

Measuring (il)literacy in Uganda, Lessons from Census and Survey data

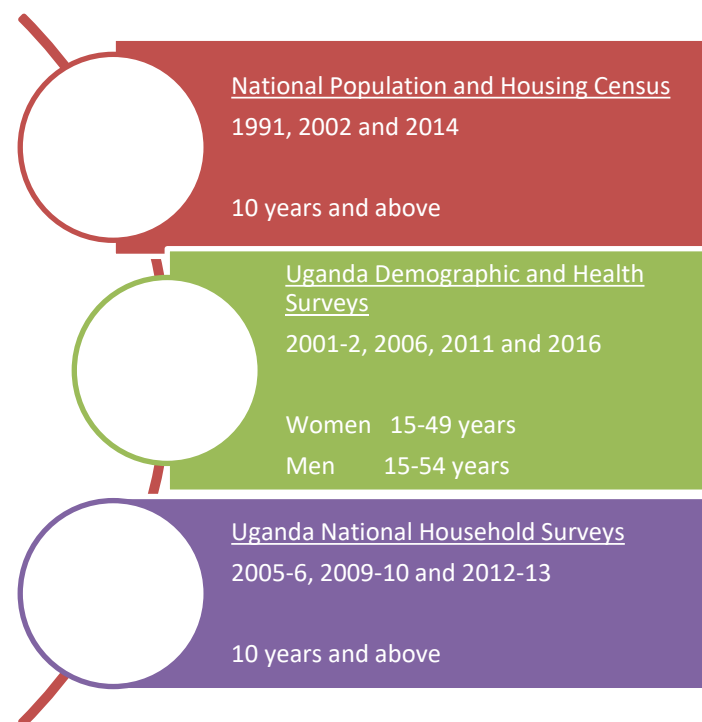
The Education for All Global Monitoring Report for 2006 focused on Literacy, a vital issue, yet one of the most neglected, according to the Director-General of UNESCO. Indeed, literacy rates are among the international statistics that are most questionable. In the same vein, there is no consensus on the definition of (il)literacy as it varies over time and across countries. Given that indicators are increasingly becoming critical, not only with regard to their derivation but also their place in monitoring and evaluation of national policies and that data sources are rapidly multiplying, it is important to question the measurement of (il)literacy for various data sources. How is (il)literacy measured in Uganda? What lessons can we draw from the way the indicator is measured?

Things to remember:

- There are marked variations in the definition and measurement of (il)literacy
- Some of the discrepancies in results stemming from data sources are difficult to explain
- Urgent need for harmonization of definitions and methods of data capture

Multiple data sources available ... but with varying base populations across surveys

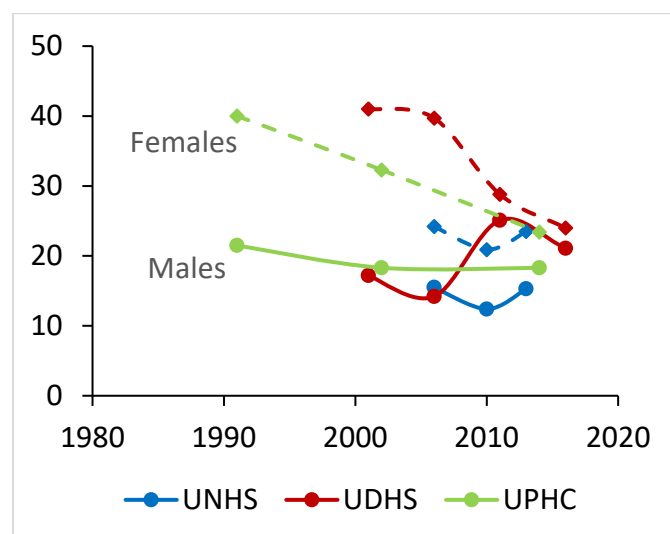
In national data sources the age group targeted regarding (il)literacy varies considerably.



A variety of results

The indicators on illiteracy vary from one source to the other, even when looking at a single common age group. Notwithstanding the strengths and weaknesses of each data source, all sources point to a downward trend in illiteracy and a reduction in gender differences over the past 3 decades.

Trends in illiteracy for 20-24 year olds



These **differences in indicators and trends** emanate from **the way the question on illiteracy is asked and how data on the indicator is collected and or computed** in reference to **the definition of illiteracy in the reports, questionnaires and Manual of Instructions**.

A diversity of approaches

From one source of data to another, the definition and the methods of measuring (il)literacy differ, both in terms of the dimensions taken into account and the methods of assessment considered (Table).

- Dimensions:

The questions asked vary considerably by data source and over the years for a similar data source.

In the censuses, the question asked changes slightly over time.

1991	"Can person read and write?"
2002	"Can (NAME) read and write a simple sentence in any language?"
2014	"Can (NAME) read and write a sentence meaningfully in any language?"

In the UNHSSs, data on literacy was collected about the ability to read and write with understanding in any language across the three rounds of the survey.

For all DHSs, all eligible respondents had to read cards with a simple sentence in Uganda's major

languages. The ability to read is assumed to imply the ability to write. Moreover, respondents from minority ethnic groups, and therefore languages, would have to read the sentence in another language than their own.

- Method of Assessment:

Information on (il)literacy is often of a declarative nature. In the census, the household head or the person who provides information about the household, responds to the questions on (il)literacy for each of the household members. In National Household Surveys, individual household members provide this information. It is only for DHSs that data on (il)literacy is collected directly from eligible individuals, by subjecting them to a reading test to ascertain their abilities.

- Language considered:

Almost all data sources in Uganda, do not specify the language in which they expect respondents to be literate in, save for the 1991 Census that is silent on the language in question. Indeed, the 2002 Manual of Instructions unambiguously states that the question on literacy is about **both** reading with understanding **and** writing meaningfully in **any** language.

Dimensions of (il)literacy considered and assessment methods for various data sources

Data source	Dimensions of (il)literacy			Assessment method		
	Reading	Writing	Understanding	Declaration by HH or any other person	Self-declaration	Test
Censuses	X	X		X		
EDS	X					X
UNHS	X	X			X	

HH : Household Head

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References

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