



Association for the Development of Education in Africa

**Biennale on Education in Africa
(Libreville, Gabon, March 27-31, 2006)**

Effective ECD Programs that can be scaled up

Parallel Session C-3

**Getting the Child Ready for
School: Organizing Holistic
Early Learning Interventions**

**Making schools ready for children:
the case of community schools in pastoralist
communities of East Africa**

by *Nathan CHELIMO*

**Working Document
Draft
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DOC C-3.4

• Original version in English •

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**Making schools ready for children: the case
of community schools in pastoralist communities
of East Africa**



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Abstract

The paradox of pastoral education is a component of broader contradiction of pastoral education development in hegemony of non-sympathetic urban-based, sedentary lifestyle oriented ideology. Historically, education among pastoralist of East Africa failed to realize substantive enrolment, regular attendance, learning achievement, transition to post primary education training or gender parity. This was erroneously reduced to a negative perception and criticism of the pastoralist as a community of drifting unskilled underdogs who did not value education or the modern civilization that education was intended to deliver upon them. This argument seems to be substantiated by the pastoralist's outright rejection of education, particularly as signified by the pronouncement of "the curse on the pen"¹ the case of the Karamojong (North East of Uganda)².

The Karamoja Programme is conceptualized in the context of Uganda's policies and programmes for education in Karamoja. Hitherto, these were largely designed to assimilate the pastoralist into the sedentary agrarian modernized lifestyle. Education was designed to mould a pastoralist subvient to modern state control, other than accomplish the pastoralist individual with unique culture and identity, this failed. By and large the state proposed that nomadic pastoralism was an inferior and primitive mode of production in terms of economic and social development

Development agencies have demonstrated a contrary extreme tendency to the state by defining empowerment of the pastoralist from perspective foreign to the pastoralist and tried to impose this world view upon the people of Karamoja. A case in point is the question of universal right to education described primarily as being in the best interest of the child. Education has been presented as the magic spell that will propel pastoralists into civilization. This in itself is frightening for the pastoralist who cannot envisage life without life stock. Empowerment of the pastoralist through education has been reduced to literacy, numeracy and rejection of pastoralism in favour of sedentary lifestyle. The question of social, political and economic exclusion and marginalization of the pastoralist has not been addressed by education. For this reason the pastoralist has remained skeptical towards education, viewing it as a tool for transforming him from into a life configuration he despises

To the state and the elite, pastoralism has further been considered synonymous with poverty. On the contrary pastoralism is a specialization developed from mixed farming and has its times of plenty and scarcity. Return to pastoralism after a catastrophe can be more challenging than the agrarian cultivator's recovery, which creates a strong tendency of frugality among pastoralists³. The greatest threat to the survival of pastoralism is the shrinkage of grazing lands and the challenge to social status of the pastoralist imposed by sedentary agrarian counterpart

The pastoral communities of Karamoja appreciate the need to ensure that the best interest of the child, include with respect to education. This is however defined in compliance with survival and socio-economic reproduction of the pastoralist community where the best interest of the collective, in this case the household holds supreme. To separate the best interest of the child from that of the household is to say the least, untenable. To put the interest of individual above the collective interest of the household is an abomination, as the structure of the organization, the survival and the reproduction of the pastoral economy rests solidly on the household and not the individual as the basic unit of survival

¹ Alinga, the tribal head of the ngkotido clan presided over a ritual sacrifice where a black ox was slaughtered a curse pronounced upon any one of their children who associated with schooling or even worked with the state

² The pen symbolizing education was buried to seal the covenant with the ancestors. Upon his death the tribal head was buried in the same grave with the pen

³ Its this frugality that is misconstrued for improvement

Education programmes among pastoralists in East Africa are founded on the premises, that the formal education system was designed to respond to a sedentary lifestyle. It undermines the socio-economic essence of pastoral existence. Not only does it threaten the reproduction of pastoral socialization, it directly seeks to deliberate the livelihood of pastoral households by withdrawing children from the core of its production structures

Through its organization, management, curriculum and methods the Uganda formal education system rejects the pastoralist sense of identity as belonging to a given ethnic group. Formal education advances a philosophy that sees nomadic pastoralism primarily as a form of livelihood and a primitive one at that, which should be supplanted and replaced with modern sedentary modes of production.

Delivery of education remains antagonistic to pastoral culture and has hitherto been executed with human interface hostile to nomadic culture. Supportive law enforcement is weak as the pastoral communities of Karamoja enjoy a tribal political, economic and military power structure that competently challenges the state

The formal school system does not take into account the incidental social, political and economic effects of its policies and practices. The hidden curriculum has not been considered when designing and implementing mass formal education programmes such as Universal Primary Education. The culture expressed within the formal school system including the strategy, curriculum and pedagogy are inconsistent with the essence of pastoral existence

There is a debate as whether the programme should prepare the children in pastoral communities for life outside pastoralism or perfect pastoral skill with a view to modernizing pastoralism.⁴ However the approach adopts a stance which rejects either or scenario. The programme is designed to respond to the needs of both those who aspire for life beyond pastoralism and those who see pastoralism as the essence of their existence

To argue that children in pastoral communities enrolled in school and completed the basic education cycle would deliver pastoral areas from its present state to a modern scenario is largely to be naïve and thus the need to articulate a pastoral development ideology cognizant of unique interplay of multidimensional barriers to development

Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) has emerged a credible rallying point for Karamoja development and therefore, provides an entry point for proposing this ideology.

