An Evaluation of the Literacy and Basic Education (LABE) Mother-Tongue Education (MTE) Project

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Uganda

Final Report. (Abridged)
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Note:
The Mother Tongue Education project took place between 2009 and 2013 and was evaluated in July and August 2013. This document is an abridged version of the evaluation report and summarises the key achievements, challenges and recommendations put forward. Detailed information on findings by activity and district can be found in the full report accessible on the AET website:
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List of acronyms

AET  Africa Educational Trust
CCT  Centre Coordinating Tutor
DLG  District and Local Government
EfA  Education for All
HLC  Home Learning Centre
LABE  Literacy and Adult Basic Education
MDGs  Millennium Development Goals
MLEN  Multi-Lingual Education Network
MoES  Ministry of Education and Sports
MTE  Mother Tongue Education
NCDC  National Curriculum Development Centre
NGO  Non-Government Organisation
PE  Parent Educator
PO  Programme Officer
UNATCOM  Uganda National Commission for UNESCO
UNESCO  United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organisation
UPE  Universal Primary Education
1. Introduction

The four-year Mother-Tongue Education (MTE) project was conducted by Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LABE) in Uganda, supported by Comic Relief (UK) and Africa Educational Trust (AET). The project has been conducted in 240 schools in six districts (40 schools in each of Arua, Kakwa, Yumbe, Adjumani, Gulu and Amuru districts) located in the North Western and Northern regions of Uganda between 2009 and 2013. LABE’s contribution has been to assist in the reconstruction of the area via an educational initiative which is aimed at supporting the implementation of the national Primary School Curriculum in the first three years of lower primary, Primary 1, 2 and 3. Until 2006 the curriculum had been delivered through English, even in lower primary. From 2007, the national education authorities, Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) have required the curriculum to be implemented through the use of the local language (mother tongue used by most people) of each district.

The 240 schools and their communities are located in areas which have experienced between 15-30 years of civil conflict, including: armed insurgencies, gross human rights violations (mutilations, abductions, rape and genocide), since 1979. Communities have been fractured and suffered indescribable torment. Up to 1.8 million people were either forced to flee to neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and into the southern regions of Sudan, or they were obliged to relocate to Internally Displaced People’s Camps which removed them from their agricultural activities and decimated local economies. Schooling was largely disrupted and few of the current generation of parents went to school or developed skills in literacy and numeracy.

The LABE intervention has several purposes. The following list of priorities arises both from explicit LABE, AET and Comic Relief documentation, and also from a contextual analysis of educational needs in the northern part of Uganda.

Firstly, this intervention has been intended to strengthen the restorative (post-conflict) provision of education and to strengthen the learning outcomes for primary school children in these districts.

Secondly, this intervention has been knitted into and aligned with the national education policy of Uganda in relation to a number of imperatives. These include active participation in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EfA) which include Universal
Primary Education (UPE) for all children. UPE, in turn, places emphasis on increased enrolment and retention, especially for the girl child. UNESCO’s EFA framework includes an emphasis on the fundamental significance of ‘quality’ delivery and literacy education (UNESCO 2004, 2005). LABE’s work dovetails closely with the EFA goals and the NGO has had a substantial track-record of working with women, girls and family literacy and education.

Finally, this intervention is a significant contribution to the implementation of the national curriculum in the six northern districts, and particularly in relation to the introduction and use of local languages as the first language of literacy development. A cornerstone of this intervention has been the involvement and participation of parents and families in their children’s education.

There is a considerable body of research which shows that children require strong foundations in literacy and numeracy in order to negotiate the school curriculum, to remain in school through primary, and to have access to and a chance of retention through secondary school. This is nowhere more important than in linguistically diverse contexts and in countries of Africa (e.g. Bamgbose 2000; Penny et al. 2008; Ouane and Glanz 2010, 2011). However, long periods of colonial rule have been followed by a perception that education is worthwhile only when delivered through one of the international languages of wider communication (usually English, French or Arabic in Africa). This perception, evident in other post-colonial contexts in South Asia (e.g. India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal) and South-East Asia (e.g. Indonesia, the Philippines, East Timor, Cambodia) often undermines the successful implementation of education which begins in the language best known by learners and their teachers (e.g. Coleman 2011).

