

FACT AND FANTASY ON SCHOOL LEAVERS IN UGANDA:

UGANDA YOUTH SURVEY

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Summary

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The report discusses the findings of a Uganda Youth Survey which was conducted over a period of two years in three rural areas near Arua, Mbale and Kampala and which made a study of the emigrant youths in the town, and the primary school leavers in Labwor of Omwony - Ojwok.

The report makes a number of points concerning what school leavers are and are not, and considers some of the approaches that have been used or are being recommended to solve the problem of the unemployed school leavers.

It recommends a youth service which is labour intensive and generates its own leadership, and the encouragement of informal avenues that already exist through which people acquire skills rather than the creation of expensive formal institutions.

Report

School leavers constitute a social category

This is myth number one. School leavers do not constitute a social category. Primary school leavers do not conceive of themselves as a unit, and so far few secondary school leavers act in this way. The category "school leaver" is an artificial category created by educators, social scientists, and laymen, and perpetuated by politicians. People generalize from a few cases they know to total populations and fail to realize that if school leavers were behaving as a group there wouldn't be only 134 boys to interview at markets in Kampala (of whom 33% had no education) or two boys begging at Christo's, or none to watch your car in the parks.

Youths who have been through primary school do not perceive of themselves as belonging to each other - instead they belong to other positions they occupy in a variety of institutions and role networks that are more significant for them and provide some stability in their lives: positions in families as son, nephew or grandson; in clubs and societies; in occupational positions, and in numerous untraced occupational roles that involve self-employment.

Education causes unemployment

It is alleged that what is taught in the school is irrelevant to local (rural) needs and development, and school instills false (unrealistic) attitudes and aspirations in their products. If anything, schooling creates employment because it is a major employer, and this through the multiplier effect spreads through the whole economy. But outside becoming teachers and other staff, schools can not be expected to create jobs for their leavers. Remembering that only approximately 30% of the age group is in primary school (though with wide area variations say between Kigezi and Karamoja) what then happens to the rest of the age group that receives little or no education? Though little "hard research" has been done in this area, it is not difficult to realize that the uneducated might also be among the job seekers (think of all the Rwandans that for sixty years have been coming to Uganda) and that education is not the only thing that causes people to seek wage jobs - there are many other factors that push people out both into other rural areas (and most migration in Uganda is rural-rural) and into cities.² Farrant's finding that one-third of the market boys were uneducated confirms that lack of an education does not serve either to keep Daudi on the farm.³

That all school leavers' aspirations are unrealistic is also a commonly held myth. A variety of studies in different countries have shown that school leavers at all levels have surprisingly realistic aspirations given the contingencies of the job market and the limited information available to them.⁴

In the past some of the aspiration studies failed to distinguish that individuals have a hierarchy of hopes and wants and expectations, and one might "hope" to be a "doctor" but "expect" to be a "driver" and know that he can always be a mixed farmer (both food and cash crops).

Educated youth will not work with their hands

This too is a myth. To realize how false this commonly held view is all one has to do is become aware of how hard youth can work in agriculture, trading, building, cottage industries, etc. This fallacy has its origins in observations of youth who are seen as "sitting", school leavers who are waiting for employment and supposedly do nothing in the process. In our own research we were able to identify very few youths who were genuinely "sitting" - the girls are quickly married off and then must work hard, and most young men are involved in a variety of fields of self-employment, activities often related to increasing rural productivity, and though they might tell an outsider they are "unemployed", they in fact are extremely busy and may be earning a considerable amount of money (from lejaleja work to pancake making, pork roasting, selling sugar cane, fishmongering, working on building houses, latrines, stores, assisting in dukas, etc.). No, inspite of this prevalent myth, youths are extremely involved and making their personal contribution to development. And even those few who really are sitting, after a matter of a year or two, and maybe moving through a variety of casual jobs, they find their niche too and "settle down". There is a marked difference between wanting a well paid salaried job and security, waiting for it, and eventually accepting something else.

