

KNOWLEDGE MATERIAL

Education attainment and employment situation of out-of-school persons in the 14–17 years age cohort in Uganda

The issue

Today, youth unemployment remains one of the major challenges facing Uganda, despite many existing government programmes aiming at addressing the issue. Moreover, existing youth-related programmes and interventions have largely focused on the age cohort of 18–30 years. This has left out younger persons of the 14 to 17 age group who, according to the Uganda’s Employment Act of 2006, are eligible to work. The assumption is that these young persons are at school and are benefiting from education programs such as universal secondary education. However, the results from a study conducted by the Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC) in Uganda indicate that about 20 percent of youth aged 14–17 are out of school. Moreover, the majority of those out of school are not self-employed nor in any form of paid employment and are often engaged in irregular, hazardous and underpaid petty jobs because they lack skills and, hence, the bargaining power to participate in better paying jobs.

This brief summarizes the finding from a study conducted in 2017 by the EPRC for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on the employment status of young persons aged 14–17 and their engagement in agriculture in Uganda. The study used two existing national-

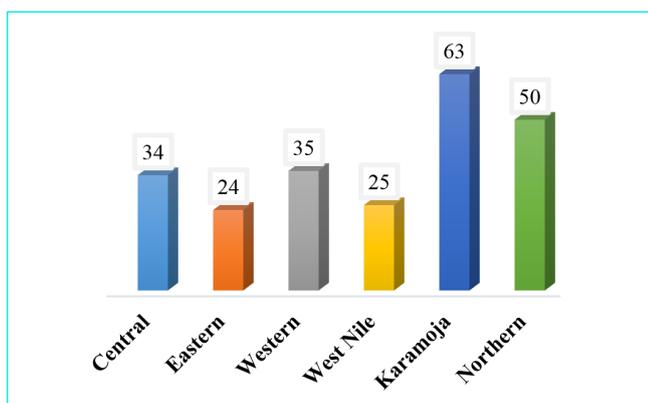
level secondary data sets (School-to-work Transition Survey, 2013; and Uganda National Panel Survey, 2013–2014), complemented with community Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). In total, 26 FGDs and 10 KIIs were conducted in 13 districts selected from all the regions in Uganda.

Schooling status and education attainment of young persons

The study used nationally representative data (school to work transition survey, 2013/14) to examine school attainment of young persons in Uganda. The results showed that a significant percentage (19.2 percent) of young persons aged 14–17 years are out of school. The percentage of females who are out of school slightly (20.5 percent) exceeds that of males (18 percent) in the same age cohort.

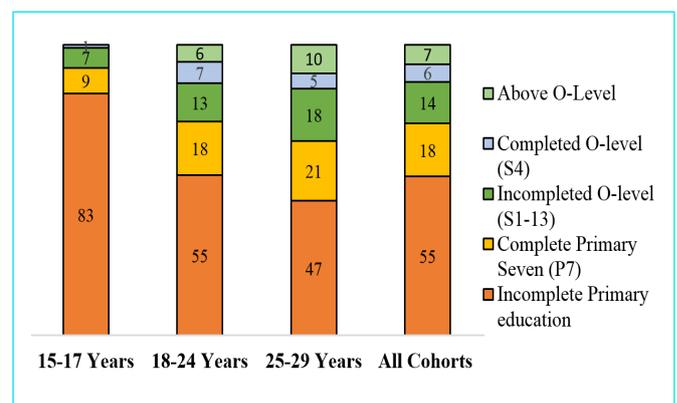
However, there are variations across the districts and regions highlighting differences in local socio-economic characteristics and poverty levels. The data from focus group discussions across the country (presented in Figure 1) showed that the highest percentage of young people that are out of school are registered in Karamoja, followed by the Northern region.

Figure 1 | Percentage of young persons aged 14–17 years that are out of school



Sources: Perceptions based on focus group discussions.

