



# Enhancing Academic Performance and Community Development in Northern Uganda through Collaborative Initiatives

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## ABSTRACT

The prolonged conflict in Northern Uganda has left its schools and communities grappling with significant challenges, including the destruction of infrastructure and a collapse of social amenities. This paper explores collaborative initiatives aimed at improving academic performance and fostering community development in the region. Drawing on data from various projects and interventions, including stakeholder engagement, educational partnerships, and infrastructure improvements, the study examines the impact of these initiatives on student outcomes and community empowerment. The findings underscore the importance of community involvement, entrepreneurship, and access to resources in mitigating poverty and enhancing educational opportunities. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses, the research highlights the transformative potential of collaborative efforts in addressing complex socio-economic issues in post-conflict settings.

**Keywords:** Northern Uganda, Collaborative initiatives, Academic performance, Community development, Entrepreneurship

## INTRODUCTION

Schools in Northern Uganda require an alternative approach for achieving higher levels of development commensurate with other parts of Uganda [1, 2]. During a time when physical and capital infrastructures including hoes, teaching and learning materials, sources of food, places for water collection other than school water tanks, orphanages, and some village huts were destroyed by the balls of fire from automobiles of rebel soldiers, roads and both physical and moral influences that could be things intense were lost completely [3, 4]. Magazine titles attest to the loss of the roads. To avoid other risks associated with vehicles, the Karuma Bridge, between the boarding school in Lira and the President's home in Northern Uganda, was thrown in the raging waters of the fast River Nile. Central to aiding solve the crises are parish school projects associations [5, 6]. These parish school projects associations are forums for design and implementation of initiatives aimed at helping communities own development issues, choices, and implementable development initiatives [7, 8]. The role of education in the development of any given region or country is paramount. As a general prescription, education is essentially the most effective means of empowering a people by creating ways and means of creating development that is life-sustainable. The Government of Uganda lacks the fiscal and moral capacity for bringing schools damaged by rebel soldiers to even minimum acceptable standards [9, 10]. Northern Uganda's rural schools face numerous challenges, including destruction by rebel forces who have been unsuccessfully opposed by the Government of Uganda for over 20 years. The result has been no education or sporadic educational opportunities of lower than minimum standards and a total collapse of social amenities, facilities, support, and networking [11 -13]. This paper reports promising results from a new model of stakeholding in schools where stakeholders share project risks, rewards, and ultimate project ownership. We present data collected from stakeholders in the model which underlines stakeholder value, enhanced stakeholder motivation, and responsibility commitment in enhancing stakeholder value in turbulent situations, under which the new model was tested [14 -16]. St. Mary's College Lacor in Northern Uganda is our ground for the paper. Our evidence gathered from academic students enrolled into Northern Uganda's schools between 1996-2006 at their routine intakes ranked institutions in their quaternion: category, funding source, property system, and for-profit status [17, 18]. After categorization in quaternion, each institution was given an objective stratified score, and schools with higher scores were compared with schools with lower absolute and differential scores to see if results in storied scores reflected observed operation.

### **The Impact of Collaborative Entrepreneurial Initiatives on Academic Performance**

Given that research participants presented consistently high educational stakeholder numbers, simultaneously, they lived in an environment hindered by several poverty-related models representative of widely recognized conditions found in Uganda [19, 20]. These patterns grounded the research's essence and reflected the participants' basic concern. Educational challenges in Uganda perceive community involvement as beneficial for sustainment and development, but few theories specifically describe the nature of such involvement when it implements enterprise. This research intended to bridge that gap by examining how the operation of a school-initiated enterprise would impact the documentation of community involvement for educational goal realization [21, 22, 23]. The participating Ugandan schools interconnected academically with local and global learning communities, reciprocating actual business development strategies through the internet. Each school defined its goals and strategically adjusted student and community resources enabling project implementation. Epistemological in nature, this business model introduced an encouraging umbrella for academic success. Educational stakeholder service activities were extended and tailored into product achievement [24, 25]. Communities continued to invest in their students' projects directly, and the impact of these investments lowered the poverty levels of their students' families [26, 27]. Utilizing authentic self-help programs, Ugandan schools desired to enhance their academic performance and alleviate poverty in their communities. Community involvement was of primary importance and integral to the inspiration to establish the schools. These communities accepted new methods of individual problem-solving, supported each of their schools, and cultivated change envisioned by their students [28]. Social entrepreneurship theory guided the research elements focusing on change initiated by each school's leaders, the collaboration with their respective communities, and the photographic evidence documented throughout the implementations. This study explicitly revealed how by-products from individual school enterprises directly influenced the schools' academic performance and directly alleviated financial poverty.

