

# SUCCESSFUL DECENTRALIZATION: THE ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF DEOs IN UGANDA

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## List of abbreviations

<b>CAO</b>	chief administrative officer
<b>CCT</b>	center coordinating tutor
<b>CFO</b>	chief finance officer
<b>DED</b>	district education department
<b>DEO</b>	district education officer
<b>DES</b>	Directorate of Education Standards
<b>DIS</b>	district inspector of schools
<b>DSC</b>	district service commission
<b>MoES</b>	Ministry of Education and Sports
<b>MoFPED</b>	Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development
<b>MPS</b>	Ministry of Public Service
<b>PLE</b>	primary leaving examination
<b>PPO</b>	principal personnel officer
<b>PTA</b>	parent–teacher association
<b>PTC</b>	primary teachers college
<b>SFG</b>	school facilitation grant
<b>SMC</b>	School Management Committee
<b>UIS–UNESCO</b>	Institute for Statistics
<b>UPE</b>	universal primary education
<b>USE</b>	universal secondary education
<b>UGX</b>	Ugandan shillings

## Executive summary

In recent years, decentralization has become a popular way of reforming educational management. Many countries with different characteristics have decided to take the path of decentralization in a number of areas, including education. Regardless of the form these reforms take, they are often implemented with the belief that decentralization will lead to a more effective administration and schools of higher quality.

However, this has not automatically been the case and decentralization has created new challenges. It is therefore essential to carry out an in-depth analysis of the implementation of these policies, so as to examine their main successes and challenges, and identify strategies for their successful implementation.

IIEP has been conducting research on this topic since 2002, with a focus on the impact of decentralization policies on local-level actors, in particular the District Education Office (DEO). This actor – referred to as the District Education Department (DED) in Uganda – is indeed in a position to play a strategic role in a decentralized framework, as it interacts with the Ministry of Education, with schools, and the district level, and as it is responsible for implementing the education policy and monitoring its quality in the district.

In-depth research was conducted by IIEP in 2008–2009 in three countries of Eastern and Southern Africa with different decentralization policies, namely Kenya, Lesotho, and Uganda. The research aimed to examine the roles and challenges of DEOs in these different contexts. It focused on four areas playing a key role in the effectiveness of this office, namely staff management, the management of financial resources, quality monitoring, and the relationship of the DEO with the central authorities and the local administration.

The research was mainly qualitative with interviews carried out with a wide range of actors at local level. The research was coordinated by IIEP and implemented in Uganda in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and a national research institution, the Makerere Institute of Social Research. The national team prepared a set of monographs on the DEDs and this national synthesis, analysing the main lessons learned in Uganda. The research was conducted with the support of the Education Programme Development Fund (EPDF) of Global Partnership for Education (GPE), formerly the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI).

The specificity of the DED in Uganda lies in its accountability to both the recently empowered district authorities, of which it is an administrative unit, and to the MoES. It was learned that the key task of the DEDs was carrying out inspections in schools, monitoring the implementation of national education policies as well as the quality of schools and teaching.

Although the structures and tools appeared to be in place for effective quality monitoring, the research established that, in practice, this task was hampered by a lack of human and material resources, such as adequate transportation. Indeed, DED personnel, overwhelmed by the needs in the district, had mainly visited schools with specific difficulties, thus adopting a ‘fire-fighting approach’ as a coping strategy. Another substantial obstacle to this monitoring role, as reported by DED officials, was the poor financial accountability and reporting skills of schools, caused by poor record-keeping and financial management capacities among head teachers. DED-led initiatives to address issues of quality monitoring did however emerge from the research, such as involving Centre Coordinating Tutors (CCTs) in both supportive and quality control functions. These actors were trainers/mentors of teachers who identified teachers’ training needs and appeared to complement inspectors in assessing performance targets.

An additional significant finding of the research was related to the lack of authority of DED officials in terms of primary school teachers' recruitment, deployment, and management. Formerly, this function was partially centralized and the DED played a role in the process. Devolution of these responsibilities had meant that the locally elected District Council had become the determining player in these processes. District and school-level actors alleged that political interference had consequently become a more common issue. DED personnel therefore viewed devolution as having unwisely weakened the professionals at the district level to the benefit of local political actors. When asked about this topic, almost all head teachers felt that more authority ought to be given to the DED, at the very least with regard to transfers of teachers and head teachers.

In general, it was observed that the DED had limited autonomy in their actions. For instance, although in principle the DEDs participate in financial decision-making, they are subjected to controls and guidelines issued by the line ministries. However, although many district-level actors made claims to greater autonomy, there were also requests for a greater presence, to a certain extent, of the ministry in the district, through more interaction and communication between the two levels. Several DED officials criticized ministry representatives for using devolution/decentralization and greater empowerment of local levels as a pretext for neglecting the problems faced by the district education departments.

Overall, and as was also established in Kenya and Lesotho despite different decentralization models, the present weak position of the DED in Uganda indicates that the core constraint resides in the lack of recognition of the strategic role that district education staff can play in shaping national policy, as well as supporting and monitoring local action.



# Introduction

Decentralization is a complex set of policies, which has an impact on a plurality of actors. Different governments have implemented different models of decentralization, but mainly with the focus of increasing management autonomy for local governments, local education offices and schools. There has been much discussion about the origins of these reforms in different countries, but there has been rather little field research on their local implementation, on the constraints which local actors face and on the strategies to overcome these constraints.

There is a rising need to understand the process of decentralization with a focus on its implementation. Against this background, UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has been conducting in-depth research on this topic since 2002, with the aim of answering a key question: what role should the state play to ensure the successful implementation of the decentralization policy? Specific attention was thus given to two main actors responsible for implementing education policies and monitoring education quality at local level, namely the school and the District Education Office (DEO).

While an intensive research programme had been carried out by IIEP on these two actors in four francophone countries of West Africa in 2002-2004 (Lugaz and De Grauwe, 2010), a new research programme was implemented in 2008-2009 in three Eastern and Southern African countries, characterized by different models of decentralization – Kenya, Lesotho, and Uganda - so as to examine the mandate of DEO in these different contexts and the challenges they face in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The research was coordinated by IIEP and conducted with the support of the Education Programme Development Fund (EPDF) of Global Partnership for Education (GPE), formerly the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI).

## The research programme

### *Three countries with different models of decentralization*

The three countries Kenya, Lesotho, and Uganda were purposely chosen to be included in the research programme. The intention was to examine the differential impact of contrasting decentralization policies. Kenya, Lesotho, and Uganda, while being different countries, are sufficiently similar for such a comparison to make sense: their administrative structures and traditions are strongly influenced by their colonial past, which is partly shared, and they have similar economic and social challenges. However, the models of decentralization in each of these countries are varied. In Kenya, there is a mixture of trends (deconcentration, devolution, and school autonomy); Uganda has opted for a policy of devolution, while Lesotho is characterized by both deconcentration and devolution. Comparing the experiences of countries with different policies contributes to identifying key conditions and lessons that can be used to improve education policies and systems. However, the purpose of this research project was not to identify the 'best' model of decentralization but rather to detect good practices for building a better system.

Specifically, the research aimed to:

- identify the different models of decentralization that countries in Eastern and Southern Africa have implemented;
- examine the constraints and challenges faced by the DEO under the different models;
- identify good practices and, on this basis, the strategies that could accompany decentralization policies to increase their chances of successful implementation.