Informed community participation in language education policy is a key criterion for successful provision of education. So too is government ownership of reforms and implementation (Higgins & Rwanyange 2005). Successful education in complex settings, especially in remote and rural contexts, therefore requires effective articulation amongst community stakeholders and local government authorities. The extent to which the LABE MTE project is likely to leave a lasting imprint upon the stakeholders in the six districts depends upon the extent to which the communities and local government stakeholders participate in, perceive themselves to have some ownership over, and are engaged in collaborative and supportive mechanisms likely to strengthen and sustain empowering educational practices.

This project has been supported with development aid from Comic Relief (UK), and managed with strong capacity-building procedures by Africa Educational Trust (AET).
This final review includes an evaluation of the project objectives, listed below, as well as project activities and outcomes:

- To establish reliable baseline indicators from 60 schools in 6 districts against which planned future gains in children’s literacy will be measured.
- To increase community and parental awareness of the value and importance of educating children in their local languages.
- To increase the capacity of 5 district language boards to work towards standardizing the local language orthography, grammar and vocabulary in the targeted districts.
- To support the production and use of sample children’s educational materials in 5 languages (Acholi, Kakwa, Aringa, Madi, Lugbara) for use in primary classes 1, 2 and 3.
- To support children in 240 schools to practice MTE literacy skills by producing local children’s magazines and picture story books.
- To work with Centre Coordinating Tutors (CCTs) and promote teaching using mother tongue in pre-service training for primary teachers.
- To disseminate the experiences from the targeted districts to education policy makers in other minority language communities.

This report begins with a brief discussion of relevant education policy documentation and a contextualisation of this study within the international literature and research on the use of local languages in education in developing and linguistically diverse contexts.
2. **Context**

The History of the Language Policy in Education

The language question in Uganda, particularly as this relates to education, is complex (e.g. Penny et al. 2008). The complexity of the matter partly stems from the linguistic composition of Ugandan society. Three major language families namely Bantu, Nilotic and Central Sudanic are represented within the linguistic ecology of Uganda. In addition, English was introduced during colonial rule and is regarded as a second language for high level economic, political and educational matters. Owing to the mobility of people from Europe and from within Africa, there are several other languages (including German, French, Arabic, Kiswahili) spoken by relatively small numbers of people as their ‘first language/s’, and sometimes by larger numbers of people where these are (second or additional) languages of wider communication.

Policies did not explicitly contextualise the issue of language in education until the Kajubi Report of 1989 (i.e. the Report of the Education Policy Review Commission of 1987-89). The recommendations from this Report were later adopted into the Government White Paper on Education of 1992. This document has become a guiding policy for mother-tongue education, also known as the use of the local language as medium in Uganda. A chapter on the language policy in the White Paper clearly stipulates that children from Primary One to Four (P1-4) (later revised to Primary Three/P3) should be taught in their mother tongue. From Primary Five (P5)
onwards, the White Paper recommends that the medium of instruction should be English. Students in secondary school are expected to study English, an area language (the term used to denote a domestic regional language of wider communication in Uganda), and a local language (if different from the area language). The policy places emphasis on Kiswahili as a language of wider communication in East Africa (i.e. cross-border language of wider communication) and sets out an elaborate strategy to teach this language in schools and institutions.

While government appears to have given emphasis to Kiswahili at a national level, its emphasis on local languages in education has confused many parents. To date there have been insufficient resources to implement a policy which insists on the use of local language for the first three years of primary school. In the context of low retention and throughput to secondary, parents may believe that a local language policy may hinder learners’ access to English (and/or Kiswahili) and are thus likely to be distrustful of policy. This distrust is likely to be exacerbated in rural and remote areas in which local language is implemented in primary rather than in districts closer to the country’s capital where pupils are more likely to have English medium education throughout or education in Luganda, a language of power. Muthwii (2002) suggests that many parents believe that the introduction of local language as medium in the national curriculum has been imposed for political rather than sociolinguistic and demographic reasons. The contested positions of those who wish to promote the use of Kiswahili and those who wish to promote the further development and use of indigenous languages has complicated the language situation in Uganda and casts a dark cloud on the language question (Pawlikova-Vilhanova, 1996).

### Education and Curriculum Policy in Uganda

Before the introduction of formal education in Uganda, communities that came together to form Uganda in 1926 had had an informal curriculum tailored along gender roles and heavily entrenched in the cultures of the indigenous people. During the colonial period, an apparently elitist education was offered for the sons of chiefs and prominent persons; although in reality this was intended to prepare a cadre of clerical staff and low-ranking officials to resource the colonial administration.

