Introduction and Background

Northern Uganda experienced a prolonged rebel insurgency launched by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) from 1986-2006 (Omona & Aduo, 2013). The rebel group, led by Joseph Kony, had opposed the government of President Yoweri Museveni, who had overthrown the leadership of General Tito Okello, from northern Uganda, in 1986. The period of conflict resulted in many social ills (Omona &Aduo, 2013). At the peak of the conflict in the early 2000s, there were around 1.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in this region living in squalid camp conditions (OCHA, 2008). With the signing of the Cessation and Hostility Agreement in Juba between the LRA and the Government of Uganda (GoU), a post-conflict Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for the region ensued (GoU, 2007). During this PRDP, interventions shifted from relief to recovery and development. Many NGOs intervened during this post-conflict period to provide services to the different categories of vulnerable people affected by this insurgency. Anaka Foundation[1] is one of the indigenous NGOs that responded to this humanitarian crisis by providing an integrated community-based service and is now engaged in the recovery and development phase through some empowerment strategies.

One of the categories of clients targeted by Anaka Foundation were the very vulnerable primary school children such as orphans, those from economically disadvantaged homes, those with a disability, those with HIV/AIDS, and other marginalised children, in a pilot project that ran from March 2014 to August 2016 with a grant of 32,300 Euros from AfriCarinthia, Austria. Anaka Foundation did this work in partnership with other systems, namely AfriCarinthia, the schools, caregivers, the community and the households. The mission of the pilot project was to provide developmental and community-based social work by engaging and empowering communities to realise their full potential and provide a conducive learning environment for the children. In the project, each of these systems was a key stakeholder in the education of the children. The project ran in nine government-aided schools in the Nwoya district, targeting 157 children in a total of 132 households. In some households, up to two pupils were selected, especially where there were twins or where the children were in extremely vulnerable conditions, like being total orphans or being cared for by an older adult or female child. The project involved professional social workers employed by Anaka Foundation, who carried out the following duties/activities with the stakeholders: linking the key stakeholders, advocacy, the provision of material support, counselling, referral, networking, conscientisation, community mobilisation and economic empowerment.

[1] Details about this NGO can be accessed at http://www.anakafoundation.org

Research Context

Today, little is known about the practice of school social work in Uganda, let alone in the entire sub-Saharan Africa. Yet because of the socio-economic and political challenges faced during post-conflict recovery, unfavourable school outcomes have ensued. Nwoya district, where this NGO operates, indeed manifests these characteristics, basing on a study carried out in 2011 (GoU, 2011). According to the study, the northern region has the highest percentages of males (17%) and females (35%) with no education, in comparison to other regions of the country (ranging from 5.1 to 15%). Overall, the Net Attendance Ratio (NAR) for the primary level is 82% in Uganda; however, the northern region has a low NAR of 74%. Up to 22% of children in the north are orphaned, which is the highest in the country. According to the same source, the ratio of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) to non-OVCs with met basic needs reflects the greatest inequality in the northern region, where only 6 % of all children have their basic needs met, with a ratio of 0.65. These statistics justified our intervention with children, and the education sector in particular. Social work interventions with children and the education sector under the said partnership have also not been widely documented. In addition, it is hoped that the unique post-conflict setting could provide a new dimension to school social work practice in similar post-war and non-post-war contexts.

Methodology

The end-of-project evaluation adopted a case study approach of Anaka Foundation, and specifically of the school social work project to collect data on the key objectives. The report adopted a qualitative and quantitative approach with the units of analysis being the specific school, household or individual child involved in the project. Though case studies are time consuming, they are credited for enabling a holistic and detailed review of a subject. They also capture a range of perspective, thus giving an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the subject, and reducing the potential for bias (Ong &Weiss, 2000). The foundation's project reports constituted another major source of data. Interviews with 344 primary respondents, consisting of the teachers, pupils, household heads, and focal persons using closed ended questionnaires as well as 12 purposively selected Key Informants who were head teachers and community leaders, were conducted. The 344 primary respondents consisted of 157 pupils, 108 heads of households (89 parents whose children were on the project and 19 parents whose children were not on the project)[2], 70 class room teachers and some deputies, and 9 focal persons from each of the participating schools. All were purposively selected. A total of

[2] The mix was to avoid bias.

176 pupils were recruited to participate in the project and a total of 19 dropped out by the time of the evaluation. The interventions evaluated in this pilot project include: payment of tuition fees for the children; the distribution of goats to households; the distribution of scholastic materials; the distribution of school uniforms; the distribution of chickens; counselling and guidance; sensitisation; social events; and workshops with community leaders. The pilot phase is over and the project was evaluated in 2016. The evaluation examined: the effects of the school social work on the children and their families; the challenges faced in implementing this project; and the opportunities for making this practice responsive to the beneficiaries. The before-and-after evaluation design was extensively used. The before-and-after design is a non-experimental approach (Guyatt, Tugwell, Feeny, Drummond, & Haynes, *1986*) that was found suitable to identify intervention effectiveness. Though this design is usually criticised for threats to internal validity, this was addressed by employing multiple methods of data collection. The primary schools covered were: *Patira*, *Kulu-Amuka*, *Anaka* Central, *Anaka* Primary, *Bidati*, *Alokulum Gok* and *Lamoki*, *Te-Olam* and *Agung*, all in *Anaka* sub-county. Observation was also used to see the physical changes that occurred in the schools, such as observing the cleanliness of the compounds, sources of water, and other physical structures. A total of 10 trained research assistants were involved, one in each community and one in the district headquarters. The data collection took 40 days. The response rates were high because respondents knew about Anaka Foundation and what it was doing in the community, understood well the purpose of the evaluation and appreciated how the feedback could be used to improve education in that community.

