UGANDA

EDUCATION SECTOR POLICY OVERVIEW PAPER

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EDUCATION POLICY OVERVIEW PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Education System in Uganda

Ugandan’s formal education terrain today has undergone several modifications since the 1880s when education was first introduced by the Christian Missionaries. Until the early 1990s the education policy was fraught with gender disparities in enrolment, dropout, performance and general attainment. Until then the education system had glaring disparities arising from historical and cultural factors that regarded the male sex as important than the female.

Uganda became independent in October formal 1962 and since then has not changed fundamentally its education system. The education system consist four levels of institutions, each followed by a national selection exam which feeds a centrally administered process of distributing successful candidates among the options available at the next level. Large numbers of students are forced out of the system at each transition stage because of limited capacity at the next level.

Starts with seven years of primary school (ages 6-12), which is compulsory (supposedly) and free according to the current Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy. This is followed by four years of secondary education (ages 13-16), which is optional though plans are underway make it universal too. This is then followed by two years upper secondary school (A level), and finally by five years of University or Tertiary education depending on professional selected by the individual.

Since the introduction of formal education in Uganda, there have been disparities in the distribution of facilities for female students, which are best seen between urban and rural areas. This is partly because the first schools set up by the government for the children of administrators and chiefs were around urban areas. In addition, the geographically poorer areas in terms of soils and climate tend to have fewer schools than the relatively richer areas. Other factors behind this disparity include historical ones such as the presence and influence of missionaries, and cultural factors and the fact that starting schools depended on the community’s initiative.

Since the beginning of formal education in the 1880s, the educational of girls and women has lagged behind that of boys and men in Uganda as well as other developing countries. In 2001,female school enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment was 49 percent and 44 percent at primary and secondary school levels respectively(Kikampikaho and Kwesiga,2002).Female students form 35 percent of those enrolled in tertiary institutions. The adult literacy rate for Uganda females is at 57% while that of males is 78%. As Tripp and Kwesiga (2002) argue, the obstacles to gender parity are embedded in the cultural norms and practices valued by the patriarchal arrangements of our society through which the policy and implementers have been modelled. The government of Uganda recognises the problem of gender disparities in education and has thus taken positive steps to bridge the gender gap.
EDUCATION POLICY

Background to Education Policy in Uganda

Formal education was first initiated by voluntary Missionary Organisations in Uganda during the colonial period around the 1880s. Since 1925, the Government started playing an active role of exercising control over education, which was expanded rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1920s and 1930s, education was available to only a small group of people mainly children of the aristocracy, clergy and tribal chiefs.

A strong emphasis on the quality of education for all people was pointed out by the Castle commission (1963), which argued for raising standards of agriculture, and technical education, expansion of girls’ education, and provision of a adult education. Since 1963, education policy in Uganda was mainly guided by the Castle Commission report up to the inception of the 1922 Government White Paper.

From independence Uganda had a healthy developing economy and education sector for at least a decade before on the onset of nearly two decades of civil unrest. Most of the burden for education of children and youth was carried out by parents. In the then economic context, this meant that children from poorer families had no access to primary education or dropped out long before completing the primary cycle.

Between 1971/2-1975/6, the Government Educational Plan was almost not implemented due to manpower vacuum created by expulsion expatriate teachers and fleeing of local teachers. Between the early 1980s and 1990s, emphasis on educational policy was on largely a general recovery and rehabilitation of educational facilities and manpower to restore functional capacity.

By the late 1980s physical infrastructure had deteriorated with nearly twenty years of civil strife. A large percentage of the primary classes met in temporary structures; permanent structures had received little or maintenance for nearly two decades. Text books, instructional materials were almost non-existent in most schools, making teaching and learning extremely difficult. The few remaining teachers who did not flee the country during repression were underpaid, under trained and demoralised. Many facilities were damaged by warfare and vandalism.

In 1986, the post-conflict government dealt with the education situation by appointing an education commission. It is this method of appointing commissions that has been one utilised for determining major policy changes, which eventually evolved the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme.

Education and training in Uganda is governed by the Education Act and other related Acts of Parliament, including University Act, Tertiary institutions Act various other Acts and Charters for universities. The government has addressed the challenges facing the education sector through commissions, committees and Taskforces.
The Evolution of Education Policy

The Government involvement in formal education began in the colonial period following a report in 1922 by the Phelps-Stokes Fund. Prior to that report formal education was entirely in the hands of missionary organisations.

The first commission was the de Bunsen Committee appointed in 1952, which recommended among other things; (a) the expansion of secondary education in order to provide teachers for primary and junior secondary school, (b) the expansion of facilities, both primary and secondary, for girls, (c) the establishment of new primary schools.