After independence, a new Primary Curriculum came into effect in 1967. This was largely academic in nature and intended to prepare pupils for secondary education (Muyanda-Mutebi, 1996). It was the Kajubi’s Report of 1989 (discussed above) which proposed a vocational primary curriculum alongside the academic component. With the incorporation of many of the recommendations of the Kajubi Report in the Government White Paper on Education of 1992, the MoES set up a Curriculum Review Task Force chaired by Basil Kiwanuka in September, 1992. Although the new primary curriculum was completed by 1995, it was another several years before the curriculum was introduced into schools (between 2000 and 2002).
Implementation difficulties were addressed in a further review, particularly in relation to what was considered to be an over-emphasis of subject-based curriculum for the lower primary (Primary 1-3/P1-3). The recommendations of the Curriculum Review Report in 2004 resulted in what has come to be known as the ‘thematic curriculum’ which gives prominence to the use of local language for the development of literacy and as medium of teaching and learning in lower primary. This new approach was piloted in several districts and then rolled out across the country in 2007 (see Ward, Penny & Read, 2006; and Penny et al. 2008).

2.3. **International Research on Mother-Tongue, Bilingual and Multilingual Education**

To begin with, it is important to distinguish between the literature written in the global north, where most school students continue to have mother tongue (L1) education for the duration of their educational experiences, and the literature which concerns education in the global south, where the majority of children who reach school are offered second or foreign language (L2 or FL) medium education. In the global south, in countries like India, Uganda and other former British colonies, English has high level significance in governance and the mainstream economy. However, it has limited functional or practical use for local rural and remote communities. In such countries, local languages have higher traction and functionality. In other words, the majority of the population speak and use local languages which are indigenous (or endogenous), whereas only a minority of people are able to communicate effectively through English.

The status of English, owing to the colonial history and the last twenty years of globalisation which has been associated with the spread and use of English in the electronic media and information technology, has risen exponentially. These influences and changes have given rise to the belief that in order to be educated one needs to become proficient in English as quickly as possible (e.g. Coleman 2011). Inclusive methodologies introduced into schools in the UK, Europe and the USA, which accommodate early use of community (minority) languages go a long way towards addressing educational needs of the global north (Blackledge and Creese 2010). However, these methodologies are insufficient for the needs of communities of the global south where the concerns lie with the majority of school learners, not the numerical minority of pupils (Ouane and Glanz 2010, 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh 2012).
There is little doubt that the LABE MTE project has had significant success, has achieved most of its objectives, has exceeded some of the objectives, and its work has led to unexpected outcomes which are regarded as of particular importance to the participating communities in the six districts. Highlighted below are key achievements and challenges or risks related to the project between 2009 and 2013. These are discussed in relation to the major objectives of the MTE Project.

3.1. Improved learner achievement in literacy and numeracy

**Increased enrolment, particularly for girls**

A key indicator of successful implementation of the curriculum, in this the thematic curriculum which uses the local language as medium for lower primary learners in the six districts in which the MTE project is being conducted, is to do with enrolment. In Table 1 and 2 below, pupil enrolment of girls and boys is shown for 2010 and 2013. Overall there has been an improvement in enrolment. It is clear that over the three years 2010 to 2013, enrolment of P1-3 learners has increased from 104,502 in the six districts to 141,733. This is an increased enrolment of 35.63% overall. This is an extraordinary achievement.
The enrolment of girls has increased by 38.7%. Whereas in 2010 more boys were enrolled than girls, now there are more girls than boys enrolled in the first three years of primary, thus the improvement of girls’ enrolment has exceeded that of boys. Notable is the improved gender ratio in Yumbe and Amuru over this period. In Adjumani, while there has been an overall increase in enrolment, this has been greater in respect of boys than of girls, resulting in a decline the ratio of girls to boys.