The quantitative analysis of the questions asked of the 344 primary respondents was done using the SPSS23. The qualitative analysis of the key informants was done thematically. The pre-planned and emerging questions used during the in-depth interviews provided themes and sub-themes for analysis on the key variables that guided the study. Content analysis of the secondary data allowed the themes to emerge from the raw data. As part of the content analysis, constant comparative analysis was used. This is a process of identifying and separating themes in the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Content analysis was conducted using a manual decision support system or by using the widely used computer programmes such as QSR NVivo (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran 2001). When using the manual decision support system, the researcher highlighted each theme as it occurred in the raw data, the highlighted theme was given a distinct theme code, the theme code name written in a data index, and a record of the themes were kept.

Literature and Theoretical Framework

School provides an optimal setting where social workers can carry out their mission of supporting children's personal development, and in so doing, raise the quality of life for all (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). School social workers in different countries have much in common regarding the methods used, namely: home-school communication, direct counselling for students, consultation with teachers, advocacy for students and collaboration with community agencies, which have been the mainstays of school social work (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002; Huxtable Sottie, & Khuajin, 2012). In Africa, as far back as 1967, the Ghana Education Service established the School Welfare Service which performed the above-mentioned functions (Sossou & Daniels, 2002). School social work is a common practice in the Western world (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Where school social work has been practised, it has led to the building of trust and credibility in the school system, with the resultant positive effects on school outcomes, human development and social justice (Huxtable *et al.*, 2012). Although the contribution of school social work is relatively new, it is likely that the practice will improve in future despite the administrative and political challenges found in many developing countries (Sossou & Daniels, 2002) The challenges facing school social work are many, and include the following: convincing parents to keep their children in school and to participate in their children's education through maintaining links with their schools; combating the negative effects of technology in schools and youth, e.g. cyber bullying; and coping with the unprecedented pace of globalisation in this 21st Century, where education has to adjust to new and ever-increasing challenges (Huxtable *et al*., 2012). However, opportunities include easier accessibility by the social workers to the school system, compared to other professions, which can facilitate their interventions to improve quality education; the use of information communication and technology (ICT) to improve on their performance and efficiency (Huxtable *et al.*, 2012); and taking advantage of the ongoing reforms and search for strategies to improve quality of education among states.

Because of the nature of the proposed study, many social work theories informed the study, but only the most predominant are examined here. One of these is the empowerment approach to social work practice (Lee & Hudson, 2011). The approach enables social workers to co-investigate reality and challenge obstacles with the service users. Proponents of the approach emphasise that the approach necessitates a joining with and validation of the experience and a dual focus on the target's potential and political and structural change (Lee & Hudson, 2011). This dual view of functions stresses that people/clients themselves actively work to change the debilitating environment and mitigate their effects. In general, the approach adopts an ecological perspective which helps practitioners see the interdependence and connection of all living and non-living systems and the

transactional nature of the relationships. To change the unfavourable equation, the approach states that practitioners must examine the forces of oppression, name them, face them, and join together to challenge them as they have been internalised and encountered in external power structures. Supporters of the theory contend that the greatest potentiality to tap is the power of people joining together to act, reflect and act again in the process of praxis (Germain, 1991). Accordingly, this process is fuelled by mutual caring and support. In this study, therefore, the approach is most applicable to the household and community components, where these have to identify, name and act accordingly to overcome the barriers to accessing and utilising educational services for their children.

Systems theory (Andreae, 2011) was also applied in the research. Systems theory emphasises reciprocal relationships among individuals, groups, organisations or communities and mutually influencing factors in the environment (Barke, 2003). It is concerned with the boundaries, relationships, roles and flow of information between people. This information-sharing is important because systems are in constant movement, and the interfaces between systems are constantly in the process of change (Turner, 1996). In essence, a system such as a household maintains itself by a process of self-regulation through the constant exchange of information feedback. This feedback is deemed to modify subsequent input signals and this alters, corrects or ultimately governs the systems' functioning (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1994). On the basis of how systems work, it is therefore incumbent upon the social worker to analyse the various repetitive links that keep the loop locked in place regardless of the system under study that prevent individuals or units who make up the particular system from moving on to more productive and fulfilling activities. The theory was found to be relevant because the project is dealing with relationships with different systems – individuals, organisations and communities – seeking to holistically change the environment of the children through the exchange of information that is useful for the education of the children. In this project, this is how the social workers have been providing relevant information, through counselling, training and providing advice to the systems involved.

