



## Karamoja Resilience Support Unit Briefing Paper



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# Analysis of Educational Approaches in Karamoja

## Background

This analysis is motivated by the concerns of international donors and other stakeholders regarding the persistent challenges in advancing educational outcomes for the majority of the population in the Karamoja sub-region of Uganda. Substantial improvements in enrolment and retention rates in Karamoja have occurred over the past eight years, but these remain significantly behind the national average, and drop-out rates after primary school are extremely high, especially for female students.<sup>i</sup> This analysis uses existing primary and secondary data to investigate various approaches for education in the sub-region.

## Methods

We began this exercise by developing a set of indicators for educational service provision with relevance for Karamoja.<sup>ii</sup> These include availability, accessibility, affordability, cultural acceptance, quality, and terms of inclusion. The last indicator—terms of inclusion—is a variable that considers the ways in which the institution and process of education requires children, families, and communities to conform to the terms, requirements, and expectations of attending school.<sup>iii</sup>

We then reviewed the qualitative data on barriers to girls' education collected under a Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU) project in 19 villages in nine sub-counties of Karamoja in 2002. These interviews and participatory data collection activities took place with girls, parents, educators, administrators, and key informants.<sup>iv</sup> We also reviewed the policy brief prepared under the same KRSU project that analyzed educational policies and programs in pastoral areas in East Africa and beyond.<sup>v</sup> Lastly, we revisited the report from the culminating workshop on the KRSU girls' education project that took place in December 2022. This participatory event brought together educators, administrators, and relevant stakeholders working on education in the Karamoja sub-region.

## Discussion

### Overview and visualization

The Karamoja Development Partners Group (KDPG) recommended that KRSU investigate how various educational options might be perceived by and meet the needs of the various stakeholders in the Karamoja sub-region. The suggested options were day schools, boarding schools, alternative basic education (ABE) models, and networked schooling. We have dropped networked schooling from consideration at this point because this

option has not been piloted in Karamoja (to the best of our knowledge), meaning that local stakeholders lack experiences with or views on this model. We have retained ABE as an option even though there is no widespread ABE model in place in the region at present because most communities had some experience with or knowledge of the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) program that began in 1998 and existed to varying degrees until the late 2010s.

The below diagram provides a visualization of the narrative that follows and is based on our analysis of the existing primary and secondary data. The scoring of one to five stars in the diagram reflects our understanding of the current (or recent, in the case of ABE) situation—as opposed to programmatic or policy aspirations—in the sub-region. These scores are relative to each other. In other words, five stars under one indicator for a given educational modality shows that this is likely *the best of the options given the prevailing conditions*. Five stars under one indicator does not imply that this modality is excelling in this regard when compared to national or international standards. For example, the consistent score for quality across the first three modalities indicates that they all have the potential to provide adequate education of roughly the same quality. It does not mean that schools as a whole in Karamoja are providing average quality education.

The terms of inclusion for pastoral and agro-pastoral students in Karamoja generally serve as barriers to enrolment, attendance, and retention. Students must conform to various expectations, requirements, and norms in order to attend school; many of these are alien to or not valued by the local cultures or require prohibitively expensive investments (such as a required number of sanitary pads and underwear for adolescent girls). Experiences of discrimination, a lack of flexible schedules, harassment (sexual, physical, and verbal)

by teaching staff, and a tolerance of bullying all work against educational success. These exist regardless of the educational modality analyzed here but may be mitigated by the efforts and approaches of specific schools and school personnel.

### Day schools

There is a relatively high availability of lower primary school facilities but much less availability of upper primary or secondary schools. For example (as of late 2022), there are two secondary schools in all of Amudat District and three in all of Kaabong District. Attending as a day scholar is thus only possible for those who live in the immediate vicinity of a secondary institution. Although there is relatively good coverage of lower primary school facilities, the availability of materials and the regular attendance of teachers are lower. These considerations have major impacts upon the quality of the education provided.

Factors determining access to available schools include long distances (in some areas) to travel, seasonal flooding of rivers and lack of bridges, and insecurity on roads. Work burdens at home mean that many children are departing for school after already working several hours, making long journeys on foot more difficult. Access is gendered, meaning that the distance deemed acceptable for a boy to travel to school is not necessarily the same as for a girl.

KRSU's 2022 report on barriers to girls' education in Karamoja included a comparison of estimated annual income for households versus the costs of education. Lower primary day schools are by far the most affordable when compared to upper primary, secondary, and boarding options. Despite these low costs, households also consider opportunity costs when deciding to enroll children in school. The main loss to the household is in labor; this is particularly true when girls are sent to school, as their labor is highly flexible.

