From the Ground Up

The Challenge of Girl Child Education in Karamoja in 2015

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Executive Summary

This research had at its core a qualitative study of the challenges facing girls in obtaining a quality primary education in Karamoja. It was a micro level, yet systematic study embracing twenty schools in two districts. These schools are the focus of the VSO pilot project EQPE. The study got beneath the stark statistics of girl child education in Karamoja and built up a multi layered picture based on the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders. Importantly, the study included the views of the girl child and provided an insight into their experiences as school children in summer 2015.

The Karamonjong Context

The children’s experiences were conditioned by embedded beliefs, cultural patterns and traditional systems as well as by the physical infrastructure and social environment of the school. The challenges in relation to girls’ education, depicted by those working on the ground, may be grouped into the following interrelated areas:

1. Deeply embedded negative attitude of the community to education and the low value attached to girl’s education. This was not simply indifference or even the absence of financial support, but rather opposition to girls’ education.
2. Economic challenges revolving around widespread poverty, harsh conditions and limited sources of disposable income.

In addition there were policy and security challenges which further aggravated the precarious position of women and girls in this pastoralist society. The point of intersection was at the family or household level where poverty and socio-cultural factors met, driving decisions regarding participation in school. The following factors shaped perceptions and practices in this regard:

- **Girls perceived as a source of wealth:** Norms at community and household levels meant that early marriages and ‘forced’ marriages were common for girls from about 15 years. The practice of the ‘bride price’ raised income for the rest of the household. The impact on girls’ education was further compounded by a relationship not evident in other communities, whether in Uganda or elsewhere. There was a distinct inverse relationship between education and the bride price. The best preparation for a traditional marriage was to stay at home and education was seen as a disadvantage in maximising such wealth.

- **Gendered division of labour:** The unequal division of labour burdened girls with most of the domestic work. Household chores impacted on school participation and performance. Girls were also ‘breadwinners’ in the family and child labour was widespread. There were ‘opportunity costs’ associated with the education of girls and they were frequently pulled out of school as they got older while sending only some of their daughters to school was the response of many.
Linking education and prostitution: There was a strongly voiced belief in the community that girls who go to school become ‘prostitutes’ and have diseases. Girls were seen as ‘spoiled’ if they went to school, in danger of enticement by males and more likely to have multiple partners. Teachers, district education officers, politicians, NGO’s and the girls in school all spoke of this conflation of education and prostitution in the public perception.

Poverty: While there was widespread poverty and very little disposable income, there was also a distinct unwillingness to spend on education. This applied also in situations where families had animal wealth. With UPE in place, there was a perception that education should be totally free and the school or government should look after all the child’s’ needs.

Challenges Faced by Girls
In Karamoja, girls were largely ‘out of school’ or failed to complete primary due to ‘in school’ and ‘out of school’ factors. Community mobilisation campaigns were highlighted as the best response to improving access. However, closer investigation revealed that while such campaigns resulted in an initial boost this was not sustained. There was little systematic follow up of pupils who dropped out, or engagement with community leaders regarding those who did not attend at all. Indeed there was little evidence of any community cohesion regarding school attendance.

There was wide variation in the quality of the accommodation and physical facilities provided by the schools. Despite the construction programmes under way in some schools, the physical infrastructure in others revealed poorly secured classrooms, a lack of school furniture and inadequate toilet and washing facilities. In some, classrooms were in use for teacher accommodation. There was widespread shortage of instructional materials, text books, pens and copies.

It was widely acknowledged that facilities were not adequate for the girl child in the schools. The vast majority pointed towards the disregard for privacy and the lack of changing rooms, latrines, wash basins, soap and sanitary wear. Schools did not provide facilities to ensure that girls were not excluded from full participation because of their maturing bodies. The study documented the ways in which poor management of sexual maturation had a detrimental impact on children’s learning, attendance and overall experience of schooling.

A Conducive School Environment
The option of boarding was positively endorsed by those who took part in the study, even where dormitory facilities were very poor. It allowed time and light for study; lessened the burdens of household work; assisted with menstruation management; and reconfigured the girls’ peer groups. It also helped keep children safe. The girls unequivocally claimed that they felt safer in school than at home. This applied not only to those in boarding but to all the girls. A comprehensive and effective boarding system resides at the core of any attempt to improve girls’ education in Karamoja.

Guidance and counselling were identified by all stakeholders as playing a major role in
supporting girl child education. However, there were major questions concerning the
definition and operationalisation of these roles within schools and of the skill levels
available to fill them effectively.

The provision of food for children in schools was looming as a critical problem with a
reduction in supply from the WFP and their signalling of further disengagement. Despite
this, there was very little evidence of pro active initiatives by individual schools. The
assurance of an adequate and sustainable supply of food, facilitated through VSO income
generation activities within a school setting, could form an important element if targeted
at the enrolment and retention of girls.

The EQPE project has made a substantial impact on teaching and learning in the pilot
schools. It operates within a context where the education system is grossly under
resourced and teacher conditions and morale are poor. Yet there is considerable scope for
additional work to broaden the project’s approach to equity and access given the gendered
context of the schooling experience.

Despite the work undertaken by the SMC’s, the statutory body for school management,
there were questions raised about their effectiveness. There were very poor levels of
literacy among members and doubts were raised about their ability to oversee school
functioning, to understand reports and contribute to strategic development. The EQPE
project had minimal engagement with SMC’s in relation to performance, capacity
building or linkages with the local community.

**Moving Forward**

Within the existing EQPE, programme there is scope to begin to address some of the
factors which penalise Karamojong girls within the education system. A longer term
intervention may well address a specific geographical area in a comprehensive manner,
and operate at multiple levels. Alternatively new programmes may have a much wider
reach but target specific dimensions. Whatever approach is pursued, in addition to the
valuable input of Teacher Educators, there will be a need for broader skills. These
include strategic advocacy skills for political and policy engagement; networking skills to
explore collaboration with civil society organisations working on the ground; and
community mobilisation skills to promote community cohesion in relation to girls’
education.
The Challenge of Girl Child Education in Karamoja in 2015

Background to Research

Over half of Uganda’s young children live in poverty. Children in rural areas are three times more likely to live in extreme poverty than those in urban areas (UNICEF 2014).

In 2014 the Ugandan Government published a National Strategy for Girl Child Education 2015-2019. It documents how the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997 led to substantial progress at national level with a huge rise in the enrolment of eligible pupils. Indeed it claims that recently the education sector has shifted its attention from access to issues of quality. (NSGE, 2014 p.10/11)

The purpose of the NSGE is to establish a clear framework for identification, implementation and coordination of interventions designed to promote girls’ education in Uganda. It is in line with the global commitments to eradicate gender inequalities in education. At the policy level, the Ministry of Education and Sports prioritises gender mainstreaming as a key to the success of achieving equality in the education sector. However the Strategy acknowledges that despite the successes in promoting girls’ education, there are persistent challenges in relation to entry, participation and education outcomes. There are also wide gaps between policy and practice (NSGE, 2014, p.12). It also points out the variations among different categories and geographical areas. Girls’ education vulnerability worsens in specific situations such as of disability, orphanhood and living in hard- to- reach areas, post conflict situations and in specific production systems such as pastoralism. These require targeted interventions (NSGE, 2014, p.18).

This study was located in an area where several of these factors combined to present specific barriers to girl - namely the Karamjoa region in North Eastern Uganda (Figure 1). At the core of this study is the identification of issues affecting girl’s education in Karamoja with a view to informing VSO and Irish Aid in relation to future programmes and interventions in this region.
The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

- To identify the nature and the range of issues providing challenges for girls in accessing and receiving quality primary education in Karamoja.
- To evaluate current provision in the areas encompassed by the VSO pilot project EQPE operating in the two districts of Moroto and Kotido.
- To identify potential strategies for improving the equitable participation of girls in quality education in Karamoja.

This study was based on qualitative research methods, which looked at the dynamics of the situation for the girl child in Karamoja. It engaged a wide range of stakeholders in depicting the every day reality for girls within the primary education system. It was a micro level study which embraced the twenty schools, which are the focus of the EQPE pilot project. The study got beneath the stark statistical data to build up a picture of girls’ education in these two districts. This picture was drawn by those working on the ground and gave an insight into their experiences and perspectives as described in their own
words. Importantly it included the views and attitudes of girls attending the schools.

The Karamoja region has the lowest human development index in the country. The Uganda Education Sector Monitoring Report on Karamoja (2010) highlighted how a combination of factors restrains access to education for children, including a semi-nomadic lifestyle, food insecurity and limited livelihood options, combined with negative community attitudes towards formal education. Internal conflicts, cattle rustling, drought, floods, historical marginalisation, poor infrastructure and disease, affect the Karamoja region. Child poverty rates in Karamoja are 68% (UNICEF 2014). The formal education structure is characterised by inadequate classrooms; overcrowded classes and high pupil teacher ratios; lack of furniture, water and sanitary facilities in the schools; and inadequate instructional materials. The Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (2011) showed how enrolment and attendance rates in Karamoja were significantly lower than for the rest of the country. According to the UNICEF Annual Report for 2014, in the Northern region of Uganda, a full 20% of children never attended school.

VSO interventions in the two districts in Karamoja have highlighted the discrepancies between the educational experiences of girls and boys in primary education, whether viewed in terms of enrolment, performance, completion or transition to second level. For example, in Moroto District just 13% of girls are reported as completing primary education (Moroto District Education Conference July 2015). According to the census reports there were 23,154 girls between the ages of 6 and 12 years in Moroto district and only 4,786 were in school (Moroto District Education Conference July 2015).

**Schools in the Pilot Project**

*The enrolments of both primary and secondary schools in the district are far lower compared to other districts in the country (Moroto District Education Conference 2015).*

Of the twenty schools in the EQPE pilot project, ten are located in Moroto district and ten in Kotido (Figure 2). So what are these schools like? What are their profiles in terms of staffing, pupils, enrolment and the numbers of children who drop out? Importantly what do the Head Teachers and other key actors say about the challenges facing the girl child in primary school and what is the school doing to address these?

Findings are based on analysis of an open ended questionnaire completed by the Head Teacher in each of the twenty schools. A sample of ten of these schools were randomly selected for a detailed study (Figure 3). In addition to the questionnaire, primary data were generated through semi-structured, face to face interviews, focus group discussions and in depth interviews with a range range of stakeholders. These key research participants are depicted in Figures 4 and 5. The research methodology and number of participants in each category are presented in Appendix One.
Figure 2  Kotido and Moroto Schools Participating in the Study
Figure 3  Kotido and Moroto Schools Participating in the Detailed Study
The vast majority of the schools in the pilot project were government schools with just one community school in Moroto. At the time of the study, 341 teachers were employed in these schools. The number of teachers in individual schools ranged from 8 to 41. Half of the schools had less than 12 teachers (Figure 6).
Overall 38% of the teachers were female. The ratio was higher in Kotido (Figure 7). This overall ratio concealed a lot of variation from school to school with a low of 4% of female teachers in one school, to a high of 60% in two schools. (See Appendix Two, Table A3 for Details).
Sending and Keeping Girls in School

*In the Karamojong context, a school is a major source for producing prostitutes and for the spread of HIV infections* (Head Teacher, Moroto).

