

STRENGTHENING THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES CONTRIBUTING TO THE
REALIZATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS

THE CASE OF ALTERNATIVE BASIC EDUCATION FOR
KARAMOJA



Photo 1: A Karamojong Home stead-the Manyatta

A paper presented by Gerard Namirembe Bitamazire, Minister of State for Education and Sports/Primary, Government of the Republic of Uganda at the HCHR & UNDP Seminar on Good Governance for the Promotion of Human Rights 15th to 16th September 2004 SEOUL, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

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Chairperson
Distinguished participants
Ladies and gentlemen

Promotion of human rights is one of the development challenges facing many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The right to basic education however, is increasingly being recognised as a basis for enjoying human and other rights. State governments today are engaged in policy reforms and strategic investments and interventions to make basic education accessible to all communities, especially those disadvantaged and marginalized by social, cultural and geographical circumstances.

Good governance plays a catalytic role in promoting the enjoyment of the basic human rights by individuals by and communities. Legal and institutional policies and structures that protect human rights must be integrated with the social and cultural environment. This ensures accessibility of the programmes to the beneficiary population

This presentation addresses provision of and access to basic education through a practical and non-formal approach in a unique socio-cultural and economic context. Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja, (ABEK), implemented under a decentralised management where local communities participate in the designing of the basic curriculum and setting the implementation guidelines and timetable. The ABEK program is low cost in many respects. It is however effective as a strategy in the promotion of the right to basic education.

The strength of ABEK both as an educational and development program lies in its dependence on local resources and participation by the various grassroots communities. The central government and the development partners build on the local community demand for basic education within the cultural setting of the people.

Karamoja (Background and Context)

Karamoja Region comprises three districts of Moroto, Kotido and Nakapiripirit. It is situated in the northeastern part of Uganda and has a land area of 27.600 square kilometers. The region experiences very low rainfall in one rain season, with temperatures ranging from 20° in rainy to 36° in the dry season. Karamoja is a hot semi-arid savannah grassland and shrub region sharing borders with Kenya, Sudan and 7 districts of Uganda.

Karamoja has a population estimated at 640,000* (Kotido 280,000, Moroto 160,000 & Nakapiripirit 200,000) (UBOS Projection 2002). The Karimojong are agro-pastoralists practicing rudimentary rain-fed subsistence crop production and nomadic livestock rearing. The population is dispersed in clustered settlements practicing a semi-nomadic lifestyle, which has greatly hampered provision of social services in region. The lifestyle offers unique challenges and opportunities in delivery of education and other social services. Karamoja has the lowest literacy rate of 12% (6% among females) compared to the national average of 65% in the country.

The level of economic, social and political development in the region is very low relative to the rest of the country. The quality of life especially among rural children is extremely poor. Most children are malnourished, do not go to school and have no access to health care. Communities live in traditional congested dwelling locally known as Manyata.

Among girls, early pregnancies and early marriages are prevalent resulting in very high mortality rate (maternal mortality 500; infant mortality 137 – 145 and child mortality 200 – 245). Life expectancy at birth is much lower in Karamoja especially among females, than the rest of Uganda. The most common diseases (90% burden) malaria, water-borne illness associated with poor sanitation, respiratory tract infections, trauma, eye infections and skin infections result directly from the harsh environment and poor lifestyle.

Insurgence in Northern Uganda has displaced and orphaned a number of children, many of whom have moved into Karamoja and need urgent psychosocial support and access to social services like health and basic education.

Superstition (not science and technology) governs the greater part of the rural Karimajong life. The majority of the people seek supernatural interventions in times of challenges such as drought, famine, sickness or death in the family. There is high heavy reliance on traditional remedies for treatment of diseases and ailments for both people and livestock.

* All data is obtained from the Karamoja Data Centre publications

There is very poor access to both adequate and safe water. This is due partly to the dry weather and the rocky and sandy soils in the region. The Water situation in the Karamoja Region emerges as the single greatest obstacle to food security, peace with neighbouring communities and improvement of the state of children's rights in the region. The search for water remains central to resolving the development crisis in the Karamoja region. The struggle for survival for both the people and their animals takes precedence over other development activities. Efforts to promote human rights must recognize and appreciate the cultural and traditional mechanism for survival in the region.

Karamoja region has 168 (81,44 & 40) primary schools, 12 (6,4. & 2) secondary schools, in Kotido, Moroto & Nakapiripirit districts respectively. There is 1 underutilized technical school and 1 teacher training college in the region. Educational establishments are concentrated in Urban areas. The Karimojong culture where households rely heavily on the contribution of children's labour encourages children to stay away from school. Indeed formal education that withdraws children's contribution to the socio-economic wellbeing of households is not yet compatible with the Karimojong social and economic establishment. Furthermore, the unique realities of semi-nomadic pastoral lifestyle in Karamoja demand a flexible basic education arrangement to fit the traditional and cultural survival mechanisms.