Problem-solving theory (Shier, 2011) was also found to be important in this process. Nezu, Nezu, & Perri (1989) have defined social problem-solving as "…a process by which people both understand and react to problems in living" (p. 27). Compton and Galaway (1994) define problem-solving as "… a rational process including actions to define the problem, actions to collect information on which to base decisions, actions to engage clients in goal-setting, and decision-making, actions to produce change and actions to produce progress" (p. 10). As can be observed, the process of social problem-solving is both cognitive and behavioural.

The theory acknowledges that an effective problem-solving intervention must consider the adequacy and effectiveness of people (clients) in solving problems. The theory is thus important because the social workers engage the clients – the systems involved in attempting to solve the educational problems of their children, with the requisite skills on the part of the clients themselves.

Social networks theory (Tracy & Brown, 2011) was also applied in this intervention. Both support and personal networks are important and both constitute social support networks. The personal network considers the individual in the context of other people in which they directly interact such as the family, friends and professionals. A support network refers to that set of relationships that nurtures and reinforces coping with day-to-day life tasks (Whittaker & Garbarino, 1983). Social support, therefore, refers to the many different ways by which people assist one another. According to Gottlieb (1983), "…social support consists of verbal and/or non-verbal information or advice, tangible aid or action that is proffered by social intimates or inferred by their presence and has beneficial emotional or behavioural effects on the recipients" (p. 28-29). According to the theory, there are many ways of helping: offering advice and guidance; companionship; emotional support and encouragement; and concrete assistance (Barrera & Ainley, 1983; House & Kahn, 1985; Wood, 1984). In essence, social support can occur through natural or informal helping networks of family and friends or can be mobilised through formal professional interventions. This theory was found to be relevant because the project aims at mobilising the networks around the children with a view to helping them overcome barriers to their education.

It can be observed that all the approaches have been helpful in implementing the project because, as much as the children were the primary focus of the intervention, solving the educational challenges of the children is multidimensional, necessitating the involvement of the parents (households), the community, the school and the relevant local government offices. They all formed the educational environment of the children which the intervention targeted through sharing appropriate information and other resources to effect the requisite change in the children. It should be noted that doing this relied on the social workers' knowledge base, ethical values and empowerment skills.

Findings

The impact of interventions on the children, the schools, the community and households was examined. Together with these, the challenges and opportunities for improving school social work in Uganda were also examined.

Impact of the intervention on children

Table 1: Impact of intervention on the pupils (N= 157)

Variable	Before (%)	After (%)	Range (%)
Activeness	45	85	+40
Punctuality	45	90	+45
Regularity	55	92	+37
Indiscipline	51	5	-46
Social relations	42	79	+37
Good health	08	87	+79

The outcomes of a before-and-after analysis of the effect of the intervention on the pupils, which was conducted across some key variables, are shown in Table 1. It can be seen that the greatest impact was on the health of the pupils. Before the intervention, the baseline study indicated that only 8 % of pupils were in good health, defined by such variables as bathing before coming to school, having trimmed hair, having untorn school uniform, clean uniform, trimmed fingernails, no skin disease, no wound. After the project, up to 87 % were in good health, giving a net surplus of +79 %. Another significant change was noted in the number of pupils who were undisciplined; this accounted for 51 % before the project, but dropped to 5 % after the project. Indiscipline was measured by such indicators as lack of respect for, and rudeness to, fellow pupils, teachers, parents and members of the community. A similar positive impact was noticed in activeness (participation) in class, punctuality while coming to school, regularity in attendance at school, and social relations. However, in each case, it can be observed that the change was not 100 %. This is because we were dealing with highly traumatised communities after the long insurgency, and it was not possible for our intervention alone to completely eliminate the negative effects of the war on the children within the short period in which the pilot project ran. Besides, being an open system, the children were constantly interacting with other sub-systems within their learning

environment, some of whom were not in the project, and this could have negatively affected their behaviours, attitudes and values.

Asked about the impact of the variables above, one head teacher succinctly said,

> "*Personally I am very impressed with the impact this project has had on the good health of the beneficiaries. See there… how smart they are in their new uniforms! They just look distinct, compared to the children who are not on the project. I wish it could be extended to cover all the children in the school… Secondly, the level of indiscipline has really gone down in the entire school because even the pupils who are not on the project are benefiting. Those days before the project, you get a pupil misbehaving and you try to discipline- s/he just jeers at you or runs away!"*

Many pupils were asked what they thought about the project and below is an excerpt from one of them:

Case 1: Opiyo Daudi, P6 (male, not real name)