Looking at the period from January 2014 to April 2015, a total of 2294 pupils were reported by the Head Teachers as having dropped out of the 20 schools. In Moroto 445 girls and 369 boys dropped out from the ten schools. In Kotido 752 girls and 728 boys dropped out. These figures should be viewed in the context of overall enrolment and this is depicted, as well as a school by school breakdown, in Table A6 in Appendix Two.

The causes given for drop out by children were several and complex. They may be broadly grouped into the following arenas:

- Causative factors in the home - economic pressures; children as breadwinners; lack of parental care; source of labour for household chores.
- Strong socio-cultural forces - early marriage, forced marriages, gender based violence, unequal gender division of labour, negative community attitudes towards education, peer influence, lack of role models.
- School factors - distance from home to school; unfriendly school environment; poor teaching and instructional materials; teachers’ attitudes; harassment or sexual abuse; and low achievement rates.

These arenas all interacted with each other. It was apparent that both boys and girls were dropping out of school. However, Head Teachers were unequivocal that the problem was of much greater proportions in relation to the girl child. In commenting on why children in general were dropping out 70% of the Head Teachers highlighted negative attitudes on the part of the parents (See Figure 9 and Table A8, Appendix Two).
In looking at why the girl child dropped out, the reasons given by Head Teachers were much more specific (See Figure 10 and Table A9, Appendix Two). Viewing girls as a source of wealth was most frequently mentioned, followed by the related problems of early and forced marriage. The role of the girl child in domestic work and as a bread winner in the family followed closely behind:

Because parents use them as a source of income to the family by making them take firewood and charcoal to town for sale. Also making girls sell local brew in order to earn some income for domestic survival. (Head Teacher, Moroto)

Almost the same problem when girl goes to school and comes home. She finds there is nothing at home to eat. She feels bad and the younger ones are hungry. They go to work in town to get food for the family. (Chairman PTA, Moroto)
The Deputy Head Teachers and Senior Teachers elaborated on some of the reasons for high drop out among girls. While described in different ways by the thirty four Deputy Head Teachers and Senior Teachers, the following were major reasons consistently identified:

- The belief that if girls go to school they will become ‘prostitutes’.
- Parents encouraged the girls to get married in order to acquire wealth and the most advantageous preparation was to be based at home.
- Parents lacked money for school fees, scholastic materials or uniforms. If paying fees parents preferred to do so for boys only as there was no return for them on any investment in girls’ education.
- Girls were engaged in all forms of domestic chores, were income earners and needed at home.
- As girls reached maturation, the problems posed by menstruation caused them to feel uncomfortable at school and to drop out
- Teenage pregnancies which inevitably resulted in girls leaving school.

This is how Teachers, an SMC member and District Education Official explained why girls dropped out of school:

Remote areas like this - when parents see girls are getting mature, they pull the girls out of school to do the cooking, to feed elders, to do other work. The girls are sent to town for
casual labour and they work to get something to feed the family. In towns they go to families and fetch water for them. They are given food which they take home or the little money that is thrown at them they buy food and take it home. Others buy booze and sell it or take it to the village and sell it ... Girls are at home doing chores - at home preparing for traditional marriage. As early as the age of 15, most girls are married. Marriages are organised by the parents and sometimes the girl may not be aware of the arrangements. They normally force their daughters to marry so that they can get animals in the form of a dowry. (Deputy Head Teacher, Kotido)

Reason girls drop out is early marriages - depends on the parents but some are even sold for marriage by them. Sold at fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years for cows. (Vice Chairman SMC, Kotido)

We have a girl who is 15 years old in P3 who the parents are forcing to marry. The girls don’t want and the parents force them and some times they drop from school and go and hide. (Senior Teacher, Kotido)

In Karamoja the girl child is not exposed. She is always someone that is supposed to be at home. She is supposed to do the domestic chores - even the building is done by the girl child - fencing, digging everything. For a home to be a home - it is totally up to the girl child. For a child to be released to go to school is depriving the family of some one to do the work. Often they will only release the girl child with disabilities - because she is not as valuable for the work. (DEO Kotido)

Early marriages were not confined to Karamoja. The United Nations Girl’s Education Initiative (UNGEI) reported that 46.5% of girls below the age of 18 years get married. However, in Karamoja there is the perception that the less educated the girl child, the more valuable she is to the family as a source of wealth. Unlike in other communities in Uganda there is a distinct inverse relationship between the level of education and the dowry price. Girls who go to school it is claimed do not fetch as good a ‘bride price’ and the best preparation for a traditional marriage is to be at home.

The perception that girls become ‘prostitutes’ if they go to school was consistently voiced not only by the Teachers, by SMC and PTA members but also by the girls themselves in focus discussion groups. It was a strongly held belief in the community and was linked with the idea of girls being ‘spoiled’, more likely to have multiple partners and exposed to disease if educated:

This community of ours - they say when girls go on to school - when they come back they have already adopted bad things - like prostitution. Say girls should stay at home so that they can get the best price. Those not going to school get highly paid - 50 cows for some. (Senior Teacher, Moroto)

They believe that when you send a girl child to school she can become a prostitute - as they believe that any marriage outside their traditional culture is prostituting. They also believe that educated girls are lazy. (Senior Teacher, Kotido)

Educated girls are seen as harlots and would not fetch high prices during marriage (Senior Teacher, Kotido)
Most Karamojongs believe that educated girls are prostitutes and have HIV/AIDS.
(Chairman PTA, Moroto)

Clearly the status of the girl child in Karamoja exerts a major influence on why they drop out or never go to school. This was acknowledged by members of SMC’s and PTA’s:

Parents do not actually value education for the girls. They prefer girls for wealth. There is no need to take a girl to school. Girls are born for wealth in the villages. Girls are domestically people who are supposed to do household work. They do not see girls as the same as boys. The boys despise girls - they have a bad attitude. They see them as not performing. Boys say they are not capable of education - they are stupid! There is forced marriages by parents even when the girl is in school - she is withdrawn. (Vice Chairman SMC, Kotido)

Parents attitudes towards school is very bad as they tend to think that it’s a waste of time to educate the girl child as she will end up being a member of another family after marriage. (Chairman PTA, Moroto)

While overwhelmingly negative parental attitudes towards education were blamed for dropping out, the lack of facilities for girls and peer influences were also highlighted:

Girls in school - look at Karamojong girls - you will not see a drop out rate like that in other areas. Problem is with facilities. Government may have the intention but there is nothing there - no facilities for girls. (Chairman SMC, Moroto)

Another thing is the influence of the peer group - it’s a negative one of course - that is why they drop out. Those ones who influence the others - they distract them from school; they do their own thing and want them to follow them. They say what is the use of education? (Deputy Head Teacher, Kotido)

How the School Addresses Dropping Out.

The primary, and in some cases the only response by schools to the problem of dropping out is through sensitisation of parents and education campaigns (Table A10 Appendix Two). Just four of the Head Teachers pointed towards counselling of the girls, with smaller numbers mentioning follow up of the parents. A small number referred to activities of SMC and PTA or the involvement of Child Protection Services. As depicted in Figure 11 the Senior Teachers and members of SMC’s also tended to echo these responses:

Child Protection Committee assists sometimes in situations of forced marriage. The police are brought on board to handle the situation in cases of early marriage and denying the girl her rights. (Head Teacher, Kotido)
The child is at risk of being ‘married off’ and ‘by force’. Some run away from home. Have a girl here who resisted – and her parents came to school. We had to go to the police. She is kept here during the school year and is boarded out the rest of the time. She has run away. She does not go home at all. (Senior Teacher, Moroto)

A child from P3 here and her mother followed her to school. The child wanted to go to school but her mother said she wanted the child to collect firewood and do other work. We threatened her (the mother) with the police. The child continued to come and is now a boarder. School had to get assertive. (Senior Teacher, Moroto)

The Chairman of one SMC saw the solution lying in a strict enforcement of the law to compel parents to send their children to school:

Those who refuse to bring children to school should be brought before the law and the law should act with conviction. (Chairman SMC, Kotido)

There have been many initiatives such as the Go to School, Stay in School, Go Back to School Campaigns. At such major mobilisations, the value of education for the girl child was emphasised and parents were urged to send their children to school. Often the school, SMC’s, PTA’s, and the District were involved with support from a body such as UNICEF. These campaigns tended to result in increased enrolment and attendance initially. However this was not always sustained:

When PTA meetings are organised we talk with the parents especially about the
advantages of the girl child coming to school. When going on campaigns for more children to come to school - parents are the focus. We use the Churches too - to talk about the importance, so the message can be given. Parents initially accept this but then later it starts dropping off slowly. One time free books were provided and girls came in great numbers. Almost 400 in one week. Next week, no books no children! (Senior Teacher, Moroto)

SMC mobilises to bring children to school. When we make a follow up we find that they have all gone back to their homes. (Chairman SMC, Kotido)

We can mobilise these children to school - come in their hundreds, even thousands throughout the District. Within a week they are back home. (DEO Kotido)

Another SMC member reported on their own efforts:

We encourage the parents - we follow up in the villages and say to them why not send the girls to school? Parents just send one or two children to school. Want one to be a shepherd, others to fetch firewood. They send younger ones to school then taken them out as they get older or they don’t send some at all. (Vice Chairman SMC, Kotido)

UNICEF also acknowledged that campaigns were not enough to make a lasting change and positive outcomes were not sustained over time. UNICEF emphasised how the district and schools needed to work together on how best to retain those who come to school as a result of campaigns. The issue of local leaders not sending their own children to school was also seen as problematic. The advisability of campaigns driven by district education officials was also questioned and one PTC staff member suggested that the ‘top down’ approach adopted was not effective and campaigns needed to be driven by local people.

Role of Teachers

Carrying out continuous and effective guidance and counselling services and following up the absentees (Head Teacher, Moroto).