### A focus on the DEO

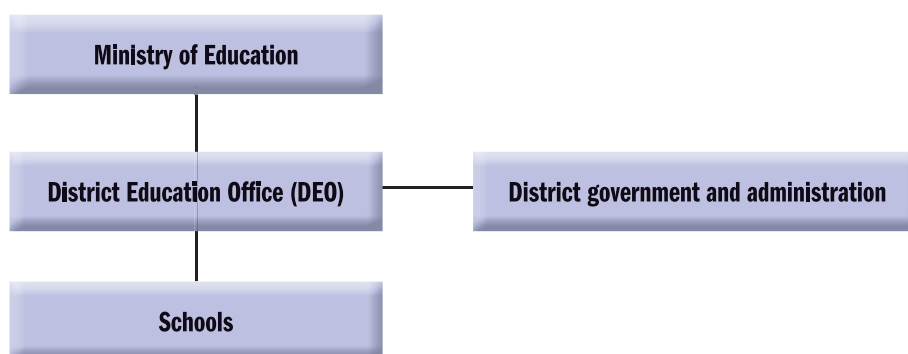
The research focuses on one actor, namely the DEO, for three specific reasons.

Firstly, the DEO is in principle a strategic actor in a decentralized context because of its position at the local level:

- It is the link between the Ministry of Education and schools: as it is the administrative unit closest to schools, it is responsible for implementing national policies and monitoring school quality while at the same time informing the ministry of what goes on in schools.
- It also links the district administration (the municipality, other district offices, etc.) to the ministry and to the schools as seen in *Figure 1* below.

Secondly, most of the literature focusing on decentralization has paid little attention to the role of such offices. Thirdly, their roles change significantly between the different models of decentralization (especially between deconcentration and devolution), which strengthens the comparative aspect of this research.

**Figure 1. The DEO in a strategic pivotal position in the decentralization framework**



### Four key themes of analysis

While district offices are in charge of several domains, their effectiveness in three particular fields is fundamental to the success of the governance reform: staff management, management of financial resources, and quality monitoring. Their relationship to central authorities and local administration has an impact on their effectiveness in these three areas. The research was therefore aimed at analysing the DEO's action on these four key issues by addressing a set of questions under each theme.

The themes are as follows:

1. **Quality monitoring:** One key task of DEOs is to monitor the quality of schools. Supervision visits are the main tool together with other monitoring tools such as examinations, indicator systems, and the analysis of school evaluation reports. The effectiveness of supervision depends on several issues such as work planning, school visits, reports, and follow-ups. The questions asked under this theme were as follows:
  - How do local offices monitor the quality of the education system and of the schools in their area? How effective are school supervision and support services? What information/indicators on schools are available? How does this information guide the intervention of the local office?
2. **Staff management:** the DEO's autonomy in managing its own staff is a key issue in debates around decentralization. Staff management includes staff recruitment, deployment, development and evaluation. Teacher management is also important in a decentralized context. The role of the DEO in these two fields was examined in order to respond to the following questions:

- What autonomy do heads of local offices have in the management of their own staff and in teacher management? What is the profile and what are the competencies of local education officials? What part do they play in recruitment, deployment, and evaluation of teachers?
3. **Management of financial resources:** the distribution of financial and material resources from the central level to other local levels, the availability of these resources at the local level, and the actors' autonomy in using them are core aspects of decentralization. Decentralization of financial resources management is commonly supposed to make resource utilization more efficient and appropriate.
    - What financial resources are available to local offices? What are the sources? How are central funds distributed among offices? How are district funds distributed among schools? For what purposes are these funds used and who controls their use and their impact?
  4. **Relations with national and local authorities:** While studying the role of the DEO in the decentralized system, it is important to examine the relationships between the DEO and the national and local authorities:
    - What is the role of the DEO in policy-making? How does exchange of information happen between the DEO and the ministry? What is the role of the local authority in education and what are the areas of collaboration between the local administrators and the DEO? How does the DEO collaborate with other actors in the district for education management?

## Research methodology

In order to respond to the above set of questions, in the case of Uganda a research project was implemented in 2008–2009, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and the Makerere Institute of Social Research. In this country, DEOs are called District Education Departments (DEDs).

The fieldwork was carried out by a research team led by a senior researcher, under the overall coordination of IIEP. In Uganda, Samuel Kayabwe and Wilson Asiimwe from the Makerere Institute of Social Research coordinated the research.

Four DEOs<sup>1</sup> were studied respectively in Kenya, Lesotho, and Uganda. They were selected on the basis of various criteria as outlined below:

1. In Kenya, the districts were selected based on several characteristics including geographical and topographical, population size, number of schools, and economic activities.
2. Districts in Lesotho were selected based on population size.
3. In Uganda, the criteria used were regional representation, economic and geographical factors, and the representation of newly created districts under the decentralization system.

The research was primarily qualitative, consisting of in-depth interviews with key actors. These included the DEO Head, supervisors, accountants, human resources officers, school principals and teachers, and locally elected officers/councillors. The objective of interviewing a wide range of people was to get as complete information as possible on the mandate of the DEO and the challenges it faces in a context of decentralization. The research provides quantitative data wherever possible to validate some arguments.

After an initial pilot exercise organized by IIEP in Lesotho in November 2008, the field visits were carried out in each country during the first half of 2009. Monographs were

1. While the terminology "DEO" has been used as a generic term in the framework of this comparative research study in the three countries, in Uganda such offices are called "DEDs", and so that term will be used in this report.

drafted by the research teams on each DEO. A total of 12 monographs and three national syntheses, as well as one comparative regional analysis (De Grauwe and Lugaz, 2011) were prepared on this basis and discussed during the Uganda regional Policy Seminar organized by IIEP, in collaboration with the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports, from 10 to 12 February 2010.

## **This booklet**

This document analyses the information collected in Uganda through the field visits conducted in the Banana, Eastern, Lubigi, and Nile Districts.<sup>2</sup> *Chapter 1* presents the profile of the country and of the four districts studied within this research, while *Chapter 2* synthesizes the lessons learned concerning the mandate and challenges faced by DEDs.

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2. The names of the DEDs visited by the researchers have been changed with fictitious names to maintain anonymity.

# 1. Presentation of Uganda and the four DEDs studied during the research

## 1.1. Presentation of Uganda

### *General information*

The Republic of Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa. It is bordered on the east by Kenya, on the north by Sudan, on the west by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the southwest by Rwanda, and on the south by Tanzania. The southern part of the country includes a substantial portion of Lake Victoria, which is also bordered by Kenya and Tanzania. Uganda takes its name from the Buganda Kingdom, which encompassed a portion of the south of the country, including the capital Kampala. The official languages are English and Swahili, although multiple other languages are spoken in the country.

The Medium Human Development Index in Uganda was one of the lowest in the world in 2009 (UNDP, 2009). The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the country was \$453 in 2008 and most of the population lives in rural areas. However, the GDP growth has been high with an average rate of about 9 per cent between 2005 and 2008; it is one of the fastest growing economies in Africa (*Table 1*).

**Table 1. General statistics on Uganda**

Population (in millions) - 2008	31.66
Annual population growth rate (%) - 2008	3.3
Annual population growth rate (%) - 1990-2007	3.2
Population in rural areas (%) - 2008	84.6
Adult literacy rate ages 15 and older (%) - 2007	73.6
Life expectancy at birth (years) - 2007	53
GDP per capita (current USD) - 2008	453
GDP growth (annual average %) 2005-2008	8.8
Agriculture, value added (% of GDP) - 2007	24

*Source:* UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), No date; World Bank, 2009.

### *Education system*

The education system in Uganda is structured as follows: seven years of primary education, six years of secondary education (divided into four years of lower secondary and two years of upper secondary school), and three to five years of post-secondary education. At the end of primary 7, pupils sit their first major national exams – the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). Pupils who pass their PLE can progress to secondary school. Primary school tuition has been free in government schools in Uganda since 1997.