The complex interplay of various factors, many of these beyond the direct realm of education programming result from the contradiction between pastoralism as a mode of production on one hand and demands of modernization on the other. Pastoralism as the optimum way of life in marginal lands has evolved over thousands of years and where lands can support cultivation it has transformed into agro-pastoralism as is the case with southern Karamoja

⁴ This question has not been disposed off

Executive summary

Many children who cannot participate in the prevailing education opportunities for various socio economic factors remain high. For many children, a subconscious opportunity cost analysis has resulted into a conscious decision to invest their time in supporting households to earn a living rather than spending the time in school systems that guarantee no prospects for improving the quality of their life, today or in the future

Formal education introduced early in the 19th century was not well received by the people of Karamoja. Opposition to formal education was heightened when reading and writing (the pen) symbolized the registration of people who were conscripted into the colonial British army during the Second World War. Many conscripts died in battle far from their motherland fighting for a cause the people of Karamoja did not understand. **The pen** together with the formal education that it represented were cursed and rejected. This curse was however lifted upon the launch of ABEK in the sub-region at the end of the 19th century. Other reasons that undermined the proliferation of formal education in Karamoja included its irrelevance to the indigenous semi-nomadic pastoral context

The implementation of Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) Programmes started in 1998, as an intervention to harmonize challenges of pastoral childhood with education as a right in childhood. It's a non formal education Programme designed for the pastoral community of Karamoja as a response to barriers in basic education experienced by children (6 to 18 year) in semi-nomadic pastoral communities of semi-arid region where they play a central role in house hold livelihoods The programme is founded on the strategic objective of increasing opportunity for disadvantage children, especially girls to experience positive early childhood development and to benefit from appropriate basic education

School age children bear the responsibility / duty to care for and carry younger children on their backs even if this meant carrying them into classrooms in both formal primary school and the learning centers under the Alternative Basic Education, Karamoja (ABEK). ABEK facilitators reported that this disruptive tendency undermined elder children's concentration during sessions and consequently their learning achievement. Direct observation revealed that many children in communities were malnourished, unkempt, lived in dirty surroundings, suffered respiratory tract and skin ailments and were hungry for most of the time.

The situation in which the children of Karamoja live is a chronic emergency and requires an emergency response approach to improve child survival, development, protection and participation. In line with other successful ECDE programmes and in view of the very needy situation in Karamoja community based holistic and multi sect oral approach to delivery of ECDE services in the sub-region was adopted

Opportunities

ABEK remains to encourage learners to develop physical, intellectual and other abilities necessary for living a healthy, productive and improved quality life and for self reliance and survival in ones environment; functional literacy skills in local language and English, cultural, moral and spiritual values; active participation in civic and community matters. ABEK has enabled pastoral communities to enroll their children in the learning centers and subsequently in formal schools (36,712) in 268 centers

Over the period, there has been a steady increase of children joining formal schools total 3,711 Children to date (1,737 = 47% girls) and 19 joining secondary schools. Establishing ABEK centres within the manyattas has enabled flexibility in studying time enabling children to balance household obligations with schooling. Elders have been able to monitor and supervise learning activities and to dispel the myth that modern education would alienate children from traditional values

Parents concern about the relevance of what children are taught has obliged elders to participate in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the learning activities. Parents have contributed to the development of the learning content, identified facilitators and monitored the effectiveness of programme besides contributing locally available materials and labour for building shelters at the learning centres

Curriculum relevance to pastoral context has hastened acceptance of education and is centred on community selected thematic areas⁵ besides reading, writing and numeracy skills. Instructors use local language (Ngkarimjong) and functional basic education methods and functional basic education methods as well as learning aids from immediate environment

Out standing among the strength of ABEK has been teaching of basic health and life skills to the children, as well as whole communities

Overtime, there has been a general change of attitude towards education among the pastoralists now seeing education as an investment and a path for development. Learners aspire for modern professionalism and communities recognise the value of girl's education

Pillars of the programme Design

In responding to these shortcomings the Karamoja education Programme is founded on the following pillars:-

- Involvement of the target communities and resource persons in programme design and implementation to ensure delivery sensitive to indigenous values and to create a human interface sympathetic to pastoral communities of Karamoja
- Involvement of central government and district local governments to build support and effective law enforcement
- The programmes are cognizant of and seeks to demonstrate respect for vast and experience of pastoral communities which is critical for their survival
- The monetary cost of schooling is a disincentive and as such, household monetary burden is avoided in view of the enormous household opportunity cost of divesting children from domestic responsibilities associated with pastoralist survival strategy
- The Karamoja programme is mainstreamed within the national education structure for institutionalization and ownership by the state as the duty bearer

⁵ Immediately accessible and relevant, comprehensible curriculum

- The Karamoja programme structure and content are highly flexible to respond to unique and dynamic circumstances of pastoral childhood
- Delivery is informally organized to allow elders to vet the curriculum through regular surveillance of physical and moral safety of children, particularly girls
- The programme exercises flexibility in meeting statistical targets in cognizance of the circumstances beyond the control of pastoral children such as in irregular attendance, drought, famine and lack of water in communities and cattle raids
- The programme is interlaced amongst various specialized government institutions and departments including the directorate of health services, water and education

Recommendations and lessons learned

Many children are still unable to access ABEK or the formal schools. Communities not reached by ABEK or formal education demand that the programme should be scaled-up urgently to reach their children. This is ongoing process. Scaling up ABEK creates increased demand for both human and financial resources. Attendance is irregular and hardly constitutes 40% of children enrolled at learning centres. There is need for a systematic strategy to strengthen sensitization and mobilization of the community to ensure that children attend regularly. At the same time, the factors that draw children away from school need to be addressed and the appropriate ECDE model conceptualized and implemented.