While on the one hand there is an acute shortage of classrooms in the region (relative to the population of school-age children), on the other hand school attendance is very low, seasonally erratic and as such the infrastructure is grossly underutilized.

Table 1 Enrolment in Formal Education Primary Schools, 2003

District	No. Of Schools	Enrolment		Total
		Male	Female	
Kotido	104	36,408	31,455	67,863
Moroto	45	9,996	8,258	18,254
*Nakapiripirit	44	10,398	11,378	21,776

Source: Ministry of Education and Sports, Planning Department

Insecurity coupled with nomadic pastoralism has further made the inflexible formal school system hardly viable. More so, the high levels of abject poverty, with over 70% of the population living below the nationally defined poverty line (as compared to 34% national average), imply that parents in Karamoja cannot afford to pay for the children's education.

* Nakapiripirit is a newly established district in the Region and it is yet to benefit from the ABEK Programme.

National Concept and Context of ABEK:

The right to education is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995. Article 30 and 34 (2-3) in the Constitution state as follows:

Article 30 - "All persons have a right to education".

Article 34(2) - "A child is entitled to basic education which shall be the responsibility of the state and the parents of the child".

Article 34(3) - No child shall be deprived by any person of medical treatment, education or any other social or economic benefit by reason of religion or other beliefs.

The Government of the Republic of Uganda is committed to providing quality basic education to all her people to eradicate illiteracy, to eradicate poverty, to ensure that they all realize and develop their potential to live in dignity. Furthermore, the on going democratization process and the decentralized mode of governance requires active participation by all people and communities in programmes to enhance development and democracy for prosperity. The macro policy goal and objective is to empower all communities to play active roles and to take responsibility in decision-making, planning and implementation of programmes to improve their lives. Basic education including ABEK, is a critical tool in this regard.

Against that Government policy objective, the President and the Government of Uganda introduced Universal Primary Education, (UPE), Programme in 1997. The programme was intended to give equitable access to quality basic education to all school going age throughout the country. The primary school enrolment has risen from 2.7 million children in 1997 to 7.3 million in 2003 under the UPE programme.

However, the formal school education system did not for a long time attract Karimajong parents and communities to send their children to school. The formal school system at that time failed to recognize and appreciate the fragile and precarious natural, social structural, cultural dynamics and economic environment in Karamoja and the impact on communities' attitude towards modern development.

The District Education Planner Lomma Philips Lim Lim had the following to say on the situation in Karamoja before ABEK was launched.

"It was not about refusal of education, but rather survival imposing competing needs and demands for labour. Who could be removed in this carefully balanced system of survival? If you remove the boy who looks after the animals and the girl who fetches water, there will not be survival".

THE VISION, MISSION AND OBJECTIVES OF ABEK

The vision of ABEK, and indeed that of Government, is to produce literate, skilled and generally enlightened children, youth and communities to enhance a sustainable development process in the

area. The mission is to increase equitable access to quality basic education by all children and youth in Karamoja Region through participatory approaches and methods involving cultural and civic leaders, parents and grass root communities and the beneficiary target groups.

Objectives of ABEK are mainly two

- To change the Karimojong attitude to education in general and towards education of the girl child in particular, by providing relevant curriculum and teaching all children in Karamoja
- To encourage and create a path to formal school to support Universal primary Education (UPE) in Karamoja

Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) is a non-formal learning program targeting 6 to 18 year old children of pastoral communities in Karamoja. The fore fathers in Karamoja cursed school education through symbolic burial of the pen due to the perceived oppressions by the British colonial governments using the pen during the late 1940s. The ABEK programme started with the symbolic unearthing of the pen by the elders and the community in Karamoja. There the issue of education in Karamoja has been an attitude question.

The programme was conceptualised to bridge the gap between the rigid formal education delivery arrangement and the semi-nomadic pastoral lifestyle where household economies rest substantially on roles fulfilled by children. It was formulated in close consultation with local communities.

Implementation Design, Funding and Implementation of ABEK

The district local governments of Kotido, Moroto, Nakapirpirit and the Ministry of Education and sports started implementing the programme in 1998 with financial and technical support from Save the Children in Uganda. Today the programme is in the process of being mainstreamed into local and central Government strategic plans to enhance development programmes in the Region. So far through a partnership strategy resources have been raised from:

- Save the Children in Uganda (65%)
- Government through the Ministry of Education & Sports (26%)
- Other Development partners (10%) including the implementing districts
- Ministry of Karamoja affairs

The Government is grateful to the Save the Children Uganda and the Stakeholders who have so far funded and sustained ABEK.