The gross enrolment rate decreased at the primary level from 126 in 1999 to 117 in 2007, while the net enrolment rate stands at 95%. There was a significant increase in secondary enrolment rates, which went up from 10 per cent in 1999 to 23 per cent in 2007. It is also interesting to note that gender parity is well maintained in the schools (*Table 3*). However, the pupil/teacher ratio is quite high in the country, at 57:1. *Tables 2 and 3* present some of Uganda's key education data.

**Table 2. Gross and net enrolment rates (GER and NER) in primary and secondary schools in Uganda (1999-2007; 2002-2007)**

Gross enrolment ratio primary (GER), %		Gross enrolment ratio secondary (GER),%		Net enrolment ratio primary (NER),%		Net enrolment ratio secondary (NER),%	
1999	2007	1999	2007	2002	2007	2002	2007
126	117	10	23	n.a.	95	16	19

n.a.: not available.

Source: UIS, No date; World Bank, 2009.

**Table 3. Key education statistics in Uganda**

NER in primary education (% boys) - 2007	94
NER in primary education (% girls) - 2007	97
Survival rate to grade 5 (%) - school year ending in 2006	49
Pupil/teacher ratio in primary - 2007	57
Total public expenditure on education (% of total government expenditure) - 2005	18.3

Source: UIS, No date; World Bank, 2009.

### *Decentralization policy in Uganda*

Uganda was declared a British Protectorate in 1860 and obtained independence from colonial rule in 1962, inheriting a semi-federal constitution. The current president, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has been in power since January 1986 when the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/NRA) overthrew the government. He then introduced popular local councils to administer the country under NRM control. These councils were formalized in 1987 and the 1997 Local Governments Act established five levels of local government – village, parish, sub-county, county, and district. Primary health and education were made the responsibility of the district.

The 1995 constitution set forth an overall framework for decentralization, which was further elaborated in the 1997 Local Governments Act. Only the district and sub-county levels have both political authority and power to raise revenues at local level.

Devolution has appeared to be the main aspect of decentralization of services in Uganda with the intensification of the powers of local authorities. In the education sector, responsibilities are shared between the following actors:

- At the central level, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is responsible for defining policy and ensuring quality and achievement in primary and secondary education.
- The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) is the head of the district technical services and the representative of the government at the local level; he/she ensures that national policies are respected. The District Council is an elected body, which develops policies at the district level. The management of district staff, including teachers, is the responsibility of the District Service Commission.
- At the district level, the DED is in charge of monitoring the quality of education, the use of funds received by schools, and the implementation of policies. The DED reports primarily to the District Council and its staff is under the supervision of the CAO.
- At the school level, the School Management Committee (SMC) is composed of representatives from the founding body of the school, teachers, parents, local authorities of the area, and the DED. It is the statutory organ that governs the school on behalf of the government. Since the implementation of the Universal

Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1997, its funds come from a conditional grant transferred from the central level. Parent–teacher associations (PTA) also participate in the daily management of schools.

## 1.2 The DED studied during this research

At the time of the study, Uganda was divided into 80 districts, spread across four administrative regions: Northern, Eastern, Central (Kingdom of Buganda), and Western. Some of the districts had recently been added by dividing up old districts.

The Ugandan research team, for purposes of regional representation, selected one district per region, altogether four districts, to include in the study. Hence, Nile District was selected to represent the northern region, Lubigi District to represent the central region, Banana District to represent the western region and Eastern District to represent the eastern region. In addition to ensuring a regional representation, selection of the districts intentionally factored in other considerations. For example, Banana District was selected to represent those districts in the country whose education sectors receive a substantial proportion (13%) of the district’s local revenue.<sup>3</sup> Lubigi District was selected to represent those districts with a mix of peri-urban and rural sub-counties. Nile District, on the other hand, was selected to represent districts with a limited resource base, while Eastern District was selected to represent the newly created districts.

These four districts have a combination of private and public primary schools, with the latter category accounting for a higher number of schools than the former. Overall, the number of schools ranges between 99 schools in Eastern District and 1,000 schools in Lubigi District, with other studied districts falling in between.

The number of public and private schools (primary and secondary) in each of the four districts is shown in *Table 4*.

**Table 4. Number of public and private schools (primary and secondary) in the four districts**

Uganda - Number of schools						
Level	Primary			Secondary		
	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total
District						
Eastern	75	2	77	7	5	12
Lubigi		-	1,000			400
Banana	489	23	512	37	40	77
Nile	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a

n.a.: not available.

Source: Monographs from Eastern, Lubigi, Banana, and Nile DED Monographs.

Following implementation of the UPE, primary enrolment in the four districts rose to over 98% with the ratio between boys and girls balancing at 50/50 – previously, before the UPE policy was put in place, there were more boys than girls enrolled. A challenge across all the four districts is the shortage of teachers in UPE schools due to a fixed staff ceiling on the number of teachers each district is permitted to recruit, under the UPE programme, irrespective of the number of registered pupils. This has greatly contributed to an insufficient ratio of teachers to pupils, especially for those districts that cannot afford to

3. Other study districts such as Eastern and Lubigi Districts respectively receive only 3% and 10% of the district’s local revenue.

recruit additional teachers outside the ceiling.<sup>4</sup> Some key education indicators from the four districts are presented in *Table 5*.

**Table 5. Key education indicators in the four districts in 2007**

District	Number of teachers	Number of students (2007)	Pupil to teacher ratio
Eastern	748	45,519	61
Lugigi	n.a	n.a	n.a
Banana	3,631	217,872	60:1
Nile	n.a	157,386	n.a

n.a.: not available.

Source: Monographs from Eastern, Lubigi, Banana, and Nile DED Monographs.

Regarding other performance indicators, there appears to be some striking differences between the districts. In both the district that had just been established (Eastern District) and the district that had a poor revenue base (Nile District), most of these other performance indicators were worrying. For example, the classroom/pupil ratio is high (Nile 1:128, Eastern 1:101 compared to the national ratio of 1:57) and so is the desk/pupil ratio (1:7 in both districts instead of the national ratio of 1:3).

One major lesson to learn from such a poor performance is that districts (new or old) with a poor revenue base tend to have financial constraints impacting not only recruitment of staff, but also provision of basic services necessary for effective performance, for example in education. Another lesson to learn is that newly established districts tend to be small in size, having been carved out of existing districts, such that their land area limits the size of grants received from the centre, since the amount allocated is partly dependent on the size of the district. For example, Banana District, which gained its status as early as 1974 (i.e. long before the introduction of the decentralization policy) and had never been subdivided into smaller districts (hence maintaining its broad tax base), at least up to the time of the study, had a very promising education performance as indicated by the following performance indicators:

- Dropout rate has declined to only 9 per cent, although girls are still more likely to drop out before completion of primary level than boys, particularly because of early marriages.
- Completion rate for primary education was reported at 84 per cent.
- Pupil/teacher ratio was reported as having dropped from 70:1 at the onset of decentralization in 1997 to 60:1, which is very close to 57:1 ratio recommended by the Ministry of Education and Sports.
- Classroom/pupil ratio was also stated to have gone down from 71:1 five years back to 58:1 in 2009 as a result of the construction of new classrooms.

4. Among the studied districts, some schools in Banana District hire private but qualified teachers from the open market to fill up the gap outside the staff ceiling.



Besides maintaining a broad tax base, Banana District local administration has been able to actively raise awareness levels of the community with regard to social development issues. This has enabled the community to appreciate the value of their participation in development initiatives, including playing a key active, rather than passive, role with regard to the education of their children. For example, a political leader from the district mentioned that *‘Unlike in other districts, in Banana we are lucky that while parents are fully aware that there is UPE, they do willingly contribute towards lunch for their children, stationery, and construction of classrooms/ teachers’ houses. Inevitably, parents play a role in the good academic performance of children in the district’*.