> "*I was born in Kulu-Amuka in 2006. I lost both my parents and I am now staying with my maternal uncle. Anaka Foundation picked me because I was among the pupils who were so miserable in school. I lacked self-esteem, was very dirty and had little interest in school. I was number 56 out of 60 in Primary 5. My uncle cared less about my education then. However, after I joined this project and with the counselling of the uncle, myself and teachers, I am beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel. The teachers' attitudes are now positive towards me; they used to abuse me in class. My uncle is now keen on my studies. His interest in following my school performance is consistent – he checks my books and follows me up in school. Personally, my attitude has changed, too. I have developed a liking for my school more than before. In the second term of Primary 6, I was number 10 in a class of 55. My target is to be among the best five by the end of the year. I am so grateful for this project. My greatest worry is: Will my uncle continue to support me even when the project has come to an end?"*

Case 2: Achiro (female, not real name)

> *"I, Achiro, age 9 years, joined this project when I was in Primary 3. I was identified because I had a torn uniform; I did not have a school bag and did not even care about good hygiene. I come from a single-parent family, having lost my father when I was about a year old. I was told he died of two*

anati[3]*. I used to be frequently sent home because of lack of school fees. My mother is growing old, she is losing her eyesight and I am the last born in a family of eight. All my siblings never went beyond primary school. I thank this project because now I am very happy in school. I regularly attend school, I'm very smart in my uniform and school bag, I have pens, books and my fees have been paid in time. I really thank God for this and pray that the project continues".*

Many pupils, across the nine schools, gave similar testimonies about the project, suggesting a high impact level on the primary beneficiaries.

Impact on the schools

Table 2: Impact on the schools

Variable	Before	After	Variance
Class swept D	7	9	+2
Latrine for special needs learners (SNL)	0	0	0
Clean water source	4	4	0
Clean compound	7	9	+2
Hand-washing	2	9	+7
Use cup while drinking water	4	9	+5

As can be observed from Table 2, the schools also registered a significant impact. For example, before the start of the project, only two schools had a hand-washing container by their toilets where pupils would wash their hands after visiting the toilet. However, after the project, all the nine schools had hand-washing containers by their toilets, a net increase of seven schools. This was made possible because of the intervention of the social workers who sensitised the pupils, teachers

[3] "*Two anati*" is the *Luo* word for HIV/AIDS.

and administration to the importance of health and hygiene within the school premises. Similarly, before the start of the project, only four schools had a cup that would be used by the pupils to drink water from a source such as a bucket, borehole or harvested rainwater. At the end of the project, all the nine schools had secured some containers for drinking water for their children at any given water source. It can be noticed that the project did not have an impact on clean water sources and latrines for special needs learners (SNL). Only four schools had what we termed as a clean water source both before and after the project, i.e. they had a borehole or harvested water, and the rest were using natural dug-out spring water sources, which are usually contaminated. Although the schools that were harvesting rain water considered this a clean source of water, it was observed in this research that this was indeed not a very clean source of water in some schools because the iron sheets used for harvesting water have rusted and the roofs contained stones and objects thrown on the iron sheets by children that can contaminate this otherwise clean water source. None of the schools had a special toilet facility for persons with a disability. Though the management and administration in all the schools were engaged by the social workers on these, it was not possible to provide such a facility. This was because the provision of such a facility required central government intervention, usually in the form of a school facilities grant[4] (SFG).

Regarding the impact on the schools, one head teacher said,

> *"…Me I only have one request to make. Can you ask your donors to help us support the pupils with mobility disability? The toilet floor, as you have seen are raised, and they cannot roll into the toilet with their wheel chairs. When the toilet was constructed, the designers never thought of pupils with mobility disabilities... However, I thank the parents, because these days, when you ask pupils to come to school with tools such as hoes and slashers, parents comply and that is why our compound looks tidy. Government does not provide these tools these days".*

Impact on community and households

There were tangible and intangible impacts of the intervention in the community and households where children were enrolled in the project. The communities were sensitised regarding many basics about the education sector in Uganda. Most learned that education was a fundamental right as per articles 30 and 34(2) of the Uganda Constitution, 1995 (as amended 2005) and the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966),

[4] SFG is one of the conditional grants, alongside capitation grant, sent to primary schools by the central government to cater for capital development – construction of houses for teachers, classrooms, toilets etc.

to which Uganda is a signatory.[5] They were told that, among other developments, the Government of Uganda in 1997 introduced universal primary education (UPE) purposely to improve the education status of its pupils. According to the Ministry of Education and Sports Strategic Plan 2013-2014 and 2017-2020, the broad objectives of the sector include the expansion of access to equitable and quality education at all levels as well as the enhancement of efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery (UNHS, 2016/17). After the project, the attitudes of the majority of the parents and community members were more positive towards the education of children than before.