Youths are flocking to the towns and cities

This also is fallacious. In 1969 the census found 9.5 million people in Uganda, with only 600,000, or 7%, in the enlarged (over 1959) towns and

Kampala (eighteen urban areas). The real rate of urban growth has been approximately 10% a year, a third of which is accounted for by fertility and two-thirds by migration. If all the school leavers (not counting unschooled and little schooled youths) were to flock to the towns, the rate of growth would be two to three times what is actually is. On the contrary, the impressive fact about Uganda is how few school leavers, youths, children and adults are moving to the towns. The rural areas are holding people far better than they are ever given credit for. ⁵

Education is perceived as an investment

This may have been true for awhile before and after independence, but it certainly is less true today. It would be better to say that an expenditure on school fees is seen more in the light of buying a lottery ticket: if one wins one's salary is ten to thirty times what it will be if one loses. But as the payoff from a given level of education (the chance of winning, or the stakes or odds) changes so that fewer win (in 1963 one out of three who finished the eight year primary cycle were successful, today only one out of ten obtain further education), it becomes increasingly likely that parents, relatives and guardians - fee paying people - will think more than twice about their "investment". In Nigeria, schools that parents perceived as not giving a payoff have died out and the number of males finishing their primary education has levelled off or declined. This suggests that a time will come when schools like Kenya's Harambee Schools, or Uganda's more than 300 private secondary schools, will experience a decline in enrolments, as to finish such a course ceases to enhance one's position in society. Already there are suggestions that people are making the choice of investing in land, livestock and farming for their youth instead of paying 4000/- for four years of private schooling which may lead nowhere. ⁶

If people are beginning to evaluate education for its other objectives, and not merely as an "investment" or "lottery", this suggests that formal schooling is more relevant to local needs than is usually thought possible. Parents won't continue to support primary schools and pay the fees if they ascribe only to the "investment" or "lottery" thesis - so obviously primary schooling is integrated into rural areas and is accepted as an end in itself (though with variations on this theme from village to village).

Daudi can be kept on the farm through changing the content of what is taught in the primary schools

It has been advocated that agricultural, home economics, vocational, commercial, technical and other practical courses be taught in the schools. This is what has become known as the "vocational school fallacy" and is a highly prevalent myth in Uganda. ⁷ Schools are agents of socialization, social mobility and role allocation, and they will serve this purpose no matter what is taught. Merely to change the syllabus will not automatically result in the other goal of keeping people in the rural areas being achieved, as the reasons why people emigrate, as has been shown already, are not only related to formal schooling. ⁸

The problem of the unemployed school leaver can be solved by introducing agricultural education in the schools (and when the "problem of the secondary school leaver" becomes more visible through agriculture there too). This perennial myth is an extension of the above point on adaptation of the curriculum to fit rural needs. As a recommendation people have been making it in English speaking Africa since 1847 and earlier. And it has always

failed to be implemented in the long run (though there have been short-run successes of a limited nature like the "middle schools" in Tanzania in the 1950's). During the colonial period the peoples of Africa resisted agricultural education because they perceived it as an attempt by the colonial powers to pass off on them an inferior form of education.

Any form of "adapted" education, be it agricultural, vocational, technical, commercial, domestic science or animal husbandry requires inputs in staff, equipment, buildings, and other facilities that no African nation is yet in a position to make at the secondary level, nor at the primary, with the exception of pilot projects at a few institutions.⁹

Agricultural education in farm schools has also been prone to failure, mainly due to a number of factors: poor organization and direction of the schools, the absence of recognized examinations which permit upward mobility, limited opportunities for modern cash crop farming and animal husbandry for the graduates, lack of follow up support and supervision with advice, capital, rural credit, etc. The very few agricultural institutions that are well staffed and equipped and are able to meet these above conditions have tended to be successful, but while this can be done in the case of a few schools it can not be institutionalized and accomplished across the board in all schools.¹⁰

Education is a revolutionary force that can be used to bring about major changes in society

This commonly held view is perpetuated by such catchy titles as "Tanzania: Revolution by Education."¹¹ The simple point here is that formal education and teachers are usually slow to change and in most societies constitute a conservative force (one function of education is to socialize youth to the society and to perpetuate the norms, values, and attitudes of that society) and where education has been a force for change it has been part and parcel of a wider social revolution (as in China or Cuba), but where attempts at revolutionary changes in education have been made and there has not been a wider social revolution, they have failed (as with Gandhi's Basic Education in India). The success or failure of Nyerere's efforts to build a terminal system (instead of a continuing one which focuses on preparing for senior entrance) will depend largely on how successful Tanzania's other innovations are (the Arusha Declaration, Socialism and Rural Development, etc.). The places where self reliance in education has been successful so far has been in successful Ujamaa villages.