Figure 2 | Highest level of education completed by the out-of-school rural young persons



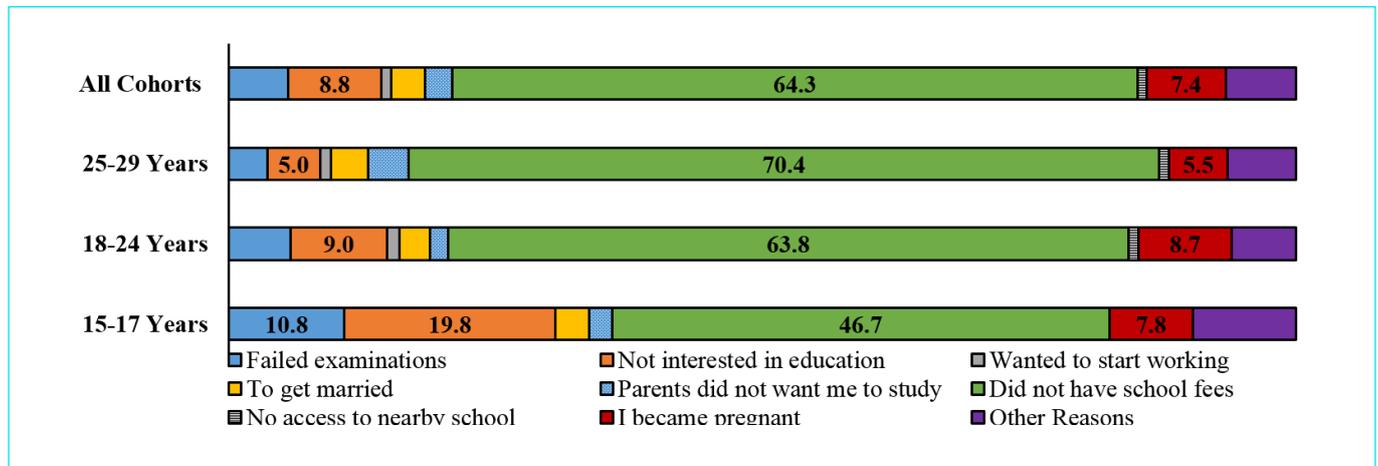
Sources: Authors’computation using School-to-work survey, 2013.

Looking at the education level of school dropouts, the study found that 55 percent of the out-of-school youth, ages 15 to 29, did not complete primary education (see Figure 2). The youngest age cohort also has the highest percentage of persons (83 percent) who never completed primary education. This means that the out-of-school rural young people would tend to lack the specific skills required in the formal job market – therefore they have no option but to engage in petty and low paying informal jobs.

Results indicate that lack of school fees is the major

cause of school drop-outs (see Figure 3). In spite of the Government efforts to promote education for all through universal primary and secondary education programmes, students still have to pay non-tuition fees for development, uniforms, meals and scholastic materials. In addition, students who do not perform well in class tend to become easily discouraged and end up dropping out of school.

Figure 3 | Reasons for dropping out of school, percent of rural young persons reporting each cause



Sources: Authors' computation using School-to-work survey, 2013.

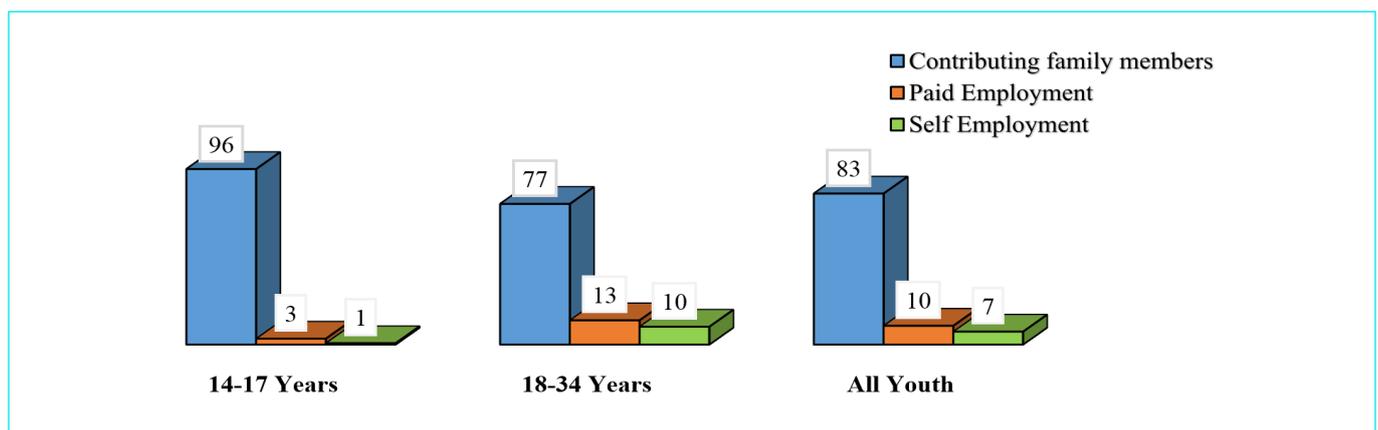
Employment situation of out-of-school young persons

