem of low teacher attendance. This process gives teachers ownership of the policy decisions arrived at. It is unlikely that, teachers will contravene the regulations which they themselves helped to produce.

### **3.3 District/Central government level initiatives**

Beyond the school level initiatives the central and local governments must be willing to experiment with new ideas and practices (i.e. to think out of the box). Some of these can only be implemented with a substantial injection of extra resources. They include:

**3.3.1 Strengthening systematic monitoring/inspection function of the central and local governments:** Closer oversight is necessary to reduce the high teacher absence rate in public primary schools as found in this study. This would involve appropriating funds, recruiting, training and motivating manpower in the key inspection positions at both central and local government levels. Strengthening inspections, documenting the extent of ghost teachers,

increasing the frequency and quality of audits, and taking corrective actions are all examples of monitoring that would help reduce teacher absence. Introducing an Education Management Information System (EMIS) program at the school level would allow collection of adequate data to better understand the problem of teacher absenteeism as well as help curb corrupt practices relating to teacher appointments and deployment. Authorities cannot manage the education system well without proper measurement of inputs and outputs (World Bank 2006a).

**3.3.2 Revisiting the existing teacher management practices:** The process of recruiting, appointing, assigning and promoting primary school teachers ought to be revisited to ensure that the DEOs and DISs who have been majorly entrusted with the responsibility of monitoring the quality of education service delivery within their districts, also have commensurate authority and powers to exact compliance from the teachers. Similarly, the SMCs need to be empowered with the hiring and firing mandates. This would help reduce teachers' discretion and scope for insubordinate tendencies.

**3.3.3 Increase teacher salaries and make them performance-based:** The most popular remedial action supported by all respondents was increment of teachers pay. There must be a deliberate effort to improve the economic and social status of teachers: teachers' salaries and other material rewards should reflect the value to society of the teaching function, and should compare favorably with salaries paid in other professional occupations requiring similar or equivalent qualifications. Earlier on in the year, primary school teachers had gone on strike demanding 100% salary increment from the current UG X 273, 000= to about UG X 550,000=. Government rejected this demand ostensibly because of its budgetary unfeasibility.

In Uganda, a teacher's earnings are based primarily on his/her qualifications and experience, rather than on actual job performance or output. Some radical community members actually mooted the idea of pay for attendance or performance as a panacea for teacher absenteeism. Their argument was that, government was through the current system, inadvertently sponsoring absenteeism as a guaranteed flat monthly salary promotes "free riding". Moving to an earnings structure that ties a teacher's pay—at least partially—to some performance indicators (including teacher attendance, students' test scores, or pupil dropout, completion and retention rates) should thus be the way to go.

#### ***Potential benefits***

- Rewarding teachers on the basis of an agreed metric or performance criteria could help to improve the relevance of education as it aligns incentives directly with what is valued and what is not valued by students, parents, the labor market or society in general.
- Basing pay on performance will attract and retain the most productive teachers and "screen out" non-performing teachers from the profession.
- Performance-based pay structure is founded on the principle of fairness, whereby poorly performing teachers receive reduced wages and lower probabilities for promotion while more capable teachers will be commanding better options for higher pay and career growth.
- Linking compensation to classroom performance will stimulate teachers' demand for further education and training, which will in turn induce further productivity gains.

- Among other things, results-oriented pay modalities call for strict monitoring of a teachers' work by the school administration so as to be able to make an objective assessment of a teacher's performance on which his/her bonus payment is pegged.
- And, if indeed performance-based pay leads to improved teacher productivity in the classroom, that itself may increase popular support for public education and thereby attract greater resource inflows to the sector and broaden opportunities for effective partnerships in education.

### ***Potential drawbacks***

In theory, the idea makes good sense. But implementing pay for performance poses many practical challenges which, inter alia, include the following:

- In the teaching profession effort and output are difficult to define and measure because the work is generally complex, unique, and often results from team efforts
- The “more work, more pay” reasoning of the performance-based pay model could lead to bitter rivalry and unhealthy competition among the teaching corps. This undermines efforts to cultivate the much needed team spirit in school settings.
- It could also kill collegiality and create new hierarchies by giving school administrators an additional source of power over teachers. This may strain the staff- management relationships.
- Linking compensation to pupils' test scores could induce teachers to “game play” i.e. stimulate them to participate in inappropriate or deviant behavior, such as cheating examinations, in order to get a bigger pay cheque.
- Linking compensation to test scores might cause teachers to sacrifice the nurturing of curiosity and creative thinking to teaching the skills tested on standardized exams—a practice known as “teaching to the test”.
- More importantly, financial incentives may undermine intrinsic motivation, that is, a spontaneous sense of duty or satisfaction that motivates someone to enjoy work. This threat is particularly real for teachers, who, as a group, exhibit strong intrinsic motivation flowing from the value they place on interacting with children and seeing them succeed.

