USE, UPE have revitalised

By Gloria Nakajubi

In 2007 when the Government made the announcement for Universal Secondary Education (USE), the administration at Smive Secondary School in Hoima Town was registering students for senior one. The entirely private run school then was to receive a set back of the year. "We had registered about 200 students for senior one, but only half of that turned up. All the rest joined public and the private schools that were to implement the programme," reveals one of the school directors, Joram Kunihira.

Two years later, the school had to apply for the same under the Public Private Partnership, an arrangement that is fortunately or unfortunately depending on which angle you perceive it, being rolled out.

Parents in this particular community according to Kunihira would struggle to pay off school fees even in the most average of schools. So USE was a long awaited miracle and parents welcomed it with open hands. His enrolment figures shot up in 2008 and the rate of absenteeism due to non-payment of school had drastically gone down.

The recent Makerere University graduation is ideally one that has let out the students that started senior one under USE programme. A number of USE schools have had their students join public universities especially under the district quota system.



First Lady and Minister for Education and Sports Mrs. Janet Museveni is at the helm of revitalising the education sector focusing on skills

First country

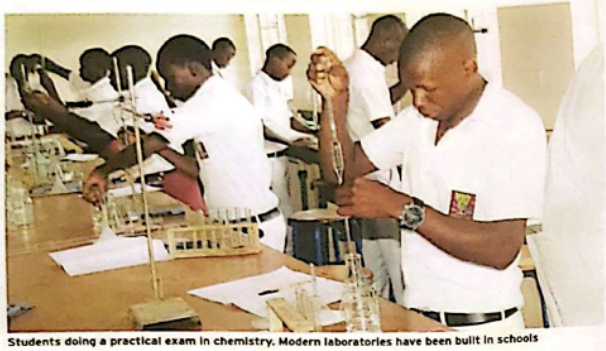
A story on the transformation of higher education in Uganda under the current administration that spans 30 years is incomplete without highlighting the immense benefits that have come with USE. This might have had its shortfalls; it still remains the biggest milestone in enabling an education to many in the country. The programme also made Uganda the first country on the continent to implement universal free secondary education.

From a total of 814,087 in 2006, the figure shot up to 954,328 students in secondary school across the country. Currently, there is a total of 1,457, 277 students of which, 952,539 are in USE schools. This is approximately 65% of the total enrolment.

Since 2007, government pays sh41,000 for each student under USE in government schools and sh47,000 for those in private secondary schools per term.

USE was implemented exactly 10 years after the introduction of Universal Primary Education(UPE). There was increasing demand for education post UPE but also it was becoming unjustifiable to bring learner through primary and then abort them half way into the system.

With a huge number of students, the demand for more schools become rather prominent. From a mere 506 secondary schools in 1986, there are currently 3,070 schools of which 1058 are government schools. This has also been augmented by the construction of seed secondary schools designed to benefit areas whose access to Universal Secondary Education was being limited by long distances. Such areas according to the Education Ministry records were also found to be dominated by poor peasants. Construction of the schools was implemented under three programmes which include; Presidential pledges, African Development Bank program III and Bank of Uganda.



Students doing a practical exam in chemistry. Modern laboratories have been built in schools

THE SKILLING UGANDA PROJECT IS AIMED AT CREATING EMPLOYABLE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES THAT ARE RELEVANT TO THE LABOUR MARKET.

The ripple effect

The growth at the lower level has had a huge impact on the growth of subsequent levels of education over the years. The mass enrollments in secondary education has impacted on the growth of both the Business, Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) and the university subsectors.

Once perceived as a place for failures, government has over the years gradually improved the face of BTVET institutions. This has seen enrolment more than double over the years. From 12,614 boys in 2000 to 29, 567 boys in 2016 while girls more than doubled from 1,463 in 2000 to 15,675 in 2016. This can also be attributed to the introduction of the Uganda Post Primary Education and Training programme that saw government undertake payment of fees for learners in the BTVET subsector.

There is currently a total of 144 public institutions, about 600 private training service providers and a host of apprenticeships and enterprise-based training programmes. The private sector accounts for over 81% of this sector.