For Lubigi District, despite the assertion by two respondents that the district was *‘one of the best performing districts in the country’*, it was not possible to establish the status of education performance indicators, as these do not appear to be recorded by the DED. It was later established that there was a need for skills training among education staff in data management and analysis.

#### **Community involvement in education in Banana District**

In Banana District, overall, it was noted that performance indicators had generally improved over the past five years largely thanks to the collaboration between policy-makers (political leaders) and technocrats in awareness raising of the community with regard to parents’ and SMCs’ roles and responsibilities towards education of their children. Indeed, one technocrat remarked that: *‘Government, through its UPE policy, almost killed the spirit of parents’ contribution to classroom construction, but following massive sensitization exercises, parents have continued to provide timber, bricks, sand, and labour while the district provides iron sheets for roofing’*.

Another contributing factor to the academic success of Banana District has been the involvement of parents and guardians who participated financially to the payment of salaries for teachers recruited outside the UPE staff ceiling. Shortage of teachers in the district, resulting from the staff ceiling that was fixed by the MoES several years back, has always been compensated for through informal recruitment of qualified private teachers from the open market by the SMCs with both technical assistance and political support from the head teachers and political leaders respectively. The research team was informed that in most primary schools there are, on average, two to three private teachers who are not on government payroll, but their salaries are being paid from parents’ contributions.

## 2. Roles and challenges of DEDs in Uganda: Main lessons learned from the research

The chapter begins with a brief presentation of the structure, role and functions of the District Education Department (DED). It then analyses the main mandate and the challenges faced by the DED in the context of decentralization of education in four main areas:

- quality monitoring,
- staff management,
- financial management,
- relations with local and national authorities.

Finally, the conclusion presents an overview of the responsibilities and difficulties experienced by the DED with the implementation of decentralization policies in Uganda.

### 2.1 Presentation of the DED

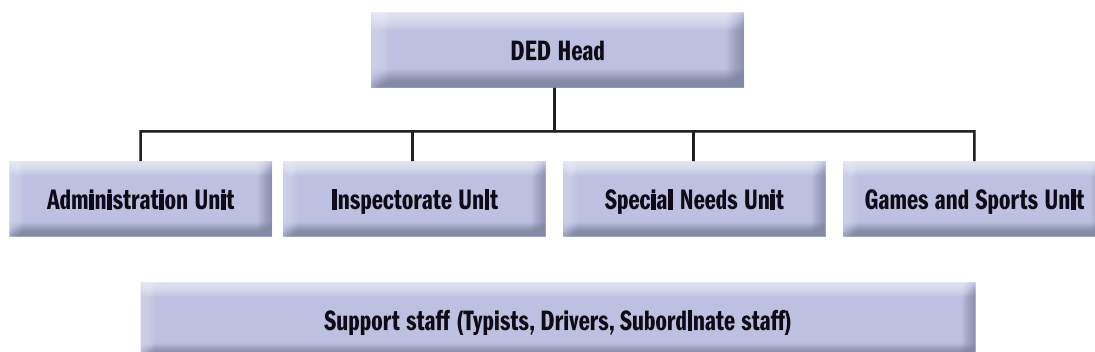
#### *Organizational structure*

Structurally, each DED consists of four basic units (Figure 2) including:

- the Administration Unit;
- the Inspectorate Unit;
- the Special Needs Unit;
- the Games and Sports Unit.

Operationally, education departments are headed by District Education Officers,<sup>5</sup> whose operations are guided by the three-year District Development Plans (DDP).

**Figure 2. Organizational structure of DEDs in Uganda**



Source: Banana, Eastern, Lubigi, and Nile District monographs.

5. They will be referred to as 'Heads of DED' in this document.

### Role of the DED

Overall, the role of DEDs is to administer the delivery of education services in their respective districts. Nonetheless, they focus more on primary than secondary education, since the former is the only level whose administration and management has been fully decentralized.<sup>6</sup>

In this respect, a DED performs the following functions: (i) controls education standards through support supervision/ monitoring and evaluation of pre-primary, primary, secondary, primary teacher colleges, and tertiary institutions; (ii) ensures compliance to government education policy and the teaching curriculum; (iii) ensures rational deployment and management of administrative staff, teachers, and head teachers; (iv) ensures prudent financial management, including disbursement of grants to schools, and follow up on accountability; (v) participates in mobilization/sensitization of parents with regard to their roles and responsibilities; and (vi) ensures sound school governance systems through School Management Committees (SMCs) and parent-teacher associations (PTAs). These roles have remained the same since decentralization in all the districts.

### Working conditions

With the exception of the Eastern District, where three different departments, including education, share a very small office space, working conditions in study districts appear to be relatively conducive to enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in staff management and administration. For example, most senior education officials (e.g. DED Head, District Inspector of Schools (DIS), Senior Education Officers, etc.) in Banana, Nile, and Lubigi Districts have their own offices while some school inspectors share offices, but still with enough space for effective service delivery. Although the DEDs are not as well furnished in terms of material resources as the district administration offices, most of which have new furniture, their furniture was in good condition at the time of the study team visit, especially that of the heads of offices.

In terms of other equipment, with the exception of the Eastern District, only the Heads of DED had fixed phone services in their offices. With regard to access to computers, only the Banana DED Head and DIS had desktop computers in their offices. Elsewhere there were no computers except in offices of personal secretaries/stenographers. The impression that the study team derived from this observation is that local governments have persistently continued to view usage of computers as a function of secretarial services by office secretaries, thereby denying district officials opportunities to adopt information and communication technologies for their day-to-day operations. It is also possible that local governments do not consider the acquisition of computers as a necessity, given other

#### Role and structure of the DED in Banana District

While secondary and tertiary education institutions are still highly centralized, it was learned that education officials endeavour to inspect these institutions (and submit reports to the MoES) although the mandate to take remedial action is a prerogative of the MoES, as implied by a district education official: *'It has been our policy to visit secondary schools in the district ... however, we cannot force secondary schools to implement our proposals. It is up to the ministry to ensure that our suggestions are implemented'*.

#### Role of the DED in Lubigi District

The Head of the DED in Lubigi District emphasized that the roles of the DED are: *'to build and maintain capacities in education services, to improve service delivery as per the education strategic plan and the district development plan'*. More precisely, her role as the head of the office is to *'oversee educational institutions, harmonize with stakeholders and inform the District Council'*. She specified that the stakeholders are *'the child and parents, the teachers and school managers, the local community, the local leaders and the founding bodies. These last ones are very important, as many of our schools are church-owned or Muslim schools. Our role is to build consensus within the national policy'*.

6. Although secondary and tertiary education levels are still highly centralized, DEDs are sometimes informed of the activities taking place in the respective institutions and may give advice, but cannot enforce implementation.

### **Working conditions in the Lubigi District**

According to the DED Head and the Assistant CAO, the main problem faced at the DED is the lack of means of transport, as pointed out by the following quotation: *'We have only one functioning computer and four vehicles: three 4WD (one for the DED Head, another for inspection and the third for other staff) and one lorry. The vehicles are not always in functioning order and I cannot shift funds from, say, salaries to another budget line in order to get the vehicles repaired. Once there is a shortage of funds for a budget line, you cannot shift to other resources'* (DED head).

This quotation puts emphasis upon the lack of flexibility in the use of budget lines, which prevents the DED Head from addressing specific problems such as the lack of material resources and vehicles for inspection.

competing needs at district level. Either way, school inspectors badly need access to computers to enable them to store data as well as type inspection reports for early distribution.

