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Kampala, Uganda
Permanent Centre for Education

Roundtable discussion on quality education in developing countries.

JOHN MAKOHA:

There have been a lot of initiatives geared towards increasing access, making education more equitable, affordability and providing quality education in Uganda. Since independence a number of education sector review initiatives have been carried out to improve the quality of education. These have included among others Bunsen committee (1952), the Castle committee (1963). In the recent past the Education review commission (1987) led by Professor Senteza Kajubi(a re-known Uganda Scholar) that made a strong recommendation on the issue of Universal primary education (UPE) that has since been adopted as Government policy but more important was how he defended and defined his position “only when every child is enrolled at the right age and does not leave school without completing the full cycle of primary education would it be possible to ensure that all citizens have a basic education needed for a living a full life”

Based on these recommendations, Uganda has used various sectoral instruments in driving the education agenda. These include Education Sector Development Plan (ESIP, 1989-2003) which was succeeded by Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP, 2004-2015) that was aimed at consolidating the achievements of the ESIP, ensuring that the education system is relevant and children can participate in national development.

What has been Uganda’s main policy instrument in the eradication of poverty known as PEAP (Poverty Eradication Action Plan now replaced by the National Development Plan) recognised and included commitments of Education for All (EFA) as part of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by the year 2015.

But as a child growing up in the rural part of the country in Uganda and as a parent now, one of the biggest challenges at the heart of our education system is the comprehensive and holistic definition of the word education. What does that means to a child growing up and being educated? Education that ensures that “a child lives a full life” as indicated in the Senteza report? Although these policies have been successful in increasing access (increased enrolment from 2 million in 1997 to 7.5 million in 2002 even though this is still a fraction of the enormous need in Uganda) and mobilising resources, the issue of quality of education, the education that addresses the needs/desires of a child growing up remains our biggest challenge. This is without doubt shared by many parents going by the reports I read in our daily newspapers.

In the recent review initiatives with UNICEF in the education sector it was observed that the biggest constraint to quality education was teacher's absenteeism. There could be many reasons around absenteeism but it was clear that technical skills and well-built classrooms, improved emoluments are not enough to give a teacher a purpose or meaning to teach. Therefore, the issue of education and quality education needs to address challenges beyond increased access, equity, and increased resource mobilisation as many of the people who have attended the workshops at the Permanent Centre for Education have witnessed.

The Permanent Centre for Education is one place that has come to address this issue and provide a place where persons can be educated in the true meaning of education that we all aspire to have for ourselves and our children. For many that have attended these courses as students, teachers, health workers, etc they have expressed a desire for the continuity of this work even far beyond what was initially anticipated. Therefore new school will provide a demonstration centre where this beautiful work can be shared with students and young adults. The Minister of Education, who is herself a re-known educator and one of the longest serving Ministers through the various regimes in Uganda, recognised the new approach (the holistic approach to education) as expressed through the trainings of the PCE. She has had a very keen interest in the initiatives around the PCE and the new school.

DANSON SYLVESTER KAHYANA

STATE OF EDUCATION IN UGANDA

The Government of Uganda is committed to improving the quality of education in its schools as shown by the initiatives put in place in different areas like curriculum review, teacher training, better monitoring and assessment systems, efficient and effective management, and increased resource allocation. In the last twenty years (1990 to 2010), the government has embarked on ambitious projects geared at improving the quality of education. These include: review of the curriculum which led to, among other things, the introduction of a thematic curriculum in lower primary school; reforming and restructuring the Education Standards Agency into a fully fledged Directorate of Education Standards in the Ministry of Education and Sports; training more teachers; constructing more classrooms and laboratories; securing more furniture; and purchasing more training materials like textbooks and laboratory equipment. Some statistics suffice here: in 2004 Uganda had 126,000 trained primary school teachers as compared to 81,564 of 1996; in 2003, Uganda had 70,000 classrooms as compared to 45,000 in 1997; in 2003 the textbook-child ratio was 3:1 for Primary 3 and 4 as compared to 37:1 in 1993 (Source: The National Report on the Development of Education in Uganda at the beginning of the 21st Century, August 2004).

In these efforts, the Government of Uganda has collaborated with many agencies including non-governmental organizations like AVSI and the Permanent Centre for Education. Three activities are worth mentioning here that are of particular importance to AVSI and the PCE: in October 2008, the Department of Teacher Education, Ministry of

Education and Sports, AVSI and the PCE organized two refresher trainings for the principals and deputy principals of all the Primary Teachers' Colleges and National Teachers' Colleges in the country on the theme 'Education as Introduction to total reality'; in December 2009, another workshop on the theme 'Educate while working' was organized for the same people.

These workshops were crucial in helping the participants rediscover their calling. Evidence of this was the testimony of Mr. Arinaitwe John Willy, the Chairperson of the Principals Association of Uganda (PAU), at the closing of the December 2009 workshop. He observed that the workshop had helped him to identify gaps in his work: what he had not done well and what he had to improve on. "The three workshops have been an opportunity for a self-audit, a personal evaluation on how well I had fared as a principal tutor," he observed. "They helped me to understand the meaning of authority, not just as power but as the possibility to grow and cause growth. This has helped me to become not just a better principal, but also a better human being."

The event on 21st May 2010 is very important for the PCE. First, it will be a moment of reflection on the contribution AVSI and the PCE have made to quality education over the years, particularly in the last three years (2007 to 2010); secondly, it will be an opportunity to learn a lot from the experiences of the guest speakers – Hon. Mario Mauro (Member of the European Parliament), Hon. Geraldine Namirembe Bitamazire (Minister of Education and Sports, Republic of Uganda) and Mr. Augustine Omare-Okurut (Secretary General, Uganda National Commission for UNESCO), who have all been involved in quality education initiatives in their different capacities. Finally, it will affirm the importance of the PCE as a meeting point where different people share ideas on any topic of public concern.