In an earlier interview with *New Vision*, Bernard Okiror, a curriculum specialist at the National Curriculum Development Centre, who is also a product of the BTVET system highlighted the fact that this is the magic bullet out of the unemployment conundrum that the country continues to grapple with.

"I started earning one year into my training. By the time I finished, I had enough money to take care of myself and my parents. When I wanted to join the formal education path, I had enough money to pay for myself," said Okiror.

Skilling Uganda

The other landmark project has been Skilling Uganda that was launched in 2012. According to the programme paper, this is aimed at creating employable skills and competencies that are relevant to the labour market.

The target population for this programme is not only those in the formal education system but the informal sector as well.

"In essence, Uganda has adopted a Modular Approach to BTVET Delivery. The flexibility of such modular credit based courses in BTVET is likely to lead to skill upgrading, multi skilling, multi point entry and exit, vertical mobility and recognition of prior learning through certification of skills acquired informally," reads a report from the education ministry.

As the country grapples with the huge youth and graduate unemployment rates, the skilling programme has been seen as the desirable path to take so as to change the fortunes of many desperate Ugandans.

University and other tertiary institutions

The years 1987- 1999 saw considerable government effort to revitalise the education system. Government developed a comprehensive education policy framework before launching the much needed education programme. Accordingly, in July 1987 the Minister of Education set up an Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) chaired by Prof. Ssenteza Kajubi, whose mandate was to formulate new education policy. This culminated into the following:

- National Council for Higher Education was established with number of units. These include; A Joint Admission Board for universities, An examination board for institutions other than universities, A bureau of Academic and professional standards, A board for Human Resource Development.
- Established new tertiary level institutions to accommodate students completing Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education; enhance the capacity of existing higher education; increase manpower requirement of both public and private sectors; develop needs of the region and the principle of equity in providing facilitates of higher education; and Government's capacity to financial resources for the establishment and sustenance of the institution.
- Establishment of Mbarara University of Science and Technology with emphasis on applied science and medicine.
- It was recommended that two new universities should be established in northern region and the other in eastern region.
- The current Kyambogo University was made into a fully-fledged polytechnic. In addition, the only existing private university in 1989 was Islamic University of Uganda.

The liberalisation of higher education in 1993 played a key role in increasing access to higher education. This has seen the growth in the number of private universities from one in 1989 to over 30 private universities currently.

Affirmative action

During the 2006/07 Financial Year Government introduced the Quota system, admitting talented students, and disabled students. In addition, it continued with affirmative action of extra 1.5 points for every female student who qualifies to join university education. As result 1,000 students are admitted every academic year through affirmative actions.

The number of female student graduating from public universities is quite competitive with that of their male counterparts.

The loan scheme

For many parents and students, university education has always remained a dream that you only wake up from. However, the introduction of the student loan scheme in 2014 is turning these dreams into reality.

Uganda's first national education financing scheme implemented by the Higher Education Financing Board (HESB) had its first cohort of students complete their courses last year.

According to the Executive Director of the HESB, Michael Wanyama, the scheme has since grown from the initial intake of 1,200 to the current 5,149 beneficiaries at 18 universities from the initial 12. Interestingly, he says, some of the students who completed this year have already paid up their loan way before the recommended grace period of one year.

The scheme also expanded to include humanities for especially persons with disabilities to make it more inclusive.

Every year, the Board receives up to 5000 applications for just about 1000 slots. This is just about 30% of the need. Wanyama, however reveals that they are working to have this improved to at least 3000 in the coming year. Going forward, they intend to have continuing students considered as well.

"The idea is to have all the needy students access the fund under this scheme. That why we would like to expand it to reach more universities and more students in their different categories of need," he said.

However, despite the milestones achieved in the sector over the years, this still grapples with limited financing especially because of the ever increasing demand for education. Funding to education has stagnated at about 2.4% of the GDP below the recommended 4%.

The limited budgetary resources have led to a shortage of teachers and lack of proper housing for teachers especially in hard to reach areas, overcrowded classes and indeed declining performance in schools.

the education sector



The skilling Uganda project was introduced in 2014 to prepare Ugandans for the job market through training in various hands-on skills

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDENT LOAN SCHEME IN 2014 IS TURNING DREAMS OF FURTHER STUDIES INTO REALITY FOR MANY.



Michael Wanyama

