

From primary to secondary: children are queuing up to get in



# EDUCATION GENERATION TO

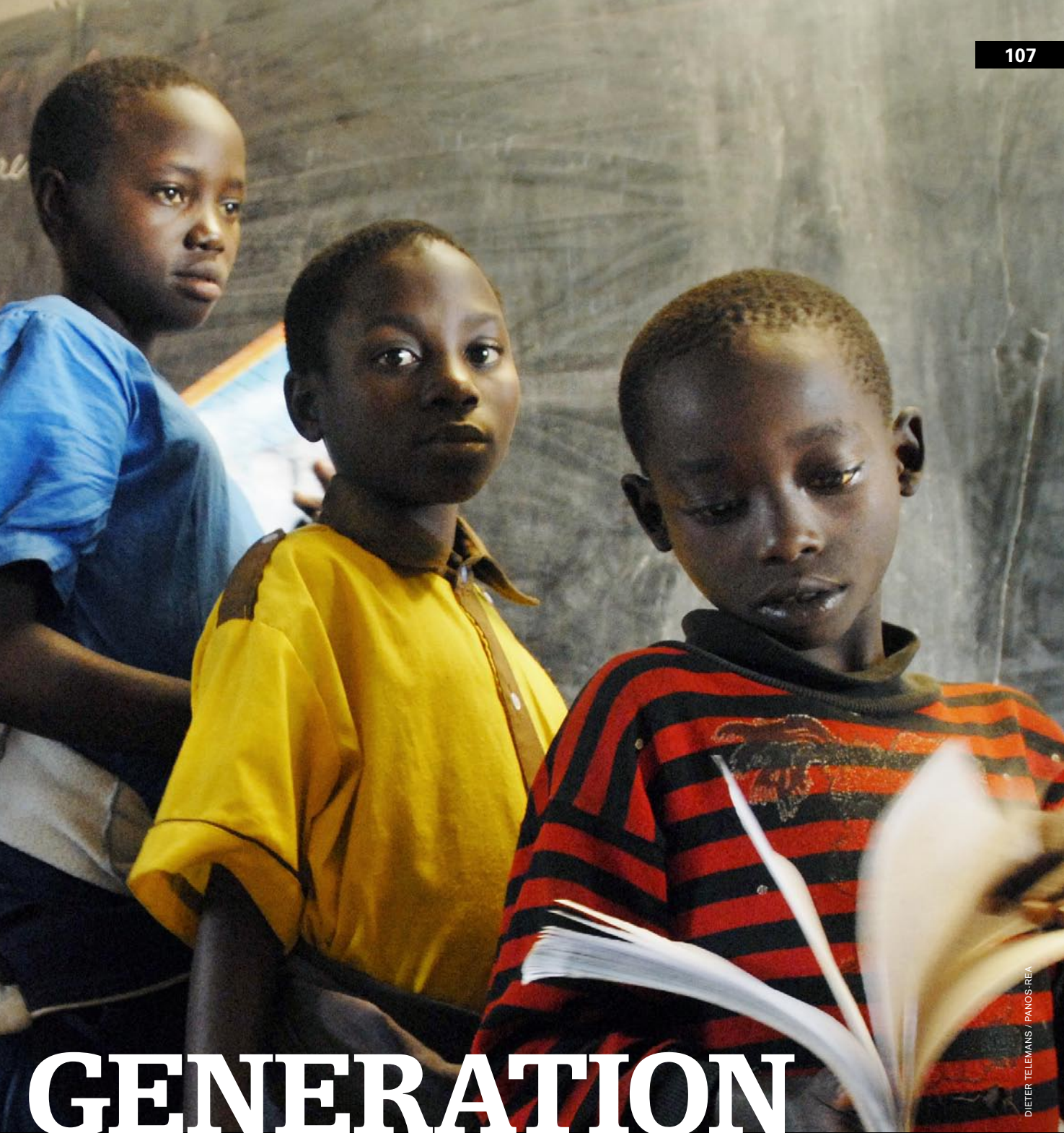
## THE AFRICA REPORT

**T**he *Africa Report* is launching a campaign to keep education firmly in the mainstream of public debate in Africa.

In successful Asian nations like China, India, Malaysia and Singapore, the positive results of a deliberate focus on education are plain to see. A skilled workforce now per-

forms high-value jobs, and legions of engineers, scientists, lawyers, businesspeople, teachers and doctors play vital roles in keeping their countries moving forward.