The major and limited functions that these recommendations were apparently meant to serve were to provide a Ugandan cadre for the local colonial civil service especially at the lower levels. However it did serve to construct a good foundation for an education system that was possible to build on the later and withstand difficult political and economic conditions.

The next commission was the Castle Commission appointed in 1963, less than a year after independence. The demand was for high-level human power to take over the running and management of both the public and private sectors. Although the need for expanding primary education was recognised, it was felt that there were not enough resources for both primary-level and higher levels. A large proportion of the education budget then went to post-primary institutions.

The practice of more resources going to post-primary institutions continued for more two decades. That situation persisted despite two attempts to promote universal primary education through the Third Five year Development Plan (1972-1976) and the Education Policy Review of 1977. The major constrain of achieving universal primary education was the negative political climate closely coupled with poor economic growth that characterised that period.

The post-conflict NRM government instituted a series of commissions to investigate the situation in all areas of government. One of them was the Education Policy Review Commission, which was appointed in 1987 under the chairmanship of Professor W.Setenza Kajubi. A major recommendation made by this commission was the Universalisation of primary education (UPE) in as near future as possible but not later than 2000. The commission defended its position thus: “Only when every child is enrolled at the right age and does not leave school without completing the full cycle of primary education it would be possible to ensure that all citizens have the basic education needed for living a full live. Also it will help in achieving a transformation of society leading to greater unity among the people, higher moral standards and an accelerated growth of economy.”

Following the EPRC report, published in 1989, the Government appointed a White Paper Committee. The government White Paper was published in 1992. The White Paper accepted the major recommendations of EPRC on primary education reform and with UPE only modified the time to frame for completion of the programme to the year 2003. Preparations for UPE began soon after including training of teachers and head teachers and the supply of scholastic materials. Most these reforms began in 1993 under the umbrella of the primary Education and Teacher Development Project. A number of strategies and interventions have been put in place to that effect and these are briefly explained below.
The Current Education Policy

The 1992 Government White Paper on Education is the basis of official policy on the purpose and programmes of education. While some of the programmes have been revised as a result of intervening events; the White Paper’s articulation of the purposes of Ugandan’s education system continues to be the supreme guidance for the sector. Its aims are to promote citizenship; moral, ethical and spiritual values; promote scientific, technical and cultural knowledge, skills and attitudes; eradicate literacy and equip individuals with basic skills and knowledge and with the ability to “contribute to the building of an integrated, self-sustaining and independent national economy”.

The key policy thrust in the educational sector for both rural and urban Uganda includes providing equitable access to quality and affordable education to all Ugandans, propelling the nation towards achieving the goals of Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), meeting commitments to achieve Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, providing relevant education and enhancing efficiency, and strengthening partnerships in the education sector. In Uganda, education is a constitutional right enshrined in the constitution of the republic of Uganda, articles 30 makes educations for children a human right, and article 34 children are entitled to basic education by the state and parents.

The current education policy focuses on expanding the functional capacity of educational structures and reducing on the inequalities of access to education between sexes, geographical areas, and social classes in Uganda. It advocates for the redistribution of resources viz a viz reforming the educational sector. More resources have been allocated to lower educational public sector through the UPE programme in order to enhance equity of access at that level between boys and girls (MoSE 1998 b). Higher education especially tertiary education is increasingly becoming liberalised, which in fact means privatised. The impact of this shift in policy on the female gender is yet to be ascertained, but for females from poor districts, their chances for higher education have become increasingly small.

In addition to the MDGs, Uganda is also committed to meeting the Education for all (EFA) goals (set in Jomtien in 1990 and reaffirmed in Dakar in 2000). The current Government efforts in education sector, especially the launching of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy are, by and large, premised on the recommendation of the Government White Paper on Education of 1992, but also focus towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals.

Equitable Access to Primary Education and Universal Primary Education

The government has pursued policies to expand access to all levels of education system, with a special emphasis placed on primary education because it directly benefits the rural poor. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) was launched in 1997 following the recommendations of the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC, 1989), and the subsequent relevant stipulations of the GoU White Paper (1992) and the development of children’s Statute (1996), has been implemented since then.

The Government set key objectives of UPE as:

(a)Making basic education accessible to the learners and relevant to their needs as well as meeting national goals;
(b) making education equitable in order to eliminate and disparities and inequalities;
(c) establishing, providing and maintaining quality education as the basis for promoting the necessary human resource development;
(d) initiating a fundamental positive transformation of society in the social, economic and political fields; and
(e) ensuring that education is affordable by the majority of Ugandans by providing initially, the minimum necessary facilities and resources, and progressively the optimal facilities, to enable every child to enter and remain in school until they complete the primary school education cycle.

