



Press Release

## **Learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy have remained low, with little, if any, signs of improvement**

**19 November 2019, Kampala:** A new Uwezo report reveals a decline in literacy and numeracy levels of Primary 3 to Primary 6 pupils. Between 2015 and 2018, the learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy remained low and appeared to be declining

- The proportions of complete non-readers and complete non-numerate children in P3-7 slightly reduced from 6.8% in 2015 to 6.2% in 2018
- Nearly all children who could read the story (at P2 level) could also comprehend: but most children have not reached that level until they are in P6.
- The percentage of P3-P7 children who could read and comprehend a basic story at P2 level dropped from 39% in 2015 to 33% in 2018
- The percentage of P3-P7 children who could do P2 division dropped from 52% in 2015 to 45% in 2018

These findings were released by Uwezo at Twaweza, an East African initiative, in its eighth learning assessment report. The findings are based on a large scale household assessment to test children's basic literacy and numeracy skills. The assessment was conducted in October 2018; involving 1,900 volunteers, 45,670 children aged 6-16 years, in 16,859 households, in 954 school and in 32 districts of Uganda.

Dr. Mary Goretti Nakabugo, Twaweza Country Lead and Manager of Uwezo Uganda echoes that learning outcomes continue to be a challenge for us in Uganda and the apparent declines in achievement are particularly alarming. However the data offer some insight for ways forward, early childhood education shows great promise as an avenue to help children learn basic skills and yet regulation, standards, teacher and resource allocation are all problematic for this level of education: not enough attention has been paid to the important role that pre-school can play in helping children to achieve their potential. Moving forward, Uwezo Uganda will be investigating viable models for high quality provision of early childhood education and we call on the government to work with us to identify a sustainable way for all Ugandan children to access this critical step in their education journey.

### **Other critical insights from the assessment:**

- While small minorities of children have already achieved basic literacy and numeracy skills at the age of 6 or 7, by the age of 14, only a minority of children have achieved P2 reading competence (about 40% in English and 34% in a local language). P2 numeracy competence is achieved by about 55% at that age
- The general trend of delayed progression of children through primary grades persists. By the time children reach the ages of 12 and 13, only small proportions have reached Primary 7 or Senior 1 through uninterrupted promotion. From Primary 2 onwards, over-age enrolment dominates the system. Grade repetition plays a major part in this and is especially high in Primary 1 (in which at least 32% of the pupils are repeaters). It is likely that schools continue to over-use repetition as a response to low achievement

- Children attending community, government and private schools continue to have large differences in learning outcomes. The rates of P2 English reading competence of P3-7 pupils are 22% for community, 28% for government and 44% for private schools.

As part of its push to increase the value and insight provided by the learning assessment and to contribute to monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in 2018 Uwezo also collected data about water and sanitation services in schools. These data can contribute to the debate and planning for achieving the SDGs while also demonstrating the value that independent monitoring can provide in understanding progress towards the SDGs.

The quality of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools has shown some improvement since 2015, but this needs to go much further:

- The mean pupil-toilet ratio improved from 93 (estimated) in 2015 to 58 in 2018. A pragmatic (rather than ideal) target would be to have a toilet stance for every 40 pupils and some urinals in addition. However, only about 44% of primary schools in Uganda meet this target
- Only half of the schools surveyed had a hand-washing facility, and of those, only about half had both water and soap available
- The testing of drinking water in primary schools showed bacteria to be present in about half of the cases

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**For more information:**

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**Note to Editors**

- The full report, including samples of the tests and the survey booklet used, will be available on [www.twaweza.org](http://www.twaweza.org)
- **About Uwezo at Twaweza:** Uwezo (a Swahili word meaning 'capability') has been a program of Twaweza since 2009. Twaweza works on enabling children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be more open and responsive in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. We have programs, staff and offices across all three countries, and a world respected practice of learning, monitoring and evaluation. Our flagship programs include *Uwezo*, Africa's largest annual citizen assessment to assess children's learning levels across hundreds of thousands of households, and *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative mobile phone survey. We undertake effective public and policy engagement, through powerful media partnerships and global leadership of initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership.