

Citizens Action on Quality Public Education

Concerns and Issues on the Ministry of Education and Sports Ministerial Policy Statement

Financial Year 2013/2014

Presented to the Sectoral Committee on Education and Sports

Kampala, July 24th 2013.

Honourable Chair

Honourable members of this committee,

Religious leaders,

NGO and Teachers' Union members,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to express my gratitude for the invitation to this meeting. Honourable chair I wish to introduce the people I have come with. The people I have come with today are from four organisations - The Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC), the Uganda Muslim Education Association (UMEA), Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU) and with CSOs under their umbrella organisation Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda (FENU). For the past few years these organisations, building on their skills and historical contribution to the education sector growth and development in this country, joined hands in an effort to improve the quality of education in the country. They launched the Citizens' Action on Quality Public Education campaign. The campaign is aimed at advocating at all levels for improvement in all aspects of education in Uganda. As a campaign we believe neither government nor any other single handedly can successfully deliver on education services.

Last year on the 17th July 2012, we presented a petition to the Deputy Speaker of Parliament. The petition was a call on Parliament to among other things:

- i. Amend the Education Act, 2008, Act No. 13 to require parents and guardians make a mandatory financial contributions towards the provision of lunch for all children at while at school;
- ii. Increase the capitation grant to at least/minimum of UGX 22,000 per child per year in the UPE system;
- iii. Ensure decent classrooms are constructed as well as rehabilitating/reconstructing of classrooms and latrines;
- iv. Recruit more teachers;
- v. Ensure the operationalisation and full implementation of the Public Service Act, 2008, Act No. 10 of 2008 particularly the setting up of the Public Service Negotiation and Consultative Council for the negotiations of a collective bargaining agreement;
- vi. Increase of teachers' basic salary from the current entry point of UGX 273,000 to at least UGX 546,000 in the financial year 2012/13.

Honourable chair, we are grateful that this petition was received by this honourable committee, was considered and a report presented, considered and adopted by the Parliament on the 12th March 2013. Honourable chair we are disappointed to see that the ministerial statement FY 2013/14 none of the above issues for which we petitioned this Parliament has been addressed, save for the emergency classroom construction of a few classrooms.

The ministerial statement in its forward it states improving quality as the priority. The statement cites a decline in learning achievement from 57.6% in 2010 to 47.9% in 2011. (9.8 and 9.7) percentage point decline in numeracy and literacy respectively¹. This figure has further declined in 2012 according to NAPE report of 2012. We should note that when we talk about numeracy here we mean basics like measurement, subtraction and division. We are all aware that sciences are compulsory at secondary education level yet more than 100 government schools still do not have a single science teacher. These plus those schools without the requisite number of science teachers need at least 3,000 secondary school science teachers. Indeed the National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) 2012 found that only 17% of student in S.2 attained the minimum required competency levels in Biology. We appreciate the commitment for instructional materials procurement, but without a deliberate recruitment drive for secondary school science teachers we can only hope for no improvement.

Honourable chair and members, the issues of teacher management has been on the table for very long. Government, like any other employer should not expect workers to do their best if they are not motivated. Under normal circumstances, payments and rewards are the starting point. Unfortunately teachers today have two basic issues – the amount of pay (basic salary), and the management of that pay. Government promised to increase the teachers pay by 50% over 3 financial years. This promise has not been fulfilled and even the little that is being paid to teachers has been irregular for a long time. These two issues are very critical and the ministerial statement to ignore them is like pretending there is no problem. If government manages to suppress the teachers' strike, it won't manage to suppress a silent go-slow strike which may partly explain the falling standards. As a country, we can't hope to pull out of this without adequately addressing the teachers' legitimate concerns.

It is clear honourable chair and members that education resources at the school level fall far short of the actual cost of educating a child. Government budget allocations to the sector have been on the decline for the past 2 consecutive financial years. In our petition to Parliament we called upon Parliament to amend the Education Act in order to compel parents and guardians to make financial contributions that would help bridge the financial gap. Without bridging the financing gaps we don't see how else the education service delivery can be improved.

¹ Ministry of Education and Sports Ministerial Policy Statement FY 2013/14. Kampala June 2013. Page 6.

The ministerial statement has proposed increases in expenditures in skills development. This is very welcome. The down side to this are the cuts in almost all the feeder subsectors namely pre-primary and primary subsector and the secondary subsector². Budget cuts in these two subsectors where standards are in decline means the sector will have fewer people to develop in skills. Skills development requires that somebody has the basic knowledge in mathematics, literacy and basic science without which it would be very difficult to develop someone's skills. Honourable chair and members, these issues remain very critical and sit at the bottom of the sector. Any efforts to improve on the sector without addressing these concerns will bear little or no fruits. It is our sincere hope that this committee and Parliament will use its mandate to see to it that these issues are addressed in the short and medium term.

Thanks a lot.

² Ibid page 58.