Expansion has a direct immediate multiplier implication for the ABEK budget. The local governments' low revenue base presents a substantial obstacle to their capacity to sustain ABEK in its present form, let alone expanded coverage. Steps are under way to make strategic plans to mobilise resources to sustain ABEK. Continued dependence on NGO support puts the programme at risk. The way forward is mainstreaming it but without disrupting its unique foundation.



Photo 3: The learning centre situation

What Makes ABEK Unique?

- Curriculum that is integrated with themes/topics that emphasize reading, writing, numeracy, life skills, occupational skills using learners experiences and exploring their environment thus making their needs (instruction is presented in ten non-linear instructional manuals integrating literacy and numeracy in both English and the local language)
- Flexible study time-learners study in times set by the community for example, 7.00 am – 9.00 am then 7.00 pm to 9.30 pm. This flexibility in the timetable ensures making relevant to their needs
- Indigenous and child centred methods (participatory & functional) employed to provide indigenous knowledge and basic skills relevant to pastoral life
- Local facilitators (paraprofessionals)-community based teachers recruited from immediate vicinity and trained on the job.
- Community learning centres located near manyattas

What is the focus of ABEK curriculum?

- Livestock education
- Crop production
- Environment Management
- Rural Technology
- Home Management
- Uganda our country: Rights & Obligations
- Peace and Security in our community
- Human Health
- Sex Education
- HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

“We want our children to get to lessons in the morning, and when they return in the afternoon, we want to see tangible results”.

Aims of the ABEK learning package

- Compliment formal schooling by encouraging children to join the formal schools in the villages, whenever they are ready to continue with their education. ABEK materials have been developed with equivalence in the formal school for easy placement of children in formal classes.
- Establish a relevant curriculum that focuses on pastoral life within integrated themes and using the local language media of instruction.
- Strengthen the Karimojong involvement in education by encouraging them to place more emphasis on educating children including the girl child.
- Involving communities in all aspects of planning and monitoring of the program

ABEK is a strategic point of entry to the complex dynamics of the broader development challenges facing the Karamoja sub-region. It is a strategic development investment with invaluable returns for the Karamoja sub-region and for relations with neighbouring communities.

ABEK ACHIEVEMENTS

1. ABEK has Generated Enthusiasm for Education and a High Enrolment of Girls

Communities are sending children to the learning centres and following the children to see that they actually learn. Enrolment of girls (19,126) is much higher compared to that of boys (13,729). Overall ABEK enrolment rose from 5,500 (1997) to 32,855 (2004). In the catchment areas, ABEK enrolment supersedes that of formal schools

ABEK was conceptualised to target 6 – 18 year old children out of the formal school system. However, it has attracted adults above 18 years of age, as well as under 6 year old children who follow their elder siblings into the learning centres.

2. ABEK as a Strategy for Realising UPE, MDG's, EFA & CRC

ABEK is encouraging schooling and providing an opportunity for Karimojong children to enter the formal school system. Children are increasingly crossing from ABEK to join the formal school system. In the November 2002 Mark Loli a pupil who had crossed from ABEK to the formal school became the first ABEK product to sit the national Primary Leaving Examination [PLE] heralding a new era of success and challenges for the programme. *[He attained division one with 11 aggregate points]* and over 30 learners sat for PLE.

DISTRICT	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
Kotido	915	799	1,714
Moroto	483	643	1,127

3. Creating a Positive Attitude towards Education



Photo 4: Parents participation in the centre activities

ABEK instruction is based on specialized modules written in the local language “NgaKarimojong”. This has enabled elders to dispel fears that schooling would alienate children from the Karimojong culture.

4. Awareness of Child Rights

There is increased awareness among the Karimojong communities about the concept of Children’s Rights e.g. providing basic education to children as a right. Elders and parents accompany the children to learning centres and some participate in practical activities like music and dance.

5. Realising the Community-School Linkage

As a deliberate strategy, the formulation and implementation of ABEK were highly participatory cultivating a sense of ownership of the initiative

Management Committees at village, parish, subcounty, district and regional levels ensure continued widespread community participation in decision-making and implementation.

This has yielded indirect benefits to the community in the development of managerial capacity and participation of women in decision-making

Within limited means, communities endeavour to ensure a conducive learning environment for children. For instance they construct shelters for classrooms and staff rooms.