### Comparison of educational modalities against indicators of service provision

	<b>Availability</b>	<b>Accessibility</b>	<b>Affordability</b>	<b>Cultural acceptance</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Terms of inclusion</b>
Day school, primary	***	***	****	***	***	*
Day school, secondary	*	*	**	***	***	*
Boarding school	*	*	*	*	***	*
Alternative basic education (ABE)	**	**	*****	*****	*	***

Notes on indicators:

*Availability*: whether or not a facility exists

*Accessibility*: the extent to which a facility can be reached by the population it serves

*Affordability*: the cost of attending based on annual incomes (financial cost) and also what is given up when attendance occurs (opportunity cost)

*Cultural acceptance*: the degree to which the local population is likely to accept the model and pedagogical approach as well as the efforts made by the model to bridge cultural differences

*Quality*: the extent to which the modality delivers or is perceived by stakeholders to deliver education with quantifiable results that compare favorably to national standards

*Terms of inclusion*: the extent to which the model expects or requires children, families, and communities to conform to specific terms, requirements, and expectations





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Local educators and administrators are aware of access, availability, and affordability as barriers to school attendance, especially for secondary school and particularly for female students.

Cultural acceptability largely depends on the values and perspectives of families and communities. These stakeholders are likely to consider day schools as more culturally acceptable because children who attend school remain a daily part of the household, can contribute labor, and monitoring of their behavior and interactions is possible. The content of the curriculum at government schools is determined nationally, meaning there is likely to be minimal difference in the cultural acceptability of the educational content across day and boarding schools.

***Our analysis indicates that expanding the network of day schools, particularly upper primary and secondary day schools, would be a positive step towards increasing enrolment and retention. This expansion would require adequate funding, building new infrastructure, and bolstering teacher facilitation (including training, housing, and support) in an effort to attract and retain adequate numbers of teachers. Such an expansion would increase availability, accessibility, and affordability, but on its own would have little impact on cultural acceptability, quality, or terms of inclusion. Improving these indicators will require more intentional, sustained, and substantive investments.***

## **Boarding schools**

Boarding schools are the only option for the many students who live in locations without upper primary or secondary schools. The small number and urban concentration of these facilities means that both availability of and access to these establishments is low. The cost of boarding schools, especially at the secondary level, is well beyond the reach of most households. Scholarships play an important role in allowing students to attend secondary school, but many of these scholarships do not extend past Senior Four, meaning the student is unable to finish their secondary degree and continue to tertiary education. In addition, the number of scholarships cannot meet the demand or serve as an effective means of educating the broader population. Evidence from other pastoral contexts shows that boarding schools require a considerable investment of financial and human resources and that a lack of regulations means that many facilities are very poorly maintained. Parents may hesitate to send children into the care of strangers, and protection concerns, especially for girls, are well-founded: evidence shows that sexual exploitation of older girls when away from home is common across pastoral regions in East Africa.<sup>vi</sup> The combination of these concerns based on evidence from the region and constraints for local communities means that boarding schools—and hence upper primary and secondary education—are unlikely to be desirable or feasible for most households.



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As with day schools, the quality of the education provided is a function of school-specific factors. While some longstanding secondary schools in Karamoja, such as Kangole Girls' Secondary School, have strong reputations within the sub-region, no secondary school in Karamoja makes the list of 300 best secondary schools in Uganda based on the 2020 Certificate of Education (UCE) results.<sup>vii</sup> Improving education at these institutions will require attracting and retaining better teachers, improving materials and facilities, and supporting students to attend and stay in school.

The cultural acceptability of boarding schools as compared to day schools varies depending on the perspective. Many parents are hesitant to allow their children—especially girls—to live away from home due to the perceived increased exposure to negative influences. On the other hand, adults from the sub-region who are themselves educated most likely went to boarding schools, and hence the system is a known entity (albeit to a very small and elite minority). Some students expressed that the more academic culture of boarding school was a net positive due to the improved learning environment and lack of domestic duties.

In contrast to the nuanced views of local communities, many district officials and politicians express strong and fervent support of boarding schools as a key to long-term gains in Karamoja. This debate has been going on for at least 18 years<sup>viii</sup> and dominated much of the discussion at the December 2022 KRSU stakeholder workshop in Moroto. District-level proponents of the boarding school model range from those who support eradication of

“traditional” and “nomadic” ways of life to those who feel that boarding schools offer the most support, structure, and protection, especially for girls. Some advocates propose that attendance at boarding schools from a young age should be forced, that parents should be fined or jailed if their children do not attend, and that facilities should be fenced to prevent “escape.” Other less strident proponents suggest expanding the network of boarding schools as one component of a broader expansion of opportunities in the sub-region to make education more available and accessible.

