



Provision of Inclusive Education in Uganda: What are the challenges?

Overview

The Education and Sports Sector has the country's mandate to offer education as a basic human right. The core goal is to equip learners/students/trainees with relevant knowledge and skills necessary for socio-economic transformation and development. This is in line with the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) which emphasizes inclusive and quality education for all as well as the promotion of lifelong learning.

The sector embraced inclusive education and evidently committed itself to bringing about inclusion of learners at every level of education regardless of their strengths or weaknesses. This was to be achieved through a number of interventions which include among others; the introduction of Universal Primary Education and Universal Secondary Education. This resulted into enrolment of large number of learners including those with special needs. The increase in enrolment required more resources, however with the stagnant grants/budgetary allocations, there has been a reduction in the unit cost of the grants to individual learners.

In 2014, Uganda reiterated in the Muscat Agreement to commit 6% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the education sector, however on average only 2.4% of the GDP has been spent on the sector in the last five financial years (World Bank, 2015). The NDP II projected that Uganda would commit 4.4% of its GDP to the sector in FY 2017/18 but the Ministerial Policy Statement (MPS) FY2017/18 indicates a commitment of only 2.5% in this period.

Introduction

Inclusive education means that all children in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, become part of the school community. This occurs when children with, or without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes.

Through various programmes, the government has made progress in ensuring the delivery of inclusive and quality education for all. The most outstanding programmes are Universal Secondary Education (USE) and Universal Primary Education (UPE) which have led to an increase in enrolment by 4.7% (from 8,264,317 in FY 2015/16 to 8,655,924 in FY 2016/17) at primary level and 13.5% (from 1,284,008 in FY 2015/16 to 1,457,277 in FY 2016/17) at secondary level.

Key Issues

- Education and Sports Sector resource allocation in relation to overall budget share declined from 22.7% in FY 2012/13 to 11.98% in FY 2016/17 which has led to reduction in allocation and stagnation in funding for some programmes.
- Provision of inclusive education is affected by a weak policy framework, limited in-service training, socio-cultural factors and inadequate financing.



Key Interventions

There are four main interventions geared towards inclusive education.

a) The introduction of free universal primary and secondary education as well as the provision of funding for non-formal programmes

The implementation of UPE and USE policies had important effects on enrolment as increased enrolment of children from poor households, eliminated the gender gap in terms of access, especially to primary education. The gender parity index was at 1.02 in FY 2016/17, implying that for every boy enrolled in primary school, there were more girls. Due to increased enrolments, the sector paid capitation grant to UPE schools totaling to Ug shs 68.5 billion for 7,096,211 pupils, as compared to Ug shs 66.3 billion paid for 6,993,962 pupils in FY 2015/16. The Government also disbursed Ug shs 2.085 billion in FY 2016/17, to facilitate non-formal training of 7,817 beneficiaries from 303 training institutions and the training was mainly targeting youths.

b) Flexible curriculum responsive to differences among learners

An inclusive education system must provide a flexible curriculum responsive to different needs among learners. The adaptation of the curriculum for P1-4 was done by the National Curriculum Development Center, in collaboration with USAID – UNITY, and Ministry of Education and Sports. Supplementary guidelines to the adapted curriculum were printed and distributed to units and schools including those with Special Education Needs learners.

The lower primary school curriculum review in 2000, resulted in the introduction of a thematic curriculum which focuses on the development of

literacy, numeracy and life skills at lower primary. The use of themes for teaching and learning, and the use of languages in which the learners are already proficient promotes equity among the different learners.

c) Equal opportunities for all learners

The ministry's effort to ensure equal opportunities for all learners was demonstrated by the introduction of a department at the Uganda National Examinations Board to cater for examination of learners with diverse needs. In FY 2016/17, the MoES launched a programme to promote access to quality and equitable education for Karamoja children targeting 283 primary schools and 23 secondary schools. The MoES adopted the Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy with the objective of ensuring that all children below eight years are provided with a conducive environment to thrive and be able to achieve their full potential in life.

d) Gender and equity responsive policies

The sector has developed a number of policies aimed at enhancing inclusion of all learners at various levels of education especially primary and secondary, and continued advocacy for gender and equity issues in education. For example, the National Strategy for Elimination of Violence Against Children in Schools, the National Strategy for Girls' Education aimed at promoting girls' education, and the Gender in Education Policy.

