

CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme

# Equity and Access to Quality Education in Uganda

**Banduga Ismail**



**Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa where just under half of the population of 40 million are children of 14 years and younger who require access to basic education.**

The country has been facing several challenges in providing quality and accessible education for its youthful population, including a lack of effective early education programmes, infrastructure, qualified teachers, and limited awareness on the importance of education. According to a 2019 UNICEF report, 'only 1 in 4 children who start primary school make it to secondary school, and less than half (40 per cent) of the students are literate at the end of primary school, with less than a quarter (24 per cent) of adolescents enrolled for secondary education'.

Meanwhile, the World Bank revealed that the pupil to teacher ratio in Uganda was 43:1 in 2017, placing the country below the average of 37 students per teacher in least developed nations. The situation is exacerbated by chronic teacher shortages and absenteeism. In 2016, more than 60% of public-school teachers were reported to be missing from their classrooms.

At the same time, Uganda is a host to approximately 1.5 million refugees, mainly fleeing conflict, violence, and civil wars in eight neighbouring countries: Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia. The largest refugee group originates from South Sudan, accounting for approximately 62% of the refugee population. The Government of Uganda and other humanitarian agencies provide basic services to refugees, including education.

While ensuring access and inclusion of refugees in education is key, the quality of education must also be prioritised. Banduga Ismail, a Commonwealth Alumnus who completed a Master of Arts Degree in Education and International Development at University College London (UCL) Institute of Education, has led initiatives targeted at providing access to education for children in emergency contexts, and youth skills development. He has also been instrumental in the development and implementation of a comprehensive National Teacher Policy which aims to streamline the management of teachers.

Banduga is currently leading the Norwegian Teacher Initiative Project, which aims at strengthening multi-partner cooperation to support teacher policy and improve learning.



Banduga addressing teachers during a training session on effective social policy dialogue in Education.

**Mr Banduga Ismail** is a 2013 Commonwealth Scholar who completed a Master of Arts Degree in Education and International Development at University College London (UCL) Institute of Education. Following the scholarship, he worked for the Norwegian Refugee Council as an Education Project Coordinator and Manager in Uganda, and later joined the Belgian Development Agency as a Skills Development Manager. He is currently employed by UNESCO as a National Associate Programme Officer in Uganda where he leads the implementation and management of the Norwegian Teacher Initiative Project, which aims to increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing countries. Through this project, he has influenced the development and implementation of the National Teacher Policy for Uganda which has resulted in the establishment of Teacher Management Information System (TMIS), a new online web-based platform to facilitate teacher registration, recruitment and ensure effective teacher management.



Teachers during a training session on effective social policy dialogue in Education.

## Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers in Uganda

Upon completing his studies in Education and International Development as a Commonwealth Scholar, Banduga experienced rapid career progression. Numerous employment opportunities in his area of expertise opened up with international organisations based in Uganda, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the Belgian Development Agency. He has worked with these organisations in implementing various programmes aimed at reforming the education system in Uganda, with particular focus on improving access to education and the quality of education as a whole.

**‘My scholarship enhanced my employment opportunities, it enhanced my understanding of Education and Development issues, and widened my understanding on educational planning in low-income countries. I have improved capacity of planning and managing education programmes in Uganda. I have looked at my work tasks differently, with a more analytical and critical reflection of what I do and why I do it.’**

As part of his current activities as the National Associate Programme Officer for UNESCO, Banduga leads the Norwegian Teacher Initiative Project in Uganda. The project, comprises seven partner organisations and four participating countries: Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi and Uganda. The partner organisations include, UNESCO, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Labour Organisation (ILO), Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Education International (EI), and the World Bank and they envisage two strategic outcomes. First, the project focused on improving coordination among partner organisations involved in setting teacher policies, both at global and at national level. Second, the project sought to support the development of national teacher policies that impact teaching and learning, and contribute to the teacher policy target of Sustainable Development Goal 4.c, with the objective of training and increasing the supply of qualified teachers to improve the quality of education in Uganda.

This project seeks to support the Ministry of Education to develop and implement a comprehensive National Teacher Policy, with the objective of professionalising and standardising the teaching profession and improving the recruitment and management of teachers to ensure the provision of good quality education in Uganda.

**‘If you compare the teaching profession to other professions, like the legal profession or the medical profession, in many countries these have councils that regulate the profession. For the teaching profession, this has not been the case for a long time. But now, with UNESCO’s intervention, Uganda now has a National Teacher Policy and will have a National Teacher Council to regulate the profession.’**

Working closely with the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders such as the World Bank, UNICEF, UNHCR, EI, GPE, and the International Teacher Taskforce in supporting the implementation of the National Teacher Policy, Banduga oversees the planning, management, and coordination of project activities.



