** **

5th Debate of the National Development Policy Forum

Report of Proceedings

**Pre-primary and Primary Education in Uganda: Access, Cost, Quality and Relevance**

29th July 2015, Kampala Serena Hotel

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# List of Acronyms

COUPSTA Coalition of Uganda Private School Teachers Association

ECD Early Childhood Development

ESAPR Education Sector Annual Performance Report

GER Gross Enrolment Ratio

LGs Local Governments

NCDC National Curriculum Development Centre

NDPF National Development Policy Forum

NDPII Second National Development Plan

NER Net Enrolment Ratio

NPA National Planning Authority

PEC ` Policy Economic Council

UNEB Uganda national Examinations Board

UPE Universal Primary Education

USE Universal Secondary Education

# Introduction

The National Planning Authority in partnership with World Bank and UNICEF organized the 5th debate of the National Development Policy Forum (NDPF) on the theme: ***Pre-primary and Primary Education in Uganda: Access, Cost, Quality and Relevance***. The NDPF debates are meant to discuss national issues bearing on the realization of Uganda Vision 2040. NPA adopted an inclusive approach to development planning where policy debates are organized to create a platform for all Ugandans to discuss development issues unreservedly all inclined to the implementation of Uganda Vision 2040.

The fifth National Development Policy Forum was held on Friday 29th July 2015 at the Kampala Serena Hotel. The chief guest was Hon. John Chrysostom Muyingo, Minister of State for Primary Education. The proceedings were moderated by Dr. Kisamba Mugerwa, Chairperson NPA.

The audience comprised different stakeholders in the education sector including politicians, representatives of government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, District Education Officers, Development Partners, the private sector, Civil Society Organizations, Academia, and students. The keynote presentation was made by Dr. Joseph Muvawala, the NPA Executive Director but the paper was prepared together with the Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Sports. The Discussants included: Ms. Viola Nyakato a lecturer at Mbarara University of Science and Technology; and Mr. Patrick Kaboyo, the Executive Director of the Coalition of Uganda Private School Teachers Association (COUPSTA).

# Opening Remarks

## Remarks by the Chairperson, NPA

The Chairperson, NPA, Dr. Kisamba Mugerwa welcomed all participants and thanked them for honoring NPA’s invitation. He informed the participants that the National Development Policy forum is an innovation aimed at pursuing strategic issues inclined to the realization of Uganda Vision 2040.

He informed the participants that one of the focus areas of NDPII is human capital development and that it is in line with this focus area, which is one of the pillars of socio-economic transformation that NPA has decided to have this debate on Pre-primary and Primary Education in Uganda. This is one the topical issues that will be presented at the PEC in a fortnight.

He informed the participants that the paper was compiled in collaboration with the ministry of education. It was presented to the Expanded Board of NPA which is composed of various institutions. It is being presented to the public through this forum to capture their views before it is presented in PEC. He introduced the discussants and the presenter.

# Remarks by Hon. John Chrysostom Muyingo

Dr. Muyingo informed the participants that he was standing in for his senior Minister Hon. Rtd. Major Jesca Alupo who couldn’t make because of an ongoing Cabinet meeting.

He thanked NPA for organizing the forum and inviting the different stakeholders to generate ideas. He said that he was particularly happy for the different participants who gave their time to reflect upon how to prepare the human capital badly needed to transform the country. He said that he is aware these are issues that have been bothering them and hoped that all their comments have been captured so that most of them end up in the policies at the Ministry.

He shared that since the Uganda Vision 2040 was presented to Cabinet he was very excited but the more he thought about it he realized the important role that his ministry to determine the human capital that will deliver that transformation.

He noted that the lack of a policy and failure to address the pre-primary education has been bothering him because this is the foundation for whatever level of education because this is the level that teaches one how to learn. Good results have always been realize in those regions where there is access to pre-primary education. However, he was concerned that the issue of school feeding has not been adequately addressed. The issue of absenteeism is also of great concern to him.