Achievement in literacy and numeracy

The Baseline Survey on Literacy and Numeracy (LABE 2010) and follow-up Literacy and Numeracy Testing Reports (LABE 2011b and 2012) show significantly improved achievement in literacy and numeracy in the project schools for learners in P2 and P3. However, there is a noticeable decline in achievement of students in the 2013 assessment. Whereas the assessments were conducted in November-December in previous years, in anticipation of the closure of the project in August 2013, the 2013 assessment was conducted in May-June, several months earlier, in order to ensure that the data might be analysed by the scheduled end of the project. See Tables 3 and 4 opposite:
There is no doubt that the 2013 data are disappointing. However, the administration of the 2013 tests, five-six months earlier than in previous years compromises the validity of the data to a serious extent. All the same, from a theoretical perspective, the increased student achievement in 2011 and 2012 is somewhat surprisingly high. From what is known of the potential for children’s reading and numeracy to improve significantly, there are a number of key indicators which need to be present. These include: adequate supply of reading materials for each child, adequate supply of paper and pencils/pens, acceptable teacher: student ratios, adequate teacher development (particularly in relation to the use of the mother tongue where this has not been well-established) and so on.

Despite the change to mother-tongue education and the support which LABE has undoubtedly provided, the larger systemic conditions are not yet in place. In the view of the lead evaluator, it would be unrealistic to have expected dramatic improvements in reading and writing and those that appear in 2011 and 2012 are a bonus, but unexpected. Although the data for 2013 are low and disappointing, they are however realistic given the timing of the assessment and in relation to the conditions in and resources with which the children are being taught.
3.2. Increased community and parental awareness of the value of local languages in education

Co-ordinated public awareness strategies, ‘sensitisation’, have been conducted in an on-going manner in each of the six districts since the inception of the project. It is clear from the interview responses in each of the districts that this continues and coheres particularly around the preparations for and celebrations of UNESCO’s International Mother Language Day. The LABE system is to take these celebrations to a different sub-district each year, thereby extending and localising the focus on local languages.

The degree to which parents and communities participate in their children’s schooling and educational life is regarded as a key indicator of successful achievement in the international research and literature. The ways in which the MTE project has involved parents (grandparents) and communities in school learning, through joint parent-child classes each week and through adult literacy classes are significant indicators of the success of this project.

Attendance and implications of adult literacy and numeracy classes

It was anticipated that about 16,800 adults would participate in classes. However, this figure has been exceeded during the lifespan of the project. A total of 20,722 adults are registered as participating in these classes. Of these, 12,698 are women and 8,024 are men. There are also participants who are not recorded in the class registers, so the actual figure is likely to be higher than this according to the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager. The evaluators found good records in registers, but also instances where the registers were full and the PEs did not yet have replacement registers, so there it is likely that more parents attend classes than are reflected here. The AET programme manager has pointed out that it has been more difficult to bring male
participants into regular attendance of these classes. Some of the reasons given to the evaluators for this phenomenon during the fieldwork included the need for men to be involved in tilling soil, planting and harvesting (i.e. the rhythms of agricultural lifestyles and economy). In the view of the evaluators, the participation of 20,000 adult learners is a significant achievement.

Informal discussions with parent learners in these classes were informative. Parents were keen to indicate the qualitative benefits which literacy and numeracy have brought to them. The significance of being able to sign one’s own name in terms of self-esteem cannot be sufficiently emphasised. More than this, these classes have allowed adults to develop confidence and independence in relation to their own economic management, use of mobile phones for monetary transactions, and writing letters, amongst other things.

Growing out of the adult literacy and numeracy classes has been the establishment of Community or Village Saving Schemes. The communities have worked out their own rules and regulations for managing these schemes and they are used to assist members to begin micro-enterprises. This has the potential over the medium term to develop strong local economies.
Probably one of the most unexpected, yet most significant developments to emerge from the MTE project has been the establishment of the 551 home learning centres (HLCs) attached to the 240 schools. These centres provide conveniently located spaces for adult learners as well as after school hours learning spaces of primary children. In several instances, they also provide an opportunity for the establishment of pre-school/kindergarten early childcare.