In areas where the footpaths were bushy and almost impassable during the rainy season, these were opened up and access to schools became easier for the children. One local bridge in *Alokulum*, which used to be impassable after a heavy downpour, was also repaired by the community using local materials and the stream was rendered crossable during the rainy season. After professional social workers had provided counselling and advice, changes were made in most homes as follows: homes that did not have pit latrines had them after the project; homes with damaged roofs that leaked when it rained had them repaired; most homes regularly cleaned their compounds; most homes planted a fruit tree; most homes had a utensils drying stand set up by the end of the project; the majority of the homes regularly smeared the houses; and some homes introduced the *wang oo*[6]. Other changes included the digging of rubbish pits and the construction of bath shelters. Besides these, the level of domestic violence declined from 45 % before the project to 3.3 % after the project. Households that used to be fees defaulters and had only one meal per day consistently improved. One community leader said this, in respect of the project,

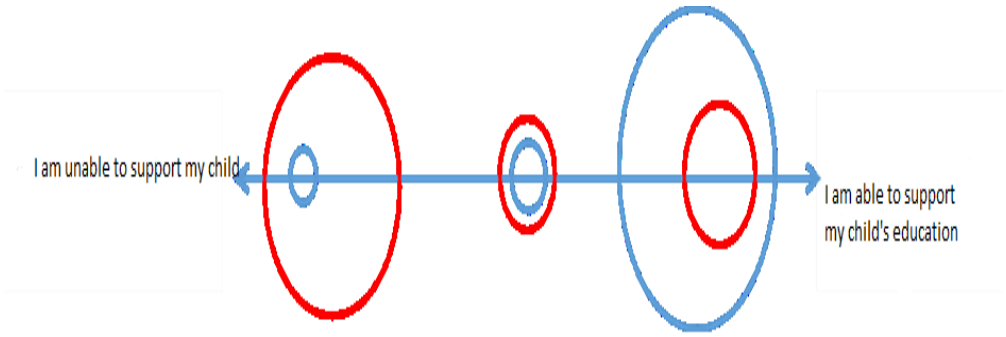
> "*…Well, I do appreciate the positive contribution of the project on the community…but my concern is, how these gains shall be sustained. You NGOs come up with good projects like this but with time you just abandoned us… So what plan do you have? Tell those donors from Austria, Australia, Britain and America to continue supporting this project…"*

[5] The convention recognises that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

[6] *Wang oo* is an Acholi word for 'fireplace'. This fireplace is a cultural practice whereby fire is lit in the compound in the evening and family members gather at it until late in the night. Here is where socialisation takes place. Elders take the opportunity to discuss family issues and also to educate children about the culture and traditions of the tribe as well as making children know about their kith and kin.

Impact on parents

Figure 1: The ability and inability of parents to support their children (n =108)



Parents were asked about their capacity to support their children both before and after the project. The response categories for parents were 'unable', 'neither,' or 'able,' and the outcomes are shown in Figure 1. The blue circles are for those who were 'able' and the red ones for those who were 'unable'. The figure shows that before the project, more parents were unable to support their children's education compared to after, where the majority were able to support their children. The ability to support the children can be attributed to the social work intervention, where parents were empowered in two ways. First, they were supported through the provision of animals such as goats and chickens, which they could sell and then use the proceeds to support their children at school. Second, they were counselled and educated about the importance of education and thus began, unlike before, to place educational requirements among the top family budget priorities. It can be noticed that even after the project, quite a number of parents are unable to support their children in schools. Our evaluation shows that these are either large families with many children going to school whose education cannot be supported with a limited budget, or families headed by the elderly or teenagers who always have limited options for supporting the education of their children.

Access to learning

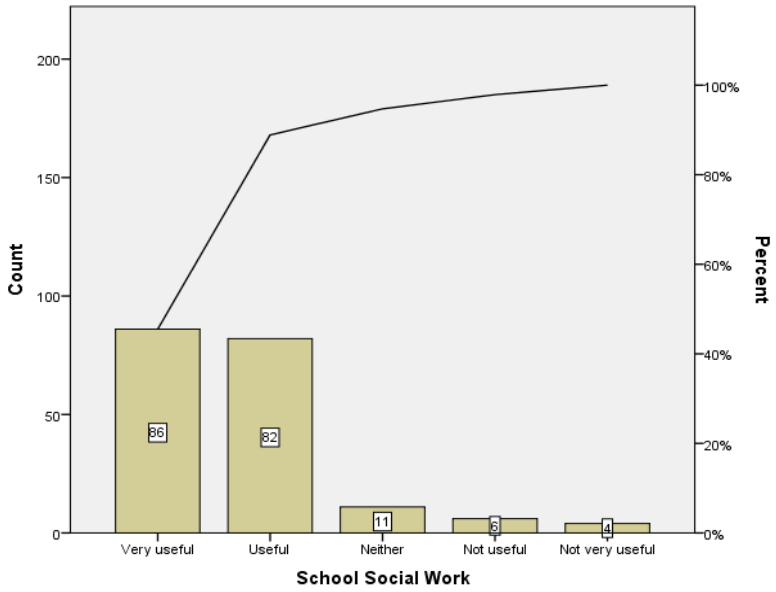
The primary respondents (n = 344) were asked what they considered to be the most important items that made education and learning accessible to their children during the pilot phase. Of the 26 variables asked to measure access, six components were extracted using principal component analysis, and the major factors that loaded highly (> 0.5) on the first component were as follows: teachers care about the child at school (.690); regularity in teacher's attendance (.697); help

from the teacher for the child to learn (.630); access to learning materials (.615); and care by the teacher about the child's success (.595). All these are indicative of the fact that, in a child's learning environment, a teacher is very instrumental and social workers in the school should endeavour to target teachers and their environment in an attempt to positively influence the learning of pupils.