In ABEK there are no classrooms. Learning is in the open windy Karamoja climate is torturous for children and is often disrupted by weather extremes. Children have no better place to sit or place a book to write, than the dusty, sandy or muddy ground. Here they must squat, kneel or lie down to write. These postures are most difficult for girls to whom tradition imposes stringent public etiquette. Lack of shelter & infrastructure present a serious setback to the quality of ABEK learning. A strategy for supporting communities to provide low cost learning shelters, furniture and secure commitment from the government is priority in putting up low cost tin-roofed shelter model supported on galvanized pipes

At its inception, ABEK placed more emphasis on access. There is now growing concern about the need to improve the quality of learning. This calls for strengthening the performance of the facilitators and supervisors and improve the professional profile, competence, performance and motivation of the facilitators while institutionalising the programme process/functions in national institutions and local government policy and investment priorities (training, curriculum & certification related) and at the same time improve the quality of learning achievement as well the formal school programme

In ABEK, an education was envisaged where communities would continuously contribute to curriculum that harmonized and enriched indigenous knowledge, skills and values with modernization. Questions of the quality, standard and equivalence of ABEK relative to the formal school system, and ABEK's efficacy in enabling children to compete for national level opportunities are emerging. These issues need to be addressed in the background that ABEK is an entry point and a central component of the equation for addressing the broader question of development in the Karamoja sub-region. A review of the curriculum proposed has to take into account issues of content, its structuring, teaching approaches, assessment, equivalency and certification in the context of ABEK as an accelerated versus an alternative education model.

The growing rate of children who transfer from ABEK to the formal school system is undermined by the increasing rate of children who drop out from the formal schools upon

crossing. This presents a need to explore modalities for ensuring a smooth transition from non-formal to formal programmes and follow-up of performance among children who transfer to the formal schools.

Previous evaluations have indicated the need to strengthen documentation, monitoring and evaluation as a strategy for improving programme management and efficiency. It's important to strengthen the capacity of the district implementation team in administering, monitoring and documenting project activities

ABEK has not adequately captured the boys who migrate with cattle in search of water and pasture during the dry season. At the same time, ABEK has not adequately addressed the question of children with special learning needs. An assessment of the needs is ongoing. These pose considerable resource implications for ABEK and the formal school system in terms of providing support, training, materials and physical adjustments to ensure access and meaningfully participation in learning activities. Designing and implementing a mobile learning centre approach to target highly nomadic herd boys is likely to be an exciting experience with a radical shift of power from the district to the lower levels

Since inception, ABEK relies heavily on donor funding. Full ownership of ABEK as a district / government programme seems to be constrained by the weak financial base in the communities, as well as at local government levels, among others. This shortcoming needs a redress substantially if ABEK is fully taken up by the Ministry of Education and Sports as an integral component and strategy for realising UPE

The ABEK advocacy Strategy is being implemented by an Advocacy Task Force comprising The Minister of State for Karamoja, Karamoja Parliamentarians, and the District Leadership in the Karamoja sub-region. This structure is important for proper functioning of advocacy activities at different levels

Since the inception of ABEK as an idea in 1995, there have been drastic changes in the internal social, economic and political dynamics of Karamoja, as well as in its national and global relations. The emerging internal debate regarding the conceptualisation of ABEK especially in relation to the formal system seems to be a manifestation of changing aspirations. This among others underscores the need to re-examine ABEK in terms of its relevance, Vision, Mission, Goals, Objectives and Strategies.

It is critical to ensure that these respond to the changing needs of stakeholders, emerging local aspirations, national policies and goals as well as global concerns in the spirit of ABEK hallmark of participation and consultation.

Expansion has a direct immediate multiplier implication for the ABEK budget. The local governments' low revenue base presents a substantial obstacle to their capacity to sustain ABEK in its present form, let alone expanded coverage. Dependence on NGO funding to implement ABEK presents a serious risk to ABEK sustainability and this calls for greater investment by government.

The overall returns from investment in ABEK are immense, with favourable implications for both the entire Karamoja region and the neighbouring communities. ABEK will benefit significantly as government recognised it as an element of Universal Primary Education (UPE) responding to the unique implementation dynamics of semi-nomadic pastoral Karamoja. Besides meeting the cost of facilitators' allowances, government is supporting ABEK under the UPE funding framework starting FY 2005/2006. The districts on the other hand need to aggressively explore alternative fundraising strategies to support ABEK.

1. Introduction

Pastoralists are predominantly livestock keepers and they derive their livelihoods essentially from livestock, cattle, camels, sheep, goats and donkeys. Examples of pastoralists in East Africa Pokot of Kenya and Uganda, the Barabaig of Tanzania, the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania (including Ilparakuyo), the Samburu, Turkana, Rendille, Orma, Borana, Sekuye of Kenya and Ethiopia, the Karamojong⁶ and Bahima of Uganda.