Initially reported ambivalence or resistance towards MTE in the six districts appears to have dissipated or was initially over-reported. Ward et al. (2006) suggest that most parents were actually in favour of MTE from the start, and this study’s questionnaire data of a small sample of respondents in the six districts show no sign of ambivalence towards or antipathy towards MTE at present. Rather it shows that there is widespread acceptance of MTE or local language education.
### Increased capacity of language boards

NCDC initially invited each district of Uganda to establish a language board in 1999. By the time that the Labe project came into being, there had already been some initial development of language boards in these districts. However, it is obvious from the interviews with the district-based and Kampala-based respondents, that Labe has played a significant role in capacity development, orthographic development, and materials development training. The five language boards, for Aringa, Kakwa, Madi, Lugbara and Acholi languages are in different stages of official recognition. It needs to be emphasised that the language boards perform a particular function in that they are key to both the initiation and encouragement of literary endeavour in each of the local languages. Their ability to co-ordinate and foster a culture of reading and writing is essential to adequate resourcing of the use of local language in education.

The potential contribution of these boards may not yet have been fully explored in relation to the kind of language support services which they could develop under their auspices, such as interpreting and translation services. Once the orthographies have been finalised, there is good reason to consider how these boards could be further capacitated with training in the use of information technology in order to develop electronic data banks for orthographic, dictionary, terminological lists, and literacy resources.

Ideally, the language boards should be able to take over some of Labe’s work in relation to public awareness campaigns or ‘sensitisation’, co-ordination of the UNESCO International Mother Language Day, writing competitions, book weeks, and so on. This would free Labe up to focus on community empowerment in the form of adult literacy and numeracy, support of parent educators, and teacher education.

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### Orthographic Development in Uganda

The evaluation of the Labe intervention by the evaluators has led to particular findings which have a possibly high risk factor for a long-term theoretical approach to orthographic development in Uganda. This relates to a recent phenomenon which has been identified as the ‘fragmentation’ of languages in Uganda (Ward et al. 2006; Penny et al. 2008). This matter was the subject of some attention at an MLEN workshop on 5 July 2013, held in Kampala. If Ugandan languages were indeed fragmenting, then this has serious implications for education.

Discussions with language board members in the districts has given rise to a concern that there may be important decisions being made by each language board or set of language stakeholders which set languages on a divergent path. The history of orthographic development in Africa has been a complicated and contested one since the Rejaf Conference in 1928 in Sudan when linguists working with languages
across sub-Saharan Africa came together to discuss ways to develop more convergent orthographies – i.e. ones which brought language varieties closer together rather than those which drove them further apart. If development takes a convergent path, then it is likely that more people will be able to read the written texts which are relevant to closely related languages. If development takes a divergent path, the result is that fewer people would be able to read texts written in divergent orthographies. Fewer people would be able to use electronic equipment (computers and laptops) to produce text easily. Over time, this may very well lead to small print-runs which become less cost-effective, and gradually the result is likely to be a return to English-only publications and learning materials for languages with smaller numbers of speakers.

On the other hand, convergent approaches offer opportunities for wider readership and stronger likelihood that the publication of materials will be cost-effective. Drawing the written form of languages closer together may result in more widespread or democratic use of the local languages in education. It needs to be emphasised here that the written and spoken form of languages are two entirely different phenomena. It is not necessary to insist on written differentiation between closely related languages based on pronunciation and variations of vocabulary. For example, speakers of Mandarin (Putonghua), Cantonese, Hokkien etc. use the same writing system when reading and writing classical Chinese languages, yet they often claim that they do not understand each other when communicating in spoken language. Speakers of many different regional varieties of English around the world tend to use either the UK-based or US-based international variety of the written language, yet their speakers use widely different forms.

This means that developments which are geared towards a further separation or fragmentation of written languages in Uganda may be counter-productive. Increasing the degree of difficulty in learning how to read and write languages (e.g. by increasing the number of diacritics and vowels) is an exceptionally serious matter with long-term consequences. The long term consequences of orthographic developments need to be discussed and thoroughly debated in order to ensure that the best outcomes for the future use of local languages is guaranteed. To this end, as a matter of some urgency, there needs to be a national forum discussion on this matter, and it would be important for this to be convened by an agency considered to have limited vested interests in the process.

### 3.4. Production and use of sample reading materials

**Story Books**

There is ample evidence of the development and printing of sets of story books in each of the five languages. The main challenge is that while these were only intended to be sample materials, in the absence of other reading and learning materials for learners in P1-3, these are often the only reading texts for children and adults in the MTE project schools. The ratio of 1 book to each of 3 learners is probably correct in terms of overall print-runs; however, because the books are distributed in the HLCs and schools, the numbers available to learners in classrooms are painfully
inadequate. Owing to the paucity of materials and the limited number of titles available to learners, they inevitably will learn the stories off by heart and this does not foster long-term reading proficiency. The challenge is how best to assist NCDC to print and distribute far more learning materials for primary children. A further challenge is to secure the system’s support for the work of language boards in order to develop appropriate reading materials and translation services for NCDC. An NGO like LABE cannot possibly provide all the reading materials for children in lower primary. Yet, because of LABE’s presence in the schools and communities it is LABE that is constantly under pressure to produce more materials and the POs and Regional Managers/Team Leaders are in the front line of receiving this pressure.