With regard to transport facilitation, only two DEDs had a relatively reasonable number of vehicles (Banana had three, and Lubigi, four vehicles) compared to Eastern and Nile Districts = which had only one 8-year old vehicle each. Once again, Banana and Lubigi Districts had a relatively good number of motorcycles for the inspectorate units to perform their routine inspections, compared to Eastern and Nile Districts which only

had one and two motorcycles, respectively. However, inspectors in Banana and Lubigi Districts do not regularly use motorcycles. These inspectors, by virtue of their seniority in service and social status in their areas of operation, do not feel comfortable riding motorbikes as a means of transport for fieldwork.

## **2.2 Staff management**

### ***Recruitment, appointment, and transfers***

In all the districts, the District Service Commission (DSC) is fully responsible for advertisement and recruitment of staff for the DED, including teachers and head teachers for primary schools<sup>7</sup>.

### **Recruitment and appointment of school staff in Eastern District**

Even for the recruitment of teachers and head teachers, there is no mandatory requirement for the DED Head to get involved, unless the DSC wishes so. There are established guidelines for the recruitment of staff, teachers, and head teachers, and the DED Head felt that he should always be involved, as it may be possible for the DSC to make wrong selections that could have been avoided. He complained about the process by mentioning that, *'with recruitment of teachers and head teachers, I need to be involved because as a DED Head, I have some competencies which nobody else on the panel has. For example, I need a secretary who has both data entry and data processing skills in addition to Word processing. But you get allocated a secretary who knows only Word processing, and you have to train her. This would not have happened if I had been involved'*.

The DED Head declares vacant positions, which he submits to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) who in turn makes a submission to the DSC for advertisement, after which successful applicants are short-listed and invited for interviews. Following the interviews, the DSC forwards the successful candidates to the CAO who in return authorises the Personnel Officer to appoint (on probation for two years) and send the newly recruited member of staff to their posting stations on his behalf. In all these processes, DEDs have no direct role to play, but they can be called upon to provide technical support to the DSC as and when felt necessary.

Regardless of the DEDs' supplementary technical support, it was noted that:

- Political interference/influence on the recruitment process is still an issue, especially given that DSCs are politically appointed by District Councils following nominations and approvals by both the District Executives and the Public Service Commission.

7. Recruitment of secondary school teachers and head teachers, still centralized, is entirely done by the national Education Service Commission.

- Sometimes religious groups interfere with deployment of teachers as they resist employment of teachers who do not follow the same religion as members of the school founding bodies.
- Even for the transfer of teachers, DEDs do not have full autonomy as political interference of local leaders through SMCs is inevitable.
- Equally importantly, DEDs cannot make transfer decisions on their own without consulting the CAOs or the Principal Personnel Officers (PPOs) for approval.
- DED officials feel that their technical and professional input into the teacher management process is given less importance than under the previous system. A staff member from Lubigi District mentioned that, *'the present teacher recruitment policy is not appropriate, it needs to be changed. I think that teachers should be recruited by the DED and not the DSC. My sitting on the DSC interview panel isn't enough. Before devolution, the DEDs were doing the recruitment and deployment and everything went fine ... The members of DSC are not well informed about education; hence, we get unqualified teachers recruited. Right now we are suffering the consequence of devolution'*.

Almost all head teachers felt that more authority and autonomy ought to be given to the DED with regard to transfers of teachers and head teachers. While the CAOs and PPOs expressed satisfaction with having teacher management decentralized at the district level for purposes of ownership and more direct control over teachers, DED officials view decentralization as having weakened the professionals at the district level to the benefit of the political actors and administrators at that level.

#### *Human resource capacity at department and school levels*

With the exception of the newly established Eastern District that had only 25 per cent of the established positions at the education department

#### **Political influence in the recruitment process in Lubigi District**

Study participants in Lubigi District noted that politics play a significant role in hiring at the DED. The PPO appeared to be aware of this political influence on the process. He explained in this regard that: *'the DSC is in principle independent, but its members are appointed by the Council, on the nomination by the Executive Committee and approved by the Public Service Commission. Some members give out information and as such they allow politicians to enter into the process'*. However, he underlined a recent change, related to the nomination process of the CAO, and which could help overcome this situation: *'Before, the CAOs were appointed by the DSC, but now they are appointed by the president. This is a positive move: it makes them more independent of the local political authorities. The centre could beforehand not discipline the errant CAOs. Now they can'*.

#### **Issues in DED recruitment in Eastern District**

Several key individuals that took part in the interviews noted that the DSC is financially handicapped by meagre funding to the extent that they are not in a position to hold regular meetings, let alone making adverts for vacant positions as required by law. There was also another observation by the respondents that even if funds were released timely and in sufficient quantities, recruitment of the much needed staff would still be problematic as the Ministry of Public Service (MPS) has increased the minimum qualification requirements for most senior positions and subsequently, many applicants do not qualify for vacant positions. For example, during the most recent advertisement for the position of DED Head, both applicants had Masters' degrees in education (the position requires just a first degree in education, plus a diploma in education management and administration), but one of them could not compete with the other simply because of a difference in their salary scales. One was at a U5 salary scale while the other was at U3, which is higher than the former, but both of them were competing for the post of DED Head – at a U1 salary scale.

Although both of them had the necessary academic qualifications, the one at U5 was disqualified simply because, according to the guidelines, it was not possible for someone to 'jump' three salary scales in between. Hence, only one competitor was left in the race, which was not acceptable for transparency reasons, as it would appear as if the situation had been manipulated to favour the remaining applicant. Accordingly, it was decided to re-advertise the vacancy and this had not yet taken place (for financial reasons), at the time of the research. In a similar circumstance, a political leader mentioned that, *'Too much experience is required and it is nowhere in the district. For example, during the most recent advertisement, nobody applied for the position of Special Needs Education Officer due to rigid requirements'*.

### **Staff development in the Lubigi District**

The district receives a capacity building grant from the central level. The PPO gave comprehensive information in this regard:

*'Our capacity building grant is about UGX (Ugandan shillings) 172 million (\$68,800). It used to be higher, but went down. But this has to be used for all political leaders down to the village, all staff and teachers. Out of UGX 172 million about 4 million (\$1,600) is planned to be used for education this year. The biggest amount goes to the training of sub-county chiefs and of heads of department, for whom about 50 per cent of the budget is used. And a large proportion goes to the training of political leaders. Before deciding on the use of these funds, we do a needs-assessment. People identify their priorities. We have three questionnaires: for individual needs, for departmental needs, for institutional needs. These are collected during March – April. We analyse these and prepare priority lists. And at the primary teachers college (PTC) meeting (in which all heads of departments are present) we decide on the actual use'.*

The information given by the DED Head completes this, also highlighting two difficulties. The first one concerns the pooling of funds: *'Before, the MoE used to send us capacity building grants via the CAO for education only. Now these funds are in the pool, it is difficult: everybody's crying, agriculture is crying, disabled are crying, health is crying and so on. The resources are spread too thinly; it is not effective. I can say that education is fairly treated by the capacity building grant, compared to others, but it is not well treated because there are not enough funds'.* A second difficulty lies in the obligation for the district to spread the use of these funds rather than to focus on one or a few sectors a year: *'I would prefer to phase the use of this fund, focusing on a specific sector every year. But the guidelines are that the funds should be spent to cover all different sectors every year'.*

The DED Head also indicates that there has been change in the use of funds: *'Before, officers were sponsored for additional training, but we saw that those who got degrees left for greener pastures. The Council came up with a bye-law and now we sponsor only brief courses and group capacity building. If you want additional qualifications, you have to sponsor it yourself'.*

### **Staff development and appraisal**

#### **Staff development in the Lubigi District**

The head teachers mentioned individual initiatives about teacher training: *'Teachers can go for further training, but will do so at their own expense. Training needs can be identified by the individual teachers (who will then go for further training at their own expense), by the school (who may invite an expert, using school funds) or by the zone'.*

thus taking a large proportion of the available funds. Hence, other sectors, including education, may either be left to manage without any allocation (e.g. Eastern District) or receive only a small proportion of the entire budget (e.g. Banana, Nile, and Lubigi Districts), insufficient to satisfy the training needs.

filled, the other three districts had all the required positions filled with qualified staff. Since the establishment of the Eastern District, the senior staff group at the DED, supposed to be supported by eight officers, had only two technical positions filled at the time of the study: one Senior Education Officer (inspectorate), and one Education Officer (inspectorate). The positions of DEO, DIS, Senior Education Officer (administration), Education Officer (inspectorate), Sports Officer, and Special Needs Education Officer were all vacant.