Though formal education contributes to social change (and studies suggest even increased rural productivity can be related to literacy and schooling), schooling cannot be used as a means of social change when the changes desired are contrary to the aspirations of pupils and parents (such as keeping Daudi on the farm with only a jembe in his hands). Education as an instrument of social policy cannot be relied on to produce results when the social problems to be tackled are not caused by education. Education cannot easily be used as a means of altering aspirations, as what an individual aspires to be is only partially determined by his schooling; a multiplicity of external factors contribute to the formation of an aspiration.

A National Youth Service can solve the problem of the unemployed school leavers

This again is a fallacious argument. The problem with any further training (which NYS is meant to include as an objective) is that it merely

delays the point at which one begins to seek work - and no matter what the training may be in, if there hasn't been an improvement in the number of wage jobs available, these youths may still be unemployed a few years later. A secondary objective of a NYS is that the participants will learn skills and abilities that will enable them to be absorbed more effectively into the rural areas (as farmers, carpenters, drivers, builders, traders, etc.), but in the absence of any proper evaluations of youth services in those African nations that have had them, we are not in a position to assess this objective. What we know from reports of youth services in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi is that they have ended up costing more per participant than existing formal secondary schooling. In countries where the numbers of primary school leavers have been over 100,000 a year the NYS's have never taken more than 5,000 a year into their ranks, and in most places only a thousand or more, so that the creation of a NYS has never been (and could not be) a blanket, across the board, solution to the problem of the unemployed school leaver (and not really a "solution" at all, but merely a "delaying tactic".).

That there should be a dual system of secondary schooling; rural schools that are adapted to local requirements and an urban system.

This is the major recommendation that Lewis Brownstein has to make following four years of studying primary school leavers in Kenya. It also would have been a consequence of the Castle Commission Report if the major recommendation calling for the creation of "high schools" had been accepted. What both reports fail to recognize is that Uganda and Kenya already have a dual system, if one merely compares the private or unaided Harambee Schools to the aided secondary schools. While both systems (private and aided) may follow the same syllabus, functionally they serve very different purposes because their graduates follow different life paths (few if any of the private or Harambee leavers making it into 5th Form and University). It is this structural divergence that will be considered when we make our recommendations.

But if there are to be successful "rural" secondary schools all the additional inputs in staff, buildings, and equipment would have to be made which cannot be made. Private schools are excessively bookish and academic because they cannot (for the most part) do anything else; adapted education costs more and they don't have the finances available to do it. 12

Rural or village polytechnics will solve the problem of the unemployed school leaver

Since the start of such schools near Busia in Kenya approximately five years ago, a number of such flagrant claims for what polytechnics can do have been made, and they have been recommended to planners in Uganda as a panacea. As with National Service, any such new innovation is not introduced on a grand scale, but in small pilot projects. In 1970 in Kenya there were only fourteen village polytechnics enrolling approximately 500 students. Though the VPT is a promising innovation, it is not clear yet even in Kenya if the overall investments are worth the output, especially when compared with alternative informal ways in which youth may acquire skills (carpentry, brick laying, brick making, butchery, tailoring, chicken raising, pig raising, etc.). In Uganda all the skills taught in VPT are learned in a variety of ways in the villages and towns, and it may be unnecessary and a waste of resources to create a new type of educational institution if its objectives are already being accomplished informally by the society.

Youth centres and youth programmes (like those of NUYO and Y's) will solve the problem of the unemployed school leavers.

So far in Uganda and Kenya "youth centres" have not made any real dent. There exists a tendency for them to be transformed into pseudo-schools, and they also have severe problems of financing and staffing.