Of all the actions that teachers could take to improve education for the girl child, guidance and counselling were by far the most frequently mentioned by the Head Teachers (Table A12 Appendix Two). Other interventions included the follow up of pupils who dropped out, sensitising parents and advocating for boarding facilities. Just a small number mentioned creating a participatory learning environment or improving the quality of teaching. Provision of sanitary wear for the girls followed on guidance and counselling in frequency of mention. These two activities were seen as interrelated with much of the counselling focused on the management of menstruation.
The Senior Man Teacher and Senior Woman Teacher are promoted staff positions and these teachers provide guidance and counselling in the schools. They have a duty to ensure all learners are well supported including those particularly vulnerable and this includes issues of gender. In the interviews with Senior Woman and Senior Man Teachers as well as those with Deputy Head Teachers the importance of these activities were consistently emphasised:

*Always trying to teach them personal hygiene during menstruation. Now that we are training them they don’t stay out of school for 5 days every month - have something to protect them ... Those who come to school, teachers get a chance to talk with them - provide them with materials. Make the school environment friendly. Some are intimidated by fellow students and teachers as they grow and develop. Some girls are not given prior knowledge of the changes that will take place in them and of menstruation. They are shy about it and don’t come.* (Senior Teacher, Moroto)

High rates of menstruation related absenteeism among primary school girls extends beyond Karamoja in Uganda. UNICEF points out how menstruation for many girls means ‘no more education’. It estimates that about 23% of adolescent girls between the ages of 12 and 18 drop out after they begin menstruating (UNICEF Uganda, Annual Report 2014). However, where this is combined with chronic poverty, grossly inadequate sanitary facilities in schools and a negative community attitude to the education of girls, the impact can be devastating. The discussions with the girls highlighted how it led to non attendance for many on a regular basis and to dropping out by others.

The National Strategy for Girls’ Education 2015 -2019 highlights the open commitment to addressing issues of sexuality and menstruation as a public/school issue. It talks of the ‘remarkable promotion of menstrual management practices’ in schools through keeping emergency sanitary pads, additional sets of school uniforms, making sanitary pads during art and craft lessons, having wash rooms and changing rooms (NSGE, 2014, p.12). Unfortunately there was little evidence of these initiatives in the schools in the pilot project.

While counselling and guidance is clearly an important function of teachers, its application in the schools seemed to operate within very narrow parameters and was concerned primarily with hygiene, managing menstruation and advising of the dangers of early marriage, pregnancies and sexual behaviours:

*It is a very good structure here for counselling. Sometimes boy and girls are separated for it but also good to have them together. Girls informed of their rights and their responsibilities; on how to behave as a girl and woman. Need to address boys too on these issues.* (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto)
There was no evidence of any focus on psycho-social support, more complex personal development issues or actual career guidance. However, the Chairman of one SMC recognised the importance of a more engaged form of counselling:

*Counselling session with girls – people who will really listen. It’s not just physical things. Parents can’t do this, because once the girls are discouraged from school, it’s even better for the parents – easier for them to get her married. Counselling skills needed for the Senior Woman Teacher – identify the challenges the girls are going through. Some are very confused – men wanting them, inveigling them and they trying to remain in class.* (Chairman SMC, Moroto)

Warrior Squad also emphasised the important role which counselling plays in relation to children in post conflict situations such as in Karamoja. Personnel from the two PTC’s spoke of the critical importance of counselling and guidance support in the schools. They recognised the limitations of what was available in terms of training and the scant documentation within school systems of the issues confronting the girl child:

*Counselling is very weak in primary schools. All are supposed to have a counselling room. Don’t even have enough classrooms. If had a well trained counsellor they could use their skills anywhere. Counsellors are not doing their jobs in some cases. Instead of the Senior Woman Teacher being approachable - she can be arrogant. Don’t know how they were appointed - some are just not approachable. Children who come late are punished. Children sleeping in classroom are threatened. Those performing very poorly - no one asks why? Population of children is big, but we fail to help these children. From P1 until P7 if they are badly performing - no one picks up on it.* (PTC, Personnel)

The National Strategy for Girls’ Education highlighted the importance of personal development of girls in school. It claimed that the majority of the young girls lacked skills to negotiate life challenges, largely due to the gendered socialization they are subjected to at family community and school level. Life skills include high self-esteem, assertiveness, decision making, communication and generally relating with others. In schools, the absence of a life skills focus hurts girls most, due to their already disadvantaged position. (NSGE, 2014, p.16)

In the interviews, Deputy Head Teachers and Senior Woman and Senior Man Teachers regularly highlighted the importance of teaching methods. A number of teachers in each of the schools in the study had benefited from the VSO programme with its focus on co-operative learning, enhancing teacher capacity and improved instructional materials. Teachers clearly play a vital role in developing positive learning environments and in providing learning activities which engage the interests of children in their classes. Teachers spoke of their efforts to incorporate these approaches in their work:

*Teaching methods that encourage girls perform - group discussion between girls and boys. Learners given tasks to encourage responsibility. Teachers cater for individual differences. Female teachers have skills of handling girls in class ...* (Deputy Head Teacher, Kotido)
Teachers use interactive methods of teaching. Attempt to motivate both girls and boys. If giving group work we mix the groups. Girls are much fewer here in the school than boys - smaller numbers. For example - in my class there are 19 girls and 40 boys! (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto)

Be gender sensitive in giving out responsibilities. Not all should be given to the boys e.g. responsibility for time keeping. Girls are less inclined to come forward. Boys have morale. Girls are more shy. (Senior Teacher, Moroto)

The ratio of female teachers in the school and its impact on girl’s participation was raised with the Head Teachers. All except two claimed it made a difference, while a further three said that the actual number did not matter so much as having a ‘good’ Senior Woman Teacher (Table A13, Appendix Two). Those who held it made a difference suggested that the girl was more open with female teachers, they understood the problems of the girl, were more ‘maternal’ and could give guidance on menstruation. Others pointed towards their importance as role models (Figure 12). However the problems of retaining female teachers in more remote rural areas was raised:

Was a time when schools did not have any Senior Woman Teacher or indeed any female teachers at all. Who do the girls turn to – a male teacher? Apart from recruitment of female teachers, there is also the issue of retention. How many female teachers will go to and stay in Tapac? Only one is there at present. There are plans to have three. Will you attract them and retain them? Female teachers too are worried by issues of security and safety. (UNICEF)

On occasions during the interviews there was some criticism of teachers, their approach and their interaction in class with the girls. This sometimes came from the teachers themselves:

Some teachers have bad language with the girls. If the girls give a wrong answer they say: Ah, you’re ready for marriage! (Senior Teacher, Moroto)

Some teachers when they rebuke the child - are very harsh especially male teachers in particular. They say - look at you; you are old enough to be married. Look at your breasts! It makes it very hard for girls. (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto)

In some instances there was criticism by SMC members of absenteeism by teachers, and of their drinking, leading to a call for restrictions on their movements:

All schools should be fenced - including the teacher accommodation. Early in the morning - some of them are going drinking - evening also. They should be contained! (SMC member, Kotido)

Indeed the problem of alcoholism in schools and the possible prohibition on the brewing of alcohol by parents and teachers in schools was raised at the Moroto Conference on Education in July 2015.
A Conducive School Environment

We can’t give our girl children all they need like washing buckets and basins - one for each child. We do not have that. They don’t have shoes, often clothes are torn. The child is just abandoned (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto).

There were severe reservations expressed about the school environment for the girl child. Almost three quarters of the Head Teachers said facilities were not adequate, with the vast majority pointing to the lack of privacy, changing rooms, wash basins, sanitary wear and latrines for girls (Table A14, Appendix Two). A small number mentioned the absence of a counselling room. However the wider physical infrastructure of the school was also assessed as inadequate with the absence of perimeter fencing, trespassing by the public and grazing animals, lack of water in the school compound and open classrooms raising issues of safety for several schools. The condition of dormitories in relation to bedding, absence of lighting systems, and provisions for washing were also raised:

Unfriendly environment in the school. Some schools have no washing rooms. When menstruating - girls stay at home ... Girls fear to be close to anyone during this time. They may stay away for 5 days. We tell them to come to us - they will be helped. (Senior Teacher, Moroto)
During menstruation periods girls are not safe due to lack of pads and other accessories. They do not have stated facilities for privacy. Door shutters are not there due to poor construction in schools, changing rooms are not available and these make girls think they are not catered for. (Head Teacher, Kotido)

We need changing rooms for the girls. Also want to have a female stay with them in the dormitory and would like to see a sick bay. Basic things like sanitary pads and mats - so if they are sick they could lie down. (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto)

Personal hygiene and training the girls to make pads. We can’t get the materials though. We need cloth, cotton wool, gauge, sewing thread, scissors. We don’t have the money to buy these. We are planning to do an income generating activity. ‘Straight Talk Foundation’ has promised to help but have not delivered. (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto)

The management of menstruation and the provision of sanitary wear posed what seemed to be an insurmountable challenge in many schools. However, a small number were tackling this issue systematically and it was not seen as a major deterrent to girls’ attendance and retention:

Girls do come to school during their menstrual cycle. We provide them with the sanitary wear and we have a shower room for them. Wash basins are available and sometimes clothes to cover themselves. The facilities here ... are good for the girl child. (Senior Teacher, Kotido)

The study revealed that there were some training activities in the two districts on the making of sanitary pads. For example a reusable sanitary pad initiative was researched and supported by FAWE-K (Forum for African Women Educationalists - Kenya Chapter). Training Workshops were provided by the Medical Assistance Programme (MAP) in December 2014 in Kacheri sub county sponsored by the Church World Service. However, even in schools where training was provided, difficulties were raised about the availability of affordable local materials.

Boarding in Karamoja

The girls are safe in the boarding school. They are safe here unlike when they are at home. More safe here. At home they don’t have good sleeping arrangements. They are not exposed to being engaged (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto).

Boarding facilities, as a major factor in the retention of the girl child in primary school, were identified by a number of Head Teachers. These were also consistently raised in the interviews with Senior Teachers, representatives of SMC’s, NGO’s and PTC’s. The provision of boarding facilities at primary level is a specific policy initiative for the
Karamoja region. The contribution of Irish Aid to the school’s infrastructure was regularly acknowledged in this regard:

Was an Affirmative Action Programme taken to have boarding schools in Karamoja. Declared as a policy – but the Government did nothing about it. Without Irish Aid - it would not have happened even if it was stated Government policy. (UNICEF)

Long distances to school. Not the same problem for boys but is for girls in going to school. If is no security - they feel very vulnerable. Once they are raped they are ready to be married off. ... Schools supported by Irish Aid provide boarding facilities – and definitely enrolment improves. (UNICEF)

Government has allowed for Karamoja to have boarding schools. Even then some of the girls still go back home. Parents do not take on to provide for their children. (DEO, Kotido)

The relative safety of the school environment, in comparison with home was consistently highlighted:

Safe in boarding rather than out with the parents. Here there are rules, guidelines, mentoring, people to listen to problems. Teachers monitor the interaction of the girls and what they do - it is much easier here. They have to get permission if absent or are not where they should be on time. They are cautioned. Especially girl children, because we know how vulnerable they are. (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto)

Being in boarding reduced the chances of the girl being ‘carried off by the warriors’. This could take place at any time:

The boy or man just grabs the girl and takes her to his place and then arranges to go to the parents to announce that he is the one for the girl and pay the dowry. (Chairman PTA, Moroto)

Boarding was seen as offering many other advantages apart from safety for the girls and these are outlined in Figure 13. Just two of the schools in the detailed study - one in Moroto and one in Kotido - did not provide dormitory facilities. One of these schools had no girls at all in grades P6 or P7:

The school is fenced so it is safe from that point of view. But we don’t have the dormitories for girls. In the case of girls - if we put boarding facilities in place it will be easier to keep them in school. No boarding for anyone here. Those who are at home have the responsibility to collect fire wood. They may be in casual labour in town where they get a little money. Boarding school would remove girls from the family and some of these responsibilities. (Senior Teacher, Moroto)

Boarding was not without its challenges both for the school and for the girls:

At the school - not as much labour as at home - where you have to access water supply, do all domestic work. One at home is vulnerable to be married straight away. One at school may be safe but is overwhelmed with all the needs - school materials, pens and books - puts
them in positions of vulnerability. Neither children are safe. School child has her own challenges. Village child has her own. (Chairman SMC, Moroto)

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**Advantages of Boarding for Girls**

- Reduces Forced Marriages
- Enhances Child Protection
- Improves Support with Menstruation
- Relieves Burden of Household Work
- Reduces Negative Peer Influences
- Allows for More Study Time

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**Figure 11** Advantages of Boarding

Fees still presented a problem for many schools. Although the contribution required was small, ranging from 10,000 shillings to 30,000 shillings, it was frequently a torturous process to get it paid. Deputy and Senior Teachers spoke of fees being submitted in amounts of 2,000 and by the end of the school year, some of it still outstanding.