Banduga Ismail, chairman of Board of Directors of ICS chairing one of the board meetings.

He also supervises local consultants hired to discharge specific tasks under the project. In this work he very often draws from the knowledge and skills honed during his studies in the UK.

**‘During the Scholarship we [Banduga and colleagues] developed an educational project for South Sudan, with a very clear log-frame of how this doctrine can be used to implement and monitor the project. That is a skill I really found very useful in my current job. I’m glad to say that I apply it quite often.’**

Moreover, he supports activities focused on ensuring that the National Teacher Policy is disseminated widely, and that all local stakeholders understand its provisions. It is particularly important that the policy is understood by its primary beneficiaries, including teachers and the Education Management Team in the country.

‘As a result of the Scholarship, I now know that for an educational policy to succeed and bring about the desired outcomes, the process of its formulation must be broad based and pro-people. These insights and perspectives influence my work in that I critique what is planned to be done from the angle of the benefits to the final beneficiary. I have applied my perspectives in discussing the provisions of the National Teacher Policy to ensure that they benefit the teacher, the primary object of the policy.’

To further ensure effectiveness and continuity in the implementation of the National Teacher Policy, Banduga and his organisation (UNESCO) have supported processes for the establishment of two national entities prescribed in the National Teacher Policy, the National Teacher Council, and the National Institute for Teacher Education. The National Teacher Council will play a pivotal role, as a professional body that regulates the teaching profession, while the National Institute for Teacher Education would specifically be responsible for supervising and developing the curriculum for teacher education, and the continuous professional development training programmes for teachers.

As part of this project, Banduga prepares briefing notes for partner meetings, and writes progress reports for management at UNESCO, the Ministry of Education, for donors, and for other stakeholders. He acknowledged the value of the Master’s course in sharpening these skills that are key to his current employment duties.

‘Reporting is one function that I do. We do regular progress reports and annual reports, to the different levels of UNESCO. I was able to get [during the Scholarship] really very good and additional skills on how to write coherently either reports, or an article, or write a piece of paper that is important for other stakeholders to look at and therefore writing to suit that audience.’

The **National Teacher Policy** was approved by the Cabinet of Uganda in 2019 and it is now a published government policy that is being implemented by the Ministry of Education. In addition to the policy itself, the supplementary instruments, policy guidelines and policy standards have been developed and the Ministry of Education is receiving support from UNESCO to implement and disseminate this policy more widely.

‘I can report that many teachers in the country, probably 50% or 60% of the teachers in the country are now aware of this teacher policy. They are aware of the provisions therein, in the teacher policy. This is something that I think is quite a tangible outcome that we can see.’

Moreover, Banduga has supported the adoption of this policy, and the implementation of its provisions, which include developing a central database of detailed teachers’ information for the Ministry of Education. This database has been used to implement better management systems, ensuring timely recruitment and replacement of qualified teachers. As part of this work, all teachers in the country are required to register their details through an online platform, and as of 2021, at least 40% of teachers had done so.

‘The Ministry was lacking in terms of the teacher database, and teacher information. How many teachers do we have in the country? If you asked this question some years back, you would get different answers. Going forward, this database will help the Ministry of Education as much as possible to know the number of teachers and answer this question with precision.’

With regards to professionalising teaching, the National Teacher Policy has defined a minimum qualification of a bachelor’s degree for someone to be employed as a teacher. Previously, persons teaching in primary schools in Uganda would either have a grade II and III certificate or a diploma in education for lower secondary and a university degree for upper secondary. There was no defined minimum qualification for pre-primary teachers. There were also opportunities to acquire a teaching licence [with no formal teacher training] which only required one to have completed a secondary level of education.



Teachers participating in a training conduct a group task.

A better educated and more professional body of teachers will result in more effective teaching and improved learning outcomes for school children.



To improve the effectiveness of teacher training in the country, an assessment of leadership, management and governance policies and practices at teacher training institutions was conducted under the Norwegian Teacher Initiative Project, and the findings informed the development of national guidelines for the teacher training institutions and strategies on improving their management.



A teacher participating in the training refers to the principles of the National Teacher Policy as she makes her point.

## Access and Inclusion in Education: Empowering Refugees in Uganda

While working for the Norwegian Refugee Council in Uganda, Banduga was responsible for several education projects in the West Nile region under the Regional Response to South Sudan Crisis Programme. These include the Emergency Education for refugee children, Education Support for refugee children, and Education and livelihood support for South Sudanese. All the projects aimed at providing access to education for children in emergencies and skills development for youth. It was primarily targeted at refugees from South Sudan, who make up the largest proportion of refugees in Uganda and complemented the work of the Government of Uganda and the United Nations High Commission for refugees.