Massive land settlement as a solution to the problem. The settlement of youth on new land or unused land near dense areas has not been made part of the approach to dealing with unemployed school leavers on any scale in East Africa. Though both Kenya, and to a lesser degree Tanzania, have had massive land settlement programmes over the past decade, they have not been primarily designed for youth. Uganda, though, has had a number of small scale youth agricultural settlement projects organized by the Church of Uganda. These youth land settlement schemes have been carried out on an extremely small scale, and have received a considerable input of enthusiasm and supervision. But it is apparent that these highly unique projects are not easily reproducible, and there is no indication that they have sparked off a chain of similar ventures.

A dramatic large scale programme of Rural Public Works will employ unemployed school leavers.

During the Great Depression in the U.S.A a variety of programmes from WPA to CCC (road works and conservation corps) absorbed youths and others, but tropical Africa has yet to develop its version of such a crash programme. Yet this is the major recommendation that came out of the Kericho Conference in 1966 in Kenya. Though economically sound, a RPWP has not been implemented because of political, social and economic constraints. Yet the grandiose thinking that underlies this recommendation remains with us today - that to solve a major social problem one gigantic effort is necessary. The authors of Rural Development in Kenya, for example, point out that a crash programme of building teachers houses would be required if all the youths trained in the building trades in village polytechnics are to be employed.

Conclusions

We have examined briefly fourteen different misconceptions about the problem of unemployed school leavers and/or what might be done to solve this problem. Our first point was that by definition it was not a problem, as school leavers in Uganda do not yet constitute a definite social category. We then went on to review various approaches and list some of their shortcomings - but the major point we were reiterating throughout is that:

There is no one solution

There is no aggregate approach

Therefore it is fallacious to assume that one tactic will deal adequately with the problem (which really is only a reflection of all the problems of rural and urban development in Uganda).¹³ And if one cannot put all one's eggs in one basket, what then is one to do?

First, it is necessary to realize that the solutions are not to be found in the schools, but in all the varied efforts that help to expand

employment opportunities across the board - and this would include the variety of programmes that will help youths to become better (or "modern") farmers (something many more than we give credit for actually aspire to be).¹⁴ Agricultural education, farm schools, District Farm Institutes, Young Farmers of Uganda, youth centres, NUYO, Y programmes, church programmes, polytechnics, all might in their own way contribute to the total process of development. What we are after then is a multiplicity of effort, which together might have an accumulative effect on the process of change. Though we now recognize that a youth service is no automatic solution, this does not mean we should not have any youth service at all - on the contrary, a small (and they all are) youth service which is labour intensive and generates its own leadership and administrative capacity (instead of the highly capital intensive style of elsewhere with their many foreign experts) should be experimented with.

Though we now realize that agricultural education will not on its own keep Daudi in the kibanja, this does not mean that there should not be any agricultural education. On the contrary, agricultural science in the secondary schools (on top of rural science in the primary) might be made to have a number one priority, to the point that a credit in agricultural science be required at the "0" level before one could go to Fifth form (as a credit in English is today). The result of such an institutional change would be that all pupils in all secondary schools would attempt to master agricultural science in the ways they do English now (and one might pass educational legislation that in secondary schools if they can teach only one science the first to be taught must be agricultural science and this would include both urban and rural schools.¹⁵ While many of the best pupils might never use their agricultural science knowledge again, such an approach might have a residual effect in that the terminal pupils, those leaving to seek employment, and those that eventually settle down and become farmers, would make use of such learning.

Ways should also be found to encourage and intensify the various informal avenues that exist through which people acquire skills, as it is cheaper for society to utilize these than to create formal institutional edifices that divert precious resources. But this is a topic for another paper.

Having come this far the reader now wonders, "But where is the blessing?" The blessing lies in the simple conviction that some education is better than none; that an educated populace will make for a healthier nation and more rapid development. That this is so is supported by a variety of evidence. Thus to have school leavers is a blessing, not a blight.