Pastoralist and hunter/gatherers have an intricate relationship to the environment and ecosystem. They depend entirely on the resources contained therein for their daily subsistence. They also obtain fuel wood, implements and tools for their use or for sale in exchange for cash and also food and medicines from the wildlife and plant life within the environment. They observe strict environmental preservation and management techniques to ensure sustainability of natural resources in order to ensure their own survival and many being closely-knit communities, have attempted to observe and maintain indigenous cultural institutions and to pass them on to their progeny despite the onslaughts of modern influences.

Because of the value they have attached to their culture and social institutions and the tenacity with which they cling to them, pastoralists are severely feeling the threat of losing not just their land and natural resources upon which some of their cultural practices are dependent, but also the traditions they consider valuable and necessary for holding their societies together.

Members of community's pastoralists still share work together for their mutual benefit. It is common for others to leave babies in the care of siblings, grandmothers, neighbours and friends while they perform other tasks such as fetching firewood, water, milking or preparing food etc. Without members of the community, it is difficult to conceive how hunter/gatherers and pastoralists could survive. The Maasai tell a story that illustrates the importance of having neighbours and sharing work.⁷

In a semi-nomadic pastoral community children's labor is pivotal to the survival of the household, such that a school system that undermines children's fulfillment of their household obligations disrupts the household micro-economy. Formal schooling tends to lead to a breakdown of traditional institutions that are strongly engraved in household microeconomics. The demanding socio-economic circumstances, coupled with the rigidity in the delivery system, which itself had no appeal since it deprived children's contribution to household livelihood, kept the literacy levels in Karamoja at 11-12% before ABEK started. This contributed significantly keeping the region behind the rest of the country in development.

⁶ The peoples of Karamoja exhibit three forms of pastoralism, nomadic, transhumant and agro pastoralism are to the south

⁷ There was a man who moved out of his neighborhood because he wanted to slaughter and eat his own fat ox without sharing it with his neighbours. But because it was just the two of them slaughtering, an accident occurred and his wife poked her eye. She sat crying while the man continued. Then the livestock they were both tending wandered off and he had to go and drive it nearer with the baby on his back. The baby fell asleep and he decided to lay him under a shade. He drove the livestock back and he continued with his task. When he finished, he could not remember where he had left the baby. So he decided to start a fire with the hope that the baby would feel the heat and he would run and pick him up. But the fire was so fast that the baby got burnt to death before he could rescue him. He was overcome with sorrow and grief so he too sat crying and as he did so, the vultures descended on the carcass of the nice fat ox and consumed it all. With shame and misery, he moved back in with his neighbours, with his wife missing an eye, without the baby or the ox, having learnt the bitter lesson of the necessity of sharing work for mutual benefit.

1.2 Framework for improving quality education among the marginalized categories

Many children who cannot participate in the prevailing education opportunities for various socio economic factors remain high. For many children, a subconscious opportunity cost analysis has resulted into a conscious decision to invest their time in supporting households to earn a living rather than spending the time in school systems that guarantee no prospects for improving the quality of their life, today or in the future. This less privileged category includes children in;

- Pastoral communities
- Fishing communities
- Hard to reach islands & mountainous terrain
- children affected by conflict
- orphaned children
- indigenous minority communities
- children with disabilities
- children living in streets
- child mothers
- children in employment

In terms of ensuring access to schooling for these categories, the strategies could be a range

- o Alternative schooling arrangements to mitigate livelihood and physical barriers to access, retention and completion
- o Improve girl's retention & completion of primary schooling
- o Improve transition to pre, post primary training
- o Improve access to relevant vocational and skills training

While the question of education quality is the centre stage in education discourse at different forums, the underpinning essence of education quality is the democratization of education to individual and common good. Education may not guarantee quality outcome, but equality of outcome but equality of opportunity for all to access and participate in education in a manner that is meaningful to their context forms the basis of quality education. In this paper programme design can conceptualize quality of education as comprising quality education inputs, processes and outcomes

- rights to quality education⁸
- commitment to quality universal education⁹
- education in the interest of the child¹⁰
- education in the fight against poverty
- quality learning environment¹¹
- civil society involvement
- early childhood development
- the critical role of the teachers and teacher trainers¹² and appropriate strategies may range from improving;
 - o Infrastructure (classrooms, furniture, latrines, co- curricula facilities, safe water, motivated staff

⁸ As articulated in United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

⁹ As enshrined in the EFA and MDGs

¹⁰ Take into account the best interest of the household as a component of the best interest of the child

¹¹ Beyond access, quality of education must accord high priority to ensure that the value of time spent at school and in the other learning programmes exceeds the totality of direct and opportunity costs incurred by households sending children to school

¹² It's evident from the foregoing that teachers are a critical point of entry in embedding practices and values cognizant of the prevailing perspectives of education quality and the context of child rights. It therefore imports to explore strategies of strengthening the quality of teaching-learning interaction through targeted professional support and supervision of teachers

- Community involvement
- Education management

In considering Education as rallying point in child protection, there is need to strengthen education's role in enhancing protection both in and outside, particularly vulnerable households through

