



# The Role of Small NGOs

## Building Quality International Education

**ELIZABETH ROSS**

**W**hen people ask me about Uganda, the first image that comes to my mind is always the pre-dawn drive along the road between Entebbe Airport and the capital city of Kampala. The smell of tropical Africa drifts through the open window, damp and warm, heavy with wood smoke, diesel exhaust, and the lingering scent of the night-blooming *Datura*. By the roadside, cooking fires and oil lamps illuminate families getting ready for the new day. Children are lit by the headlights, endless lines of children, walking along the verge. In a rainbow of uniforms, often barefoot, carrying books and lunch, they are on their way to school before it gets light.

This scenario is repeated every school day all across Uganda. Dustier and longer in rural areas, more polluted and congested in towns, these walks span up to 8 km in each direction. It is an enchanting sight. Pink and green and blue shirts and dresses move in and out of the shadows but as the sun rises, it shines not only on the children but also on the biggest problem facing education in Uganda. Twelve year olds outnumber 16 year olds and there are

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twice as many 6 year olds as 10 year olds. As the children get taller, there are fewer and fewer girls.

Actual figures are contested, but everyone agrees that the school dropout rates in Uganda are enormous and that they disproportionately impact girls. In November 2012, Ugandan national newspaper, *The New Vision*, claimed that 70 percent of the primary school graduating class of 2012 had dropped out in the years since they began kindergarten.

There is some argument over whether “ghost” enrollments, children claimed by schools that were never enrolled, inflated this figure, but whatever the truth, for a government committed to the Millennium Goal of provid-