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With the assistance of the Scott Kloeck-Jenson Pre-dissertation Travel Grant, I was able to conduct dissertation research in Uganda from September 2008 through May 2009. This Travel Grant allowed me to spend a large amount of time working and living in Uganda to conduct field research at a local secondary school participating in the government's new Universal Secondary Education (USE) policy.

When I first arrived in Uganda I had not anticipated studying Universal Secondary Education. I have a long history with country of Uganda which has driven both my research interests and my desire to return to Uganda to complete my field work. I first traveled to Uganda as a Peace Corps Volunteer from 1998-1999 and worked extensively with the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program as a volunteer. After multiple return research trips, I returned to Uganda in the summer of 2007 to conduct a three month pilot study on the growing abstinence-only sex education movement which fueled my dissertation topic and research plan.

When I arrived in September of 2008, my aim was to conduct research on the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPEPFAR) funding and the Uganda Government's new nationwide Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communicating to Young People (PIASCY) secondary school curriculum. I had intentions of focusing my research on the gendered aspects of sex education programming within secondary schools—particularly within this new curriculum funded during the Bush administrations push for abstinence-only education. However, after arriving, I quickly realized that the PIASCY sex education curriculum that was supposed to have started in January of 2008 had not yet been implemented and the program seemed to have stalled. Unsure of how to proceed, but not wanting to waste my field research opportunity, I began to redefine my research topic in order to put my time and money to the utmost use.

During the first few weeks in country, I focused on acclimating myself to my site and the school environment. It was during this time, and through many hours of classroom observations and informal conversations with teachers, students, and parents, that I quickly realized the issues most pressing on the stakeholders in the research community. All of the participants of the school had myriad concerns about the future of the educational system that were directly linked to the new Universal Secondary Education policy that had been foisted upon my research site the previous school year.

In January of 2007 Uganda embarked on a strategy to implement a nationwide Universal Secondary Education (USE) program. Unlike the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program that was put into place in the late 1990's USE was only implemented in select schools across the nation. The government selected one secondary school per sub-county to move from a fee-based school to a USE school. My research site happened to be a school that was chosen for this transition and at the time of my arrival was in its second year of implementing the new and often controversial policy. This policy, at least within my research site, has brought to the forefront issues surrounding: socio-economic status,

who has a right to a free education, and the affect of increased demands on teachers time—particularly when their pay is simultaneously decreased.

Uganda’s strategy to implement a nationwide Universal Secondary Education program is one of the first in Africa and the first in East Africa. While the program is still in its infancy many are anxiously awaiting the four year mark where the first set of USE students will sit for their National Examinations (November 2010). These exams will most likely be used as one of the preliminary indicators for the policy’s supposed success or failure. However, what I hope to draw out of my research is how gender was and was not utilized while planning and implementing this policy. As donors await the results of the 2010 National Exams, teachers, students, and parents are embroiled in constant debates surrounding the purpose of USE, its commitment to educational access and quality, and the controversial facets of this multi-tiered policy. Interestingly enough, even as USE is being promoted as a tool for educational empowerment and equality, gender remains noticeably absent in both political and school level discourse, especially around issues of teacher equality and the gendered impacts the policy has on school structures.

During the nine months that I spent conducting field research in Uganda, these issues became central to my research. My methodology included over 1,000 hours of classroom and school-based observations and over 120 interviews at various school, community, government, and international levels. My desire to understand the nuances of the formal policy, its creation, and its implementation, as well as its impact on one particular school struggling to implement USE, I conducted interviews at all levels of stakeholder involvement. Starting at the research site I conducted interviews with teachers, students, administrators, and parents of the students’ attending the USE school. In addition to these site specific interviews, I also held formal interviews with various planning and implementation departments at both the Ministry of Education and District Education Offices as well as local and international non-government organizations helping to fund and implement this nationwide policy. These wide-ranging interviews have given me a chance to understand the policy from various standpoints, rather than seeing it through the lens of only one location. I believe that these methods will help me to situate the research more fully in the Ugandan context, and it will hopefully shed light on how the policy is being differentially implemented and understood at the community and government levels.

As stated above, the majority of my time in Uganda was spent collecting a multitude of data from a variety of sources and regions, an aspect of qualitative research that often makes it difficult because of the travel and time that is involved in the research process. I greatly appreciate that I was awarded the SKJ Travel Grant that afforded me the opportunity to travel to my desired field site and conduct long-term educational research. My sincerest thanks go out to Scott Kloek-Jenson’s family and to the Global Studies community for awarding me this fellowship.