Talking up the benefits of the 'knowledge economy' is easier than working out a strategy in which education can be a vital catalyst for addressing the most pressing development challenges presented by each country. What makes it harder is that the battle to improve educational



DIETER TELEMANS / PANOS-REA

# GENERATION

standards takes generations to win and that the results may not be quickly apparent.

In much of Africa, the challenges are both enormous and fundamental. How do you persuade a family to send a daughter to school when she brings the water and helps in the fields? How do you convince a promising student who is studying abroad not to remain there? How does an education minister make the case for a bigger budget when his country

is faced by other, more immediate social and economic crises?

Even if agronomy graduates are needed to help a country increase its yields of maize or rice over the longer term, they cannot help reduce the price of food today. And yet, Africa must invest in education. African rural dwellers and the growing numbers of unemployed in the cities want a livelihood. To meet widespread aspirations for the creation of more skilled jobs within Africa

rather than abroad, appropriate training for these jobs are needed in situ. Africa's new dynamic of improving its roads, electricity and sanitation needs to be linked to a new drive for what former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo calls the "human infrastructure".

Each edition of *The Africa Report* will examine an aspect of education in Africa, from the performance of schools and colleges to issues such as

school fees, syllabus choices, teacher training and so on. We would like you to help. Send us a short essay (500-1,000 words) on your favourite school, training college or university. Tell us what works and what does not. The winners will have their entries published in the magazine and receive a free subscription to *The Africa Report*. ●

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Africa has seen a bulge in demand for secondary-school places

GIACOMO PIROZZE/PANOS-REA

government. A decline in primary enrolment ensued.

After stock-taking in the late 1980s, governments and donors decided to focus on universal primary education (UPE) and this has allowed many countries to make tremendous gains in improving access to primary education. The result is a bulge in the population of schoolchildren who now need secondary education – but many countries are unprepared to receive them. The result is wasted talent.

All levels of education are interlinked, and paying attention to one while ignoring others has been one of the failures of education policy in Africa. Once again, attention is quickly shifting to secondary education and, perhaps soon, it will shift to tertiary education. Donors have been complicit in this inconsistency and failure to treat all levels of education systematically. Poor quality at one level inevitably affects the other levels.

What is to be done with all the children who have been rushed through primary education? Some educationalists believe secondary schools are too costly and wasteful, and cannot accommodate all kids from primary schools unless drastic changes are undertaken at the secondary level to cut costs. The proposed solutions include reducing salaries, larger class-sizes, reduced training, using more contract teachers and removing boarding costs.

Others argue that expansion should be controlled by more vocational training that would keep children in the villages and allow only a few to go to

## FOCUS Africa needs world-class policy

*Prioritising one level of education at the expense of another has been the undoing of Africa's education policy; it is now time for a holistic approach*

MOSES OKETCH IN NAIROBI

The time has come for African countries to be more consistent in their education policies, rather than continually shifting emphasis between primary, secondary and tertiary education. Countries like Botswana, Cape Verde, Mauritius, the Seychelles and Tunisia seem to be on track with successful education systems, but most African countries are still showing a disjointed approach.

After an enthusiastic focus on secondary education in the 1960s, governments gave priority to the tertiary level in the 1970s and 1980s. Primary education also thrived, in part because of private contributions and community support, but then came the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s which – instead of increasing wealth and improving the fiscal balance – in fact helped to increase poverty, inequality and corruption in

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secondary schools, given that unemployment is sky high. This is a 'manpower planning' type of approach. Still others argue for a managed expansion, to be able to send the greatest number possible to secondary.