Despite the importance of boarding facilities for girls and an extensive construction programme in some schools, there were very poor conditions in some of the dormitories:

*Some of the schools are turning classrooms into dormitories - no exit doors, no fire extinguishers, sleeping on floor - no bedding.* (DEO Kotido)

At the Moroto District Education Conference in July 2015, the urgent need to provide beds, mattresses and solar lighting systems was raised. The poor conditions in dormitories were also patently obvious when visiting schools in both districts. One school ‘dormitory’ was in a hall divided at waist level by a piece of wood, with children sitting exams on one side, while the other provided sleeping accommodation. Of the 18 bunk beds about half had mattresses and few had bed clothes. Only three mosquito nets were evident. Here the girls shared beds with friends who had mattresses. In contrast there were very fine buildings in the process of being built in some schools, which will
provide good quality accommodation.

In several of the schools teachers spoke of the need for some form of medical facility in the dormitories. They called for a room with mats where children could lie down if ill, nursing care to be available, or someone to be present at night for the girls. At the Education Conference in Moroto the fact that boarding schools do not have matrons to take care of children in the dormitories was identified as an issue with a proposal to begin such recruitment in the autumn of 2015.

**Feeding School Children**

*If food is there - the girl child will be there* (Warrior Squad Foundation).

Teachers claimed that nothing impacted quicker on school enrolment and attendance by the girl child than the availability of food in the schools. The provision of food in the schools presented major challenges. There was a huge dependence on the WFP which provided one meal a day to the schools. However, this programme was disengaging in terms of quality and quantity of food and schools were being encouraged to become more proactive, to develop their own gardens and a more sustainable food supply. There was little evidence of this happening. A few schools said they were waiting for seeds, while others speculated about the acquisition of land for cultivation. Just a very small proportion of the schools visited displayed any systematic cultivation:

-WFP provides food but not as in the past. Had beans, poshu and vegetables. But now only maize. Have introduced some school gardens so schools can become self reliant. We have a garden but we’re waiting for seeds. (Vice Chairman SMC, Kotido)

-We’re ignorant about education matters. But it’s very difficult to send a girl to school if there is no food from the WFP. No food in school, no food at home. You can’t remain in school. WFP is only giving a little food now and other food is provided for the boarders and paid for by the parents. (PTA member, Kotido)

-Government is not aiding this school. It is a Community School. When we have no food the child says why should I go there and starve? School needs to secure funds and food. If WFP provide lunch, if there is something there the children will come and then others will come. (Senior Teacher, Moroto)

-WFP providing food. By next year it will stop. We will have to provide food for the children - it’s very important. Lunch is provided. They need it. It helps the spirit of learning. (Vice Chairman SMC, Kotido)

Over ten years ago a gender specific initiative was introduced by the WFP in Karamoja to address equity imbalances in school enrolment. It provided the incentive of ‘Girls Take Home Rations’ and was linked to regular attendance at school by the girl child. It also helped to compensate parents for the loss of the girl’s labour while she was at school. It
ran until 2010 and focused on classes from P4 upwards. It was acknowledged by teachers, district education officials and politicians as very successful. However, it ended when the WFP experienced a sharp reduction in its funding from its donors. When this programme finished attendances dropped.

The drought of the past few years has not helped in terms of encouraging more sustainable cultivation by individual schools. At the Moroto District Conference (July 2015) there was discussion about identifying a green belt for food production in the district to be supported by the new dry land project (Millennium Promise). Whatever initiatives are taken, the provision of food in schools is critical and directly impacts on the attendance and retention of girls.

**Academic Performance of Girls**

*Very few girls from here go to second level. They are willing and most are well qualified. If they want to go, the parents say there is no money for fees. You see the girls languishing in town and you feel bitter for them. They lose morale. The problem is money*  (Senior Teacher, Moroto).

The teachers, training colleges and district education personnel all concluded that boys performed substantially better than girls in school. This was also widely acknowledged by the girls in the focus discussion groups. The fact that the girls attended school less consistently and were over burdened with domestic chores was most frequently cited as the reason:

*Boys are better when comes to performance. These boys attend school regularly. Girls are less regular - absent because they are sent to the other side, or have to work at home. The boys come every day. Maybe girls miss a full week. Miss out on some important teaching. They can't catch up on the lessons taught to others ... There is little reading culture for the girl child ... They have no contact with their books with so much housework. Girls cannot sit and read. Boys can read more and later in the evenings. The girl child is too busy.*  (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto)

However the lack of confidence on the part of girls in class was also seen as a factor:

*Boys put up their hands all the time. Need to call on the girls as well and deliberately bring them in so that their shyness goes away and they keep on doing. Do not leave the girls quiet.*  (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto)

The Chairman of one PTA was inclined to blame teachers for the performance of girls:

*The teachers are also to blame for the poor performance of the girl child because some tend to neglect them or use abusive language which makes them shy away from school.*  (Chairman PTA, Moroto)
Even where extra help was available to those struggling in some way at school, issues of the girls’ safety were sometimes seen as a deterrent to its take up:

Also the girl child will not take up remedial teaching if they are struggling because it is done late - fear of abuse by male teachers providing the extra tuition. Also they are afraid then of going home late after extra tuition. (Deputy Head Teacher, Moroto)

This under performance by girls was not confined to Karamoja. Overall in Uganda girls lag behind in the completion of primary education as well as achievement in the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE). In addition, fewer girls than boys sit the exam (MoES 2012 and UNGEI p.8), The National Strategy for Girls’ Education concludes that engaging in early sex, early marriages, as well as teenage pregnancies are current pressing blockages to girls’ concentration, performance and completion of different levels of education. (NSGE, 2014, p.15)

Teachers in the detailed study reported that few of the girls continued in formal education after primary education:

They want, but school fees are a problem. Parents could sell a goat to pay for school fees, but no! It is so painful to get them to sell off anything. Child goes up to P7 and goes looking for sponsors. If they fail it automatically means that is the end of the journey - this is for boys too. Some are sponsored by missionary men and woman. (Senior Teacher, Moroto)

Sponsorship by organisations such as FAWE and BRAC reached very few of these girls because of their emphasis on high performing pupils:

Girls get discouraged when they get to P7 and then go home because they have no money to proceed. Some organisations like BRAC - only sponsor those at Division One. (Deputy Head Teacher, Kotido)

FAWE - only small numbers are supported. They pick out a couple of dozen out of 500 applications. For others it’s all finished - end of their hopes. Nothing for them now but to go home. (DEO Kotido)

FAWE give money to children for education - but it is only to the children of the rich. It should be up to the school to identify the well performing children. BRAC - are only aiming at first class children. As a result mostly boys are taken because they do much better than girls. (Deputy Head Teacher, Kotido)
School, Parents and Community

Community attitude is that girl education is of no benefit, a waste of resources and a serious drop in family labour force (Head Teacher, Moroto).

A conducive school environment was only one part of the picture for the girl child in Karamoja. The girls’ interaction with school was influenced by their families and by their community. The Head Teachers were asked about the role that parents play in relation to the education of their girl children. Less than half of them said parents provided some support such as scholastic materials, fees, uniform, soap, sanitary materials (See Figure 14 and Table A15, Appendix Two). A quarter said that while some provided essentials, many did not. A further 20% described the sole contribution of parents as actually sending or allowing the girl child to attend school. Of course many parents sent only some of the girls in the family to school.

![Diagram: Parental Role - Girl Child Education](image)

**Figure 12  Role Parents Play**

Teachers and district education officials spoke of the perception that Universal Primary Education (UPE) meant ‘free’ education. Some parents presumed that the Government and the schools would provide everything the child needed if they sent them to school. One official described the attitude as follows:

*Parents feel that education belongs to the Government. They say - you wanted the children - now we’ve sent them - you look after their needs.* (DES, Kotido)

One Chairman of a School Management Board was very critical of some parents’ attitudes to education:
Some have money - all wasted on drinking. Yet they can’t support their children’s’ education. They fail to raise money for the child to continue. We try for sponsorships, bursaries, NGO’s - it’s very difficult. Parents should be fined 100,000 shillings if they fail to send their children to school. The government should take some action. Parents don’t know the value of education. (Chairman, SMC Kotido)

The lack of government action in relation to Gender Based Violence (GBV) which impacts so negatively on the girls’ education was raised in several interviews:

Also get government and law enforcement agencies to take action against those who spoil these young children from school - others should learn that you cannot do it! No steps are taken - they just divide up the cows and goats. (Deputy Head Teacher, Kotido)

The most dangerous thing here is the defilement of girls. About 6 or 7 girls are defiled here every month. When a girl is pregnant she is sent home and does not continue with her education. This defilement is a big factor influencing the school. Girls get pregnant at dances or in the villages and in centres. They meet outside - fellow students. They buy drink, defile her and then reject her. Only 14 or 15 years - it’s not right. Still too young. (Chairman, SMC Kotido)

In some rural areas the continuing practice of FGM was blamed for preventing young girls from attending school:

There is FGM in the region. When a girl is mutilated - they think she is ready for marriage. (PCT Personnel)

One school described its intervention in rescuing two sisters of eight and ten years, one of whom had already been mutilated. The school placed them in a boarding facility away from their home village where they were able to continue their schooling.