Before reading the message from the Minster of Education, Science, technology and Sports, Dr. Muyingo said that very soon a policy to address most of these issues will come up with the support of everyone. He urged everyone to perform their roles. The government has good plans to strengthen the inspectorates and the office of the District Education Officers. He said that education is NRM government’s priority and many things are going to take place.

The Minister appreciated the organizers for the choice of the subject “Pre-primary and Primary Education in Uganda: Access, Cost, Quality and Relevance” which falls under her docket. This subject she said is not only timely but will also contribute towards the success of her ministry in the delivery of pre-primary and primary education. She said that it is undisputable is indispensable in the human capital development process and that in light of this the NRM government has enshrined the right to education in the constitution and has put in place policies and programmes that facilitate the development of education. She added that Government has also made deliberate efforts to make education accessible and affordable through the implementation of UPE and USE.

The Minster said that UPE has made a significant impact on primary school enrolment which increased from 2.8million to currently 8.5 million. The success in enrollment notwithstanding, she said that there is need to increase the quality of education at both pre-primary and primary levels through policy reviews and interventions targeting improvement of learning and management at all levels. Once good quality is achieved at pre-primary and primary better education attainments will be realized thereafter.

She informed the participants that an attempt has been made in this direction starting with the enactment of the Education Act, 2008, which recognizes pre-primary education as the first level of education. Though pre-primary education has not yet been fully embraced in practice, the law is now in place, what remains is putting in place mechanism for implementation.

Existing evidence suggests that pre-primary schooling is critical as a foundation for quality education and so investment in thus area will certainly help in improving the quality of primary education.

The Minister concluded by stating that the decision made today and the actions we take over time should aim at improving the quality of education to realize a bright future for our children. But this will only happen through a joint effort among all stakeholders including government, parents, development partners and the community at large.

Before officially opening the dabate, she once again thanked the National planning Authority, the World Bank and UNICEF for making this debate possible.

# Keynote Presentation by Dr. Joseph Muvawala (PhD)

## Pre-Primary Education

The importance attached to pre-primary education in Uganda is still limited. Consequently, access to this level of education is extremely limited (at only 9.5%), and its quality is very poor. This state of affairs is attributed to the decision to allow the private sector to spearhead this sub-sector, which resulted into weak policy framework and absence of service delivery standards.

To improve pre-primary education, three options were proposed:

1. **Incremental Approach:** Dealing with the fundamentals first, (Policy and Regulation + Private Provision Only), this can be realised by:
2. Integrating the training of pre-primary teachers into the Primary Teacher Colleges (PTCs);
3. Developing an integrated pre-primary education policy and strategic plan to stand as a legal framework for ensuring a holistic approach to the development of early age children;
4. Developing a pre-primary education curriculum with emphasis on activities developing the child’s creative, physical, emotional and social skills besides literacy and numeracy;
5. Formulating and enforcing national service delivery standards for pre-primary education

This is the most feasible option given the financing constraint already facing this sector. However this option would only have a minimal effect on enrolment and overall provision of pre-primary education.

1. **Targeted Approach:** Dealing with fundamentals + private provision + selected public provision in underserved areas by attaching a pre-school class to selected primary schools.
2. **Broader Approach**: Dealing with fundamentals + private provision + public provision. The implication is to attach a pre-school class to every primary school. The cost implications for this recommendation are higher since it would require recruiting new teachers, construction of additional classrooms and providing capitation grants

Option II and III require detailed analyses (to determine the cost implication, infrastructure requirements, teachers etc.) but is the most appropriate if the desired changes are to be realised. For instance, when the public and private provision of pre-primary education is realised and pre-school attached to every primary school access and quality would considerably increase.

## Primary Education

The country has done commendably well in expanding access. Both the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) are high at 110% and 93.7% (2014) respectively (EMIS, 2014).