Photo 5: Evidence of community support and involvement in programme activities

ABEK presents education as a strong rallying point for discourse on the broader development challenges facing the Karamoja sub-region.

6. Opportunity for Professional Capacity Building

Facilitators, male and female are recruited from school leavers in the community. ABEK has therefore provided an opportunity for youths to serve the community as useful citizens. It has offered a window of access to opportunity for self development and professional growth among the youths in the sub-region. The facilitators have been inspired to seek further professional training and higher education. A number have acquired the national school certified and others graduated as professional teachers.



Photo 6: The role of facilitators in the learning process

Facilitators [ABEK "teachers"] as immediate and most readily available in the community are looked up-to as role models. Today with the few district officers and NGO staff they have created a potent cadre demonstrating to the community the value that schooling offers.

The astounding success ABEK has made in achieving its original goal of popularising education and mobilising pastoral communities to embrace education, has resulted into widespread appeals to have these benefits extended to the entire Karamoja sub-region. This presents new challenges. It necessitates re-examining the ABEK vision, mission, goals and strategies in account of emerging development dynamics in the region, changing aspirations of the community, national policy priorities and global concerns.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION PROGRAMME: A Supplementary Programme to ABEK and UPE programmes

Goal

- To improve the standard of living of the children among the semi-nomadic pastoralists in Karamoja

Overall objectives

- Strengthen Capacity among the Karimojong pastoral communities in order to improve early childhood care, development and education
- To provide emotional support for children and help them create awareness and basic skills among the pastoral communities in Karamoja

Specific objectives

- To reduce infant and Child mortality through community capacity building
- To improve child health, nutrition status and livelihoods among pastoral communities in Karamoja.
- To establish locally sustainable arrangements for improving child cognitive and psychosocial development among pastoral communities in Karamoja.
- To encourage school entry at appropriate ages with increased enrolment, persistence and performance in formal schools and in ABEK learning centres among pastoral communities in Karamoja.

Programme Implementation Approach: A Holistic Strategic for Basic Education

The ECDE programme in Karamoja revitalized the long gone child rearing practices; it's looking into ways of enhancing child centered capacity building in rural communities and the transition from home to school of children. The programme focuses on community based ECDE delivery strategies that have been developed and grounded on the strength of traditional child rearing practices in Karimojong and enriched with modern Knowledge about child development (integrated/holistic approach). This community-based programme has been developed to complement and strengthened the ABEK programme and partly to answer the way to improve

childcare in Karamoja and in itself, it's a process of providing quality basic education among the Karimojong pastoral communities. The programme takes into account the health care, nutrition and psychosocial needs and early stimulation needs of young children 0 to 5 year age group built on traditional practices in selected communities of Karamoja.

ABEK CHALLENGES & PROPOSED INTERVENTION

1. Scaling-up ABEK

Many children are still unable to access ABEK or the formal schools. Communities not reached by ABEK or formal education demands that the programme should be scaled-up urgently to reach their children.

2. Improving Participation – Enrolment and Attendance

Attendance is irregular and hardly constitutes 40% of children enrolled at learning centres.



Photo 7: The involvement of those below 5 years

There is need for a systematic strategy to strengthen sensitization and mobilization of the community to ensure that children attend regularly. Attendance of ABEK by children below 5 years also poses a unique problem to the teachers, who have to manage a multi-aged. On the part of the learners, care for the younger siblings in the class creates distraction.

3. Facilitator Performance

At its inception, ABEK placed more emphasis on access. There is now growing concern about the need to improve the quality of learning. This calls for strengthening the performance of the facilitators and supervisors. There is need to recruit more facilitators especially females to handle new learning centres. Currently, 416 facilitators 81 (19.4%) are female.

ABEK is exploring linkages with the Teacher Training Institutions to conduct regular tailor-made Competence-Based Training coupled with recognised certification to enable ABEK facilitators to improve performance capacity and to realise personal growth as well as professional development. Strengthening quality of instruction in ABEK and equivalence with the formal school system provide basis for facilitators to access national public service payroll.

In ABEK there are no classrooms. Learning in the open windy Karamoja climate is torturous for children and is often disrupted by weather extremes. Children have no better place to sit or place a book to write, than the dusty, sandy or muddy ground. Here they must squat, kneel or lie down to write. There is need to explore a strategy for supporting communities to provide low cost learning shelters, furniture and secure storage. In response to which, the implementing districts propose to pilot a low cost tin-roofed shelter model supported on galvanized pipes, upon securing funding support.



