

2.2 Problem Analysis

Significant population growth (3%) and insufficient investment in human development are not only threatening sustainable development in Uganda, but are exacerbating inequalities, vulnerabilities and pressure on natural resources and jeopardising human development outcomes. The high total fertility rate coupled with a high number of unmet family planning needs (28.4%) will lead to a doubling of the current population (41 million) within the next 25 years. Uganda's population is very young with 75% of the population being less than 30 years old.

Uganda faces significant challenges in the participation of adolescent girls in secondary education. In 2016, the enrolment rate for girls was 25% compared to 29% for boys, with significant variation by region and district. A recent sector analysis notes that in 2016 42.7% of lower secondary age children (13-16) were out of school and over 70% of upper secondary school age students (17-18). Indeed, the sector analysis notes that 69% of adolescent girls have never attended secondary school, which reflects the bottleneck in primary school years with high repetition and drop out, and low levels of transition to secondary.

The financial barriers to education appear to be the number one barrier for access to education. The Uganda National Household Survey 2019/2020 report found that the main reason for 6 in every 10 persons who had left school was the costs associated with education. In Uganda, it is common for families (30% of the families) to borrow to pay for basic education. Even for the poorest families, education remains a priority and education consumes a significant part of their household budget. Households' expenditures for education in Uganda is one of the highest in the world, including for government-aided schools. Many government-aided school facilities send pupils home because parents cannot cope with school fees.

The secondary education per capita grant provided to schools is too low to meet the operating costs and schools continue to charge significant charges to parents. The stagnant enrolment in secondary education for over a decade is a consequence of the declining transition rate from primary to lower secondary education with a gross enrolment rate of 42% in lower secondary and high dropout rates in the last 2 years of primary. Uganda has also seen a drop in learning outcomes pointing to a decrease in the quality of education.

Over the past 5 years, access to safe water in Uganda has stagnated between 65%-69%⁹ despite continuous investments in new infrastructure. This stagnation is attributed to population growth over the same period which does not match the volume of investment required. Unreliable and inequitable water supply, poor operations and maintenance of existing infrastructure, especially at institutional level and inadequate funding to the sector compound the problem. In particular, the situation of WASH in schools is not meeting national standards which are critical to children staying in school and keeping healthy. According to a national survey conducted by UNICEF only 58% and 42% of primary and secondary schools respectively have access to water. Lack of access to adequate WASH facilities and related proper menstrual hygiene management in schools is a significant barrier to education for adolescent girls.

Another well-documented cause of girls dropping out of school, particularly at secondary school level, is pregnancy and early marriage. The broader environment of safety for girls in and around school and the prevailing support they receive, the attitudes of communities to support girls' education are often not conducive to keeping girls in school.

In spite of progress made towards a more robust legal and policy framework for gender equality and empowerment, a significant gap remains between the laws and policies on one hand and the reality of women's and girls' lives on the other. The impact of violence against women and girls translates into drawbacks on human capital development and at worst loss of lives. Violence in and around schools is also prevalent in Uganda. A survey¹⁰ conducted by the MoGLSD in 2018 indicated that one in three girls (35%) and one in six boys (17%) between the ages of 18 - 24 reported experiencing sexual violence during their childhood. A similar 2021 survey¹¹ by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) reveals that of 10-14 years old children, 40% report schools as a place where

⁹ Source: water and environment sector performance reports

¹⁰ Uganda violence against children survey - findings from the national survey by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, August 2018

¹¹ Research findings on the situation of, and impact of COVID-19 on school going girls and young women in Uganda, April 2021