### ***Threats***

- Unlike the relatively risk-free input-based traditional payment system, performance-based pay exposes employees to earnings variability beyond their control. This could induce them to demand higher compensation packages as a buffer against earnings fluctuations, thereby inflating educational costs.
- It is sometimes argued that, as professionals, teachers are motivated more by nonmonetary rewards, such as additional holidays, and less by pecuniary rewards. Therefore, increasing teachers' financial incentives may not significantly enhance the performance of a classroom teacher.
- Teacher unions worldwide strongly oppose performance- based pay. Unions view wage differentiation on the basis of subjects taught, as well as any sort of subjective evaluation of teachers, as threats to their collective bargaining strategies and therefore reject them outright.
- Poorly designed merit pay programs with unclear objectives make it difficult for administrators to explain why some staff members receive a bonus and others do not. In

such cases, many concerned people remain skeptical that bonuses go to qualified teachers.

- Finally, implementing performance-based pay is easier in small organizations, than in large public school systems with sizable teaching staffs. It is quite expensive to periodically conduct adequate evaluation of every teacher for decision-making in performance-based pay schemes. Moreover, being a consuming rather than a producing sector, education does not generate added income to help mitigate budget problems.

### ***Opportunities***

Several of the many potential obstacles to implementing an effective performance-related pay system can be addressed. For example:

- To get around the difficulties associated with measurement of teacher effectiveness based on gains in student achievement on standardized tests—measures often known as “teacher value added”, teachers could be compensated basing on the subjective head teacher assessments of their staff. Some doubts have however been expressed about the ability of the head teachers themselves to identify effective teachers or to assess their teachers honestly.
- In response to the concern that merit pay models may hamper collaboration; one could structure the system to reward teacher cooperation; especially through group-based pay. This strategy can foster teacher interdependence and team work. However, team-based incentive systems raise the risk of “free riding.” If each teacher’s share of the team/group or shared reward is small relative to the work effort and if work effort is difficult to observe, every teacher in the team will have an incentive to shirk and free ride on the efforts of others. One way to avoid this problem is to encourage peer pressure and mutual monitoring within the team.
- The idea that teachers themselves—as reflected in the positions of their unions—oppose performance-based rewards is probably overstated. One study (Koppich and Rigby, 2009) found that, most teachers favor additional pay for additional duties per se and as a component of a career ladder where performance dictates the speed of advancement. Unsurprisingly, performance based rewards are more popular when they supplement, rather than replace, other forms of salary. Teachers’ attitudes thus appear relatively malleable and to depend on program design.

Many of the practical challenges faced by performance-related pay, then, can be addressed through careful design of the system. And despite the opposition of teachers unions to performance-based compensation, it is not clear that the objections to such systems come from the teachers themselves.

**3.3.4 Punish non compliant school heads:** As the chief executives in schools, head teachers are supposed to act as school inspectors and quality controllers. However, many continue to run their schools “by remote control” and were rarely present. In an effort to make head teachers more accountable and deliver better results in UPE, government introduced performance contracts in 2006 for primary school heads and their deputies to no avail. There is therefore need to heavily punish errant school heads to ensure that they effectively supervise their staff. Some head teachers who connive with their teachers to report that they are sick when inspectors visit yet the

teacher is away doing a second job outside the school must be, upon getting such information, charged.

**3.3.5 Construct houses for teachers and head teachers to ensure they stay at school :** As already pointed out, the vast majority of the teachers in the project schools walk long distances and some are even forced to borrow money to facilitate their travel to school and this correlates with teacher absenteeism. Government should therefore invest in accommodation for teachers. The government ought to be able to do this, since Tanzania, a sister neighboring country of comparable economic resource base, is capable of giving the least paid teacher a monthly salary equivalent of UG X 600,000= as well as providing him/her with accommodation plus a teaching allowance (World Bank, 2008).

**3.3.6 Construct more classrooms to create a more teacher-friendly work environment:**

**3.3.7 Provide meals for teachers at school:** Providing teachers with school lunches could help to mitigate the problem of teacher absenteeism and early departures.

Fortunately, government has now revised its policy on school feeding in UPE schools. Minister Jessica Alupo says the SMCs will now be allowed to collect and manage money for lunch as long the parents accept to pay it. Alupo emphasized that, where parents agree to contribute actual food items such as beans or maize, management of these contributions will be done by the SMCs (New Vision, August 28<sup>th</sup> 2012).