The policy emphasises equal opportunity for both boys and girls. It promotes parity in enrolment, retention, and performance in primary education. The main achievement of UPE has been a surge in gross enrolment in primary schools, especially for the rural and urban poor. The greatest beneficiary of the UPE has been the girl-child. Enrolment of girls has increased dramatically. Consequently, gender disparities in primary school enrolment have been almost wiped out because there is a steady increase in the number of girls enrolling at school each year.

UPE is not an isolated reform package, but part and parcel of the entire process of education reform being implemented within the entire broad spectrum of the Ugandan’s education system. Primary education has immense importance because it is the only type of education to which most Ugandans can have access: secondary and university education are beyond the reach of the majority.

**Decentralisation**

Central government has decentralised public service. Under the local Government Act of 1997, nursery, primary schools, special schools and technical schools fall under the administration and management of District Councils. Each district has the authority to formulate, approve, and execute its own development plan.

Registration for UPE children, distribution of textbooks and monthly remittances for schools from central government are all channelled through the district Administration officer. Decentralisation has brought the schools closer to the administrative units above them and therefore potentially could be more responsive.

**The Education Sector Strategy Plan (ESSP)**

The 1995 Constitution posited education as a right, specifying that each child is entitled to basic education, which is a shared responsibility of the state and the child’s parents.

The ESSP commit the government to assuring universal access to primary education as the highest priority, points to the removal of financial impediments and pay particular attention to gender and regional equity. Putting the plan into practice was envisaged through shared contributions by the public and private sector, by the household and community. The ESSP of Uganda’s Ministry of Education
and Sports (MoSE) covers the fiscal years 2004/5 to 2014/5, and it succeeds the Education Strategic Investment Plan (ESIP of 1998-2003).

In 1998 the MoSE developed and launched the Education Sector Investment Plan (ESIP) as the sectorial development framework over a period (1989-2003). The broad objectives of ESIP were: (a) achieving equitable access to education at all levels; (b) Improving quality of education, particularly at the primary level; (c) Enhancing the management of education service delivery at all levels; and (d) developing the capacity of MoSE to plan, programme and manage an investment portfolio that will effectively develop the education sector.

The MoSE is developing the Education Sector Strategic plan (ESSP) for the fiscal years 2004-2015. The ESSP is set to succeed the ESIP in two ways. It will build on and take forward the successes of ESIP, particularly in the implementation of UPE, while addressing the weaknesses /gaps in ESIP such as providing adequate treatment of the post primary and other sub sector in addition to primary. The objectives of the ESSP are:

- To build an education system that is relevant to Ugandan’s national development
- To ensure that all children participating in the education system achieve education goals.
- To maintain an effective and efficient education sector

**Sectorial Context for ESSP, International Long-term Commitments**

The second Education Sector Plan is based on the government’s White Paper for Education, its long-term commitments to the international community, and on the medium-term goals and plans and current undertakings of the Ministry of Education.

Uganda has international sets of commitments to the international community that have an impact on its long-term plans. These are the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Education for All goals (EFA). The plan is in line with these broad sets of goals.

The Millennium Development Goal that is relevant to the Ministry of Education is to ensure that by 2015 boys and girls will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that gender disparities will be eliminated at the primary level by 2005 and at all levels by 2015.

The Education for All goals include completion of free and compulsory primary education of good quality, equitable access by all children, elimination of gender disparities, and achievement of measurable learning outcomes, especially in literacy, innumeracy, and essential life skills.

**CONCLUSION**

Development of education sector has been guided by the first Education Sector Investment Plan (ESIP I) 1998-2003 and the second Education Sector Investment Plan (ESIP II) 2004-2015. Although highly successful in achieving its goals of increasing access, of mobilising resources and of sector wide approach, the first ESIP has been less successful in addressing some of the major issues facing the sector, such as the improvement of education quality, the delivery of education services, including
devolution of responsibilities to the district level, and the development of capacity in strategic planning and programming.

ESIP as a strategy encourages civil society involvement in education development. It confirms that “communities will retain the responsibility for the expansion of primary classrooms”. With the expansion of enrolment within UPE, the ability of rural and urban poor communities to provide classrooms and recruit and retain school teachers has placed an additional strain upon the fragile fabric of self-provisioning. The second ESIP has much more broader focus on the issues of quality and adopt a holistic view of the sector including education from pre-primary through to university level.

Uganda has achieved remarkable successes in the field of education during the last decade to date. Recognising that basic education is a human right and is fundamental to reducing extreme poverty and achievement of both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All goals (EFA).

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