But by worrying only about secondary, we fall again into the same trap. Education policy seems to shift between access, skills and levels of education, instead of ensuring that access and skills go hand in hand, and that sectors are given balance.

#### SPREAD OUT THE SPENDING

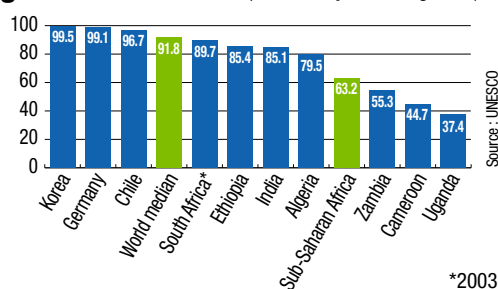
In terms of education expenditure, the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation statistics show that Botswana devotes 8.7% of its GDP to education, Cape Verde 6.3%, Mauritius 3.9% and the Seychelles 6.5%. As a result they all have impressive enrolment rates of around

100% at primary level, at least 80% at lower-secondary level and between 50-100% at upper-secondary level (with Botswana and Cape Verde at the lower end and Mauritius and the Seychelles at the higher end).

The successful countries distribute the available funding proportionally between the different levels. In Botswana's education budget, for example, primary receives 19%, secondary 48% and tertiary 32%; in Mauritius, primary gets 28%, secondary 47% and tertiary 11%; and in the Seychelles, primary takes 21%, secondary 34% and tertiary 20%.

These countries have generally been pragmatic, conceiving education as a series of interlocking parts, with the changes being made at one level felt throughout the whole system. Elsewhere in Africa, it

### Transition from primary to secondary general education (% , School year ending 2004)



\*2003

is time for a focus on primary, secondary and tertiary education with similar vigour and commensurate resources.

A world-class university can only grow out of world-class primary and secondary education, and the latter need the former to aspire to. If Africa aims to offer world-class education, then it is time to pay attention to its education sector as an integral whole. ●

## Theological roots sprout academic respect

**A** mere eleven years after it was set up, the Uganda Christian University (UCU) in Mukono, 23km from the Ugandan capital, Kampala, is emerging as one of the best-run and most sought-after in the country. The University, which is owned by the Anglican Church of Uganda, grew out of the 84-year-old Bishop Tucker Theological College, preserving its original courses in theology and education but adding programmes in business, social sciences, technology and law.

While other long-established universities in the region struggle to cope with overcrowding and shrinking budgets, Mukono has established a reputation for order, smaller classes and a good academic environment. Student numbers are up from 120 at inception to over 5,000 and growing, with almost as many females as males. Apart from the 86-acre main campus in Mukono, the university has a campus in the capital and a constituent college at Bishop Barham in Kabale in south-western Uganda. The university also has three study centres in the north, east and north-west of the country.

UCU commands a great deal of respect because of its emphasis on research and academic excellence. Its law degree is one of only two recognised by the Law Development Centre, which administers the bar course in Uganda, while its arts and humanities graduates are now considered as good as, if not sometimes better than, those from the country's oldest university, Makerere.

Apart from its main library, the university has a technology park library, a law and health library,



MORGAN MIBAZI

Uganda Christian University in Mukono

another library at the Kampala campus and an archives collection which houses many rare documents on the growth of Christianity in East Africa. The technology park is at the core of the science and technology programmes and also has a huge lab with several computers for study. The university also provides a campus-wide WiFi network.

Tuition for most academic programmes at UCU ranges from \$365 to \$520 per semester, which is cheaper, on average, than Makerere. The university provides scholarships to students who excel; by the 2006/07 academic year, it was spending about \$500,000 on scholarships for about 500 students. ●

DANIEL KALINAKI IN KAMPALA