The problem of sexual abuse of girls is prevalent in other parts of Uganda as well. The National Strategy on Girls’ Education reiterates that girls are at risk of sexual abuse - rape, defilement and enticement - by males of all kinds. It points out how rape and defilement are particularly common in societies that have experienced disruption such as war affected areas in northern Uganda and parts of the Karamoja region, among others, and concludes that sexual abuse remains one of the top challenges to girls’ education. (NSGE, 2014, p.15)

In exploring the ways in which the school worked with parents to improve access for the girl child, almost three quarters of Head Teachers mentioned the activities of the SMC’s and PTA’s and mobilisation and sensitisation campaign. Smaller numbers (20%) identified joint work on improving physical facilities in the school or supplementing the food programme, while others saw the relationship simply as around enrolling children in school. (See Table A16 Appendix Two)
Three quarters of Head Teachers were unequivocal in describing the attitude of the community to girl child education as negative (See Table A17, Appendix Two). Perceptions of the child as a commodity, a source of wealth and labour and the persistent pattern of withdrawing the girl child from school as she got older, were most frequently cited as indicators of this. One senior teacher in a rural school suggested that differing ethnicities was a factor influencing the relationships between the community and school:

_Relationship between school and community is passive. Some are ready to participate in school activities, others have no interest. Most of them are not supportive to the school because the school staff is comprised of different ethnic groups. Therefore they see them as alien, as strangers._ (Senior Teachers, Kotido)

One district education official spoke of the lack of community cohesion regarding education. He said one week the girl child was at school, the second week she was at home, the third week she was at home. Yet no one went to see what is happening!

Despite the negative attitude of the community to education, virtually all the Head Teachers reported having a positive and strong relationship with the community. Prompt community responses to calls for assistance, or in tackling fencing, security or water problems were all mentioned. Working positively with SMC's, PTA's and Local Councillors, sharing decision making and the existence of ‘trust’ were also highlighted. Smaller numbers mentioned community engagement around monitoring teachers’ attendance and performance (TableA18, Appendix Two).

**Community Engagement**

_SMC’s - most members are illiterate - they can’t read or write. Management affects the school and leaves a lot of power in the hands of Head Teachers._ (DEO Kotido)

Links between the schools and the community were mediated by the twin structures of School Management Committees (SMC’s) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA’s). The SMC is the statutory body for school management. It has the responsibility for overseeing the running of the school - including budgets, disbursement of grants, strategic planning, implementation of plans and performance of the Head Teacher. The PTA’s, on the other hand, are voluntary local committees.

SMC representatives from all ten of the schools in the detailed study were interviewed with a total of 15 members participating. At least one of these members was the Chairman or Vice Chairman. Members of nine of the PTA’s participated in the study with a total of 12 members in all interviewed. In these interviews, as in the case of the Deputy and Senior Teachers, a semi structured interview guide was utilised. In a couple of cases interpreters were required. It was clear from the analysis dealing with the school environment that several members of SMC’s and PTA’s were very exercised about the obstacles facing the girl child in accessing quality education. This section of the report focuses explicitly on the activities they engaged in as a Committee and on their
relationships with the school, community and with each other.

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<th><strong>Key Activities of School Management Committees</strong></th>
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**Figure 13** Activities of SMC’s

In describing their own work, SMC members emphasised sensitisation of the community and mobilisation of children to school (Figure 15). While relationships with the wider community were generally reported as good, sometimes tensions arose:
Had been having a very good relationship with community but since we started trying to pressurise them to bring their child back to school - they are not happy. Otherwise it’s okay. Major problem we have is in a family of five children we say - give us these children. They will give only one ... The problems are because of negotiating to bring children to school. It’s not something bad. We are not at loggerheads. We still go back and try to sensitise. Others think we are driving away the children who could help them with work. We tell them the benefits. They say if I put all the children to school and don’t have fees, where will I get the money and who will help me here? (Chairman SMC, Kotido)

Other Committee members also reported on hostile reactions encountered and on occasions being told to ‘look after their own children and forget about other peoples’ children’. Another member was critical of the large scale ‘Back to School Campaigns’ spear headed by the District. She called for resources for local people to do the mobilising themselves:

People saying that a campaign is being done by the District - local people resent and are hostile because they don’t know these people. We want to mobilise ourselves. If we could get assistance and do it with parents who do not bring their child to school. (SMC member, Moroto)

It was clear from the interviews that a number of the SMC’s took their responsibilities seriously and were pro-active regarding school governance. This sometimes involved tackling difficult situations:

One thing it has done - there were so many deficiencies in this school - teachers not teaching, bad relationships between Head Teacher and teachers. We campaigned to get the Head Teacher removed. Teachers are now teaching and there are good relationships with the school, the PTA, SMC and community ... We make sure the school uses the funds that they get from UPE. When they come in, we come together and discuss the use of funds and see they are used properly. (Vice Chairman SMC, Kotido)

The work of EQPE in improving the standard of teaching practice and of inspection was acknowledged by some members of the Management Committees:

School inspection was a major problem. We need to have specialists. Since VSO came there is a big improvement - better funding now in that sector - Inspectorate, School Improvement Planning, Head Teachers’ Training. (Chairman SMC, Moroto)

The need for constant engagement with the school was raised by another Chairman:

Even when the school is running well you need to be there - meet teachers; meet P7 parents about moving to secondary school; regular meetings for Management. We don’t have full say on construction - or authority. We can advise and if unhappy take our concerns to where they will be raised. We have evidence from our own minutes of the work done. We follow a School Improvement Plan. (Chairman SMC, Moroto)

Another SMC member spoke of his satisfaction at the status of the school in the community and the way it was run:
For the future, since the school is one of the best in Kotido, we must find ways of supporting it. A lot want to come here - even from town they come. It's kept well - they appreciate the place. In this school, once it is class, it is class, once it is play, it is play. Children are happy and feel free when they are here. (Member of SMC, Kotido)

The PTA Committees, for the most part, seemed to work closely with the SMC's. This strengthened the role of the statutory body. Good working relationship between the two structures were frequently reported. In a couple of instances it was acknowledged that the PTA's were not active on the ground, while others did not organise meetings but came together at the behest of the SMC:

*When we say we want to mobilise children, we move with them together. But they don’t organise meetings - they could be operating like the SMC and working with us. They don’t take the initiative, although they do help us.* (Vice Chairman SMC, Kotido)

In some of the focus group discussions the presence of the SMC's and PTA's within the school was raised by the girls. They knew the members and had direct contact with some. They described how from time to time Committee members came to the school and checked on the attendance of teachers and what was happening in the classrooms. They also reported on their involvement in enrolment campaigns. Elsewhere Committee members talked to the girls at Assembly persuading them of the importance of staying in school:

*They tell us - if educated you can be a nurse. Say you will get a better life in the future.* (Kotido pupil)

In another school, the girls said that Committee members told them when they go home they were to tell their parents that they should be sleeping separately and not in groups of girls. They also urged them to go and talk to their friends so that they would come to school. They advised against going to discos and against early marriages.

The make up of the SMC was shaped by the type of school, with the Chairperson and sometimes Vice Chair appointed by Foundation Bodies and members then elected by the community. A number of those who took part in the interviews reported how they were on their second term and a couple of members reported they had served for seven consecutive years. The members acknowledged there was a status attached locally to serving on the Committee.

It was difficult to establish just how effective Committee meetings were and how extensive the involvement of the Committee in planning, monitoring and ensuring financial accountability as well as in school improvement activities. It was also unclear how much liaison there was between the SMC's and grassroots leaders (LC1s) regarding the attendance of children from their villages in school or the extent to which they provided a link between Head Teachers and district education officials.
There were clear differences apparent during the interviews regarding the level at which the Committees appeared to function. A number of Chairmen spoke of the lack of active engagement by many of its members. There seemed to be little formal structures to promote ongoing communication between the Committee and the wider community or between the Committee and local leaders. It was apparent though that SMC members were engaged at quite different levels in planning and monitoring, not just in relation to the range of activities but to the strategic level of engagement.

As part of the EQPE programme, VSO Teacher Educators ran a training programme, in both districts, on the roles and responsibilities of members of SMC's and PTA's. The Chairman of both Committees was invited as well as one other member. Part of the ongoing monitoring of the EQPE schools looked at indicators of SMC functioning - attendance at the school, meetings, minutes, the development and implementation of school improvement plans. It was reckoned by the Teacher Educators that 60% to 65% of the SMC's in schools in the pilot programme were functioning effectively. Apart from the one training programme, described as quite introductory, there was little direct engagement with the SMC's or PTA's within EQPE. Clearly these structures formed a vital link with the community in the running and development of schools. According to many stakeholders who participated in this study, they were not structures that were working effectively in the Karamoja region and there were widespread reservations expressed regarding their effectiveness.

An affirmative action initiative is currently being planned by Moroto District Council. It is seeking to secure support from Save the Children to engage the SMC's and PTA's in the district reminding them of their roles and functions and attempting to enhance their capacity. However the poor educational background of many members of these Committees was seen as a barrier in making progress.

The functioning of SMC’s was pursued in the interviews and discussions with District Education Officials, PTC personnel, political representatives, staff in NGO’s and civil society organisations. One interviewee was very critical of the functioning of these Committees but distinguished between schools in the towns and other schools. In the villages he described a huge literacy problem among most SMC and PTA members. Unsure as to what they were supposed to do, they depended on the Head Teachers for guidance. This allowed the Teachers to draw up their own plans and even to manipulate the Committee at times. They felt inferior to the Head Teacher who retained control of the management. This situation was echoed by other s as well:

It is very common in village schools. They come to SMC or PTA meetings - but are illiterate. They want to come when the Head Teacher has something for them - food or drink. Some don’t come to check and look and ask questions. In rural areas still a big challenge. (PTC personnel)

Indeed one Head Teacher complained that Committee members in both the SMC and PTA looked for payment for anything they did.

Other PTC personnel assessed the contribution of the SMC's in the schools as ‘minimal’.
They were described as ‘passive participants’ in school activities with many of them relinquishing their responsibilities to Head Teachers and teachers. Once again the high illiteracy rates and lack of understanding of their roles and responsibilities were emphasised. Indeed it was claimed that some members ‘harboured’ negative attitudes towards education and saw it as a threat to their ‘status quo’.

Another issue which arose in relation to the effectiveness of the SMC’s was the involvement of Committee members who did not have children in the school:

> To a greater extent they are not effective. There is membership by people who do not have a child in school. If composed only of those who have children in the school, will be much more effective. Also many are not literate enough. Those that are, may not have children in the school. To qualify for membership of SMC - you should have to meet pre-conditions for it. (District Councillor)

District Education Officials were also critical of the capacity of the SMC’s and their impact on school management:

> SMC’s leave a lot to be desired - only 20% are able to read and write. Of these perhaps 5 out of 11 have children in schools - for others their children are at home. It leaves their arguments weak if their own children are not in school. Management is plagued with problems of ‘dependency syndrome’. Lukewarm or negative attitudes about the schools they have been appointed to manage. (District Official)

At the Moroto Conference held in July 2015, the District Education Office identified as one of the challenges the fact that some SMC’s were not very active in supporting their schools (Paul Oputa, DEO Moroto).