**Children’s magazines**

The children’s magazines have been successful and it is reported that the learners’ whose stories, drawings and other artefacts have been included in the magazines are encouraged and feel validated. Even if most children’s work cannot be included in the magazines, the fact that some children’s work is included offers encouragement to others. Not all of the volumes that were intended to be published were completed. Partly this is because of rising printing costs and a
reallocation of expenditure on this item towards the anticipated costs of the teacher’s guide, the Pedagogy Handbook. Partly this is also because there have been too many expectations placed on the POs and the Team Leaders who are hard pressed to acquit themselves adequately in each of their expected roles. One possibility would be to equip each school with a computer, and to provide each school with training in information technology, so that these materials could be produced in each school, and thus involve more learners. However, this may be a longer term objective and a more practical alternative could be to transfer the responsibility to the language boards once these are sufficiently capacitated.

### 3.5. Teacher education

Each of the stakeholders indicated the contribution of LABE towards the work of CCTs, involving capacity development in relation to MTE, evaluation and assessment. The presence of a dedicated Programme Officer (PO) in each district as well as regular contact with the Team Leader or Regional Manager and the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, as well as other LABE staff, has ensured on-going support for teacher education alongside the CCTs in each of the project schools and in relation to the training and support of parent educators (PEs). The value of this work is acknowledged in the District and Local Governments (DLGs) and by NCDC and MoES.

What has been learned from this work has informed LABE’s contribution to the Pedagogy Handbook for Teaching in Local Language, in collaboration with NCDC, and which is due for publication in the last quarter of 2013. This publication, in conjunction with a national forum on teacher education to be convened by LABE at the end of 2013 extends LABE’s work to a high level national platform. That LABE’s work is so highly thought of at a national level is indicative of the quality of expertise which resides within the organisation.

### 3.6. Dissemination of experiences to policy makers

LABE staff have maintained a participatory and collaborative approach with district and national levels of government. LABE participates in the Multi-Lingual Education Network (MLEN) as does NCDC. Through this network, the lessons learned by all stakeholders are circulated and shared by a wide set of interested parties, including language associations, writers’ guilds and language boards in other Ugandan districts. A mature working relationship with NCDC and MoES, which has resulted in the production of the Pedagogy Handbook is a strong indicator of the extent to which LABE’s work is being disseminated amongst policy makers. The Minister of State for Primary Education made a particular point of emphasising the value which government places upon LABE’s work during a meeting with the project evaluators in July 2013.
3.7. Significant challenges and risks

The main challenges and risks to the successful implementation of the MTE Project are more to do with the national and district level conditions than they are to do with LABE’s work and delivery. The MTE Project sits within the national MoES and NCDC commitment to implement the Primary School Curriculum, and specifically the thematic component for Primary 1-3. LABE’s interventions pave the way for the wider implementation across the Ugandan primary school system and demonstrate the advantages to community and broad stakeholder involvement in education. However, it is at the end of the day incumbent upon the state to provide adequate learning materials (reading/story-books and textbooks) for each child in the system. It is also necessary to develop a plan to ensure that each child has simple but adequate supplied of exercise books and pencils in order that writing and arithmetic can be practised on paper each day. Without these simple resources, it is virtually impossible for children to learn to read and write. While LABE’s initiation and supply of sets of story-books and children’s magazines have made a contribution to ease the situation, they are a drop in the ocean, even in the six northern districts. Whereas LABE has made contributions to teacher education, the system of transferring teachers has meant that the human resources have not remained constant within the project schools and it has been difficult for LABE to maintain stability within these schools. These are conditions over which LABE has little control. Teaching children in the language that they know best, is undoubtedly the best policy and approach, but it has to be well-resourced, and this is an issue for the state.
4. Recommendations