Overall, the youth unemployment rates are very high. Most of the young people aged 14–17 reported that they are not self-employed nor in any form of paid employment. Almost all of them (96 percent) are contributing family members.

Although most adolescent youth aged 14–17 years are

supporting family members, those employed are mainly involved in low paying petty and irregular jobs. These irregular and petty activities most often include casual labor in agriculture, such as land preparation, planting, weeding, spraying and harvesting. In addition, when below 18 years of age are engaged in work that is considered hazardous, such as spraying pesticides, carry heavy loads, using sharp tools and working lack of personal protective equipment when

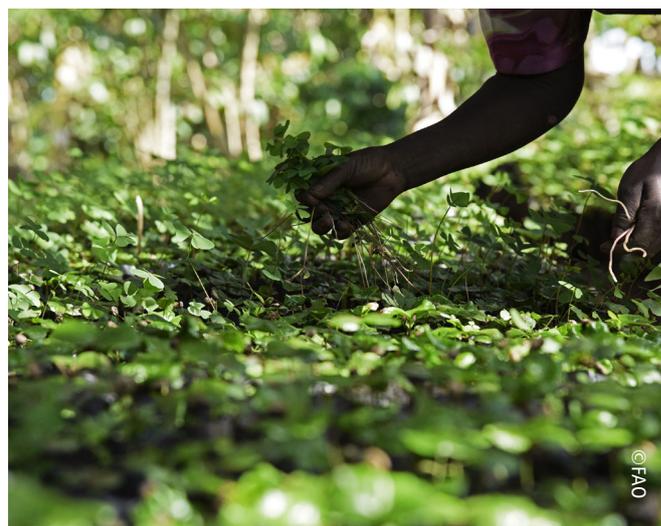
Figure 4 | Reasons for dropping out of school, percent of rural young persons reporting each cause



Sources: Authors' computation using School-to-work survey, 2013.

necessary, it is considered child labour. In regions growing specific cash crops, boys were reported to be working on plantations. For instance, in Eastern Uganda, planting and harvesting of sugarcane was a major activity reported, while in the Central Region it was coffee harvesting and in West-Nile it was cotton picking and working in cotton ginneries. Other activities that the boys in the 14–17 age cohort are involved in include working as potters on construction sites, brick laying, quarrying, fetching water for a pay, collecting firewood for a pay, carrying bananas to urban centers for sale, working in restaurants, cattle rearing, charcoal burning and to a lesser extent, riding boda bodas (motorcycles). in Eastern Uganda, planting and harvesting of sugarcane was a major activity reported, while in the Central Region it was coffee harvesting and in West-Nile it was cotton picking and working in cotton ginneries. Other activities boys in the 14–17 age cohort are involved in include working as potters on construction sites, brick laying, quarrying, fetching water for a pay, collecting firewood for a pay, carrying bananas to urban centers for sale, working in restaurants, cattle rearing, charcoal burning and to a lesser extent, riding boda bodas (motorcycles).

On the other hand, it was reported that most girls are at home without any income generating activities. Across all the regions visited, there were more out-of-school girls working as supporting family members than those with petty and irregular jobs. In addition, there were no girls with full employment. Most of the working girls are employed as maids in major towns, they serve in restaurants and salons, while others work as casual laborers in agriculture.