At the school level, in all four study districts, the number of government schools and number of teachers on the UPE payroll has largely remained stable over the past five years, despite a rising number of pupils registering to primary school each year, leading to high pupil/teacher ratios. Hence, all the study districts experienced human resource constraints, to which one of the districts had adjusted by hiring private, but qualified, teachers from the open market as a coping strategy. Besides the staff ceiling, lack of teachers can be caused by some teachers refusing to work in remote rural areas where they have been posted. One interviewee observed, *'This is a problem created by the DSC which recruits and deploys teachers anywhere, regardless of their point of origin, instead of recruiting teachers from the very locations where there is need'.*

All districts receive some capacity building funding from the central government which aims to develop capacities of all personnel, including administrators, political leaders and technocrats at the local level. However, the tendency at the district level has been to give priority to training of administrators and political leaders,

Given the meagre allocation of funding for capacity building, individual staff members can, on their own initiative and at their own expense, register in any recognized teacher training college for distance learning opportunities during school holidays.

The implication for this alternative approach is that further training for career development can only be undertaken by those who have access to financial resources (either personal savings or micro-credit).

Hence, many teachers and head teachers miss out, which has negative implications. A technocrat from the Eastern District mentioned that, *'You get someone from a classroom to become a head teacher without giving him induction training. Head teachers need a simple management course on how to make school development plans and budgets; and also need training in curriculum management, school governance, personnel management, education management, and financial management. Head teachers are given funds, but they lack skills to manage them'*. Also, even if some staff have access to some in-service training organized by the district, the duration of this training is so short (e.g. two days) that many of them are not provided with enough training to become proficient in management.

Just like other public servants, DED employees are required, on a yearly basis, to complete staff appraisal forms prepared by the MPS. These forms are evaluated by the DED Head before submission to the CAO for review.

At school level, performance appraisals of teachers are supposed to be done by head teachers who in turn are appraised by the DED Head. However, it was observed that in most cases teachers are never appraised by head teachers, unless there is a compelling need to do so; for example, in the case a teacher requests to be promoted. This irregularity of appraisals could also be linked to a lack of inspection visits, as explained in the next section.

In addition to contributing to promotions, performance appraisals, whether at departmental or school level, can also lead to disciplinary measures. A technocrat from the Banana District complained that, *'During the evaluations, one staff member (Inspectorate Division) in charge of a county was discovered to have visited only 10 out of 48 schools in a year and had appraised only 4 out of 400 teachers. He was suspended without pay for one year'*.

#### **Appraisal and management of teachers and DED personnel in Nile District**

In order to measure staff performance, employees from the DED complete staff appraisal forms prepared by the MPS, similar to all civil servants in Uganda. These evaluation forms are filled in on a yearly basis. They are then submitted to the CAO for analysis. However, this exercise does not always lead to the promotion of best performing staff, which frustrates most DED staff. It should be noted that the DED is influential as far as transfer of teachers is concerned. More so, the DED Head can recommend to the CAO staff members who deserve promotion, although the latter are not obliged to comply. On the other hand, the DED is blamed for frustrating some appointed teachers by not facilitating their confirmation as soon as possible.

#### **Room for improvement in staff appraisal in Eastern District**

At the school level, the head teachers are supposed to appraise the teachers, but the study team learned that because of lack of in-service training, most head teachers lack both interpersonal skills and capacity to supervise/appraise subordinates. Hence, most teachers have never been appraised and where appraisals have been done, this has only been done once starting in 2008 following the introduction of the Teacher Scheme of Service which requires appraising a 'teacher in a classroom' before s/he is promoted in teaching service. Appraisal of head teachers is supposed to be done by the acting DED head. However, it was reported by some key informants that this is not satisfactorily done, allegedly owing to the overwhelming workload shouldered by the acting DED head, for which he has no substantive appointment. This means that promotion of head teachers is stifled as promotions are partly pegged on to satisfactory staff appraisals. As remarked by one head teacher, *'Appraisal of teachers encourages teachers in a classroom to work hard to improve their weaknesses in order to benefit from promotions, especially following the introduction of the Teachers' Scheme of Service. Equally, appraisals can lead to disciplinary measures by the District Disciplinary Committee. But there are times when this does not happen'*.

## 2.3 Quality monitoring

### *Main characteristics and challenges*

Overall, monitoring of schools in all districts does not measure up to the required standards largely owing to shortfalls in attaining the inspection targets. The shortfalls are a result of: (i) lack of adequate transport facilitation for school inspectors; (ii) insufficient inspection funds, which are also released late; (iii) the large number of schools assigned to each inspector; and (iv) inspectors are often (e.g. three out of five working days a week) assigned to other administrative functions, including, among other things, registration of schools, handling reports, planning and attending workshops.

Because of the above-mentioned reasons, not all schools are visited according to workplans. Instead, actual inspection visits to schools are determined on the basis of:

- performance of a school: poorly performing schools at Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) level are given priority;
- community demand-driven visits, e.g. in case of regular complaints by parents about persistent teacher absenteeism;
- time interval since last visit to a particular school.

#### **Reasons for under-inspection of schools in Lubigi District**

As emphasized by an inspector, ‘we do not assign a specific number of schools to inspect, because the inspectors are also involved in administrative duties for the DED; they spend three days in the office and two days in the field. One inspector helps the DED Head with staffing issues and the others help with registration of schools, handling reports, planning, coordinating work with an NGO and other administrative work.’ The same applies to the DIS who is also involved in administration of examinations. He said: ‘by virtue of my position, I have to do both administrative work and school visits.’

Given the above determinants, some schools may be inspected more than others, depending on the prevailing circumstances; for example, as mentioned by a technocrat from Banana District, ‘When we found out that some schools were performing poorly, we spent a week in just one sub-county in order to find out the challenges these schools are facing’. Hence, inspectorate units have a tendency to adopt a ‘fire-fighting approach’ as a coping strategy. Some situations also warrant that school inspections be conducted in

teams, during which each inspector focuses on a particular aspect to ensure quality.

For purposes of consistency in quality monitoring, inspectors use guidelines put in place by the Directorate of Education Standards at the national level. A range of issues is taken into consideration. Among those issues are:

- teacher and pupil attendance;
- classroom teaching;
- lesson preparation by teachers;
- school feeding arrangements;
- community participation;
- adherence to teachers’ code of conduct;
- teaching and learning environment;
- school academic performance;
- school infrastructure facilities;
- support supervision to teachers;
- resource management and administration;
- gender-sensitive sanitation facilities;
- availability of safe drinking water;
- implementation of teacher scheme of service;
- support supervision by head teachers;
- provision of physical education and sports;
- identifying schools qualifying for becoming PLE examination centres.



It is believed that these indicators are key in improving the quality of basic education. In fact, there is a great number of issues to inspect and they are generally not all addressed during one visit to a particular school. Thus, there are variations between different schools with regard to the aspects that receive attention during each visit, depending on which aspects triggered the visit in the first place.