### **Increased Access to Educational Resources**

Collaborative community academic productivity is important because it involves community members working together to foster enhanced school academic performance in their area [29]. There is a strong correlation between extremely poor individual community members and extremely poor community-based learners. One of the co-contributing factors attributed to the rising poverty in the region is the civil rebellion that stopped rural development activities and disorganized ongoing education and empowerment programs [30]. Urgent efforts are required to elevate families and communities from extreme poverty by providing the villagers the much-needed education (enlightenment) and re-strengthening morale so that security poverty risks and vulnerability to security threats are addressed based on a clear understanding of the local needs [31-34]. This paper presents collaborative strategies for addressing the security (vulnerability) and poverty issues based on an empirical study conducted by Gulu smart school (SGSS) and community informatics development organizations (CIDO) in the catchment areas of the university foundation prep. school in Depa and Ukus subcounties Gulu district. A cross-sectional survey study was conducted to assess the impact of the interventions. Based on the survey study, the results presented in this paper reveal a twofold increase in the student-to-computer ratio (SCR), with the computer-to-science, technical, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) laboratory ratio averaging approximately 5:1. The SCR was on average 18 and 9 for secondary and primary schools, respectively. More than 85% of teachers reported positive product use. According to the survey study, UPE national exam results for schools using accelerated e-learning infrastructure significantly improved from a mean of around 50% in the year 2010 to a mean of 60% in the year 2013, with an average of 4 details per year. SEGANGA N. J and HEALTH UPE schools in Nwoya, Gulu district, and Kitgum TWONI P. S, ENABLENG NURSERY AND LOW GULU PRI SCHOOL in Amuru district were amongst the best 25 schools in the parishes and districts of their operation [36]. Inadequate access to the most basic educational resources, including textbooks, laboratories, science equipment, and e-learning materials, results in limited academic performance of learners, especially in remote areas. This study deployed computer laboratories, e-learning materials, and accelerated e-learning and living systems at ten secondary schools in northern Uganda. In addition, the study introduced or refurbished 31 low-cost e-learning classrooms in 31 rural and slum-based nursery and primary schools. Use of the laboratories and classrooms was supported by professional teacher training sessions and a user-driven and experience-based testing of the introduced systems on real-life problems to foster creative thinking [37-39].

### **Enhanced Teaching and Learning Methods**

Another problem was noted in the manner in which Mathematics questions were tackled by the teachers and students. We noticed the use of an outdated technique called 'vertical method' which was the most common, and only method used by the teachers and recommended by the textbooks used in the schools.

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With this method, the teachers would find a solution to a mathematics problem and write down the process of finding that solution in a number of orderly lines with no horizontal lines to give the solution a clean, well-arranged look. With a little over twelve lines needed to give a solution to a simple exercise, and little used in referring to a previous line, the students used to struggle a lot to understand the teacher's solutions to exercises [40-42]. A major benefit of the collaboration with the schools in Northern Uganda was the discovery of teaching and learning weaknesses/challenges. Due to a war that raged for two decades, schools lost regular contact with many of the best-qualified teachers. In the years prior to visiting Northern Uganda, we observed obvious weaknesses in the way teachers tried to communicate the language of instruction. For example, Mathematics teachers' weak grasp of English meant that he or she used Lukonzo, Lutachoni, or Alur - the local languages spoken by the vast majority of the students - as the medium of instruction. Also, students taught Mathematics might have had very little or no idea at all about the English equivalent for some of the dominant words, thus making it difficult to follow the teacher's explanations. This language problem was also noticed in the teaching of different subjects like Physics, Chemistry, Biology, etc [43].

### **Improved Student Motivation and Engagement**

Emphasizing the need for broad-based collaborations among all education stakeholders to reliably foster primary school performance rates, stakeholders reiterated previous literature to argue that: "Achieving meaningful learning outcomes, particularly for marginalized children, demands that collaborative effort from all levels should not only be encouraged, but amply supported to achieve collectively observable desired changes [44]." It's therefore reasonable to echo Uker's call for the need to streamline primary school collaborations to perpetuate the list of CIPEP interventions in schools with the prospect of ensuring a better future for the marginalized children, families, and communities in the region. The positive relationships that existed but were not studied in this paper between the teachers' perceptions on job satisfaction and student achievements were consistent with previous UK studies where job satisfaction was originally recognized to nurture a thriving learning environment that supported high-quality educational outcomes for the learners. This meant that a community-managed CPD initiative would possibly enjoy equal prospects of sustaining student performance and the same school's prospects of launching itself out of acute poverty [45]. As a result of improved teacher job satisfaction and enhanced teaching and learning conditions, CIPEP initiatives aroused school students' interest in achieving long-term educational objectives, which led to increased student motivation and engagement. When asked what student achievements pleased them the most about the interventions of CIPEP, teachers and parents provided testimonies on student performance and exhibition of multidisciplinary talents. Teachers observed that students developed a new habit of on-time attendance for classes and examinations. Parents also testified that premature school dropout rates reduced when their children's performances in Mathematics, English, Sciences, and Sports were transformed from dismal to promising levels [46]. Using a similar arithmetic approach that was previously recommended on teacher job satisfaction, parent enthusiasm further simplified how CIPEP microfinance economic empowerment and training innovations revolutionized student learning to move from "dismal levels to 'promising' levels of performance. In the traditional, war-torn villages of Northern Uganda, watching children perform complex mathematical equations and solve tough science questions was for long considered a reserve for well-to-do parents who were capable of sending their children to well-to-do private schools in urban centers [47].