Notwithstanding this monumental achievement, low quality is now the main challenge. Recent trends on virtually all the primary quality indicators are below the desired levels. Low quality is demonstrated by low learning achievement (school outcomes); literacy and numeracy proficiency at P.6 are below average at 40.15% (38.72boys; 40.10%) and 41.40% (45.80%; 37% girls) in 2013 respectively (EMIS, 2014). In addition, the efficiency of Uganda’s primary education is low- Survival rate to P.7 stands at 32.1%, Repetition at 10.19% (2014) and teacher absenteeism is estimated at 20-30%.There is a persistent problem of “ghosts” (i.e. “ghost” schools, teachers, & learners), which is responsible for substantial leakage of budgetary resources (annually estimated at over UGX.50 billion shillings). School inspection, monitoring and support supervision is inadequate and there is poor management of primary schools (ESSAPR, 2013/14).

It was particularly noted that even after dealing with all the leakages the sector will still require additional financing if quality improvements are to be realised. Our capitation which started at 9,000/- in 1997 today stands at only 7,000/-. In Kenya, where UPE is being implemented, expenditure per pupil per term is 300,000/- which explains for better performance at this level compared to Uganda.

The above challenges are exacerbated by a number of factors that include:

* High population growth;
* Budgetary constraints; and,
* Limited community participation.

It was recommended that interventions to address the quality challenges in primary education should focus on the following critical areas:

1. Improve the quality of education through teacher education, curriculum and assessment, school leadership and management, community engagement, facilities and utilities, ICT and education funding
2. Separation of delivery from quality assurance roles
3. Reconstitute the staffing establishment for the inspectorate departments at the district and national levels based on the number of schools;
4. Full implementation of the scheme of service with a view to improving inspection at school level;
5. Full implementation of the scheme of service with a view to improving inspection at school level;
6. Implement incentive package for teachers, including in-service training, re-deployment, provision of accommodation (starting with hard-to-reach and hard-to-stay areas)
7. Sensitise communities on the importance of creating conducive school environment for children;
8. Education data to be centralized and managed to ensure single source ownership;
9. Institutionalise school feeding programme. This is justified by the fact that the UPE Policy requires parents to feed children which is however failing in many areas. It is also widely agreed that school feeding is necessary though the cost of its provision in high (about 48 billion which even exceeds the UPE capitation provision). It is expensive when you treat it as an education matter. However, this is not an education matter alone; it is a nutritional and a wealth creation matter as well.

# Discussion

# Discussion by Mr. Patrick Kaboyo, the Executive Director of the Coalition of Uganda Private School Teachers Association (COUPSTA)

1. *Compartmentalization of the sector* - Just this year the Ministry in charge of education changed names to the “Ministry of Education, science, Technology and Sports”. The Ministry is now too congested. This calls for the splitting of the Ministry into two ministries: Ministry of Basic Education and Career Guidance and Ministry of Higher Education, Science Technology and Innovations, this will make work easy for supervision.
2. *The acting syndrome –* When someone is acting, as is the case for the Ag. Commissioner for ECD at the Ministry of Education, he/she is not fully in charge. This is also the case for the Ag. Director of Education Standards and the Commissioner of Secondary Education. There is need to make all these offices substantive so that officials are fully in charge.
3. *Universal Primary Education (UPE) –* with decentralization all the UPE schools are under the supervision of Local Governments. One wonders whether, the LGs have thought about the implication of implementing the UPE programme since 1997 without a holistic review. Decentralization should also be reviewed holistically through wide consultations so as to capture the views of the key stakeholders i.e. parents, teachers and students.
4. *The employment terms for civil servants of “permanent and pensionable”* leads to complacence among the teachers and the supervisors. Why should one be permanent without delivering results?
5. *Policy Vs Practice –* each parent who pays school fees in primary schools pays more for nursery. Nursery school kids are now being occupied with homework and are no longer enjoying school. In order to address this there is need to clarify the policies and practices for pre-primary education for the good of the children.
6. The statistics on survival rate, dropout rates and completion rates are alarming. Mr. Patrick Kaboyo wondered why there should be a school which doesn’t deliver holistic teaching i.e. the Brain, the Heart and the Body. Children today no longer play because the schools have no play grounds. We are still struggling to implement the education system which was left by the colonialists which they themselves have since abandoned.
7. *School Land* – why should government schools complain about lunch for pupils yet they have vast idle land? School land should be used for farming, produce for the school to sell, and diversify. But because the education sector is pre-occupied with too many things such things are not addressed.
8. NPA should shift from asking questions, as the Executive Director was during his presentation, to show commitment to actual implementation by setting clear targets and timelines.