Photo 8: the need to improve the capacity of the facilitators

5. Curriculum, Equivalence & Certification

In ABEK, an education was envisaged where communities would continuously contribute to curriculum that harmonized and enriched indigenous knowledge, skills and values with modernization. Questions of the quality, standard and equivalence of ABEK relative to the formal school system, and ABEK's efficacy in enabling children to compete for national level opportunities are emerging. These issues need to be addresses in the background that ABEK is an entry point and a central component of the equation for addressing the broader question of development in the Karamoja sub-region.

A review of the ABEK curriculum has been proposed to take into account issues of content, its structuring, teaching approaches, assessment, equivalency and certification in the context of ABEK as an accelerated versus an alternative education model.



Photo 9: Developing literacy and numeracy skills

6. Linkages between ABEK, the Formal School System & Community

The growing rate of children who transfer from ABEK to the formal school system is undermined by the increasing rate of children who drop out from the formal schools upon crossing. This presents a need to explore modalities for ensuring a smooth transition from non-formal to formal programmes and follow-up of performance among children who transfer to the formal schools.

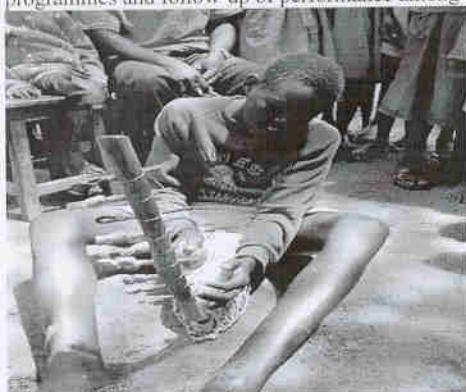


Photo 10: Life skill development for the learners

Joint curricular activities for children, training of formal school staff and regular consultation across schooling systems have been proposed to strengthen linkages and support to children who cross from ABEK to formal schools.

Joint participation of children in formal schools, ABEK children and children out of school in co-curricular activities may promote mutual acceptance among children. Joint participation in co-curricular activities will enrich ABEK programmes and may attract more out-of school children to ABEK and to formal schools.



Photo 11: The Minister of Education GOU & his minister of state Hon. Bitamazire during their routine monitoring of the programme

Previous evaluations have indicated the need to strengthen documentation, monitoring and evaluation as a strategy for improving programme management and efficiency. The programme has embarked on documentation, monitoring, evaluation and information flow arrangements involving all stakeholders (including children) and partners. It is envisaged that this will lead to and support effective advocacy activities to secure favourable national policies on non-formal education and to attract further support for the programme.

8. Target Group & Inclusiveness

As a pillar of UPE, EFA, MDGs & CRC; ABEK strives to ensure universal and equitable access to quality basic education for all children. However, ABEK has not adequately captured the boys who migrate with cattle in search of water and pasture during the dry season. At the same time, ABEK has not adequately addressed the question of children with special learning needs. These pose considerable resource implications for ABEK and the formal school system in terms of providing support, training, materials and physical adjustments to ensure access and meaningful participation in learning activities. There is need to explore modalities of taking education to the children who migrate seasonally with the kraals, as well as identifying partners to provide for the learning needs of the over 18 year-old adults who disrupt learning at ABEK centres.

3. Children with Disabilities

As a thrust for the project period 2003, children with disabilities in ABEK catchment areas are to be purposefully sought-out and where possible enrolled in ABEK and subsequently into the formal school system. Professional / technical and financial / material support is needed. This constitutes a priority component of facilitators' training needs to be met.

Way Forward

Any shortcomings in the implementation will be redressed substantially when ABEK is fully mainstreamed by the Ministry of Education and Sports as an integral component and strategy for realising UPE in Karamoja. There is need to define the critical partners and stakeholders in ABEK and the roles each of the partners and stakeholders should play in ABEK. Particularly, the roles of communities, the District Local Governments and the Ministry of Education & Sports will be re-evaluated and interpreted against constitutional and human rights obligation to the pastoral child of Karamoja. An ABEK Advocacy Task Strategy has been developed with relevant authorities and now facilitating smooth integration of ABEK activities in local and central government budget systems. The Strategy is to be implemented by an Advocacy Task Force comprising The Minister of State for Karamoja, Karamoja Parliamentarians, and the District Leadership in the Karamoja sub-region.

CONCLUSION

Giving equal opportunities to all members of the society is one of the strategies to achieve the objectives and goals of development. In Africa, and in Uganda efforts to promote of opportunities are in many respects constrained by ethnic, cultural and social economic status of some communities. The challenge in this respect is to integrate and transform such societies through targeted and responsive programmes like ABEK.

The time frame during which to achieve the designed change may not matter at this stage; but the process has started.