4.1. Extend timeframe, or initiate a second phase for the MTE Project

It is recommended that the MTE Project is extended at least for another four years or that a second four year phase of the project continues without a break in activities in each of the districts. Each of the relevant stakeholders at national, district and school community level have argued that a four year MTE project in this part of Uganda needs to be extended for at least another four years. The chief reason is that these districts are in the early stages of recovery after decades of particularly brutal civil conflict, and it is not possible both to heal the communities and establish sustainable programmes within such a relatively short period of time. As one DLG official argued, LABE’s work is consistent, reliable, and it has remained while other NGOs have come and gone. The expertise developed and nurtured by AET is significant and there are strong arguments that this should be retained and used to expedite further developments in the six affected districts.

4.2. Consolidate objectives, possibly focussing on fewer objectives and fewer activities

It is recommended that a second phase of the MTE Project should include fewer objectives in order to permit a deepening and consolidation of areas in which LABE has the capacity to make the greatest impact. It would be advisable for LABE to focus on teacher education at the school, district and national levels as well as the capacity development of parent educators at community and school level. Unless it were possible to increase the district-based staff from one to two Programme Officers, the complexity and range of expected objectives, activities and outputs are too numerous. The danger is spreading human resources too thinly. The POs need to get to schools and the HLCs more frequently because their face-to-face support is needed by teachers and PEs who are struggling to make use of the local language in their teaching. The reason for this is that teachers themselves are very unlikely to have learned to read and write the local
language, and they have to become sufficiently confident in the written language to be able to
teach their learners effectively. While the MTE project had to invest in a wide range of activities
in order to build community awareness and support in the first four years of the project, it would
be important in the second phase to consolidate in areas of particular strength. Is it possible that
LABE might be able to negotiate other partnerships where other agencies take more
responsibility for certain activities, such as the awareness/sensitisation programmes and a lesser
role in the organisation of International Mother Language Day activities.

The experiences of increasing contact with schools, teachers and parent educators would be
invaluable in terms of informing teacher education more widely across the country. It is therefore
recommended that LABE focus on developing dedicated teacher education modules which
might continue to be trialled at district level and then included in regional and national level
training. A serious weakness in the implementation of new curriculum in most countries of the
world has been an underestimation of how much and for how long teachers in schools need
support in order to implement changes in their teaching practices. Since LABE already has made
significant strides in this area, it is strongly recommended that this area become a site of future
concentration and that LABE’s expertise at working with stakeholders at all levels of the system
is used to maximum effect.

LABE’s expertise in monitoring, evaluation and assessment, is an important aspect of the
potential contribution particularly at school and district levels.

4.3. Language boards

It is strongly recommended that a national conference on orthographic development be
convened. The purpose of such a conference or forum would be to guide agreements on the
theoretical and practical trajectories of orthographic development.

This is a task which is beyond the capacity of LABE and should be taken on at a higher level. The
Secretary General for the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO (UNATCOM) has offered to
facilitate such a national workshop/convention, but this may require some collaboration in
fundraising. This is a matter of urgent relevance and needs to be flagged with all relevant
stakeholders in order to ensure that the long-term consequences of orthographic development
are clearly understood. This in no way suggests that the autonomy of each language board or
the creative contributions of language associations, writers’ guilds and other language bodies
should be compromised. There is every reason why the enthusiasm and commitment of linguists
and writers should be encouraged and fostered.

Language boards need further capacity development in order that they can become sufficiently
empowered to assume responsibility for the writing and preparation for publication of reading
materials for school learners, perform translation and interpreting services for district and even
national stakeholders, and to train teachers and other stakeholders to use the orthographies.
Ideally the language boards should take over the co-ordination of the UNESCO International Mother Language Day celebrations and other public awareness activities.

Each language board needs to be provided with adequate office space by the local DLG. Each language board requires the use of electronic equipment and training to use this in order to produce their own materials and also in order to be able to offer translation services at the district and regional levels. A further recommendation would be that each language board be capacitated with small-scale business expertise in order that they might offer not-for-profit business services, the funds for which could be used to support the running costs and activities of each board.

### 4.4. Parent educators and HLCs

It is recommended that LABE focus on continued support and further capacity development of parent educators to strengthen the home-school connections; and to build the internal capacity of the home learning centres to offer early childcare opportunities and micro-economic skills development for adult learners.