### *Recent initiatives*

Mindful of the importance of inspection for quality education and of the shortage of inspectors, it was found necessary in all districts to engage area Centre Coordinating Tutors<sup>8</sup> (CCTs) and head teachers in quality monitoring of schools. CCTs being trainers/mentors of teachers and having training skills, they are able to identify teachers' training needs, which is an added value the CCTs bring to the inspectorate. In addition, because of the small number of inspectors and the proximity of CCTs to schools (one CCT per resource centre and one resource centre per sub-county), CCTs seem to complement inspectors in assessing performance targets. Hence, CCTs are now fully recognized as providing both supportive and quality control services in primary schools falling under their areas of operation.

For purposes of facilitating timely inspection visits, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) started sending funds for school inspection directly to the DIS (rather than channelling them through the district administration) beginning the second quarter of the financial year 2008/09. This new approach was intended to cut down bureaucratic delays in disbursing funds to inspectorate units, and these are the very funds accessed by 'associate assessors' to undertake their team supervisory visits.

#### **The role of CCTs in the Lubigi District**

The Centre Coordinating Tutors (CCTs) appear to play a key role in the development of capacities of school staff, through regular support and training. The head teachers indicated in this regard that *'the CCTs organize training, mainly during the holidays, for head teachers on issues such as: financial management, human resource management, utilization of grants and government policies. During the term, we have a few one-day workshops and during the holidays, they may last a week'*.

#### **New initiatives to improve quality and quality monitoring in Eastern District**

Beginning the second quarter for financial year 2008/09, the MoFPED started sending funds for inspection direct to the DIS, rather than channeling it through the DED. Initially, funds for inspection which represent 5 per cent of Universal Primary Education (UPE) capitation grant, were supposed to be deducted from the UPE grant sent to the DED which would in turn pass it onto the inspectorate division, but this did not work effectively owing to mismanagement/abuse of the grant, according to one interviewee. At the time of the study visit, the DIS had just received the inspection funds (UGX 3,489,661 [\$1,395]) for the third quarter and a supervision plan involving a team, termed as 'associate assessors', of 12 inspectors, including two political leaders (Secretary for Education and District Speaker) and retired teachers/tutors. The team had been constituted to enhance the inspection process. With this new initiative in place, it is expected that every school will be visited at least once every term.

The second initiative, in light of the human resource constraint at the DED, is the subdivision of the two coordinating centres' catchment areas into sub-zones to enhance supervision. Under this initiative, head teachers undertake joint inspection visits (two rounds per term) within their sub-zone, an approach that enhances learning from each other. At the end of the joint inspection visit to a particular school, a report is written, a copy of which is left at the school for action, while other copies are shared with the CCT and the District Inspectorate. It was learned that when the District Inspectorate Division prepares its term work plan, it takes into consideration the head teachers' joint inspection visits. Although the sub-zone joint inspection is voluntary in nature, if the approach is to be efficient and sustainable, it might need some facilitation from the CCTs and the District Inspectorate Division.

8. CCTs are non-resident senior tutors in PTCs but assigned to particular catchment areas (ideally, each CCT is assigned one sub-county) to render technical support services to teachers.

Supervision undertaken by head teachers also constitutes a complementary key instrument for quality monitoring. Under this initiative, head teachers undertake joint peer supervision visits (regularity varies between districts) which involve experience sharing and learning from each other. In addition to involving CCTs and head teachers in quality monitoring, another alternative intervention pursued by districts is that of ‘associate assessors’. This is a group composed of inspectors, retired teachers/tutors, and political

#### **Report writing, distribution, and follow-up in Nile District**

Inspectors normally prepare school inspection reports and leave a copy with the respective head teachers. Afterwards they consolidate all school reports into sub-county and district reports. Inspectors endeavour to follow up on the progress made by schools. They normally insist on the implementation of the recommendations made. However, inspectors claim that most teachers are conservative and rigid and fail to comply. School inspection reports are shared with district officials such as the Resident District Commissioner, Chairman of the ‘Local Council 5’, the Chief Administrative Officer and the Secretary for Education but they do not always receive feedback from them.

Since 2008 the DED has been fairly independent from the top district administration as funding for quality monitoring directly comes from the centre. The DIS independently prepares quality-monitoring reports without any interference. Towards the end of 2008, the Directorate of Education Standards (DES) conducted training for district education officials on the use of inspection instruments, information collection, and report preparation.

leaders, etc., who come together to constitute an inspection team in order to enhance supervision and ensure that every school can be visited at least once a term. All three supervision initiatives (engagement of CCTs, head teachers and associate assessors) are formally recognized and coordinated by the DED to which regular inspection reports are submitted, just as the traditional district inspectorate units do.

#### **Feedbacks and follow-ups**

After every inspection visit, a report is written, shared with the relevant school, and at the end of every month integrated copies of inspection reports are compiled and submitted to relevant offices including: CAO, DED, PPO, District Local Council, Resident District

Commissioner, Secretariat for Education, and MoES (DES). However, regardless of the wide distribution of inspection reports, inspectorate units never receive feedbacks on issues raised and recommendations made in the reports. This problem was present in all four districts and it was found to be very demotivating for inspectors as some issues and recommendations raised in the reports may require action or reaction by some of the officials to whom the reports are submitted.

## **2.4 Financial management**

All the DEDs get funding from the central government (conditional and unconditional grants), complemented with revenue generated from local fund raising and, in some cases, from donor funding. Indeed, some districts may benefit from NGO funding and others not. Donors are free to channel their funds through the central government or send it directly to districts of their choice.

The unconditional grants constitute funds for payment of wages for the staff attached to the DEDs and funds for operationalization of other activities in the same office. The conditional grants, on the other hand, include funds for UPE, Universal Secondary Education (USE), School Facilitation Grants (SFG), and salaries for primary, secondary, and tertiary teachers. All the grants are supposed to be allocated on a quarterly basis and have conditions and allocation guidelines. For example, UPE funds, sometimes referred to as capitation grant, are distributed to recipient schools on the basis of the number of children registered. DEDs also receive some proportion of local revenue collected, which varies from one district to another. Overall, the DEDs appeared to be drawing the biggest proportion of the entire district budgets,<sup>9</sup> e.g. about 52% and 60% of the budgets for Eastern and Banana Districts respectively.

9. District budgets are composed of funds from the central government (conditional and unconditional), donations, and district local revenue.

## Decision-making and financial control

Although in principle the DEDs participate in financial decision-making, for example during the planning and budgeting process, this does not translate into autonomy as whatever decisions are taken, they are subjected to controls and guidelines issued by the line ministries on how funds are to be accessed and used. For example, computation and allocation of funds (UPE or SFG) to different schools is done by accounts assistants attached to the DED, but they are answerable to the Chief Finance Officers (CFOs). Indeed, authorisation of payment is dependent upon financial requisitions being compliant with the education sector work plans and budgets approved by the district councils. This implies that control of financial resources is a joint effort between the DED Head, CFO, CAO, and the District Council. In addition, all the spending must be within the Local Government Act 1997 and the Public Finance Act and, above all, usage is monitored at several levels, in order of importance, to ensure compliance: Auditor General (central government); MoFPED (central); Office of the CAO; District Internal Audit (district); District Executive Committee; and the District Technical Committee. In reality, given the foregoing controls, there is nothing like full autonomy in financial decision-making by the DEDs. Nevertheless, the controls appear to partly contribute to some level of transparency in the management of the funds allocated to DEDs from the central government and then allocated to each school.