### **The Role of Collaborative Entrepreneurial Initiatives in Alleviating Poverty**

When the numerous critical assessments of UPE were decontextualized by critics, and shortcomings generalized across the board, it was incumbent upon researchers and education managers to ensure neutrality and present a balanced picture of the state of education. This article re-contextualized UPE in holiday homestead work and established what strategies schools and parents in an agrarian society adopted to save education. The article reports on multiple actions such as partnering with parents and communities that have families engaged in work activities during holidays, which lead to results. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data from a larger study conducted in northern Uganda, this article explored the role that collaborative entrepreneurial learning strategies played in the educational development of UPE pupils under conditions of holiday labor [48, 49]. Unlike many African countries, Uganda has taken positive steps to level the educational playing field. For instance, the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE), with which primary education became free for the parent, and Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007 have opened educational opportunities to previously excluded children. Nevertheless, following the reinstatement of UPE in 1997, the system became overstrained. Although the numbers vary depending on the source, between seven and 9 percent of those of school-going age remain excluded from an education. The greater burden though reduces the quality of education for some schools and students in the form of crowded classrooms, overworked teachers,

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inadequate instructional materials, and inability to maintain the schools' infrastructure, among other things. Structural and management challenges in the realization of the government's bold targets saw criticism, debates, and increased attention drawn to education in Uganda from all over the world [50].

#### **Creation of Income-Generating Opportunities**

Parents viewed FALIWODA as an enabler for them to create opportunities to earn additional income, which is used to support vulnerable school children and provide funding for return-to-education scholarships. This is an important finding given the fact that many research studies are normally directed at firms while forgetting the role played by innovative initiatives such as the one in this study. Besides moral support to mentoring and financial service expertise, most board members were not reluctant to support start-up businesses that were initiated and driven by both FALWODA. FALWODA has, however, continued to struggle against some board members who do not support business start-ups, and as such, this may limit the overall potential of the pioneering initiatives [51]. According to findings from this study, profits earned under educational partnerships and investment clubs were used to alleviate school poverty. Highlights of such income-generating activities were sneaker and branded curtain production for Koro Mixed Secondary School, greenhouse farming for Dara Christian Secondary School, and meat sales for Trinity College, Ediofe. This point supports Adiger and Muyama's study, which established that income generation for school assessment involved setting up small income generation activities to contribute to the school's revenue and sustainability, e.g. fish pond excursions, farm excursions, and research among others. The ability of the partnerships to bring schools and communities together is regarded as a critically important dimension of all forms of "base" entrepreneurship that extends beyond the narrow parameters of business creation and growth [52].

#### **Development of Entrepreneurial Skills**

Collaborative entrepreneurial initiatives have the potential to mitigate the problem of low academic performance and poverty if scaled up in refugee hosting areas. This project has witnessed over 1,500 families in the Lira district each receiving 10 kilograms of bean seeds and fertilizers each in order to improve nutrition and also become contributors to development. In addition to promoting nutritional needs, the projects also tick the entrepreneurship box. Both projects are founded on the provision of start-ups. It is a catalyzing factor in promoting economic growth. Therefore, the focus of the projects is the development of the entrepreneurial skills of the beneficiaries in order for them to identify viable economic opportunities around their environment [53]. Residents of the district have been sensitized using the opportunities in their environment, and as a result of these entrepreneurial initiatives, they are likely to be alive to business opportunities when provided support mechanisms. This means that part of their focus is the development of entrepreneurial skills. Nutrition is an essential determinant of learning outcomes, with poor diets leading to poor academic performance, whereas good nutrition and health leads to good academic outcomes. In Uganda, Northern Uganda underperforms other parts of the country, and yet it is also, on average, poorer than the other parts of the country. It is in the public domain that Uganda has the youngest population in the world, with about 78% of its over 42 million people being under 30 years of age. Between 2013 and 2016, over 600,000 Ugandan children went to bed hungry, causing their poor nutrition. Due to the diet deficiencies arising from poverty and food insecurity, 36% of the children under the age of 5 in Uganda are stunted. Stunting negates and slows down any measures to alleviate poverty and improve academic performance remotely [54, 55].