Parent educators require further support in terms of on-going capacity development and remuneration in order to build on their expertise and role in fostering home-school linkages in the six districts. The emergence of the home learning centres during the lifespan of this project provides an opportunity to extend the potential of these in a second phase. It is therefore recommended that further support of both the PEs and HLCs are included in a second phase of the MTE project in order to strengthen home-school connections to the educational advantage of the communities, adult learners, pre-school children’s child care, and primary school learners’ achievement and retention. In particular, it is recommended that a second phase of the project would focus on the early childcare possibilities within the HLCs, and training of PEs and other community members in early childcare education. A further recommendation in relation to the HLCs is to consider taking on board a request from the communities to introduce other forms of adult education which would support the establishment of micro-enterprises and hence the economic independence of villagers.

### 4.5. Reading and learning materials production

It is recommended that LABE focus on transferring materials development activities to the language boards and NCDC as soon as possible. Alternatively, it would be recommended that LABE enter into partnerships with other agencies engaged in materials development, e.g. via MLEN. Where possible, LABE should consider moving towards handing over the development of reading and other learning materials in local languages to other agencies, such as the language boards and the NCDC, and thus relieving itself of this task. Clearly this may require a staged transfer of responsibility, to be negotiated with both language boards and NCDC.
4.6. **Electronic resources in local languages for schools, language boards and the national system**

It is recommended that each language board, in the short term; and each school in the medium term, develop capacity in information technology. The sustainability of development in each of these sets of stakeholders is reliant on this capability. At the national level, it is recommended that an open-access National Databank for Local Languages is established to increase opportunities to access learning and teaching materials at district and school level.

Even if this were to begin with one computer in each school and language board office, this would be an important step forward and it would immediately reduce the reliance on external agents for the production of reading and learning materials.

At a regional and national level, the development of a website and electronic data bank would provide opportunities for resources to be uploaded and shared. These resources could include lesson exemplars, examples of lessons that work well, and reading materials etc. This recommendation is for NCDC or for LABE to lobby with NCDC and other stakeholders. It is not for LABE to undertake.

4.7. **Relationship between community stakeholders and LABE**

It is recommended that LABE ensure that communities have a clear understanding of the boundaries between LABE’s responsibilities and contributions and those responsibilities and contributions expected of the community, as well as those expected of the DLGs and the national education system. Community expectations of what LABE can and ought to deliver need to become more realistic. It is therefore recommended that LABE develop a strategy which is clear and concise and which informs communities of the limitations of its engagement with the community. This is to protect both communities and LABE staff from any misunderstandings about responsibilities and issues of accountability. It is also an important aspect of community empowerment in that communities need to take ownership of initiatives, contribute towards and participate in the work and activities of developing stronger non-formal and formal educational environments. Communities now need to develop a mature understanding of their own agency and co-dependency rather than slipping into relationships of one directional dependency. At the same time, communities need to distinguish between government (at local and national levels) responsibilities and those of LABE.
4.8. Language education policy monitoring and review

It is recommended that MoES and NCDC have an on-going language policy review process which is responsive to changes as these occur on the ground.

This recommendation is to ensure on-going support of the use of local languages in education as the primary mediums of instruction, and to ensure that children receive the appropriate configuration of languages in order to guarantee their successful academic achievement through primary and secondary school. This recommendation is also intended to ensure the best match of the linguistic expertise of teachers with that of their learners.

The mobility of people has increased dramatically over the last two decades and this is having an effect on language use, even in rural and remote contexts. The reality is that most communities are now multilingual and that the use of terms such as ‘mother tongue’ or ‘local language’ may come be seen as too narrow for contemporary and emerging contexts over the next decade or more. ‘Local language’ does have more flexibility than ‘mother tongue’ and does allow for the possibility and reality that more than one local language is used in most districts nowadays. Nevertheless, there are also cogent reasons why the term ‘mother tongue’ prevents ambiguity about which language should be used in a particular community. At the same time, migration whether based on economic or socio-political circumstances, means that each community is increasingly becoming linguistically diverse. This diversity will ultimately need to be addressed at local and national levels of the system. There is an tendency in the international community towards considering the term ‘multilingual education’ which allows for different combinations of languages in different districts or regions, and the current debates suggest that ‘multilingualism’ is becoming the ‘new linguistic dispensation’ (Singleton et al. 2013).
References