- safe schools initiatives
- children's clubs
- community safe nets

Important to conduct analysis of education financing issues at household and community levels and using information generated to inform national as well global policies that affect children

- real cost of schooling
- mitigation of household cost of schooling (cost of schooling and poverty)
- advocacy in partnership and networks

2. The Interventions: Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja

The implementation of Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) Programmes started in 1998, as an intervention to harmonize challenges of pastoral childhood with education as a right in childhood. It's a non formal education Programme designed for the pastoral community of Karamoja as a response to barriers in basic education experienced by children (6 to 18 year) in semi-nomadic pastoral communities of semi-arid region where they play a central role in house hold livelihoods.¹³ The programme is founded on the strategic objective of increasing opportunity for disadvantage children, especially girls to experience positive early childhood development and to benefit from appropriate basic education

2.1 Origin & Theory

Formal education introduced early in the 19th century was not well received by the people of Karamoja. Opposition to formal education was heightened when reading and writing (the pen) symbolized the registration of people who were conscripted into the colonial British army during the Second World War. Many conscripts died in battle far from their motherland fighting for a cause the people of Karamoja did not understand. **The pen** together with the formal education that it represented were cursed and rejected. This curse was however lifted upon the launch of ABEK in the sub-region at the end of the 19th century. Other reasons that undermined the proliferation of formal education in Karamoja included its irrelevance to the indigenous semi-nomadic pastoral context.¹⁴

The fore fathers in Karamoja cursed school education through symbolic “burial” of the pen in *Namejho* just outside the present town of Kotido. This was done during the colonial times when the British used the pen to enroll soldiers for the 2nd world war in Germany and the “magic pen” had deprived the ethnic communities their men and education in Karamoja was shunned for a very long time. With the launching of ABEK the pen was “unearthed” and the communities have now embraced education.

During the inception of the ABEK programme key core questions remained pertinent for an appropriate intervention strategy in Karamoja;

- Would survival priorities have to change or could an education programme adapt to reality and time constraints of Karimojong children?
- Could education be brought to the Karimojong in the *Manyattas*, since children did not come to school the Karimojong?
- Could the Karimojong choose education for themselves if an alternative was created specifically for Karamoja?

¹³ ABEK is a complementary basic education programme anchored in national education policy, in global principles of Education for All (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and the Convention for the Rights of Children (CRC).

¹⁴ International level organization built a very big school with all boarding facility in the middle of the largest village in east Africa (Watakau in Kotido). There were no children in the school since the community saw that the education was not meeting the needs, the situation and interest of the community.

The answer became alternative basic education for Karamoja (ABEK). “*ABEK*” in NgaKarimojong is to “hatch” and the new borne hatched is “*ABEKUN*”. In essence alternative basic education hatched in Karamoja (ABEK programme) with a new borne ABEKUN (ABEK learners/children). This is the basis of using ABEKUN as a symbol for ABEK programme in Karamoja.

This newborn alternative hatched in the communities with the goal to provide beneficial knowledge for both within and outside the pastoral tradition a goal to provide complementary opportunity for basic education, mobilize and built the capacity of the communities in Karamoja to enroll children in school and explicit objectives;

2.2 Strategic objectives

- To develop relevant education for Karimojong children (positive attitude, appropriate curriculum & teaching)
- To help Karimojong children find a path to formal school to support UPE in Karamoja.

2.2.1 Specific objectives

- To increase enrollment, inclusiveness, retention & participation of children in pastoral communities enrolled for basic education
- To improve the profile, competence, performance and motivation of ABEK facilitators
- To improve quality of learning achievement and establish benchmarks for equivalence of ABEK programme
- To strengthen institutional capacity of the district core coordinating team to support implementation of expanded ABEK
- To mainstream programme functions in gazzeted technical institutions as well as government policy & investment priorities

2.2.2 Rational & philosophy

Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja is designed to provide education in a framework cognizant of the unique local challenges and aspirations, national policy & global concerns. As a pillar supporting the national policy to realize Education for All (EFA) through Universal Primary Education (UPE), ABEK programme targets and provides an opportunity for schooling to disadvantaged children in Karimojong pastoral communities. ABEK is designed to respond to the unique social, cultural and economic dynamics of the semi-nomadic pastoral childhood.¹⁵

ABEK therefore, is a strategic point of entry for redressing the complex broader development dynamics of the Karamoja sub-region. It is a strategic development investment with invaluable returns for the Karamoja sub-region and for its relations with neighboring communities.

¹⁵ The Programme advances the position of the National Constitution on the right to education and Uganda’s commitment to realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s) in Education. ABEK is also founded on the principles enshrined the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - CRC and the OAU Charter on the Rights of the African Child.

ABEK was designed on the community's aspirations, offering a culturally acceptable curriculum and presented through socially viable approaches. The guiding philosophy, principles and central theme of ABEK were pastoral livelihood.