***Our analysis points to the role of boarding schools in providing students with a potentially positive learning environment. As communities unto themselves, boarding schools may be able to offer better quality education than day schools, but reduced transparency can also mean that poor quality or protection concerns go unrecognized. Boarding schools are much more expensive than day schools and entail far greater opportunity costs for households by entirely removing children from the labor pool. Although the preferred solution of vocal authorities, the motivations behind this option seem ill-placed and not thoroughly considered. Evidence from numerous countries (e.g., United States, Canada, and Australia) demonstrates that forced attendance at boarding schools to address a cultural “problem” has long-term and extremely negative repercussions for the well-being of children, families, communities, and ethnic groups. Implementing governments can face decades of costly litigation and reparation payments.***

### **Alternative basic education (ABE)**

At present there is no widespread alternative basic education system functioning within Karamoja, and thus most children of school-going age do not have experience with this model. ABEK was phased out in the 2010s, meaning that communities in some areas still recall participating.<sup>ix</sup> We rate a theoretical ABE model as having greater availability and accessibility than secondary or boarding schools but less than primary day schools. This is based, in part, on the previous experience of ABEK in the region, whereby teachers were often absent. The ABE model is considerably more affordable given that many of the hidden costs of Universal Primary Education (UPE)—such as classroom contributions, uniforms, and supplies—do not exist. However, we rate quality as less than the other modalities given the previous experiences in the region, whereby ABEK’s success was marred by poor funding, limited facilitation, unreliable performance, and lack of teachers. These problems are not specific to the Karamoja model; ABE approaches in other locations have suffered when they become a sub-standard variant of the mainstream education provision, but with lower quality, regulation, and support than formal schools.<sup>x</sup>



Despite these challenges, there were also positive and at times longer-term benefits arising from ABEK, such as 12% of attendees going on to complete mainstream primary education and at least beginning secondary school. One review found that many local employees with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the region attended at least some ABEK classes as children.<sup>xi</sup> Several government officials attending the December 2022 KRSU workshop in Karamoja stated proudly that they were “products of ABEK.”

Given their flexibility, functioning ABE models can be much more culturally acceptable to families who practice seasonal transhumance. For example, the ABEK program in Karamoja was developed with local input and specifically designed to overcome some of the barriers of the formal education model, including through flexible scheduling and instruction in the local language.<sup>xii</sup> These measures can greatly improve terms of inclusion related to pastoral mobility and seasonal schedules. An outstanding question is the extent to which populations in Karamoja continue to practice mobile transhumance to a degree that would require an ABE model. Additional assessments would be required to ascertain if and where ABE was appropriate.

***Alternative basic education models have the potential to offer learning to students who cannot access fixed-place day schools due to location or mobile lifestyles. They may also reduce some of the barriers to inclusion and be more culturally acceptable. To be effective, however, they require a high degree of organization, political will, and commitment. These models are designed to work with and support pastoral systems. As such, they are most likely to realize success when implemented and run by national and district administrations that wish to protect and maintain such systems. Current evidence implies that the Ugandan government is not inclined to invest resources in upholding pastoralism.***

## Implications and conclusions

The primary and secondary data sources reviewed for this analysis indicate that there is widespread interest in improvements in educational access, availability, and affordability within Karamoja by all stakeholders. Expanded availability and access, particularly of upper primary and secondary day schools, will help to reach more communities and improve affordability. Cultural acceptability is likely to improve over time as growing numbers of students attend and complete school. Hiring more local teachers and administrators who understand and value local ways of life will also help with cultural acceptability. A reinvented and revised curriculum with relevance to learners in Karamoja would go a long way towards increasing the cultural relevance of the education system.



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We recognize that this recommendation to expand and improve day schools runs counter to the vocal support for compulsory boarding schools as advocated by some stakeholders. While recognizing that there are some positive outcomes from a boarding school approach, including the potential for improved learning environments for pupils, the compulsory nature of the model proposed by many stakeholders runs counter to international human rights, which prohibit the forced separation of a child from his or her parents. In addition, boarding schools at present are well beyond the financial reach of almost all households in Karamoja. Establishing and running quality schools in the region—even if students were paying tuition—would require a massive investment of financial resources and human capital. Given that international actors are unlikely to support an approach that runs counter to international norms and has been proven to have extremely negative outcomes in multiple countries, such funds would have to come from the government. This seems highly unlikely based on the already poor funding and facilitation of the education sector in the sub-region.