Importance of school social work

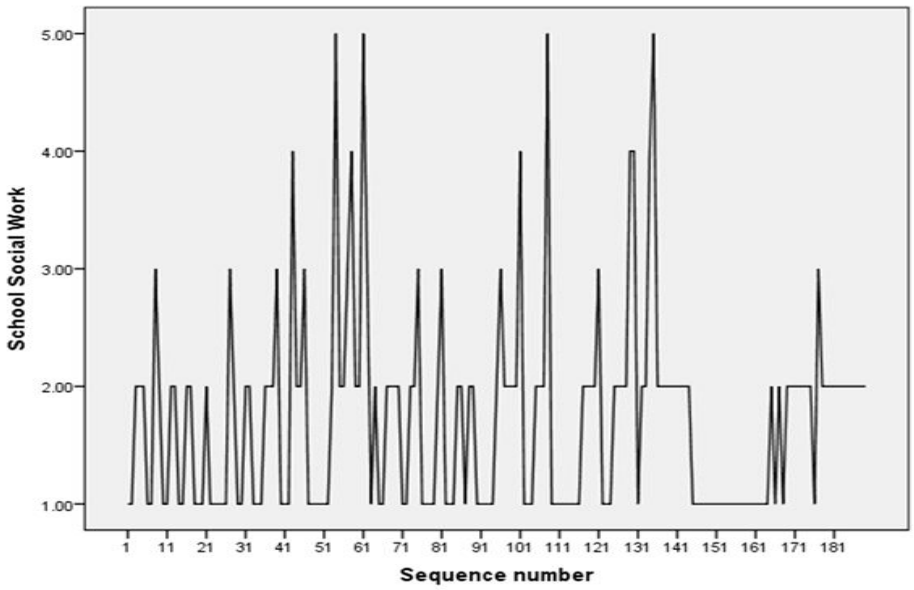
The respondents (*n* = 344)were asked about the overall importance of school social work. The response categories were 'Very useful (1), Useful (2), Neither (3), Not useful (4) and Not very useful (5)'. Overall, the responses were generally positive as the Pareto (cum simple) Figure 2 shows:

Figure 2: The *Pareto* (cum simple) graph showing the distribution of responses (*n*= 344).



A sequence plot on the same question confirms the same scenario, i.e. the majority of the respondents rated that intervention as 'very useful' and 'useful', as seen in Figure 3 below, with the sequence of responses concentrated around 1 'Very useful' and 2 'Useful'.

Figure 3: Sequence plot of responses (n = 344)



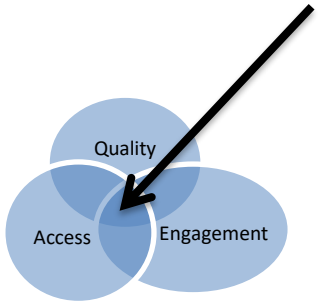
When further analysis was done using the chi-square; (a=0.05), $X^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{R}\sum_{j=1}^{C}\frac{(o_{ij}-e_{ij})^2}{e_{ij}}$, to test the hypothesis that there was no difference in the responses by gender in each category for teachers and pupils (n = 227), the outcomes were as follows: pupils $\chi 2 = 39.274$ df=4, p=.000 (2-tailed); teachers: $\chi 2 = 10.471$, df=4, p=.033 (2-tailed). This showed a significant difference by gender in each case.

Table 3: Chi-square statistics on the responses of teachers and pupils by gender

School	Category	Pupil		Teacher	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
Anaka Central	Urban	06	10	04	05
Anaka Primary	Urban	14	06	04	05
Patira	Urban	15	12	02	06
Kulu-Amuka	Urban	10	06	02	06
Bidati	Urban	07	07	03	05
Lamoki	Rural	10	06	01	06
Te-Olam	Rural	11	05	01	06
Gok	Rural	10	06	01	06
Agung	Rural	12	04	01	06
Total		**95**	**62**	**19**	**51**

When the respondents were further asked to justify why they favourably rated school social work in enhancing the education of the children, they variously noted that the active involvement of the social workers and their professional inputs led to three unique contributions to the conventional education service delivery in the community – what we would prefer to call the tri-cycle model of effective school social work: access, quality and engagement, as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4: Tri-cycle model of effective school social work



The arrow points to the area where school social work is expected to place a child, in the hybrid of access to education which is of quality, and this can be achieved through quality engagement with all the systems in the environment of a child. It is believed that once learners are made to access educational provision, and are engaged effectively in this process with quality teaching and learning, then the educational outcomes are enhanced.