These reservations were also very evident among some of the NGO’s and community based organisations interviewed. Organisations such as ADRA, Action Aid, and Warrior Squad were working with SMC’s and PTA’s as part of their education initiatives. One organisation was working with ten schools and SMC’s in three districts. While SMC’s were supposed the manage the schools, the roles of some were described as ‘almost ceremonial’. Low levels of literacy; interpreting and understanding reports; and ability to engage with Head Teachers on planning were all identified. The manner in which members were appointed was also raised:

> In the appointment of SMC’s, Foundation Bodies usually determine the chair and vice chair. This ensures that there are a couple who can read and write. It might be a pastor or a priest. As for the rest of the members, if someone has a profile in the community and speaks up at meetings, it is considered sufficient to get on to the Committee. (NGO)

In the schools in which they are working intensively, one NGO was trying to build the capacity of the SMC’s regarding their roles and responsibilities and helping them identify the challenges the school is facing. In one parish the SMC developed a strategy to demand from grass roots leaders (LC1) what they were doing about mobilising children to school from their villages. Another organisation claimed that overall capacity among
SMC’s was low. They were supposed to develop action plans, to commission them and to appraise the performance of teachers. However, they did not always hold the schools to account when the money comes in:

They forget that they are the government themselves! (NGO)

There were no structures in place whereby the EQPE programme engaged with others in the NGO sector who were working on community engagement and with SMC’s in the two districts in which the project operated.

**Perspectives of the Girl Child in School**

*We come on foot. We come every day. Only in the rainy season when the river can block us - then we can’t come* (Lokitelaebu pupil).

Child friendly group discussions were held with girls in each of the ten schools included in the detailed study. In addition, a group of young women who had dropped out of school and were undertaking a six months training programme in Moroto took part in a focus group discussion (See Appendix Six). An interview undertaken with a woman of thirty years who had started to attend school for the first time is also summarised in Appendix Six.

Among the school groups, over half of the girls taking part in the discussions were in P6 and P7 (in one school there were no girls in the P6 or P7 classes). Overall, the ages of the school girls ranged from 10 years to 17 years and more than 60% were fourteen years and over. The distribution of girls by age and grade in both Moroto and Kotido are presented in Figure16 and Figure 17 (see also Appendix Five). Figures 18 and 19 show the breakdown by age and by grade within each of the schools in the two districts.
Figure 14  Distribution of Girls in Focus Group Discussions by Age

Figure 15  Distribution of Girls in Focus Group Discussions by Grade
These girls were part of that atypical cohort of Karamojong children actually in school at the time of the study. As the research got underway in July 2015, statistics were presented at the Moroto District Education Conference which showed that there were a total of 23,154 girls between the ages of 6 - 12 years, of which just 4,786 were in school (Moroto District Education Conference 2015).

Some of the girls who took part in the discussion groups had sisters who were not in school and all knew girls in their villages and home communities who did not go to school. They had a lot to say about the reasons for the low attendance by girls and about their own experiences of school in Moroto and Kotido in 2015.

![Bar chart showing participation in focus group discussion by school and grade.](image)

**Figure 16** Participation in Focus Group Discussion by School and Grade: Moroto

**Girls Not In School**

In the group discussions, the girls were asked about others their own age and why they were not at school. In all schools and across the two districts there was a similarity in the core reasons given. These included the following:

- Some parents force girls to get married because they want the dowry.
- Cannot come to school because parents will not support them.
- Parents believe that girls who come to school become prostitutes.
- Some girls don’t want to go to school because they want to be ‘warriors’.
- Girls become pregnant and drop out.
- Some girls are orphaned and have no one to help them.
- Girls are poor and don’t have books, pens, uniforms, money for fees.
- When they start menstruating, girls stay at home because they are ‘shy’ to come to school.
- Parents need the children to do the work at home.
While less frequently mentioned, the following were also raised by the girls:

- As a result of FGM, they ‘fear to come’ because they have been mutilated.
- Many of the parents use money for alcohol and do not want to use it for books.
- Girls are harassed at school by boys - perhaps because of ‘big breasts’ or being called ‘grandmother’ because they are older than others in their grade.

Of course some girls offered several reasons:

*Some of the parents don’t want their daughters to stay - say they will become prostitutes. If they have cows at home they don’t sell them. If they have money they just drink it.*

(AketelaEbupupil)

This linking of school attendance with prostitution was consistently raised by the girls themselves and was explored with several of the groups. It was described as a traditional belief held firmly by parents and within the community. It was linked with the wearing of non traditional dress, with movement from the villages to towns and with the likelihood of having multiple partners. While the girls acknowledged such prostitution was ‘not happening’, it was a reason given by young girls themselves for not attending school:

*They refuse to come. . They say if you go to school you become a prostitute.* (Atedeoi pupil)
Some say that being in school is like being a prostitute. Our friends who are not in school say this. They feel if you are going to school you will become pregnant - no one to look after you when you’re not at home. (Kasimeri pupil)

Some spoke of the fact that not all the girls in a family go to school. One girl from Karachi pointed out that her parents think that when some are sent to school you need the others to stay at home to do the work. In her family there were six girls, two of whom attended school while four stayed at home.

Virtually none of the girls’ parents had received formal schooling. A couple spoke of their fathers going to school for some time but ‘breaking out’ before completing primary school. These apparently regretted not staying at school. Some girls said that the lack of education by parents resulted in a poor attitude to the education of girls:

Parents don’t encourage us to come to school. Encourage boys only. They give us all the chores. (Rengen pupil)

They deny girls their rights - they are only interested in the dowry. (Tapac pupil)

The Work Of School Girls
Looking at the work carried out by these girls at home, gendered roles in Karamoja were starkly depicted. Girls did virtually all the domestic work. Boys minded and herded animals and sometimes dug. Everything else was done by the girl. The girls in the various discussion groups described all the work they did at home. Their own listing is captured in Figure 20.

It was an onerous list - hard and relentless physical work; responsible work like looking after younger children; work which generated badly needed income for the household. It was also work which impacted on attendance, participation and length of time spent in school:

Fetching water, collecting firewood, digging, garden work, brewing liquor, raising animals. We brew at home - that is how we pay my fees. Sometimes you can’t get to school at the right time - leads to failure because you don’t understand what is happening in class. It causes you to drop out of school or leads to early marriages. (Lia pupil)

At home the days I don’t come to school, I dig, cook, fetch water. The days I come to school I go home in the evening and still do this work. By the time for coming to school and I’ve done the chores, it is already late and I don’t come ... Not everyday but if a lot of work, sometimes all the days. (Atedeoi pupil)

The work of the girls was not confined to their own homes, in many instances it was for income as well:

Go to the garden to dig. If you fetch water in this area they pay you 500 shillings for a jerry can. (Nakapelimoru pupil)
Brewing beer; selling beer; digging. Some work in the restaurants in the Centre - get 5,000 shilling for the whole month. (Nakapelimo pupil)

*Figure 18  Their Work at Home as Described by the Girls*

**Paying School Fees**
The amount of fees paid by boarders varied from 10,000 shillings to 50,000 shillings. Day scholars often paid small amounts. The children reported that the fees were paid by their parents, guardians and sometimes benefactors such as the Charity Sisters or other religious congregations. Some of the children said they earned their own money for fees:

Girls pay themselves. We do work at the weekends. We take in some money on a Monday. They use that money for buying food. If you don't pay you are chased away. (Lia pupil)
Sometimes we do some work to get money. Sell menazi during the weekends. If you fail to pay fees you are chased away. If you go home - then you have to spend all your time selling things. (Moroto pupil)

While some girls said they would be ‘chased away’ if they did not pay fees, when this statement was pursued, there was no evidence of it being enacted in practice. It seemed that latitude was exercised with regard to payments, and how they were made, particularly in relation to day scholars:

Some have not paid - they don’t have the money. They do not chase us away - they talk to us about it. If we talk to our parents and they say they don’t have the money - nothing happens. We come back. (Kacheri pupil)

In particular situations, the school waived the fee:

Sometimes the school is paying for us - who are poor. Will not pay for everyone. Will choose by themselves. We are very poor - we have no cows, no goats - only chickens. (MMG pupil)

In discussing fees, the unequal treatment of boys and girls in the family, was raised by the girls in many groups. Situations were described repeatedly where parents said they don’t have money to pay for the girls but it was different for the boys:

Parents give more preference to boys than to girls. They say I don’t have the money for you - you are old enough to marry. (Lia pupil)

If money is not there, it will always be the boy that gets to school. The girl can always be married - so preference to the boy. (Kasimeri pupil)

Some parents have cows but they don’t want to sell them. Will always pay for the boys. They say if a girl goes to school she becomes a prostitute. The girl they can sell to the rich people. Girls can help them out at home. If you go to school no one will pay the dowry. Girls fetch high bride price when at home. (Nakapelimoru pupil)

Boarding in Karamoja
A total of 38% of those who participated in the focus discussion groups were boarders while 62% were day scholars. In two of the schools there were no boarding facilities. Many of those who boarded, lived in villages some distance from the school, as did some of those who were day scholars. There was virtually unanimous endorsement of boarding as a preferred option for the girls - by boarders and non boarders alike. This pertained even when boarding facilities in the school were very poor. The girls were quick to point out the advantages as evident from this listing by pupils in Tapac school:

- At home your mother or father comes in drunk and you may be beaten.
- Child labour - you may be sent out to work.
- At home when trying to study your mother will come and disturb you.
- At home you are told - you don’t go to school today - you go to the garden. Here you
can study.

- Are free to play, to meet with friends but at home it’s just work all the time.
- In the dormitory your mind is free from the disturbances you have at home.

In other schools too, the freedom from domestic chores figured prominently in the attractions of boarding. Other advantages, such as the following, were also consistently highlighted:

1. Opportunity to read.
2. Learn better as boarders.
3. Can enjoy studying.
4. Free lights - can read at night in school but not at home.
5. Getting fed - are not hungry.
6. Some fear travelling to school. Safer in boarding.
7. Free from forced marriages.
8. Help in coping with menstruation.

Boarding involved challenges and a changed life style for some. For example, in Kacheri, a remote rural area, there was only three girls boarding in the school. A new dormitory was almost completed and it was intended to have it operational in September 2015. The girls said that while they would like to come as boarders it was not easy. They described how some ‘shy away’ because of poor clothes and not having sheets or mattresses. They said they did not even have a box in which to carry their clothes to school. One of the girls emphasised how life at school and life at home was very different. At home you can wear clothes for weeks without being washed - that is okay in the village. But in school you have to wash clothes and you have to bathe. You need ‘soap and smelling oils’.

