

The education sector citizens want

It's imperative that the appointment of new ministers responsible for Education get to be concerned about millions of children dropping out of school and those in school but not learning. Statistics indicate eight out of 10 children can't read and comprehend a simple sentence by age 10. Teacher attrition is at an upward trend. Integration of technology and IT is still a distant dream. Domestic education financing is still below the global benchmark as outlined in the Paris Declaration (2021) and Fortaleza Declaration (2024).

Therefore, as citizens, parents and learners alike are asking one fundamental question: What kind of education system do we truly want for our country in the next five years? The answer to this fundamental question is simple; an education system that works for all children, not only for the privileged few.

This article, therefore, is not merely a congratulatory note to the new leadership at the Ministry of Education and Sports. It is a collective reflection from citizens, practitioners, teachers, parents, learners, and communities that continue to believe that education remains Uganda's strongest pathway to equity, dignity, productivity, and national transformation across rural villages, urban slums, refugee settlements, and emerging towns.

Ugandans want an education system that prepares children for life, work, citizenship, and innovation. Yet many learners continue to experience overcrowded classrooms, inadequate learning materials, teacher absenteeism, high dropout rates, school-related violence, weak foundational literacy and numeracy, and growing inequality between rural and urban schools.

First, citizens want an education system that prioritises improvement of learning outcome. Too many children complete primary school without basic reading, writing, comprehension, and numeracy competencies. Foundational learning should no longer be treated as an early-grade issue alone but as a national emergency requiring urgent invest-

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ment in teacher support, mother tongue instruction, reading culture, and school leadership.

Secondly, Ugandans want teachers to be respected, motivated, and empowered. Teachers remain the backbone of the education system, yet many work under difficult conditions characterised by low and delayed salaries, limited professional development, overcrowded classrooms, and low morale.

Thirdly, citizens want equitable education financing. Education budgets must prioritise learning outcomes rather than administrative expansion alone. Rural schools, community schools, and hard-to-reach areas deserve targeted investments in infrastructure, staffing, digital access, sanitation, and learning materials.

Citizens want an education that responds to the realities of the 21st Century. Uganda's curriculum reforms must go beyond examinations and memorisation. With the journey to review and implement competence-based curriculum from Early Childhood Education to tertiary education, learners need critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, digital skills, climate awareness, entrepreneurship, civic responsibility, and problem-solving competencies that prepare them for an evolving world. Ugandans want safe and inclusive schools. Every child, regardless of gender, disability, refugee status, economic background, or location deserves dignity, protection, and equal opportunity in education. School environments must actively address

violence, discrimination, bullying, and exclusion. Inclusive education should move from policy rhetoric to practical implementation.

Importantly, citizens are asking government to strengthen accountability systems within education governance. Communities want transparency in school financing, monitoring of teacher attendance, effective inspection systems, and stronger engagement of parents and local leaders in school management. The new ministers also inherit a generation of young people facing rising unemployment, mental health challenges, and uncertainty about the future. Education must, therefore, reconnect with livelihoods, technical skills, agriculture, innovation, and industry.

Furthermore, the growing effects of climate change should compel Uganda to rethink education resilience. Floods, droughts, displacement, and food insecurity are already affecting learning continuity in many districts.

As citizens, we recognise that transforming education is neither easy nor immediate. However, leadership matters. Political will matters. Listening to citizens matters. The new ministers have an opportunity to rebuild trust, inspire reform, and place learners at the centre of decision-making. This will require courage to confront systemic inefficiencies, corruption, inequities, and policy implementation gaps that have persisted for years.

Citizens are asking the new education leadership to prioritise; learning outcomes over statistics; equity over privilege; accountability over rhetoric; inclusion over exclusion and long-term national transformation over short-term political interests. To claim economic justice and quality public services of our country, the Executive and Parliament must be committed to transforming education through prioritising long-term strategic investment in the generation that will build the future we want.

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