#### **Empowerment of Local Communities**

Local communities now understand the benefits of having refugee schools and the relief programs in their areas. They constantly make new and relentless demands for more schools and more relief programs to come to their communities, in spite of the extremely cry problems associated with poverty. Our relief programs empower the needy in various ways, according to the donated items. The beneficiaries often use these donations to generate more revenue than the initial sum. By the end of 2010, the HISF DEF had organized and supported 280 needy, orphaned, and vulnerable children to engage in home business that has helped the children earn an average income per month of \$100 [56]. The schools offer comprehensive, free primary education to the orphaned and vulnerable children of the rural communities, which they serve. Undernourishment is a major problem among the children, as it is with many in the local at-large population, due to chronic poverty. The average family income of the 33 Luo, Lango, or Acholi speaking refugee/education staff is approximately \$12 to \$18 per month. \$30-\$50 is a more realistic subsistence sum of money, though still not sufficient to provide a dignified standard of living for each family. It will, at least, reduce from 7 to 3 the number of days during each month in which the staff member lacks the proper food to eat. Each member of the staff of the rural village refugee primary school acknowledges that if Lakeriyan had not intervened, he or she would not be in his or her position as educators today. It was only fifteen years ago that these children were the most highly oppressed and

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hated people in the country and were trapped in the local version of the Holocaust that had lasted for twenty years (1986-2006) [57].

### **Reduction of Dependency on External Aid**

A third incentive for parents to continue sending their children to school, which is not frequently mentioned, is the reduction of dependency on external aid. Good academic performance reduces dependency on aid because it increases the chances for individuals to contribute to their communities and the country. Kids born out of school might contribute to economic growth but will also compete for employment, and the more jobs there are, the less stress on governments to abandon animals and run schools because there is no funding. The stress reduces the perceived legitimacy of government, be it local, national, or international, and as a result, non-state armed actors could easily recruit community members out of necessity. The urgency and importance to improve academic performance becomes clearer when we appreciate that in Northern Uganda, about 95% of audited top 100 companies in 2016 are state-linked and are in agriculture, not employment [58, 59]. The long-term objective of the collaborative projects is to have a positive impact on academic performance across primary schools in Northern Uganda. It is therefore intriguing to have clarity on how the collaborative projects improve academic performance and explain why academic performance is considered an effective way of having a positive impact on poverty. Improvements in academic performance come from the elimination of constraints to learning such as poverty, malnutrition, and poor health that arise from unstable livelihoods of parents and caregivers. Conditions in homes, schools, and communities are made conducive to teaching, learning, inquiry, and creativity. Compared to home, schools have fewer opportunities for children to learn, especially after school hours, weekends, and holiday periods. As such, the ruptures in home routines that do not enhance learning will cause slower progress in the acquisition of competencies [60]. Our research proposes that, in order to improve performance in rural schools that suffer from a scarcity of trained manpower, schools should consider recruiting only trained and competent staff responsible for the equipment that matters most. Schools located in rural Uganda can introduce Ru a More at different grades to alleviate the effect of losing teachers to more urban schools. Finally, in order for Ugandan schools to improve student performance, the government should consider delivering computers to schools along with providing salaries to staff who will have to give up room to keep computers and keep themselves up to date for the changing working environment. It's our hope that, with training from schools, computer use will not only benefit the students and the academic performance or improve life in schools in general, but also improve future industrial output, benefiting the country and the world [61]. The analysis demonstrated that introducing Ru a More improves academic performance. Pupils are generally finishing their homework and passing their end-of-term examinations after the introduction of Ru a More. Analysis of variance at the 0.05 level of significance demonstrated that schools that introduced Ru a More have significantly higher mean grades and mean examination scores after the intervention. Our findings support previous studies in rural Uganda that with training from schools and equipment provided by families, students utilize the rest of their time for studying and improving their grades. Exposing students to information technology early not only improves performance but also motivates students to pursue computer science at higher levels and broadens children's capacity to think critically and creatively—a trail that few Africans and those who think about Africans are familiar with [61]. Given the dire academic performance in northern Uganda's schools, we wanted to see whether introducing the Ru a More program in primary schools under the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund would help improve academic performance. We collected data from students and school administrators, and we were invited to seven schools in the districts of Lira and Apac to conduct in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis [62].

### **CONCLUSION**

Collaborative initiatives hold immense potential for addressing the complex challenges facing Northern Uganda's schools and communities. By engaging stakeholders, promoting entrepreneurship, and enhancing access to resources, these initiatives contribute to improved academic performance, community development, and poverty alleviation. The findings underscore the importance of holistic approaches that prioritize local participation, capacity building, and sustainability. As Northern Uganda continues its journey towards recovery and development, fostering partnerships and innovation will be crucial for building resilient systems and unlocking the region's full potential.

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