# Discussion by Ms. Viola Nyakato

*School inspection and accountability* – when one talks about accountability, he/she needs to thing account who is asking for accountability. Accountability has embedded power, without power it is hard to ask for accountability. What do parents and school management committees contribute to accountability in schools if they are being paid for the service. There is need to go back to the basics and put in place a structure that can account to each other, the parents, teachers and administrators.

Ms. Nyakato wondered whether Uganda’s pre-primary and primary education curriculum is nurturing any talent or skills considering that the pupils are being given too much homework that they do not even get time for leisure or sports. The reading culture is also dying. The students at higher levels of education cannot write assays because that talent was killed at the primary school level.

Attaching pre-primary education to each primary school is a welcome idea and should be welcomed.

# Plenary Discussion

1. The forum was informed that an ECD policy exists in the ministry of Education
2. There is need to vocationalise the curriculum
3. I recommend that every teacher should be trained in agriculture skills so that this is rolled out to the pupils and community?
4. Policy to tap skills of retired teachers who excel in the literacy skills?
5. The real problem is not that we can’t generate to our education challenges?
6. Solution have been prescribed since 1925 (The Phelp stokes commission) to the Ssenteza commission but implementation has failed?
7. The single worst contributor to our failure has been financing?
8. The importance of preschool education is not debatable?
9. Option to pre-primary should be adopted to avoid the funding emblezzments in UPE
10. Consider cost sharing in primary schools or introduce an education tax (let every Ugandan feel a duty to contribute education)
11. Study and model the katikkiro tofaali model on transparency and accountability.
12. Let co-curricular activities be compulsory as it used to be i.e. music, games and sports
13. Inspectors should be picked from both secondary and primary teaching background
14. Books to be used in the curriculum should be provided at the time of rolling out the new curriculum not after 2-3 years
15. Assessment should be based on achievement on the 1st grades
16. Let the politician advocate for the parents to provide their children food
17. Government allow teachers to have early retirement to eliminate the tired teachers
18. I think we should come up with ways or solutions to the existing problems in the education system
19. Each time/year, new ideas are being mentioned/taken into account and still the past problems/issues persist as the saying goes .charity begins at home focus should be put on the start of evolution of the education system and picking up halfway
20. Appreciation for the good presentation
21. From the questions the ED/NPA posed after the presentations, I think govt through MOESTS need to re-examine or assess the current fundamentals see what or where implementation went to wrong so that it is addressed
22. However in regard to the options presented ,I would support the second option. This should be implemented in a phased manner ie starting with a few selected districts and schools to act as a pilot
23. There is need to vocationalise our education system if we to achieve good outcome
24. The current currilum should be changed because it is more theoretical then addressing practical issues.
25. Teachers have been forcwd to have holiday teaching because if you are to teach effectively the content in the present curriculum(primary) time 8:00-5:30pm is not enough.so the policy implementation should revisit this area to ensure that time is reversed in the current curriculum
26. Observation on the misinterpretation of policies and articles in the constitution
27. ‘Land belong to the people’ has been misinterpreted by people and communities that school land especially for primary schools are being claimed and taken away.no more space for expansion, play grounds and school agriculture,
28. Let us make strong laws to protect school land.
29. Harmonization of laws (NCDC Act, UNEB Act, as well as, the universities and other tertiary institutions Act) - NCDC mandate includes development of primary school curriculum to be in tandem with pre-primary and primary. This is also currently included as teacher education mandate handled but Kyambogo University which spearheads primary teacher training.
30. Children at pre-primary and primary are always handling tests, exams, weekly, monthly and termly, this focuses mainly on the four 4 subjects examined at PLE.
31. ‘There is no assessment policy we should have affirmative assessment to promote learning. All learning areas would be covered namely; mathematics, science, social studies, science, art and technology, music dance and drama, physical education and local language.