The involvement of the stakeholders – the parents, the community, district officials, schools and the pupils themselves – generally made it possible for the children to gain more access to education than before. Each of the stakeholders played their role within the laws and policies, which helped the pupils and parents to gain confidence in the school system, hence increasing access. Related to access was the aspect of engagement of all stakeholders, from the parents to the central government. The engagement of the stakeholders by the social workers ensured that the attitudes of the parents in particular were changed in favour of the school, peers became supportive, materials became available and school-related infrastructure improved in some cases. In terms of quality, best classroom practices, such as group work and teachers engaging pupils through targeted questions, were witnessed. The learning environment improved in most schools where classrooms had displays, learning aids and chalkboards. Child-to-child work was encouraged and this was found to be in line with findings that show that when pupils are given a regular opportunity to work in groups or pairs other than simply listen and respond to a teacher, there will be increases in academic achievements, the quality of interpersonal skills and relationships and improved self-esteem (Prince, 2004). Owing to the hybrid of the above, there was general improvement in the performance of all the participating schools, as shown by the performance of the pupils in the Primary Leaving Examination of 2015 where, out of the nine candidates who sat in one of the schools, up to seven passed in division one. In addition, three schools obtained division one for the first time in seven years. However, there could have also been some improvements mentioned above in schools that did not participate in this project, and this would require another study to established the causes.

Challenges Faced

During the implementation of the project, many challenges were faced, and they affected the project. These centered on cultural issues, especially early marriages, domestic chores and the extended family. Two girls married and the social workers reported these to the appropriate authorities. Domestic chores, especially during planting, weeding and harvest, caused many pupils to miss school, and some dropped out entirely after being persistently absent from school and failing to cope with school demands thereafter. Other children moved away

from the project site and joined other schools owing to the influence of their extended families. We lost a total of 19 pupils because of these challenges. There were also challenges which were social in nature, where some caregivers would leave to attend funeral rites or marriages for days. In some cases, for example, caregivers in such families would go with the school-going children to such functions and, in other cases, they would leave the children alone at home, but such children would not come to school. Children would also report late at the beginning of every term because, owing to a high level of illiteracy or because they lived in remote communities, the parents would not know when exactly the term would open.[7] The economic challenge faced was mainly on our side –limited financial support to the children enrolled on this project amidst high school-related demands. The increase in the fees/Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) contribution in 2015 also affected our operation since this was not budgeted for in the work plan. The political challenges we faced were of two types: First, in early 2016, there were presidential and parliamentary elections, and these interrupted the social work schedules in schools as this period was full of politicking, which distorted the normal programmes in the communities. Second, some local politicians wanted to influence the recruitment of the children in the programme to favour their children or relatives. We had to refer to the professional ethics of social work, which guided us to confront this challenge. Administratively, the massive transfers of head teachers and teachers in the district in 2015 also affected the project as those who we were working with us on the project and who were coordinating the project were moved away and we had to start afresh with those newly transferred. Malaria[8], which is prevalent in the area, also contributed to the irregularity of attendance by our beneficiaries.

Opportunities for Rolling out School Social Work in the Community and Country

The respondents indicated that Anaka Foundation should continue to make use of the capacity it has developed in this regard to continue pursuing this new model of school social work. One key informant (KI) indicated that the foundation should maintain and improve on the existent networks it has so far established to sustain the programme. In addition, it was requested that Anaka Foundation should continue to look for further funding opportunities, both locally and internationally,

[7]The literacy rate of persons 10 years and above in Acholi sub-region is among the lowest compared to other regions, standing at 61.4 % in 2012/13 and 61.7 % in 2016/17 compared to central Uganda at 80.1 % and 86.2 % , Busoga at 69.5 % and 69.9 % and Ankole at 74.4 % and 75.6 % over the same period (UNHS, 2016/17).

[8] Uganda has the highest recorded malaria transmission rates in Africa, with an average of 1,500 infectious bites per person per year in the high density areas and one of the world's highest malaria incidences of 478 cases per 1,000 persons per year (UBOS, 2010).

to enable it to scale up this good project within the district, region and at the national level. Another KI also indicated that the project should take advantage of the government's commitment to reform the primary education sector and the increasing use of ICT in the education sector to improve on the scope and quality of its future interventions. Yet another KI opined that when new funding is secured, the model can be replicated in other parts of northern Uganda, and perhaps in other parts of Uganda or sub-Saharan Africa. The existent National Development Plan, which spans five years, the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) and the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis, which are the budgeting and planning tools used by the Uganda Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Sports (MoESTS) could be exploited by social workers to advocate the inclusion of social work for the entire national education programming.

Discussion

Prolonged war, such as that experienced in the study area, brings untold suffering to the population, and the greatest victims in any war are usually the children and the women. As noted earlier, this war severely affected the region, and especially the socio-cultural and economic fabrics of the communities, which led to the unfavourable social and education outcomes in the region, compared to the other regions of the country (GoU, 2011), thus necessitating the intervention of such an agency as Anaka Foundation to contribute to the recovery and development of the region. The agency's intervention was appropriate, timely and a response to the government's call to the main actors, districts, development partners, civil society fraternity and local communities through the PRDP to help the country recover from the ravages of the war by investing or intervening in different sectors of the economy. Anaka Foundation's intervention in the education sector was one such intervention and because social problems are complex, the agency also made interventions in other sectors such as health, water and livelihoods in general, which are outside the scope of this evaluation.