Resource constraints and other challenges faced by the out-of-school young persons

Over 96 percent of the youth aged 14–17 who reported to be working for a pay in rural areas are employed in agriculture; and yet they are deprived of some critical inputs and services, particularly land and financial services. According to findings presented in Table 1, out-of-school youth aged 14–17 in western and northern Uganda neither own land nor have access to land, yet land is the single most important factor of production in the sector where they are engaged. Even in other regions, the percentages of 14–17-year-olds who can access or own land are very small.

Across developing countries, youth face many challenges in accessing financial services, especially in rural areas,

Table 1 | Level of land ownership and access by young persons aged 14–17 years

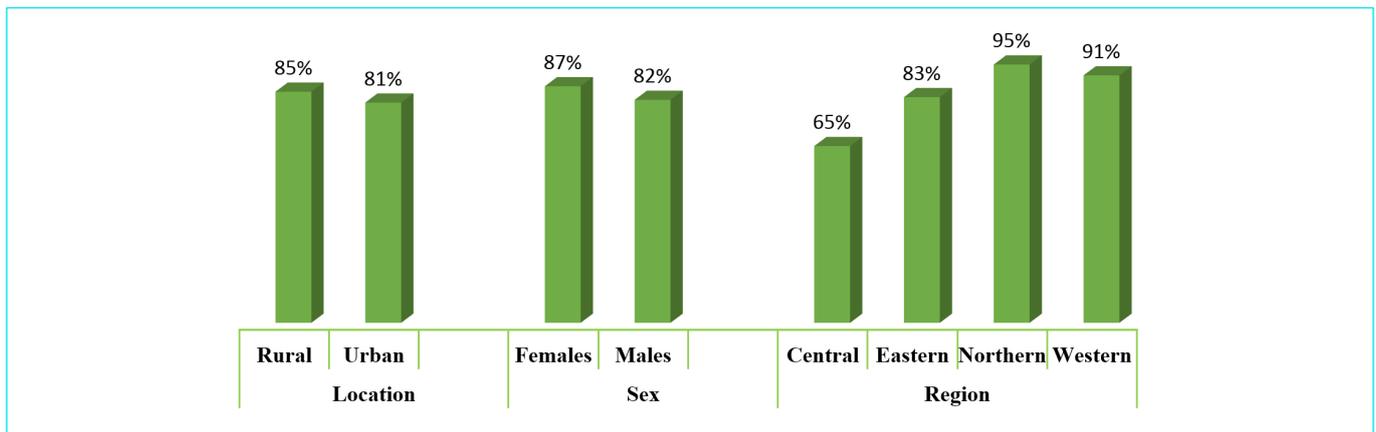
Region	Percentage of 14–17 year olds with access to land	Percentage of 14–17 year olds owning land	Land size owned by 14–17 year olds (Acres)
Central (Nakaseke, Luwero and Kalungu)	05	00	00
Eastern (Iganga, Mbale and Soroti)	06	04	00
Western (Ibanda and Isingiro)	00	00	00
West Nile (Nebbi)	18	00	00
Karamoja (Napak and Moroto)	23	17	05
Northern (Lira and Kore)	00	00	00

Source: Perceptions based on focus group discussions.

Note: (a) The percentages/numbers presented in the Table are averages of the percentages/numbers that were agreed upon by members of the different focus groups.

(b) Results from FGDs can only be interpreted within the context of the surveyed communities.

Figure 5 | Percentage of out-of-school rural 15–17-year-olds without access to financial services



Source: Authors' computations using the 2013 School-to-Work Transition Survey.

mostly due to lack of collateral (such as land titles and other property that can be used as security to obtain credit) and financial literacy. This is particularly the case in Uganda. At regional level, limited access to financial services by out-of-school youth is mostly reported in western and northern Uganda compared to central and eastern regions (Figure 2). The limited access to financial services by the out-of-school youths means that they are most likely to lack sufficient capital to set up income generating business entities.

