

# Partnership for Transparency Fund

## Project Completion Assessment

### Uganda Ethics Network Outreach (UENO) Promoting Citizen Involvement in Public Management: Monitoring Classroom Construction, Procurement Procedures and Accountability for Funds in the Educational Sector

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#### Introduction

With support from the Partnership for Transparency fund (PTF), Uganda Ethics Network Outreach (UENO) implemented a project aimed at increasing public participation in the activities of monitoring school construction projects. The theme of the project was: *Promoting Citizens Involvement in Public Management.*

Uganda Ethics Network Outreach (UENO) is a registered NGO with a vision to see a Uganda with citizens who uphold ethical values and integrity. Their mission is to enhance integrity and social values through advocacy and public awareness-raising in partnership with government institutions and CSOs.

The Government of Uganda has committed to providing basic education to all citizens. In 1997 it passed the Universal Primary Education program and began offering free secondary school education in 2007 to all students who pass their primary school exams. This has caused a dramatic increase in school attendance.

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has established school facilitation grants (SFGs) and other funding resources for school infrastructures. Large amounts of money are disbursed annually for education, and much of it is lost through mismanagement and corruption at the local level. In addition, substandard work has resulted in buildings collapsing and students being killed.

Recognizing that the MoES and other government authorities lack the resources to carry out the necessary supervisory work, the government requires members of the community to participate in school management as provided for in the Constitution, and has provided guidelines on procurement and disposal of assets.

The key stakeholders (School Management Committees, teachers, parents, etc) are poorly equipped to carry out this role, and this project was an effort to meet this challenge.

In August, 2008 the Partnership for Transparency Fund approved a grant of \$24,000 to UENO to sponsor a project to engage ten selected school communities in monitoring classroom construction, procurement procedures and accountability of funds in the educational sector. The project began in August, 2008 and ended December, 2009.

On July 23, 2010, Kathleen White visited three of the ten pilot schools, and met with head teachers, as well as teachers and students involved in the UENO sponsored Ethics and Integrity Clubs.

### **Original Objectives and Project Design**

The overall goal of the project was to contribute to promoting community participation in the governance of schools in order to improve classroom construction and promote accountability for funds in government aided schools. The main focus of the campaign was to improve supervision through greater transparency and openness in bidding and the procurement system, improve building standards, and encourage greater community participation in school management so as to improve the quality of service provision.

The project was intended to supplement the efforts of the Education Standards Authority (ESA) in their supervisory work of school management with improved community oversight and involvement of school management committees.

The pilot project was implemented in ten government aided schools in Kampala district - five primary and five secondary schools. The major stakeholders included; the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), the Directorate for Ethics and integrity (DEI), Local Governments, Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets (PPDA), SMCs and the school community .

In the evaluator's view, the project was overly ambitious, with too many goals given the timeframe and level of resources available. Tackling large scale corruption would require a long term commitment and involvement by Government.

The project's goals were:

1. To increase community oversight/supervision in the tendering and procurement process;
2. To promote transparency in the bidding process, procurement of construction materials and construction of school buildings;
3. To promote community participation in school affairs; and
4. To empower school children to act as change agents in promoting integrity and fight against corruption.

The key activities were to:

1. Conduct a survey to identify gaps in bidding and procurement ;
2. Develop a tool for community monitoring;
3. Identify and train monitors in each school, including students, teachers and other staff;
4. Hold regular meetings of stakeholders to report on progress and lessons learned;
5. Produce a position paper on recommendations for improving tendering, procurement and construction of classrooms;
6. Produce 3,000 handouts to be distributed at schools and elsewhere on citizen engagement in monitoring; and
7. Produce a M&E report on lessons learned and plans to scale up the experience to other school districts.

## **The Implementation Experience**

The project activities were carried out as planned. The baseline survey carried out in the beginning of the project revealed weaknesses in the in the bidding and procurement procedures in schools, enabling UENO to highlight these and make policy recommendations to improve community involvement in monitoring school construction programs. The findings were discussed in a dialogue meeting with 70 stakeholders in a half day workshop. This drew participants from schools, CSOs, development partners, church agencies, Makerere University and the media fraternity and was chaired by Mr. Ashaba Aheebwa; the Director for Ethics in the Directorate for Ethics and Integrity, Office of the President

A monitoring tool to track procurement practices was developed by a consultant and tested by students who were trained in monitoring. School managers resisted this activity in part because they objected to being monitored by students, and because some viewed this as auditing. The monitoring tool was also found to be too cumbersome and has now been refined. However, it was not possible to test it during the lifetime of the project. 140 students and 16 teachers were trained as monitors.

The project also carried out capacity-building workshops for 167 teachers and School Management Committee (SMC) members. The consensus among attendees was that the training was needed and useful. During discussions, the following key issues were raised:

- Secondary schools have procurement and contracts committees but members are not familiar with or equipped to carry out their duties, roles and responsibilities
- Head Teachers and Bursars manage all the financial transactions and procurement. There is limited involvement of teachers in the process, apart from making requisitions
- Financial matters are only known by the Head Teachers and the Bursar
- Financial and procurement documents are considered confidential and are not shared with other stakeholders
- Most members of the school management and contracts committee are not appointed on merit but on personal grounds
- There are no procurement and contracts committees in primary schools
- Primary Head Teachers procure everything and handle finances alone
- Head Teachers are very powerful, and in many cases teachers are too intimidated to challenge their authority

Finally, the project sponsored the creation and expansion of student Ethics & Integrity Clubs which proved to be very popular.

## **The Impact**

The project did a lot of groundwork that revealed many of the underlying causes of corruption and identified obstacles to reform. The project also raised awareness about procurement issues among staff members, school administrators, students and the public, and made some very thoughtful policy recommendations.

However, given the entrenched culture of corruption and resistance to change among several key stakeholders, awareness alone will not bring about the desired change. It is fairly clear that little long term reform can be achieved without sustained government support and commitment to reform.

### **Institutional Development Impact**

UENO took a very thorough approach to studying the issues and learned a great deal about promoting transparency in procurement and school construction. If they plan to continue with this work, they would be well advised to partner with a larger donor or NGO organization that specializes in education reform. They should also establish a more formal partnership with the MoES and other key government agencies (ESA, PPDA and DEI) with the aim of ensuring that findings and recommendations are acted upon and obstacles are removed.

The evaluator found the UENO staff to be very professional and committed to their work.

### **Lessons Learned**

The following are some lessons that emerged from this project.

1. Given the time and resources available, the project objectives were too broad. A more focused approach would have had more impact.
2. The project needed more stakeholder involvement and would have benefited from a more formal agreement with the MoES and other government agencies.
3. While the Ethics & Integrity clubs are worthwhile, there is a limit to what students can do as monitors to stop corruption. They are useful extra eyes, and it is good for them to be aware of the damage caused by corruption.
4. There are larger issues at stake here that are beyond what the project could address. Too much is outside the control of the SMCs – such as information about budgets, building standards and the flow of funds.
5. In a future project design, the grantee should use the Logframe approach to ensure that the project has internal logic and all critical assumptions are identified and managed.