Frequently the facilities for boarders and for day scholars were described as inadequate. This was raised by older girls and was seen as a particular problem during menstruation:

The dorm is a big room - toilets are far away. During the menstrual cycle you change your pads when others are there. No wash basins - just one between us. Some come to school during their period. Some don’t because they cannot afford to buy pads. We don’t know how to make the local ones. (Lokitelaebu pupil)

Is a dorm but we don’t have a place that is private. We need a changing room. (Nakapelimoru pupil)

While the facilities for boarders may be inadequate, they did not miss out on school during menstruation. The same did not apply to some of the day scholars:

Girls stay home because they don’t have pads - afraid you will spoil yourself and the boys will laugh at you. For boarders - the teachers help you if you tell them. (Moroto pupil)

No - don’t come during menstrual cycle. Have no pads and no soap and no pants. Are no changing rooms here - no buckets. (Rengen pupil)
The sanitary provisions for older girls were described positively in one of the two schools which did not offer any boarding facilities:

During menstrual cycle - some stay at home. If at school and it happens - we get pads. Is a shelter here for girls - they can wash and change. Happy with the toilets. When inside though, boys can hear you and laugh at you. (MMG pupil)

Feeling Safe at School
The question of feeling safe in school was discussed in all the focus groups. While related in a particular way to boarding, it also applied to all the girls in school. The following two facts consistently emerged from the discussions:

- In the vast majority of cases the girls said they felt safe in school.
- They also perceived themselves as safer attending school than being at home.

In the view of the girls the issue of safety was related to the real threat of early or forced marriages as this pupil explained:

It is better to be at school than at home. At home parents will prompt you to get married. At home - there is hardly anything good which will help with my future’. (Kacheri pupil)

Some pointed to the moral authority of the school, saying that parents feared teachers would tell the police if they forced their children to marry. Others were aware of the physical security offered by the school and the protection it offered:

Safer in school - no one will carry you away. Boys fear to come in because it is protected. (Nakapilimoru pupil)

When not in school they come by as a group and can carry you off by force. Once there you can’t run away - they will beat you. (MMG pupil)

The girls spoke of being protected while in school from strangers such as ‘sugar daddies’ and of forced marriages to older men:

If you go into the villages - you see. You can be married by your parents to an old man - they mind about cows only. They give you to an old man. (Lia pupil)

Some parents actually force girls to marry an old man. An old man may send his sons to come and carry off the girl that he wants. He wants a particular one. He will pay a lot of cows for her. If the girl does not want, she sometimes harms herself. The old man has too much cows - you can get diseases from the old man. (Nakapilimoru pupil)

Another way in which the school was seen as providing a safer environment to home was in relation to sleeping arrangements. This applied particularly to boarders. The practice of ‘communal sleeping’ or ‘girls houses’ was raised by the girls themselves:
Some don't have enough room and sleep with their mothers. But in the villages girls sleep in one room and boys come in at night. They sleep with them all. Girls get infected or get pregnant. Those with HIV come and infect those sleeping together. (MMG pupil)

In a couple of instances the girls raised issues of safety relating to the infrastructure of their school. For example in Nakapelimitoru, which had no water in the school compound, girls spoke of feeling vulnerable when at the bore hole fetching water for the school. Also the absence of a perimeter fence at Lia, and its location at the foot of the hills, caused concern to some boarders because of the openness to trespass by ‘warriors’ at night.

Teachers, Teaching and Learning
The male/female teacher ratios differed radically among the schools in the pilot programme. In one school there was only one female teacher out of twenty four, while in three schools there were more female than male teachers. In the discussion groups the girls said they liked both the male and female teachers - sometimes for very different reasons. The male teachers were ‘good at teaching maths and stopped ‘boys from laughing at the girls’. The female teachers provided pads, soaps and advised the girls on hygiene:

If have your cycle - you’re not to fear. Even if you spoil your clothes - they will help. They provide guidance. They say to report to them if parents are forcing you to marry. (MMG)

The girls were quite enthusiastic about the teaching methods used. They liked the interactive aspects, the mixed seating arrangements, the breaking up into groups of boys and girls:

We share ideas. Sometimes they don’t know things and they also ask us. (Lokitelaebu pupil)

However, there was little doubt as to whether boys or girls performed better in school overall. It was virtually unanimously stated by the girls that boys performed best. Just one girl in Kasimeri claimed that while boys may do better at maths, girls are ahead in English. When exploring the reasons for the better performance the girls were quick to point to the work they were obliged to do at home and the time available to them for study:

Girls are working and baby sitting and brewing alcohol. Boys are running up and down. Playing football, waiting for food from the girls, watching videos and they can read their books. Girls don’t have light for reading at night. (MMG pupil).

Being pre-occupied with demands at home was also seen by the girls as impacting on their learning:

When girls go back home you are given a lot of work and you forget what you have been taught. (Atedeoi pupil)
There was little time for homework as one Rengen pupil explained. After school she went home and did all the same type of work as she did in the morning before she leaves for school. As for homework - ‘we don’t, we don’t have time for it’.

In brief discussions as to whether they would prefer a mixed school or an ‘all girl’s school’ there was unanimous endorsement of the mixed school option. The reasons given were clear and varied little:

*Because boys help girls with their maths.* (Kasimeri pupil)

*Mixed is best. Can go to the boys and get help. Girls can learn from the boys.* (Lia pupil)

*Boys teach us maths - the good ones help out the girls.* (MMG pupil)

*It adds to the numbers - if it was girls only it would be very small.* (Atedeoi pupil)

As far as going on to second level was concerned, the immediate reaction of the girls was an enthusiastic one with an overwhelming majority saying they would like to continue their formal education. Their enthusiasm was quickly tempered by the realisation that it would not be an option for most because of the cost. Some said there was no point in wanting to go if the money was not there. Just a couple of pupils indicated they were trying for sponsorship to go to secondary school:

*We do not have the money and parents don’t. If we get into first division, BRAC will pay for us. I’m working hard for it.* (Lokitelaebu pupil)

Yet the girls said they get very discouraged if they reach P7 and have no money to proceed. Some repeat exams a couple of times before finally going home. The need to support girls to stay in school and to progress further after primary level was raised in many of the groups.

**Improving Girl Child Education In Karamoja**

Those who took part in the discussion groups were asked what they would like to see happen in relation to girl child education. In most instances the girls focused on immediate and tangible improvements as Figure 21 illustrates.

Many of the same issues were raised repeatedly by the girls. There were varying emphases, depending on the facilities and condition of the school infrastructure. Some specific pleas were made such as to repair the floors of classrooms; build a perimeter fence; in a couple of schools there was a call to construct a (proper) kitchen. Provision of food, school furniture and the planting of fruit trees and seedlings were also identified. One pupil said parents should be sensitised to send their children to school. If they refused they ‘should be arrested and handled by the law’. In a couple of schools the benefits of organising exchange visits for girls to other schools and of getting ‘successful’ women in the community to come into the school to inspire pupils were emphasised.
However, help with school fees, better toilet and sanitary facilities, more classrooms and teachers were consistent themes.

Figure 21  What Would Enhance the School Environment According to Girls
Areas for Potential Action

Education in Karamoja is still the lowest. Still a ‘sick child’ in context of Uganda. Those in school are less than a quarter (DEO Kotido).

The National Strategy for Girls’ Education identifies many challenges facing the girl child in Uganda including the risk of sexual abuse, early sexual engagement and teenage pregnancies. The school system itself remains a dominant source of gender bias and stereotyping. The need for targeted interventions because of the particular vulnerabilities of girls in an area such as Karamoja - which is hard-to-reach, post conflict and pastoralist - is also emphasised (NSGE, 2014, p10-15).

This study documented the obstacles, the challenges and the realities of girls’ education in Karamoja in 2015. Empirical data were generated by diverse groups of stakeholders ranging from senior teachers to management committee members; from personnel in teachers’ training colleges to NGO’s; from the girls attending primary schools to district education officials; from parents’ representatives to local politicians. The research tools deployed offered the maximum opportunity for those on the ground to reflect on their experience, to identify the issues they saw as critical in girls’ education and to do so in their own way and using their own words.

The research also sought to identify potential strategies for improving the equitable participation of girls in education in Karamoja. These strategies could be pursued at different levels - at political whether national or local; at individual school level and concerned with physical and social environments; at institutional level and designed to enhance the capacity of teachers and school management; at cultural level, targeting long term goals of social and attitudinal change. The most effective strategies will encompass multiple levels. Movement may be made on some strategies within the framework of the existing EQPE pilot programme, while others will require the reach of a broader and more long term intervention.

A Conducive Environment

UPE policy in Uganda has led to increased enrolment for both sexes but it does not challenge the social construction of gender in a society that disadvantages girls. More effort is required to address the problems that keep girls from going to school and the gender gap in access in place. It was apparent from this study that many children in Karamoja who go to school encountered very poor physical facilities and quality of education and many dropped out as they get older due to early marriage or because their labour was needed by their family.

By sending the girl child to school many families saw themselves as sustaining an ‘economic deficit’ because of the ‘opportunity costs’. These costs derived from foregoing an income from a child who was also a breadwinner; from the reduction in the labour
supply for household chores; or from postponing, and possibly reducing, the wealth accruing from a traditional marriage. These economic factors were reinforced by strong negative community attitudes to education. They were further aggravated by poverty and a lack of disposable income to pay for school fees, scholastic materials, uniforms, meals. Children were minimally supported by parents and there was little evidence of interest in their progress and learning activities. Gender greatly compounded the impact of poverty and the point of intersection was the family where poverty and socio-cultural factors met.

The ‘push’ factors from home and community were so weak in Karamoja that a huge reliance rests on the ‘pull’ of conducive girl-friendly schools - physical and material facilities, social environment, the quality of teaching and the support offered to the girl child. These ‘pull’ elements were not in place in many schools in the pilot project. While there was huge variation between the schools, the following posed persistent problems:

- Physical infrastructure - inadequate classrooms and school furniture. Sometimes classrooms were used for dormitories or for teacher accommodation. Some were open to the elements and to grazing animals.
- The provision and the quality of boarding facilities for girls. The level of accommodation in some dormitories was very poor with no lighting systems, bedding, insecure doors/windows and inadequate latrines and washing facilities.
- Very poor facilities for older girls - no privacy, changing rooms, wash basins, soap, sanitary wear.
- Acute shortages of instructional and scholastic materials, text books, pens, copies.
- Limited sources of financial support - scholarships/bursaries/waiving of fees.

Some elements, such as the physical infrastructure will require considerable investment. Several schools in the pilot programme benefited from recent construction programmes, some from Irish Aid. Others had very poor facilities. There were more minor but critical issues which required considerably less resources to address, such as ensuring that girls were not excluded from full participation in the education system because of their maturation. There seemed to be a virtual paralysis in some schools in relation to managing menstruation and the provision of sanitary wear. This contrasted with the situation portrayed in the National Strategy for Girls’ Education which spoke of the ‘remarkable promotion of menstrual management practices’. (NSGE, 2014, p.12) These were not evident in schools in the study. However, there were NGO’s working in this field in Karamoja who were supporting the training of teachers in the use of sustainable and reusable sanitary wear.