### Financial constraints at school level

Head teachers do not get what they are supposed to get as far as the school capitation grant is concerned and the little amount that is received always arrives late. In principle, every child is supposed to be allocated UGX 480 (\$0.2) per month, but over the last couple of years the total amount of UPE funds tended to remain constant regardless of the rising number of children enrolling in schools. The implication for this

### Financial decision-making in Lubigi District

The Chief Planning Officer explained the following as the process of decision-making for the budget at the district level: *'the preparation of the budget goes through a long cycle. There are workshops at the district level, writing of draft development plans, writing of budgets, budget conferences with all stakeholders, preparation of a budget framework paper with inputs from all sections, finalization of the budget to be submitted to the centre by 30 January, sector-wide discussions at the central level, distribution of budgets to the districts. We can allocate internal revenue as we want. We propose in our budget inter-sectoral flexibility. This is part of the fiscal decentralization strategy. However, we don't tamper with the resources assigned to education. Education should not be affected by the flexibility requirement.'*

Concerning education, an assistant accountant in charge of education underlined that the DED decides on the use of the funds coming from the local revenue: *'There are no fixed percentages; this depends on the needs. The inspectors and the DED Head decide where the needs are. The engineer and the auditor may also be involved'*. The assistant CAO however indicated that the DED does not have full autonomy in this regard, the district having *'some control over the use of this grant and can assign priorities'*. This was confirmed by the DED Head who said: *'Concerning the use of the internal revenue, we propose an allocation to the Education Commission; we convince them to approve it'*.

As for the group of head teachers, they specified that, *'As individual head teachers, we are not involved in the definition of the district budget. But the leaders of the union and the chairperson of the association of head teachers are invited to participate in the budget conference.'*

### Challenges for financial management at school level in Eastern District

Most head teachers lack both record-keeping skills and financial management capacity, which partly contribute to poor financial accountabilities. One respondent remarked that: *'When head teachers get appointed in administrative positions, it is just assumed that they have some elementary knowledge in handling accounts, but the current generation of head teachers does not have any training in financial management skills. In any school we have visited, I have never seen a work plan nor a budget, they just keep a shopping list'*. This remark was substantiated by one of the head teachers who argued: *'We have not been taken through the financial management course to enhance our skills in financial management. All the head teachers who joined teaching after the expiry of the Teacher Development Management System (TDMS) in 2002 lack this type of training. Hence there is a lot of trial and error'*. Notwithstanding this challenge, the district has never undertaken any initiative to ensure effective management of funds at the school level, nor has the MoES ever considered allocation of a grant for this activity.

mismatch has been the declining amount allocated per child, which makes it extremely difficult for the school management to offer the necessary services. Most head teachers lack both record keeping and financial management skills, which partly contribute to poor financial accountabilities.

## 2.5 Relations with local and national authorities

Overall, there is interactive teamwork between technical departments and political wings at district levels. There are, however, times when political leaders are quite lenient when it comes to enforcement of certain aspects, for fear that they will lose their political positions during future general elections. In addition, for technical issues in which political leaders have personal interests, they tend to exert some political influence, even when it means interfering with founded technical decisions. For example, for both appointment and transfers of teachers/head teachers, it was noted that political interference can be quite common – that somehow, they tend to influence teacher management decisions of the DSC and CAO with regard to whom to appoint or transfer, where and when.

### **Positive relations between technocrats and political leaders in Banana District**

Both technocrats and political leaders spoken to reported an interactive teamwork spirit between technocrats and political leaders at the district level. This is partly attributed to the fact that the district chairperson has a background in education management, which means he has developed a keen interest in playing both a political and advisory role to the department. Another factor that also contributes to the harmonious coexistence between DED technocrats and the political leadership is the fact that most of the district councilors are retired teachers with vast experience in education management issues. Hence, their support is not only political, but also technical. For example:

- *'We do planning and budgeting together and they (political leaders) cooperate. Our problem is only with regard to sharing the local revenue where they seem to give priority to their own political agenda'* (Technocrat).
- *'There is a harmonious interaction here. This is why Banana District excels ... we do everything together and transparently'* (Political Leader).

There are two examples to illustrate harmony between politicians and technocrats:

- Sensitization exercises of parents on their roles and responsibilities under UPE and USE arrangements were jointly undertaken.
- Unlike two other study districts (Eastern and Nile where the political leaders occupy a separate building from that of the technocrats), politicians and technocrats operate under the same roof without any distinct division between political and technical wings. For instance, the office of the DED Head (technocrat) is directly opposite the office for the Secretary for Education (political leader) and both officials share a receptionist who doubles as a stenographer.

At the national level, exchange of information between the DEDs and the parent ministry (MoES) is very limited, except when an emergency issue occurs and needs to be addressed. While the DED would want to have a linkage with the MoES, the latter would want the DEDs to be fully answerable to the districts as spelled out under the decentralization framework of the Local Government Act 1997.

Although decentralization should mean that districts are autonomous, the district education officials expressed a wish that there ought to be regular meetings between districts and the parent ministry (MoES). Such interactions could be through mid-term regional review meetings organized by the MoES and attended by all heads of DEDs. This would indeed be an opportunity for them to share experience and learn from each other.

### ***Weak relationship with the MoES in Lubigi and Eastern Districts***

In Lubigi District, the DED Head emphasized that the relationships of the office with the MoES are poor, because of the decentralization framework: 'Because we are decentralized, the ministry leaves us out. When we approach the ministry, they send us back: you are decentralized, you should solve your problem at your level'. She indicated that: 'Because we disagree with the district on some issues, especially related to teacher management, we, as DED Heads, have tried to create our own association, but we didn't get any support. We will be received by the ministry individually, but not as an association. We want to have a dialogue on policy reform with the Principal Secretary as a team. In national meetings, it is difficult to bring up these issues'.

In the Eastern District, it was noted that exchange of information between the DED and the MoES is very limited. The only time the district communicates with the ministry is when there is a problem to address; otherwise there is no communication at all. Although decentralization means districts being autonomous, the district education officials expressed a wish that there ought to be regular meetings between districts and the MoES. The feeling is well captured in what a district education official had to say, 'Lack of regular meetings (involving the MoES) with us constitutes a gap. The MoES does not get to know our problems. Emergency problems like sanitation issues have to wait for the next financial year, as there is no way the MoES could come in for help. We need to hold regional review meetings so that we are kept abreast of issues in the ministry, but this never happens'.

## **2.6 Conclusions**

Uganda has opted for a clear policy of devolution. In the education sector, this means that DEDs are not extensions of the MoES, but form part of district authorities.

The most preoccupying aspect of the devolution policy is the relative absence of the ministry in districts. The ministry gives limited guidance and support to district officers. It seems that the ministry's interventions are limited to two areas, namely:

- to put conditions and guidelines on the use of financial resources which are transferred to districts;
- to undertake the school data collection process as districts do not seem to be very keen on this, which may be for financial and technical reasons.

The key task for the DEDs is that of monitoring the implementation of national education policies and the quality of schools and teachers. In principle, the structures and tools are in place for effective quality monitoring. Although the number of inspectors is far below the number of schools, which is made worse by inadequate transportation facilitation and heavy administrative workload, there have been some remedial initiatives to address issues of quality monitoring, as detailed in this report

It is anticipated that a combination of these initiatives will ensure more regular school visits leading to improvement in education quality.

Overall, DEDs have limited autonomy in financial management, the fact being that all funds from the centre are clearly earmarked for particular activities. The only funds without attached conditions, although still controlled by the approved annual work plan and budget, are the proportion of local revenue allocated to DEDs. Most of the people the study team spoke to did not identify '*lack of autonomy in financial management*' as a serious constraint; they appreciated the need for the central level to circumscribe local autonomy, especially in the use of funds.

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