Notes:

1. Efforts at forming a Uganda School Leavers Association since July 1970 have met with limited success. The USLA has no members who are primary school leavers, and out of 300 members 200 are still in secondary schools. From a personal communication from the founding-director, October 1971.
2. There are many studies on migration in Uganda. See T.K. Hopkins, A Study Guide for Uganda, African Studies Centre, Boston, Boston University, 1969, for references.
3. Farrant, op.cit., p. 18. Fifty-seven percent of this sample are migrants to Kampala (or their parents), but it is not known how many of those were never schooled.
4. For a very recent comprehensive survey of the whole field of "aspiration studies" in Africa, see: J. M. Wober, "Aspirations: African's Ideas about Education and Work: a Review", Makerere University, Kampala, Department of Sociology, Occasional paper No. 3, October 1971, mimeo, 24 pp.
5. Why the rural areas are able to do this is a separate issue, but we would suggest that youths and others when assessing the opportunities open to them are very shrewd and calculating and have many ideas about the comparative advantages of living in the village or in a town or Kampala, and that, contrary to widely held opinion, the rural areas are perceived as offering more than the town/city. Hoad in Tanga found that school leavers were actually more active in the village than in the town, with the major exception being the ability to go to libraries in the town. Most of the glamour, magnetic attractions of town they never partook of as they did not have the resources. See: Peter Hoad, "A Study of Primary School Leavers looking for Work in Tanga", Unpublished master's dissertation, Kampala, Makerere University, 1969. In the rural areas they were more active in sports. We have had similar findings in the UYS, and a study of day students living in Kampala in 1962-1963 found that very few of them actually enjoyed the attractions of the city. In the absence of such compensations the difficulties in coping with town life can cause people to turn away from it in favour of village life (high costs of housing, food, transportation, noise, thieves, etc. are all associated with towns and their opposites with villages). This process has been described by Josef Gugler and others. See: J. Gugler (ed.), Urban Growth in Subsaharan Africa, Kampala, Misr. Nkanga editions, No. 6, 1970. See especially Caroline Hutton's article, "Rates of Labour Migration" (which also contains an excellent bibliography).
6. This is particularly true in Bugisu where private secondary schools have not received the same support that they have in other parts of Uganda (and those few private schools in and around Mbale have very few Bamasaba in them).

7. Philip Foster, "The Vocational School Fallacy", in J. W. Hanson and C. S. Brembeck, Education and the Development of Nations, New York, H. R. Winston, 1966, pp. 167-76. At a meeting at Makerere University in October 1971 between the Senior Staff and President Amin, a number of people spoke calling for the introduction of agricultural education in primary schools.
8. This point was made most adroitly by the Castle Commission report in 1963. "The problems of agricultural education are not primarily educational; they are intimately bound up with the solution of economic, technical, and social problems..... systems of land tenure, improved land use, finance and marketing, research and development, traditions and tribal customs....." Education in Uganda, Entebbe, Government Printer, 1963, p. 34.
9. In wealthy Western Nigeria when they introduced Secondary Modern Schools in 1955, they were meant to have such "biases", but by 1960 when there were over 1000 such schools, only nine had the staff, equipment, etc. It is simply too costly. The World Bank has backed the introduction of "biases" in secondary schools, and it too may be premature as even if the buildings and equipment are paid for by loans, there are few local people qualified to teach, and the biases end up being taught by external volunteers who are also unqualified. For a fuller discussion of these issues see: S. G. Weeks, "Innovation in Education", Makerere University, Social Science Conference Sociology Papers 1968, Kampala, MISR, 1971.
10. There are also serious reservations held by educators concerning the purpose of primary and secondary education; they tend to favour a sound basic education with courses in rural science in primary schools and agricultural science in secondary schools. See: Castle, op.cit.
11. J. Resnick (ed.), Tanzania: Revolution by Education, Arusha, Longmans, 1967.
12. In Kenya only one Harambee School out of over 483 has attempted to do more than be a pseudo-secondary school. See: David Zarambeka, "The School as an Agent of Rural Development", Rural Africana, No.9, Fall 1969, pp. 38-39.
13. Not even the Uganda Army as a major employer really makes a dent. Though perhaps 7000 youths were recruited into the army in early 1971, this would be equal to only one from every three "villages" in Uganda.
14. Perhaps 60,000 young people turn to farming as their life's vocation every year. It is at this point of readiness, when youths are motivated to become farmers, that they should be reached by agricultural and related educational efforts.
15. Having only agricultural science proved to be an effective approach at the Ajuwa Grammar School in Nigeria. See S. Weeks, "Innovation in Education", op.cit.