Apart from the limited access to land and financial services, out-of-school youths aged 14–17 who are engaged in agriculture face several other challenges. Although the Employment Act allows youth aged 14–17 to work, as per Ugandan law, youth under 16 cannot enter into legally binding contracts and find themselves often at risk of

exploitation. Specific challenges found included: employers defaulting on wage payments either by refusing to pay or paying lower wages than previously agreed upon; delayed payments; exploitation in terms of working for long hours and being subjected to heavy work which is not appropriate for the age cohort; working while hungry as employers often do not provide food and wages can be paid at the end of the assignment only; lack of protective gears - according to the 2013 SWTS only six percent of males aged 15–17 years are provided with protective gear at their work places; lack of appropriate farm tools, which limits their productivity and earnings; sexual abuse from their employers; bad weather conditions (droughts and floods); and long distances (too much travel time) to places of work.





Working conditions and wages for the employed youth

The majority of working youth are not entitled to non-wage/salary benefits. Very few paid employees benefit from services such as transport/ transport allowances, meals/meal allowances, paid leave, pension, end of service payment, overtime pay, medical insurance coverage, and occupational safety (e.g. provision of protective equipment and clothing). The most frequently cited benefit across all age cohorts is meals or meal allowance, and there are noticeable gender differences in this regard.

Table 2 | Work conditions of out-of-school young persons and youth residing in rural areas

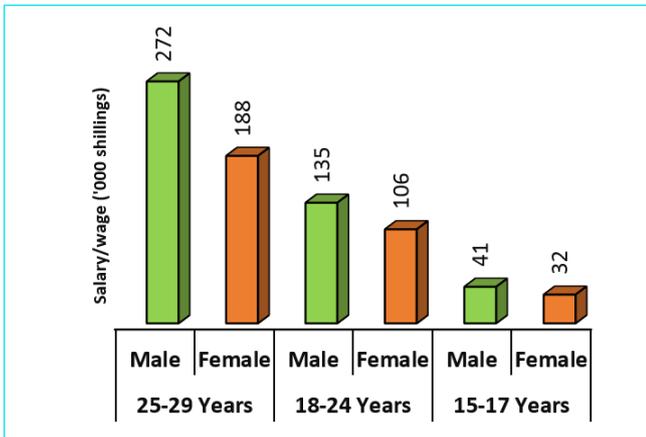
	25–29 years		18–24 years		15–17 years	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Transport/transport allowance	0.20	0.06	0.13	0.10	0.00	0.00
Meals/meal allowance	0.50	0.56	0.45	0.53	0.64	0.33
Paid Annual Leave	0.16	0.19	0.02	0.09	0.00	0.00
Paid Sick Leave	0.16	0.22	0.09	0.23	0.14	0.05
Pension Scheme	0.06	0.15	0.02	0.06	0.00	0.00
End of service payment	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.08	0.00
Overtime Payment	0.12	0.12	0.09	0.07	0.00	0.00
Medical Insurance coverage	0.09	0.08	0.07	0.05	0.14	0.05
Occupational Safety (e.g. protective equipment)	0.11	0.11	0.06	0.02	0.06	0.00

Source: Authors' computations using the 2013 School-to-Work Transition Survey. Note the reported statistics are means, you multiply by 100 to get percentages.

Salaries and wages

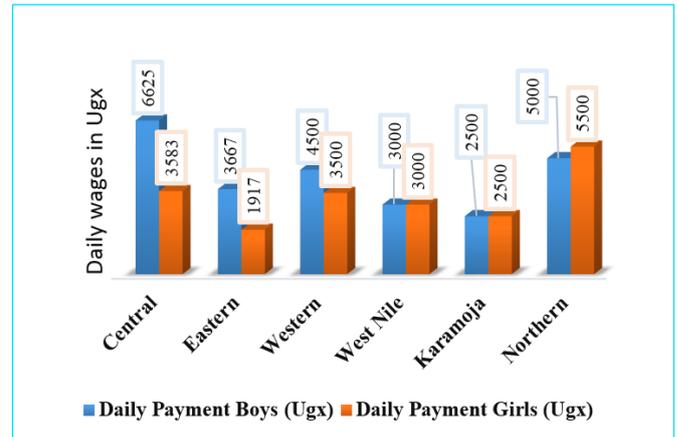
While the older youth groups tend to earn the highest incomes, out-of-school rural youth tend to earn lowest salaries for all age groups (see Figure 6). Throughout all age cohorts, girls earn less than boys, which indicates gender imbalances in employment and earnings. The wages of working young persons are the highest in the Central and Northern Regions (see Figure 7).