2.3 Pillars

- ABEK instruction is based on specialized modules written in the local language “NgaKarimojong”. Instruction is presented in ten non-linear instructional manuals integrating literacy and numeracy in both English and the local language. Themes covered have immediate practical relevance to the pastoral lifestyle making it relevant to their needs
 - i. Livestock education (animal care)
 - ii. crop production (types of crops grown)
 - iii. Environment management (concept of environment)
 - iv. Rural Technology (identification of rural technologies
 - v. Home Management (introduces concept of family)
 - vi. Uganda our country: rights and obligations (introduces the child to other parts of the country)
 - vii. peace and security (focuses on related issues in the society)
 - viii. Human Health (primary health)
 - ix. Sex education (realization of roles and responsibilities)
 - x. HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (creates awareness)
- ABEK adapts schooling to the “framework” of Karamoja’s agro-pastoral lifestyle, recognizing the central role of the child in the household economy. Learner’s study between 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. and after 4:00 p.m. to enable the girls and boys fulfill their domestic obligation, which are critical to the functioning of the households.
- ABEK teaching and learning are conducted in the vicinity of community settlements (manyatta) thus keeping children within easy reach. Children can be called upon to support the household should need arise. It is also possible for elders to oversee the activities at the learning centers to monitor if, what and how the children are taught.
- Indigenous and child centered methods (participatory and functional) are employed to provide indigenous knowledge and basic life skills relevant to pastoral life skills
- Facilitators (paraprofessional) are community based teachers recruited from the local from the immediate vicinity and trained on job
- ABEK learning package compliments formal schooling by encouraging children to join formal schools in the villages. The curriculum focuses on pastoral lifestyles within integrated themes and using the local language as media of instruction. It strengthens the community’s involvement in education by encouraging them to place emphasis on educating children including the girl child and planning and monitoring of the programmes

3. Early Childhood Development and Education among children in pastoral communities of Karamoja

3.1 The need for an ECDE intervention linked to ABEK

Early childhood experiences form the foundation for later human development. The quality of early childhood care influences the quality of the entire life of the individual. Children in pastoral communities in Karamoja are intricately embedded in the household productivity at an early age. As early as five years of age boys are involved in herding livestock while the girls are submerged in domestic chores particularly child-rearing roles. The hostile climate with scarce water, very low and unreliable rainfall, frequent famines, prevalence of diseases and proliferation of small arms related insecurity associated with cattle rustling amidst a very poor social service delivery infrastructure compound the hardship children face in balancing the fulfillment of their household obligations on one hand against enjoying a childhood which includes schooling on the other. The general quality of life for the children of Karamoja is characterized by poverty, poor sanitation, poor hygiene, low school enrolment and high drop out rates in primary school.

School age children bear the responsibility / duty to care for and carry younger children on their backs even if this meant carrying them into classrooms in both formal primary school and the learning centers under the Alternative Basic Education, Karamoja (ABEK). ABEK facilitators reported that this disruptive tendency undermined elder children's concentration during sessions and consequently their learning achievement.

Direct observation revealed that many children in communities were malnourished, unkempt, lived in dirty surroundings, suffered respiratory tract and skin ailments and were hungry for most of the time.

The situation in which the children of Karamoja live is a chronic emergency and requires an emergency response approach to improve child survival, development, protection and participation. In line with other successful ECDE programmes and in view of the very needy situation in Karamoja community based holistic and multi sect oral approach to delivery of ECDE services in the sub-region was adopted.¹⁶

3.2 Goal and objectives of the ECDE project

The overall goal of the ECDE project is to strengthen capacity of duty bearers to sustainably improve early childhood care, development & education of children in pastoral communities in Karamoja

The objectives of the ECDE project are:

¹⁶ The ECDE baseline survey report 2004, noted that pastoral communities in Karamoja need and appreciate help, and they should be allowed to participate in planning and implementation of development initiatives affecting their lives through community based approaches.

To support existing institutions & structures to sustainably reduce infant & child mortality with improved child health & nutrition status among children in pastoral communities in Karamoja through;

- Establishing & implementing provision for immunization, de-worming, growth monitoring & other child & maternal health care including HIV/AIDS services at ECDE corner
- Establishing provision for supplementary feeding among ECDE project communities

To strengthen systems that encourage school entry at appropriate ages with increased enrolment, retention & learning achievement among children in pastoral communities in Karamoja through;

- Establishing & operating ECDE facility at ABEK centers & in selected primary in pastoral community catchments areas
- Training, encouraging & supporting PTA's, SMC's, ABEK committees & LC's to mobilize & ensure children's school enrolment & completion

To strengthen institutional capacity & local arrangements for sustainably improving early cognitive stimulation & psychosocial development among children in pastoral communities in Karamoja through;

- Supporting communities to identify, recruit, train, deploy & supervise child care givers
- Strengthening cross-sectoral linkages among child focused departments at local government level
- Strengthening collaboration & networking among child focused agencies

To improve household livelihood among pastoral communities in Karamoja through;