As a project coordinator and programme manager, Banduga designed, implemented, and managed the education programme which targeted older refugee children who had missed out on a basic primary education. One important aspect of the programme was giving child mothers (young girls who have babies) an opportunity to complete basic primary education and transition to either secondary education or vocational skills training. The programme was implemented in collaboration with the Government of Uganda, and therefore the Ministry of Education was one of the key stakeholders, working very closely with Banduga in his role as a representative for the Norwegian Refugee Council in Uganda.

In addition, he coordinated activities with other agencies, including the United Nations High Commission for refugees, the office of the Prime Minister (the government agency responsible for refugees), and the district local governments where the refugees were settled. Banduga identified project management, reporting, and making presentations to stakeholders as some of his key responsibilities. As with other projects, he very often drew from the skills honed during his scholarship to successfully deliver his work tasks.

**‘This work we’re doing involves regular research activities. I made use of the skills in the different areas that I got from the scholarship, including the research knowledge and skills, communication skills, analytical skills that I was able to use in the different cognition mechanisms.’**

Apart from gaining technical knowledge and skills while on his scholarship, the Commonwealth Alumnus spoke proudly of the networks established during his time in the UK, and their value in supporting his developmental activities after completing his studies. In particular, Banduga mentioned his host supervisor and lecturers at University College London Institute of Education, who have been supportive in sharing ideas on projects, and suggestions for scaling up the refugee education programme.

**‘I’m very glad the Scholarship was able to give me the opportunity to have that network, which otherwise I wouldn’t have.’**

Through this programme, 30% of the children who were out of school from 2011 to 2015 were enrolled into the accelerated education programme in Adjumani refugee settlement, which is home to over 200,000 refugees. These children were able to complete a three-year cycle of primary education rather than the seven years which is standard for primary education in Uganda and through this, they acquired basic numeracy and literacy skills. Apart from gaining access to education, enrolling the refugee children in education in emergencies classes (a type of education that supports children with emotional and cognitive development and facilitates their reintegration into a formal schooling system) contributed towards their healing and recovery following the trauma of displacement, and gave them the opportunity to connect with peers and friends. They were also equipped with other life skills such as self-expression, personal hygiene, and sanitation. Moreover engaging the children in this education programme protected them from risks in the community, of child abuse, exploitation, and child labour.

In addition to his employment, Banduga is also engaged in voluntary work. In 2019, he was unanimously nominated as the chair of a local non-government organisation, Integrated Child Services (ICS). ICS works with communities in West Nile including refugees to address issues of child abuse and runs programmes in education, child health and nutrition and children in conflict with the law.

For the youth skills development programme, as a Skills Development Manager with Belgian Development Agency, Banduga oversaw six grantees (national and international non-governmental organisations and training institutions) who were charged with the responsibility of training young refugees in technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial skills.

Under the leadership of Banduga, four vocational skills training centres were established to train youth in technical and vocational skills. Each centre enrolled **240** youths (of whom **50%** were female) in various trades and in one year, **960** youth completed their training and transitioned into employment. In a period of two years, **1,920** young people acquired skills in different trades and approximately **60%** of the graduates established their own businesses within the refugee community, or in the neighbouring host community.

Graduates of this programme were offered start-up kits, for example, a sewing machine for graduates in tailoring and garment-making and supported to set up their own enterprises to earn some income to meet their basic needs, support their children, and improve their livelihoods. Banduga's work empowering the refugee youth with skills was supported by the Refugee Policy in Uganda, which makes provisions for refugees' freedom of mobility and participation in business enterprises.

To continue supporting education and development in Uganda, and in Africa as a whole, Banduga is planning to further develop his skills, knowledge, and expertise in this area. He is currently seeking advice from his former UK supervisor on career progression and hopes to secure funding to pursue PhD studies in line with his work on Education in Emergencies.

### More about Banduga Ismail's work

<https://en.unesco.org/news/uganda-nationwide-dissemination-teacher-management-information-system>

<https://en.unesco.org/news/uganda-makes-strides-implementation-national-teacher-policy>

[Teacher Organizations Strengthen Skills in Social Dialogue in Education \(unesco.org\)](https://en.unesco.org/news/teacher-organizations-strengthen-skills-social-dialogue-education)

[Virtual Workshop: Benchmarking on the Establishment and Functionality of a National Teacher Council for Uganda](https://en.unesco.org/news/virtual-workshop-benchmarking-national-teacher-council-uganda)

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