Figure 6 | Wages of out-of-school rural young persons who are paid employees



Sources: Authors' computations using the 2013 School-to-Work Transition Survey.

Figure 7 | Daily wages for the young persons (14–17 years) who do petty jobs



Sources: Perceptions based on focus group discussions.





Interventions supporting young people to transit from school to work

The various forms of support provided to the out-of-school youth can be summarized as: Skills development and linkages to employment opportunities; co-investment in acquisition of critical farm inputs and linkages to output markets; facilitating provision of extension and advisory services; and facilitating young people to access financial services.

Unfortunately, the 14–17 age cohort are often neglected from employment generation initiatives. Moreover, many initiatives are limited in scope, in terms of the geographical coverage (most projects operate in a very limited number of districts), life span (short to medium term), eligible age groups, and gender. Finally, most initiatives appear limited in providing young people with opportunities in different nodes of agricultural value chains, particularly agro-processing and value addition.

Emerging actions for consideration

The Government is urged to invest in interventions that will keep youth in school until they have successfully completed and attained some employable skills; this includes addressing the many issues that lead younger youth to drop out, including lack of school fees. It is universally acknowledged

that young people who stay in school longer have better opportunities and greater earnings.

Moreover, training and employment programmes and interventions should target young persons aged 14–17, and especially those who are out of school. Vocational and business trainings can help build the capacity of the young people, enabling them to acquire decent jobs. This can be applied to those who are currently contributing family members or those who are employed in underpaid petty jobs who most often lack technical skills. Improving access to employment opportunities along different nodes of agricultural value chains, including value addition, is also encouraged in program formulation. Ensuring girls have access to these programmes is essential.

Programmes should also look at case specific innovative ways that can better assist younger youth to access land and financial services. This may entail community lots and greater training on financial literacy, including specific financial products for younger youth.

There is a need to recognize and enforce formal contracts between employers and the 14–17 age cohort. In this regard, general working conditions of rural youth need to be improved. The latter can be done through enforcing the provision of protective gears, meals at work, and medical allowance. In addition, strict penalties should be handed to the employers and employees who commit acts of sexually

abuse towards young workers and improved monitoring of such issues should be carried out. The latter may include regular awareness raising/education programmes on gender and sexual harassment.

Specific to organizations that are supporting the out-of-school youth, based on lessons learnt from previous initiatives, we recommend improvements in terms of project implementation so as to achieve greater impact on youth employment creation. In particular, this can be achieved through the following:

- Projects should attempt to address both the supply and demand challenges faced by the out-of-school 14–17 youth. Removal of constraints to enhancing production coupled with sustainable market linkages will make engagement in agriculture profitable and attractive for the unemployed, underemployed and youth in disguised employment.
- Project implementers should work within existing structures and collaborate with other partners to leverage on their resources and expertise.
- All projects should have a sustainable exit strategy. An example is FAO’s aquaculture interventions in Uganda that systematically reduce the level of project contribution towards inputs acquisition. Selected beneficiaries are given inputs such as water pipes, fish cages, feed mills, hatcheries, and fingerlings (fish fry). At the start (year 1), each beneficiary receives 75 percent of the inputs (not cash) that he/she requires, during the second year the beneficiary gets 50 percent of the required inputs, and in the final year (year 3) he/she gets only 25 percent of the total inputs required. Thereafter, the beneficiary begins to meet the full cost of inputs on their own.
- Implementing organizations should closely monitor and evaluate the project implementation, and an adaptive management style should be applied. This means that organizations should be flexible enough to respond to unexpected emerging needs and priorities on ground.

Notes

The brief is a summary of the study report titled “Employment situation and engagement in agriculture of out-of-school young persons (14–17years) in Uganda”, commissioned by FAO. The report was authored by EPRC team (Francis Mwesigye, Mildred Barungi and Musa), supported by FAO’s Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equity Division (ESP) (Jessie Fagan, Ileana Grandelis and Marco Fiorentini) with the coordination of Edward Tanyima from FAO Uganda Country Office.



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