

EDUCATION IN UGANDA

Education is the key element for whoever wanting to improve on their situations and to realize a better future. In Uganda there are many people competing for a limited number of good jobs, and without a polite education there are very few chances of ever landing to one. However, getting that education in the first place is a big challenge. During the Y.K. Museveni's time in office, (The Ugandan President), has been enthusiastic to promote free primary education for all. At the same time as this may be a noble goal in theory, the reality is somewhat different. Despite these ideologies, Uganda has very few free government schools, and those that do exist are hugely oversubscribed. The classes are having over one hundred students with very little in the way of facilities, and unmotivated, over-worked teachers heading them. This means that for most of the population, especially those who want a good education, the only real alternative is private school.

In Uganda, private schools vary extremely in fees and quality, and miserably, with so many large families in one country and most of them being orphans especially due to HIV/AIDS, there is hardly ever enough money to go around. This means that many children are left sitting at home, waiting for their relatives to try to scrape together enough money to send them to school. However, matters are made worse by the fact that there are many extra school requirements to pay for on top of fees. From brooms, toilet papers and blankets to school books and shoe polish, on the reporting day back to school each child must turn up at the gates with everything asked of them, or else they will simply be sent back home. It is apparently impossible task for many children and their families to fund an education, and a lot of children instead choose to stay home looking at themselves as failures in the society. This is a common incidence, and however hard a child has worked at school, if they can't pay their fees in full they are not given a chance to be assessed neither can they reach their hand to examination certificates.

THE UGANDA EDUCATION SYSTEM:

The Ugandan Academic year starts in February and ends in December. The first term runs from February to April, the second term from May until early August, and the third term from September to December. This is the reason why at Wide Smiles for All Through Education we ask for our sponsorship payments to be made three times a year, on January 7th, May 7th and September 7th in order to meet the school requirements in time. Alternatively, you can choose to pay your sponsorship costs in one yearly lump sum on January 7th.

The Ugandan Education system follows a quite similar pattern to that in Britain. Children are in primary school for seven years [Primary 1- Primary 7], and then continue through secondary

school for the next six years (Senior 1- Senior 6).

The three most important school years for a child in Uganda are:

- Primary 7: All students must take leaving examinations which will determine which secondary school they go to.
- Senior 4: O-Level year.
- Senior 6: A-Level year.

At Wide Smiles for All Through Education, we want to see all of the children that we support go to school until the end of Senior 4. After this level depending on the child's ability we talk seriously with the child about what they think their future holds, and from there we make the decision as to whether they should continue on to A-Levels or whether they should move on to vocational training. Once they have completed this next stage of their education, their sponsor is no longer expected to support them. However, if the child is bright enough to go on to university, and the sponsor wishes to support him/her, we will be extremely happy for the sponsorship to continue, and we will offer our support in any way we can.

The Ugandan school system is very competitive. There are so many children who want an education, that schools all over the country are able to pick and choose the best students in order to improve their grade average and national standing. Testing is relentless for students, as every term they have to take examinations as well as having ongoing assessments of their performance; based on their results they are given a grade and a position in their class. If the child is successful, they can move in to the next class in the New Year. However, if their performance is poor they may have to repeat the school year again.

As many of the children on our program have been out of education for a long time, they have a lot of adjustments to make in their new life. This is why we pay for our children to get extra lessons when they first re-enter school, helping them to catch-up with their classmates much quicker than they would do otherwise. Classes in Uganda are not based on age because a lot of children drop out and re-enter school based on whether or not they can afford to pay the school fees. This means that the children on our program might be in classes with students who are more older or more younger than them. This may seem strange to other education systems, but it is of no consequence in Uganda, as the most important factor is that they all want to learn!

If you were to ask any child in Uganda if they would prefer to go to boarding school or day school, the answer would almost always come back as boarding school. In Ugandan boarding schools, children are provided with a much better education, as students get to fully concentrate on their studies and receive extra classes in the evenings. It is hard to be a teacher in Uganda, as you are faced with such large class sizes and poor resources that it is incredibly difficult for you to give one-to-one attention to those students who need it most. When the day-school students go home after classes, the teachers are at last able to work on a more individual basis with the boarders. That is why at Wide Smiles for All Through Education we try to enroll most of our children on our program to boarding schools, where they will receive the best education that they can get. They have been through so much already in their short lives that we want to give them the best chance possible to move forward and to shape their future for themselves.

Primary Education

Children in Primary school take four traditional subjects, English, Mathematics, Science and Social studies. S.S.T is a subject that includes Geography, History and Religious Studies. There is also the option of taking Agriculture as a fifth subject, depending on whether the school provides this option or not. They are examined at the end of every term in each of these subjects.

Grade system for primary school:

Distinction = 80 -100 %

Credit = 50 -79%

Pass = 30 - 49%

Fail = 0 - 29%

Secondary Education

Children in secondary school take a wide variety of subjects with English, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry and Physics as mandatory.

For each subject, a child is given grades based on their exam performance:

Division 1 = 100-81 %

Division 2 = 81-72 %

Class 3 = 72-68 %

Class 4 = 68-61 %

Class 5 = 61-53 %

Class 6 (Fail) = 53-0 %