Livelihood systems in Karamoja continue to diversify. This trend will continue with economic growth and development in the region, which will ideally create economic opportunities outside of heavy exploitation of natural resources. While pastoralism has and will continue to evolve, the focus on livestock husbandry

as an appropriate livelihood in a semi-arid region characterized by high climatic and ecological variability will continue. Educational approaches must take both of these realities into account. As stated in the policy brief produced by KRSU in 2022:

***Since within-household diversification is now widespread in pastoralist regions, schooling needs to engage vigorously with this reality and the diversity of learning needs that it produces. Unfortunately, a characteristic norm of formal schooling is the assumption that schooling should serve as a pathway out of pastoralism.<sup>xiii</sup> Education service providers have been slow to recognize***

***that schooling should also work for those who “stay in,” by helping to improve the resilience and sustainability of pastoralism as a livelihood, instead of only offering an exit strategy.<sup>xiv</sup>***

We recommend a concerted and sustained effort on improving education through the expansion of day schools at all levels, hiring and training teachers, and working with educators and administrators to understand and value pastoral traditions.

## Acknowledgements

This briefing paper was written by Elizabeth Stites. Photo credit: Matteo Caravani.

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## Endnotes

- i As reported by Mr. Sambey Logira, UNICEF representative, at “Regional Stakeholders Workshop on Improving Education for Girls in Karamoja and Beyond,” December 6, 2022, Moroto, Uganda.
- ii We started with indicators developed by the World Bank to assess educational and health services across many countries in Africa, available at W. Wane and G. H. Martin, “Education and Health Services in Uganda: Data for Results and Accountability” (World Bank and African Economic Research Consortium, 2013), <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/680381468174903963/pdf/826660ESW0Ugan090Box379862B000U0090.pdf>.
- iii C. Dyer, “Does Mobility Have to Mean Being Hard to Reach? Mobile Pastoralists and Education’s ‘Terms of Inclusion,’” *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 43, no. 5 (2013): 601–621.
- iv E. Stites, B. Athieno, and C. Dyer, “Educating Girls in Karamoja, Uganda: Barriers, Benefits, and Terms of Inclusion in the Perspectives of Girls, Their Communities, and Their Teachers” (Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU), Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, Kampala, Uganda, 2022).
- v C. Dyer, “Education in East Africa’s Pastoralist Areas: Why Are Girls Still Not Going to School?” (Karamoja Resilience Support Unit, Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, Kampala, Uganda, 2022).
- vi Dyer, “Education in East Africa’s Pastoralist Areas.”
- vii *Pearl Times* Reporter, “List: Here are Uganda’s Best 300 O-Level Secondary Schools (2022)” (*The Pearl Times*, February 3, 2023, Kampala, Uganda), <https://pearltimes.co.ug/list-here-are-ugandas-best-300-o-level-secondary-schools-2022/>.
- viii UNICEF was having a nearly identical debate with politicians and authorities when the author began working in the Karamoja region in 2006.
- ix S. Datzberger, “Lost in Transition? Modernization, Formal Education and Violence in Karamoja,” *World Development* 158 (2022): 106013.
- x Dyer, “Education in East Africa’s Pastoralist Areas.”
- xi V. Brown, M. Kelly, and T. Mabugu, “The Education System in Karamoja” (High-Quality Technical Assistance for Results (HEART), 2017), [https://karamojaresilience.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/the\\_education\\_system\\_in\\_karamoja\\_revised\\_july\\_17\\_dfid.pdf](https://karamojaresilience.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/the_education_system_in_karamoja_revised_july_17_dfid.pdf).
- xii Datzberger, “Lost in Transition?”
- xiii S. Krätli and C. Dyer, “Mobile Pastoralists and Education: Strategic Options,” International Institute for Environment and Development, London, 2009, <https://pubs.iied.org/10021iied>; C. Dyer, “Evolving Approaches to Educating Children from Nomadic Communities,” *Prospects* 46, no. 1 (2016): 39–54, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11125-016-9381-6>; A. Catley, J. Lind, and I. Scoones, “The Futures of Pastoralism in the Horn of Africa: Pathways of Growth and Change,” in “The Future of Pastoralism,” eds. J. Zinsstag, E. Schelling, and B. Bonfoh, *Revue scientifique et technique (International Office of Epizootics)* 35, no. 2 (2016): 389–403, doi:10.20506/rst.35.2.2524.
- xiv Dyer, “Education in East Africa’s Pastoralist Areas.”

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## USAID Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU)

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