**3.3.8 Devise new modalities for delivering teachers' salaries:** Many teachers receive their monthly salaries and or other emoluments through the banks. Most of these banks are located in some reasonably big towns that double as district headquarters. These are distantly located outposts for the majority of remotely located rural-based primary school teachers. The MOES should, in close consultation with the banks, devise an expedited teacher salary payment arrangement.

**3.3.9 Appoint teachers on performance contracts:** Respondents in the study pointed out that most teachers decide to absent themselves since they are already assured of their salaries which are paid directly on their accounts. To ensure that teachers value their profession and are motivated to work harder and efficiently, the Ministry of Education and Sports should consider appointing primary school teachers on contract, and make satisfactory performance and commitment a conditionality for contract renewal. In some Asia and Latin American countries, this scheme has yielded fruits. The government of Uganda is already considering introducing contractual employment of all its employees. This should however be done in such a way that there is minimum political interference especially when assessing and renewing teachers' contracts.

### **3.4 Resource implications of the proposed strategies**

Some of the proposed strategies for curbing teacher absenteeism, most especially the recommended increment in teacher salaries and additional school infrastructure construction (classrooms and teacher houses) have quite enormous budgetary implications. The prospects for the closure of this vast resource-

gap by government alone look gloomy at the moment. Expenditure on primary education is not commensurate with the level of expectations in terms of quality outcomes. In FY 2008/9 for example, total actual expenditure (recurrent and development) of the entire primary education sub-sector was Ushs 451.431 bn for 6.8 million pupils enrolled in government aided primary schools. Further analysis revealed that actual government expenditure per pupil under UPE in FY 2008/9 was Ushs 65,695. In FY 2009/10, expenditure on primary education increased to Ushs 525.199 bn, but so did enrolment to 7.1 million pupils. This translated into per capita expenditure of Ushs 73,971 per annum. Although there has been incremental growth in budget allocation, the level of expenditure is still low. This partly explains why issues like lack of adequate classroom space, lack of teacher's houses, lack of adequate desks, lack of midday meal for pupils and low pay for teachers continue to be the subject of debate.

During the FY 2008/9 education sector was allocated a share of 15.4% (Ushs 719.371 bn) of the national budget. The share increased in real terms to Ushs 826.481 bn (16.3%) in FY 2009/10 and again to Ushs 962.183 bn (17.2%) in FY 2010/11. However, the share of education in the national budget has since declined from 17% in 2010/11 to 14% in FY 2012/13. And public expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is still low as it was only 3.8% in FY 2008/9; 4.2% in FY 2009/10 and 4.4% in FY 2010/11.

Despite this gloomy picture, a substantial amount of money can be saved to support a phased translation of the suggested strategies for curbing teacher absenteeism into reality , by containing resource leakages in the primary education sub-sector. For example:

1. Teachers' wage bill accounts for 70% of the annual expenditure of primary education sub-sector. However, 20% of the teachers in primary schools are usually absent from their work places for various reasons. This coupled with perpetual late coming and shirking on the job, constitutes a minimum loss/wastage of 20% of the total wage bill;
2. Procurement and contract management continues to be an issue at the district level (TIU, 2012). Whereas the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets (PPDA) Act provides that the tenure of the members of the Contracts Committee shall be three years and a member may be re-appointed for only one further term, most members to the Procurement Committees are permanent – which increases the risk of getting bribed by bidders. Moreover, some Procurement Committees tend to use the prices quoted by bidders as a yardstick for evaluating the bids. This runs the risk of selecting a weak bidder or an unscrupulous one that has deliberately “front-loaded” costs;
3. There is shortage of technical personnel to manage and supervise all ongoing construction works. This has weakened the technical supervision of SFG/PRDP works especially at the most critical stages in the construction process. Monitoring and supervision of education activities on the ground remains largely inadequate;
4. Local Government Financial and Accounting Regulations (LGFAR - 2007) and UPE guidelines are reluctantly enforced in the management of primary education funds.

Primary schools are reluctant to maintain updated cash books; reconcile cash books with the bank statements; use of vouchers and acknowledge receipt of UPE releases. Inspection of schools' financial records is weak and the requirement to submit schools' financial statements to the sub-county councils for each academic term is not always complied with;

5. While the majority of schools comply with the mandatory requirement of displaying UPE releases, what is displayed is only amounts credited into the school accounts and amounts withdrawn. Summary of expenditure is not displayed and the SMCs and parents seem less interested in holding the head teachers accountable; and
6. District Internal Audit Departments are not functioning well enough to respond to challenges of violations in public financial management in the education sector.

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