32. In a bid to improve performances in pre-primary and primary education, there should be special motivation at school and individuals level i.e. the best performing schools, teachers and students. This will increase competition which will yield excellent results as far as education is concerned
33. Pre-primary education to promote inclusive education for children with disabilities by training special needs due teaches for the pre-primary schools
34. Invest in producing scholastic materials for children with disabilities by local manufacturers to reduce on the cost of importing special scholastic materials for children with disabilities.
35. The curriculum for primary education emphasizes development of practical skills, life skills and valves. Emphasis should be put on retooling teachers and intensity support supervision
36. Need for sensitization of the public through media curriculum issues
37. Please make scheduled assessment of pupils instead of one PLE exam after 7 years carry out nationwide periodic assessment
38. Organize ongoing training for teachers
39. Have pre-primary teacher education colleges.
40. School leadership should see themselves as a community of learners where learning and teaching have evolved. The ever-changing education landscape calls for school leaders to be consistent learners and provide intellectual stimulation to both student and teachers encouraging the adoption of philosophy of lifelong learning.
41. Effective community mobilization and involvement in education is vital. Parents should be sensitized for the need of providing basic needs, motivation and schools are part and parcel of the community so that schools don’t operate as isolated entities from the community.
42. There are no enough facilities for the inspectors for example some of the district inspectors tend to use boda bodas or move from school to school.
43. The government has to come up with assessment forms for the public to participate so that it’s able to know peoples thoughts and find solutions to them. The assessment must have a policy.
44. Teaching has to be with a vision not to pass exams. This has been noted with this regime of students that many do not remember what has been taught in the next few years because they were just capturing topics to pass exams
45. Putting up policies of feeding and failure to do so then the need to punish those who have gone out of the idea suggested
46. The government has to change the assessment mode because children are spoon fed and cannot think outside the box
47. Government has to come up with a policy of which age and what is it supposed to be at school and on which dates. For example there is no need why a pre- primary child is taken to school on Saturday and goes ahead to study the whole day.
48. There is bias on the kind of education which is existing
49. There is need of sensitizing the parents on their roles and responsibilities
50. Provision of adequate instructional materials to enable the children to perform well
51. In some districts there is a habit of teachers moving with books to the inspectors at their office so that they can be signed and approve their syllabus
52. The government has to improve on the management skills under this sector
53. Within the limited resources we can plan for them and we can be able to achieve with strategy.
54. The head teachers should be trained as CEOs so that they manage the schools as businesses
55. The government has to fundamentally change the training institutions
56. The teaching system has to base on the practical method
57. Training of inspectors because many are lucking skills under this sector
58. Making primary schools as production centers. The schools need to have their own gardens to carry out agriculture so that they produce the food that they eat and also provide the required nutrition content.
59. There is need to open up regional transformation mindset centre so that they absorb all stakeholders, technical and political to be exposed to the knowledge of transformation so that they become direct actors in pre-primary education.

# Closing Remarks by Dr. Kisamba Mugerwa

What is emerging is that something ought to be done regarding early childhood development. The society is evolving and people want to catch up, the question is how does the country manage? This is food for thought.

Some people are suggesting that there should be a Ministry of Basic Education and Career Guidance as well as that for Higher Education, Research and Innovation. However, in this case others are wondering whether secondary education is to be considered as part of the higher education or basic education.

We have generated some ideas but the debate continues, and all stakeholders are encouraged to submit their ideas to NPA. Dr. Kisamba informed the participants what is discussed in the forum may end up in the policy so should not be ignored because it puts ideas before the people that matter. He asked them to make sure that they submit ideas that may influence the decision makers.