Implementation Challenges

The sector is faced with various challenges that limit provision of inclusive education. These include:

**i) Financing**

There has been a decline in the allocation of resources to the Education and Sports Sector in terms of the overall budget share over the years. The sector, previously ranked second among the best-funded sectors has since declined to the fourth position according to the National Budget Framework Paper (NBFP) for FY2017/18. While in terms of absolute figures, the sector has increasingly been allocated more resources, its share as a percentage of the National Budget continues to shrink. In the past five years (FY 2012/13-2016/17) the percentages have fallen from 22.77% to 11.98% respectively.

Worse still, according to the NBFP FY 2017/18, the education budget has not only diminished more in terms of percentage share of the overall budget, but has also suffered cuts. For example, in terms of figures from FY 2016/17 there was a cut of 7%. To this effect, there was a decline in allocation and stagnation in funding to some programmes which limits interventions aimed at inclusive education. In FY 2016/17, the sector allocation to primary education declined by 3.73%, while secondary education declined by 2.7% in comparison to FY 2015/16.

The capitation per student under the USE programme has stagnated at Ug shs 47,000 per student over the last ten years, and the Development and Improvement of Special Needs Education Project's budget stagnated at Ug shs 2.06billion for FY 2016/17 and FY 2017/18. The special needs education recurrent programme's budget reduced from Ug shs 1.49billion in FY 2016/17, to Ug shs 1.43 billion in FY 2017/18.

ii) **Weak policy framework** which has limited access, particularly for disadvantaged children. For pre-primary education, the current policy delegates the responsibility of provision of pre-primary

education to the private sector which aims at making profit and there is no regulatory framework for the charges. Urban and richer community members are more able to access pre-school services as compared to the rural poor.

iii) **Limited in-service training;** many teachers are still not sufficiently able to assist learners in an inclusive school due to limited in-service training and supervision on how to develop a child-friendly class that can accommodate the diversity among learners. Since FY 2012/13, the budget for in-service training for all the Primary Teachers' Colleges (PTCs) was scrapped, and with the inadequate funds to PTCs, sometimes the training is not carried out.

iv) **High cost of schooling** is one of the major reasons for excluding children especially at secondary education level. Unlike the UPE programme where 75% of the primary schools are public. The capitation unit cost has remained constant at a meager Ug shs 41,000, and Ug shs 47,000 for public schools, for PPP schools at Ordinary level - Ug shs 90,000 and Ug shs 95,000 for Advanced level.

v) **Limited data on learners with disability for appropriate planning;** the data mostly captured for learners with disabilities refers to children with visual or hearing impairments. Data on learners with intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities or psychosocial disabilities is not often captured and this affects planning for their needs. In addition, disability data is mostly at the national level, the lack of which, especially at the district and local levels, compounds the difficulties in planning and targeting of services for those with disability.

vi) **Socio-cultural factors** that specifically undermine girl child and special needs children



enrolment. These include child marriages, early marriage, child labour and female genital mutilation, among others. In addition, lack of meals/feeding at schools has affected the attendance of pupils/students, and hence limited inclusion of learners. There has been a general disconnect between the Ministry of Education and the families of pupils on the point of feeding children at school.

Conclusion

Education for all in inclusive schools requires substantial changes if it is to be achieved and the whole system has to be adjusted to accommodate all learners. An inclusive education system requires sustained resources – financial and committed human resources.

The MoES is embracing the idea of inclusive education and a number of initiatives such as curriculum review have been done, however the sector needs to recognize the socio-cultural factors, and the inadequate resources given to the education sector in general and education of learners with various needs that exclude them from going to school.

Recommendations

i) The MoES should avail the implementation plan for the ECD policy to the relevant actors, and improve the existing infrastructure to ensure that a reception class is provided for general provision of ECD.

ii) The MoES should develop a National Teacher Policy to guide entry into the teaching profession, recruitment, training, continuous professional development and teacher code of conduct. In addition, the ministry should develop a support system which can provide continuous and competent guidance to teachers, learners and parents in order to ensure that quality and inclusive education takes place.

iii) The MoES should intensify a nationwide awareness creation campaign on the role of parents in educating their children - which include the responsibility of parents to feed their children as the policy demands in the Education Act 2008.

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