These theories were found to be relevant for the purpose of implementing and evaluating the pilot project: systems theory (Andreae, 2011), problem-solving theory (Shier, 2011), social networks theory, (Tracy & Brown, 2011); social networks theory (Tracy & Brown, 2011); and empowerment theory (Lee & Hudson, 2011). They enabled a critical, holistic and comprehensive analysis of the environment and education of the child – focusing on the child, parents/households, schools, district officials, the community and the central government. However, it should be noted that these are not the only theories that can be applied in such a post-conflict context; many more theories are available and their application could be premised upon the purpose, scope and context of the study. The outcome of the principal component analysis, indicating exclusively the variables relating to

teachers in shaping a child's education, should not be completely ignored in any intervention that intends to promote the education of the children in any context. I think, though, that the variables considered were varied and reflected the complexity of the learning environment, and the dominance of teacher-related issues in the outcome, was probably because in the education setting, teachers have more contact hours with pupils than any other persons, and this could have biased the respondents' opinions to that effect.

It is no doubt that the positive impact of the intervention has been acknowledged in the schools, and by the pupils, communities and households. This impact does not only comprise academic outcomes, but also relates to health, socialisation and future economic potential, as well as to produce cohesive and inclusive societies. A similar impact was observed in the work of Huxtable *et al.* (2012). However, the main concerns remain with regard to coverage, inter-level linkages and sustainability. As much as the nine schools benefited, what are the plans for roll-out at the district, regional and national levels so that as many schools as possible are covered? As far as the inter-level linkages are concerned, the main question remains, how will interventions ensure that a child who benefited from this programme at the primary education level continue with the benefit at the secondary and possibly post-secondary levels? How will school social work be sustained in the absence of donor support? These are the key lingering questions that management are grappling with, and to which they are seeking appropriate answers.

The proposed school social work model is a welcome development and innovative; focusing on quality, access and engagement. Indeed, these have prominently manifested themselves in this research. These are the qualities that promote well-being, human rights and social justice (Huxtable *et al*., 2012), not only of the primary beneficiaries but also of the entire affected communities. The greatest role played here by the social workers is to effectively engage all the systems in the environment of the child to make sure that the systems play their roles within their mandates and existing policies. The pertinent role of school social workers was also observed and acknowledged in the work of Huxtable and Blyth (2002), where their intervention were found to support children's personal development and to raise their quality of life. This requires social workers not only to be imbued with professional ethics, skills and knowledge, but also to be passionate, committed and sacrificially deliver social services to such disadvantaged communities. The use of different approaches, such as counselling, direct service provision, training and economic empowerment were instrumental in causing the positive changes. Similar approaches were used in the work of Huxtable and Blyth (2002) and Huxtable *et al.* (2012).

It is absolutely impossible to undertake such a project without being confronted with some challenges: socio-cultural, economic, political and administrative, amongst others. Earlier work by Sossou and Daniels (2002) and Huxtable *et al.* (2012) also found that similar challenges affected school social work, though theirs delved into more complex challenges, including those relating to the unprecedented pace of globalisation in the 21st Century. The only other difference with the current study is that the challenges in the current study site seem to be more pronounced than in the previous cases. This could be attributed to the fact that the current study was done in a post-conflict scenario, where the socio-cultural and economic fabric and infrastructure were seriously destroyed compared to the earlier cases that were done in non-post-conflict environments. The study also generally contends that, much as school social work is a common practice in the Western world (Huxtable &Blyth, 2002), it can equally be implemented in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, with similar positive outcomes, as this study has revealed. The initial success achieved in Ghana, in the 1960s, through the School Welfare Service (Sossou & Daniels, 2002) should be a motivation to the rest of the sub-Saharan African countries seeking alternatives to reform their education sector.

The key limitations are two: Firstly that the author is the founder of Anaka Foundation and this position could have caused him to be biased in the analysis and reporting. However, being a professional social worker and author, sensitivity to issues of reflexivity made him produce this work within the professional ethics and ethos. Besides, during evaluation design and data collection and analysis, a mixed approach was used, by engaging both non-staff and staff of the agency in executing this noble work, and this helped to ensure some objectivity in the outcome. Secondly, the threats of internal validity cannot be entirely ruled out, since this was a non-experimental study, whereby the influence of other contextual variables on the project outcome could not be controlled.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the pilot project had a remarkable impact on the beneficiaries, the children, households, the community and other systems around the children. The theories helped to inform the evaluation and expose the variables responsible for the comprehensive education of the children. It can further be concluded that school social work brings in three benefits of the tri-cycle model of school social work: quality, access and engagement and these should always be the target of intervention by all educational policy makers and practitioners whether in developed or developing countries.

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