Whether approached on a intensive scale or across a wider district level, in order to make an impact on education equity, the situation of the girl child needs to be addressed more comprehensively. At the core of this is the provision of boarding facilities. One local politician called for continuity in investment in an effective boarding school system over a period of fifteen years. Aligned to continuous investment in boarding facilities, he also advocated that primary education would be ‘totally free’ from the learners and their family’s point of view for this fifteen year period. For people impoverished for so long
even buying a pen was sufficient to discourage families from sending children to school. This period of a decade and a half would allow for workable local systems to be put in place. It would also allow for the emergence of examples of educated people in the community who could provide positive role models for young girls.

**Quality of Teaching**
The EQPE programme strengthened the education system in the selected schools and at district and PTC levels. It developed materials and piloted new approaches. District education officials and other schools were anxious that the programme be extended while PTC’s would like to see further collaboration regarding pre-service training and outreach activities. In schools within the pilot project, teachers’ responses to the training and capacity building initiatives were very positive. This capacity building was targeted at specific teachers in each school and small cohorts of teachers availed directly of it. The idea that the training and skills gained by them would be passed on to their peers, resulting in a multiplier effect, is not realistic without a system in place at school level to support it and to ensure follow up. No such system was evident.

There is scope for additional work to broaden EQPE’s approach to equity and access and to improve the quality of girls’ learning and participation in the classrooms. There is a challenge to develop tools on gender inequality and gender sensitive approaches. The current pilot programme could also move ‘upstream’ into PTC’s and target the next generation of teachers in order to improve teaching practice and ensure that gender equity issues are addressed. No doubt the plans by MoES/UNICEF to replicate and scale up the EQPE and the BRMS mentoring model will bring broader, and possibly national changes, in teaching practice and learning outcomes.

The quality of teaching cannot be divorced from the conditions under which teachers operated in the Karamoja region. The school inspection system was weak. District officials complained of a lack of motor bikes and fuel to carry out inspections. Teacher pupil ratios were very high. Teachers experienced a chronic shortage of instructional materials. Frequently accommodation was inadequate or not available and the remoteness of some schools was problematic, especially for female teachers. Salaries were meagre and not sufficient to live on comfortably. One teacher, in Kotido spoke of being unable to pay school fees for his own four children on his salary. These teachers of poor children were often poor themselves. They sometimes ran small businesses to supplement their income, leading to consistent absenteeism from the classroom. In some schools, morale was very poor as was the motivation of Head Teachers. Training, motivation and adequate remuneration of teachers are issues which need to be addressed in any affirmative action drive in the region.

**Guidance and Counselling**
Few areas were identified as more important in relation to girl child attendance and retention in primary school than that of guidance and counselling. The promoted positions of Senior Woman Teacher and Senior Man Teacher provided a structure at school level to address this area. While this structure is very welcome, the study
revealed how guidance and counselling in the schools operated within very narrow parameters. It was concerned primarily with improving hygiene, helping to manage menstruation challenges and advising on sexual behaviour.

There was no evidence of focusing on psycho-social needs, on formal counselling, on providing support to troubled children or on empowering girls to deal with abuse and exploitation. There were no formal programmes to help girls develop positive self esteem, assertiveness or a sense of self worth. There was virtually no documentation at school level on the types of issues confronting the girl child which impacted on her performance and, indeed, retention in school. Neither was there emphasis on the promotion of value systems through which both boys and girls could be guided into safe and healthy adulthood. Improving the quality of education for girls and protecting them more effectively, a key area for improvement in schools lies in the attitudes and behaviour of boys.

Guidance and counselling has tended to be delegated to the Senior Woman and Senior Man Teachers. It is, however, an ‘all school’ task to ensure that all children are well supported. The development of different models for counselling could be encouraged and facilitated in schools. In the first instance though, there is clearly a need for training in counselling skills for teachers. There was no training available even to the Senior Woman and Senior Man Teachers. Neither was it a field given much attention in the PTC curriculum. The EQPE programme has not, to date, addressed training and capacity building in this area. This could be initiated in the pilot project schools at least with Senior Man and Senior Woman Teachers and with the Head Teachers. More long term issues relating to the role of EQPE in curriculum development in the PTC’s, in pre service tutoring and upskilling cohorts of teachers already working in schools, could also be pursued.

**Feeding Children**

Food in the schools was a very big issue in relation to enrolling and retaining children in general and girls in particular. It was one of the critical ‘pull’ factors. The success of the WFP initiative in ‘take home rations’ for girls (from P4) who attended school consistently, demonstrated its power. However, the WFP is disengaging from its current feeding programme and schools and districts will have to address this issue in a strategic and sustainable manner. While there was some discussion of school gardens, there was little indication of any systematic movement to provide food or to generate income at school level through such sources. In addressing this, there are models which could help guide new interventions based on partnerships between the school, district, local community and partner organisations. If VSO takes an initiative in relation to livelihoods or income generation, locating it within a school rather than a local community context, would enhance the likelihood that it could be tailored to contribute directly to the enrolment and retention of girls in school.

**A Role for Law and Advocacy**

The issue of enforcing the law in relation to the girl child and school attendance arose in a number of contexts in the study - for example parents withdrawing children from school
to work; forced marriages; female genital mutilation; rape and defilement. In the case of the latter, accommodation was often reached among parents, law enforcement agencies and the perpetrators of the abuse which resulted in families securing a financial benefit. Schools, on occasions, reported taking a strong position with parents in relation to forced marriages and female genital mutilation. The National Strategy for Girls’ Education emphasises that family and parental responsibility must be a key point for mass sensitisation and law enforcement (NSGE 2014, p.19).

New education ordinances were passed recently in Moroto District. In Kotido, on the other hand, while the process was under way, it was at a much earlier stage of drafting. Following drafting, resources will be needed for Council members to take the ordinances to communities to sensitise people on their content and on penalties associated with them. Problems were voiced in relation to the availability of the money required to actually print the draft ordinances and undertake such consultations.

These statutory instruments are potentially very important to children’s participation in formal education. However, they will only have a positive impact if implemented rigorously. There is scope for VSO to work at an advocacy level in relation to such ordinances. There are challenges regarding their implementation, monitoring and documentation of effectiveness. There are systemic issues pertaining to education in which VSO could be forging partnerships with ‘change makers’ and key actors at district levels as well as engaging strategically at the macro level.

Other skills are needed in addition to those of the Teacher Educators, who have been effective in enhancing teacher capacity. Such an advocacy role could provide a link between schools and local government on policy issues such as targeting the prevention of teenage pregnancies and providing mechanisms for the retention of pregnant girls in school; or systematically dealing with defilement, rape and sexual abuse in schools. It could also contribute to the mobilisation of groups within civil society to exert pressure to implement corrective policies and to clarify the roles of different stakeholders in girl’s education. The National Strategy for Girls’ Education speaks of ‘tapping into key spaces of societal conscience such as cultural and political leaders as well as a specific focus on male involvement in supporting girls’ education’ (NSGE, 2014, p21). The Strategy suggests such actions as developing programmes to work directly with cultural leaders; guides for politicians for their own constituency; and materials to help religious leaders to play their part.

**School Management**

The SMC is the statutory structure responsible for overseeing the management and development of schools. It is also a link with the wider community. Despite the work done by the SMC’s and notwithstanding the variations among them, there were reservations expressed about their effectiveness in the study. Some of this related to the low levels of literacy within Committees overall and the capacity of members to contribute in an informed manner to the development of the school. There were also concerns expressed about their monitoring and oversight roles and the vulnerability of some to manipulation by Head Teachers. Their ability to call local leaders to account in
ensuring children are sent to school was also raised. There was criticism that some
members did not have children in the School and it was suggested that pre-conditions be
imposed for serving on such Committees. Of course, those who served on the SMC
were also members of the community and they too were part of the ‘status quo’.

Within the EQPE programme there was little emphasis on working with civil society and
links with the SMC’s and PTA’s were seen as a form of such engagement. However,
there was little direct engagement with SMC’s. An EQPE training initiative was
undertaken involving one or two members from each SMC, but it was of a very general
nature and there was no follow up. A number of other NGO’s and civil society
organisations were actively working with SMC’s in both Moroto and Kotido and in some
instances in the same communities in which the pilot project was operating. There is
scope for complementary activities with other civil society organisations at district level
and in learning about promising strategies for enhancing management capacity. On a
short term basis, there is also a role for the EQPE programme to be proactive around
training and capacity building for SMC’s and in the design and piloting of tools that are
not class room based but focused on management and leadership.

One area of activity closely identified with the SMC role was that of mobilisation and
sensitisation campaigns. These were often headed by the district and supported by
organisations such as UNICEF. However, this study raised questions about their
effectiveness on a long term basis particularly if there was no sustained follow up by the
schools and SMC’s. The advisability of such ‘top down’ campaigns headed by District
Education Officials rather than by local leaders was also raised. The model of
‘community dialogue’ used by UNICEF in working with local government in Moroto (in
relation to FGM) could offer an alternative strategy if working intensively to promote
community cohesion around girls’ education.

**Procuring Robust Data**

Within the EQPE areas of operation it was very difficult to secure accurate data at either
school or district levels, and particularly standardised data which could serve as a
baseline. An enormous amount of time can be expended at field level on gathering data
which are of dubious value. Recording keeping systems in schools were very basic and
virtually all those relating to gender were based on the disaggregation of figures on
enrolment, attendance and completion. No data was gathered on gender by ethnicity or by
residence (rural/urban). None were available on those who drop out of school and why;
on the progression of individual children; the challenges faced by girls in school; on any
follow up with parents or with community leaders.

The poor record keeping in the schools was highlighted at the Moroto District Education
Conference (July 2015) where it was claimed Head Teachers did not give correct
enrolment and attendance figures. Data at district level was therefore compromised by
dubious school level recording as well as by local government’s own management
systems. The absence of base line data in programmatic activities at the start of the
EQPE programme meant that the relevance and robustness of targets and indicators

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cannot be assumed.

Some of the conceptual and methodological inadequacies of targets as a tool for monitoring and measurement have been well argued (Jansen, 2005). Targets will certainly help track progress but only if they are solidly grounded and appropriate in the first instance. Existing data within EQPE does not provide such a foundation. The appropriateness of the Results Based Framework (RBF) as the major monitoring tool in such circumstances and its capacity to capture real change is open to question. In dealing with complex attitudinal changes and in enhancing the capacity of school personnel, different tools may need to be developed. In any new programme, effective and appropriate data collection systems would need to be put in place and the implementation and maintenance of these adequately resourced.