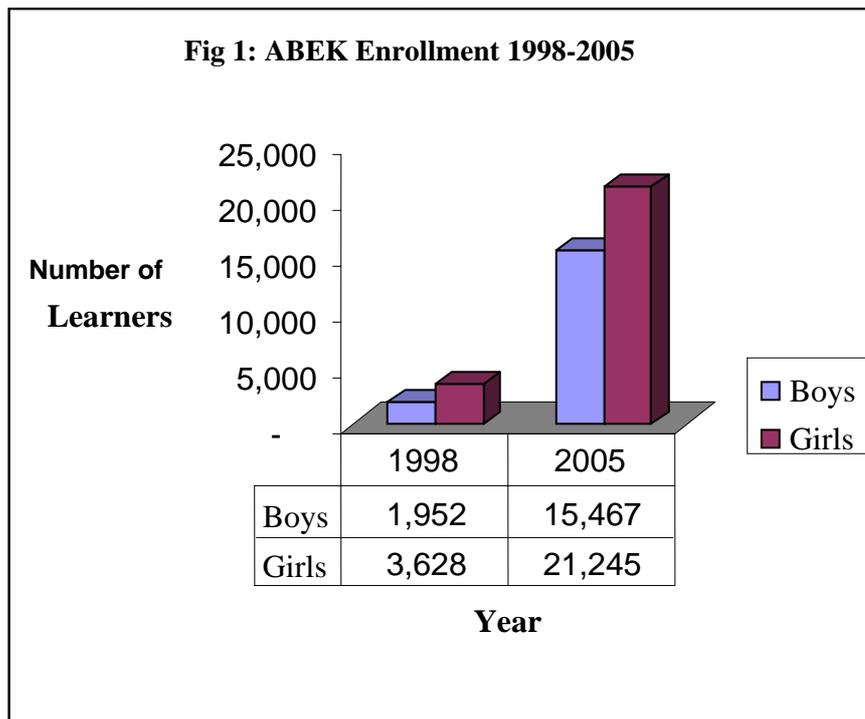
- Training & encouraging households to adopt diversified livelihood strategies to improve income & food security
- Training, encouraging & supporting households to improve household incomes through basic processing & marketing of livestock products

14 pilot centers were established as a pilot with a total of 3500 children below five years. The introduction of ECDE introduced new dynamics of working across more than one district technical department and having a second formal structure for seeing activities. It presented a new dimension where communication and decision making rests heavily on the women folk

4. Opportunities

ABEK remains to encourage learners to develop physical, intellectual and other abilities necessary for living a healthy, productive and improved quality life and for self reliance and survival in ones environment; functional literacy skills in local language and English, cultural, moral and spiritual values; active participation in civic and community matters

ABEK has enabled pastoral communities to enroll their children in the learning centers and subsequently in formal schools (Fig 1)



Over the period, there has been a steady increase of children joining formal schools total 3,711 Children to date (1,737 = 47% girls) and 19 joining secondary schools.¹⁷

Establishing ABEK centres within the manyattas has enabled flexibility in studying time enabling children to balance household obligations with schooling. Elders have been able to monitor and supervise learning activities and to dispel the myth that modern education would alienate children from traditional values

Parents concern about the relevance of what children are taught has obliged elders to participate in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the learning activities. Parents have contributed to the development of the learning content, identified facilitators and monitored the effectiveness of programme besides contributing locally available materials and labour for building shelters at the learning centres.¹⁸

¹⁷ 25% of children enrolled in school in Moroto are either in ABEK or have gone through it

¹⁸ Parents and elders occasionally sit in lessons and support facilitators in keeping order among the class, encouraging learners to participate actively, while they too attempt to learn basic literacy skills

Curriculum relevance to pastoral context has hastened acceptance of education and is centred on community selected thematic areas¹⁹ besides reading, writing and numeracy skills. Instructors use local language (Ngkarimjong) and functional basic education methods and functional basic education methods as well as learning aids from immediate environment

Out standing among the strength of ABEK has been teaching of basic health and life skills to the children, as well as whole communities

Overtime, there has been a general change of attitude towards education among the pastoralists now seeing education as an investment and a path for development. Learners aspire for modern professionalism and communities recognise the value of girl's education

¹⁹ Immediately accessible and relevant, comprehensible curriculum

5. Summary and conclusion

5.1 Addressing short coming arising from development work in pastoral communities (pillars)

Involvement of the target communities and resource persons in programme design and implementation to ensure delivery sensitive to indigenous values and to create a human interface sympathetic to pastoral communities of Karamoja

Involvement of central government and district local governments to build support and effective law enforcement²⁰

The programmes are cognizant of and seeks to demonstrate respect for vast and experience of pastoral communities which is critical for their survival

The monetary cost of schooling is a disincentive and as such, household monetary burden is avoided in view of the enormous household opportunity cost of divesting children from domestic responsibilities associated with pastoralist survival strategy

The Karamoja programme is mainstreamed within the national education structure for institutionalization and ownership by the state as the duty bearer

The Karamoja programme structure and content are highly flexible to respond to unique and dynamic circumstances of pastoral childhood

Delivery is informally organized to allow elders to vet the curriculum through regular surveillance of physical and moral safety of children, particularly girls

The programme exercises flexibility in meeting statistical targets in cognizance of the circumstances beyond the control of pastoral children such as in irregular attendance, drought, famine and lack of water in communities and cattle raids

The programme is interlaced amongst various specialized government institutions and departments including the directorate of health services, water and education

5.2 Addressing access and quality of education

Expanding opportunity for children in pastoral and other less privileged communities to access and participate in meaningfully in education through the non-formal education approach

Exploring strategies for strengthening the quality of teaching-learning interaction through targeted classroom-based professional support and supervision of teachers

Supporting school communities in hard to reach areas to establish child friendly learning practices and environments; including participation of children in the organization and management of learning

Providing infrastructure, instructional materials, scholastic materials and psychosocial support

²⁰ One cannot escape from the fact that the pastoral elite are a formidable gatekeeper to the communities

for children affected by conflict

Working with and supporting the education civil society to lobby for formulation and implementation of legislation supportive to educationally disadvantaged children

Strengthen the capacity to implement the programme at different levels of the programme

6. Recommendations and lessons learned

Many children are still unable to access ABEK or the formal schools. Communities not reached by ABEK or formal education demand that the programme should be scaled-up urgently to reach their children. This is ongoing process. Scaling up ABEK creates increased demand for both human and financial resources. Attendance is irregular and hardly constitutes 40% of children enrolled at learning centres. There is need for a systematic strategy to strengthen sensitization and mobilization of the community to ensure that children attend regularly. At the same time, the factors that draw children away from school need to be addressed and the appropriate ECDE model conceptualized and implemented.

