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Roundtable discussion on quality education in developing countries.

There has 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 ore 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 it would 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 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 2million 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/meaning to teach. Therefore 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 of those places that come to address this issue and provide a place and persons that can be educated in the true meaning of education that we all aspire to have 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 were this beautiful work can be shared with students and young adults. The Minister of Education, who is herself a re-known educationist and one of the longest serving Minsters 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.