In ABEK there are no classrooms. Learning in the open windy Karamoja climate is torturous for children and is often disrupted by weather extremes. Children have no better place to sit or place a book to write, than the dusty, sandy or muddy ground. Here they must squat, kneel or lie down to write. These postures are most difficult for girls to whom tradition imposes stringent public etiquette. Lack of shelter & infrastructure present a serious setback to the quality of ABEK learning. A strategy for supporting communities to provide low cost learning shelters, furniture and securing commitments by government remains a pivot. Piloting a low cost tin-roofed shelter model supported on galvanized pipes could be a better technological option

At its inception, ABEK placed more emphasis on access. There is now growing concern about the need to improve the quality of learning. This calls for strengthening the performance of the facilitators and supervisors. There is need to recruit more facilitators especially females to handle new learning centres. There is need for teacher training Universities to develop a course for the facilitators in order to;

- Conduct regular tailor-made Competence-Based Training coupled with recognised certification to enable facilitators to improve performance capacity and to realise personal growth as well as professional development.
- strengthen quality of instruction in the programme and equivalence with the formal school system
- Provide basis for facilitators to access national public services payroll.
- improve the professional profile, competence, performance and motivation of the facilitators
- institutionalise ABEK functions in national institutions and local government policy and investment priorities (training, curriculum & certification related) and at the same time improve the quality of learning achievement as well the formal school programme

In ABEK, an education was envisaged where communities would continuously contribute to curriculum that harmonized and enriched indigenous knowledge, skills and values with modernization. Questions of the quality, standard and equivalence of ABEK relative to the formal school system, and ABEK's efficacy in enabling children to compete for national level opportunities are emerging. These issues need to be addressed in the background that ABEK is an entry point and a central component of the equation for addressing the broader question of development in the Karamoja sub-region. A review of the curriculum proposed has to take into account issues of content, its structuring, teaching approaches, assessment, equivalency and certification in the context of ABEK as an accelerated versus an alternative education model.

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

Previous evaluations have indicated the need to strengthen documentation, monitoring and evaluation as a strategy for improving programme management and efficiency. It's a critical undertaking to strengthen the capacity of the district implementation team in administering, monitoring and documenting project activities

As a pillar of UPE, EFA, MDG's & CRC; ABEK strives to ensure universal and equitable access to quality basic education for all children. However, ABEK has not adequately captured the boys who migrate with cattle in search of water and pasture during the dry season. At the same time, ABEK has not adequately addressed the question of children with special learning needs. An assessment of the needs is ongoing. These pose considerable resource implications for ABEK and the formal school system in terms of providing support, training, materials and physical adjustments to ensure access and meaningful participation in learning activities. Designing and implementing a mobile learning centre approach to target highly nomadic herd boys is likely to be an exciting experience with a radical shift of power from the district to the lower levels

Since inception, ABEK relies heavily on donor funding. Full ownership of ABEK as a district / government programme seems to be constrained by the weak financial base in the communities, as well as at local government levels, among others. This shortcoming needs a redress substantially if ABEK is fully taken up by the Ministry of Education and Sports as an integral component and strategy for realising UPE

The ABEK advocacy Strategy is being implemented by an Advocacy Task Force comprising The Minister of State for Karamoja, Karamoja Parliamentarians, and the District Leadership in the Karamoja sub-region. This structure is important for proper functioning of advocacy activities at different levels

Since the inception of ABEK as an idea in 1995, there have been drastic changes in the internal social, economic and political dynamics of Karamoja, as well as in its national and global relations. The emerging internal debate regarding the conceptualisation of ABEK especially in relation to the formal system seems to be a manifestation of changing aspirations. This among others underscores the need to re-examine ABEK in terms of its relevance, Vision, Mission, Goals, Objectives and Strategies.

It is critical to ensure that these respond to the changing needs of stakeholders, emerging local aspirations, national policies and goals as well as global concerns in the spirit of ABEK hallmark of participation and consultation.

Expansion has a direct immediate multiplier implication for the ABEK budget. The local governments' low revenue base presents a substantial obstacle to their capacity to sustain ABEK in its present form, let alone expanded coverage. Dependence on NGO funding to implement ABEK presents a serious risk to ABEK sustainability.

The overall returns from investment in ABEK are immense, with favourable implications for both the entire Karamoja region and the neighbouring communities. ABEK will benefit significantly as government recognised it as an element of Universal Primary Education (UPE) responding to the unique implementation dynamics of semi-nomadic pastoral Karamoja. Besides meeting the cost of facilitators' allowances, government is supporting

ABEK under the UPE funding framework starting FY 2005/2006. The districts on the other hand need to aggressive explore alternative fundraising strategies to support ABEK.