

By Maureen Nakatulle

Over the last four decades, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), under the leadership of President Yoweri Museveni, has registered notable progress in transforming Uganda's socio-economic and political landscape. Since 1986, Government Interventions have focused on expanding equitable access to services, promoting inclusive development, improving infrastructure and enhancing the welfare and participation of Ugandans across different sectors. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) was established as one of the institutional mechanisms to advance equality, fairness and social justice in the country.

Dr Nasser Mukwaya, the Secretary EOC says the Commission was established under Article 32 of the 1995 Constitution and operationalised through the EOC Act, Cap.7. He noted that it is mandated to eliminate discrimination and inequalities against individuals or groups of persons.

Dr Mukwaya said the EOC provides oversight to ensure Ministries, Departments, Agencies, Local Governments integrate gender and equity in planning and budgeting. He explained that this mandate is reinforced by the Public Finance Management Act, Cap. 171, which requires government entities to address the needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups in their plans and budgets. He added that the PFMA strengthened accountability and inclusive development, emphasising the need for continued support to enable the EOC fully implement its mandate.

According to him, these reforms have provided a stronger foundation for improved service delivery and inclusive national development, which is reflected in the achievements registered in key sectors such as health, education, political participation, infrastructure, energy, communication and economic empowerment among others.

#### ACHIEVEMENTS: HEALTH SECTOR

Dr Mukwaya says the NRM prioritised health as a key area of development, implementing various policies and programmes aimed at improving healthcare delivery. When the NRM government came to power, the President saw the need to improve the health sector. He noted that "a healthy, educated and united population is the most valuable resource for development". At that time, the health system was weak. Preventable diseases like measles, polio and tetanus were rampant and access to medical care was limited.

Through sustained investment in the Expanded Programme on Immunisation, Dr Mukwaya noted

# NRM'S BIG PUSH FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN UGANDA



Safia Jjuuko, (left) EOC's chairperson handing over a report on the compliance of the national budget and ministerial policy statements with certificate of gender and equity requirements for FY 2026/27



Dr Nasser Mukwaya, Secretary to the Commission



Susan Atukunda, principal research officer at EOC

that these diseases had largely been eliminated, while maternal, child and infant mortality rates have significantly declined, thereby promoting equal opportunities through improved access to quality healthcare for all and enhanced survival.

He further observed that Uganda's health system has undergone significant expansion since 1986, moving from reliance on Mulago National Referral Hospital alone to a more decentralised network of five specialised national referral hospitals (Butabika - mental health), Kawempe, Kiruddu, Uganda Heart Institute and Uganda Cancer Institute) which has reduced congestion at Mulago and improved equitable access to specialised care across the country. Similarly, regional referral hospitals increased from two to 17, extending specialised healthcare services to all regions and reducing urban-rural disparities. In addition, the number of general hospitals has grown from 49 in 1986 to 193 in 2025, while Health Centre IVs have reached 294 and 2,203 Health Centre IIIs ensuring that even remote communities' access essential health services. These developments, together with improvements in staffing

## ENROLMENT RATES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS ROSE TO 60% IN 2020, UP FROM JUST 20% IN THE 1990S

levels to 80% in 2022/23 and the expansion of medical training institutions, reflect Government's sustained commitment to ensuring equitable access to healthcare as a core pillar of equal opportunities in Uganda.

#### EDUCATION SECTOR

No sector better illustrates inclusion than the education sector. Always echoing his mantra, "Education is a great equaliser," Dr Mukwaya says President Museveni has ensured every child/youth has access to free education through UPE, launched in 1997, and USE, introduced in 2007, which have expanded access to learning, especially for girls and children from low-income households, thereby advancing equal

opportunities in education. As a result, literacy rates have increased, reflecting steady progress in promoting inclusion. The number of higher education institutions has also grown beyond Makerere University, which commenced in 1922, to include Mbarara, Kyambogo, Gulu, Lira, Soroti, Kabale, Bunyoro, Muni and Busitema University, broadening access to tertiary education. To further promote equal opportunities, scholarships and the University Loan Scheme have been introduced to support marginalised students. Special Needs Education has also been prioritised, with government facilitating increased access for learners with disabilities; according to UBOS 2020 report, enrolment of children with special needs in primary schools rose to 60% in 2020 from 20% in the 1990s, highlighting progress in inclusive education.

#### POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Since 1986, under, Uganda has pursued inclusive governance through both the Movement System (1986-2005) and multi-party democracy (2005 to date). There has been a significant increase in the number of women appointed to Cabinet positions, from only 10 (14.7%) in 2006 to 38 (45.8%) in 2021/2025 reflecting the government's commitment to promoting equal opportunities and affirmative action. Women representation in parliament increased from 2 women in 1962 to 188 MPs in 2021/2025 which has promoted women empowerment. He further mentioned that the 1995 Constitution provides for representation for youth, older persons, Persons with Disabilities, army and workers, in Parliament which has facilitated effective

participation of marginalised groups in the decision making processes. The local governments Act, 1997 has also provided for representation of special interest groups in all local councils to ensure that the concerns of youth, women, persons with disabilities, older persons and workers are mainstreamed in the planning process. This remarkable progress is a direct result of the President's commitment to empowerment of the marginalised groups and ensuring their active participation in the governance process.

#### ROAD NETWORK EXPANSION

At independence in 1962, Uganda had only 844 km of tarmac roads, Susan Atukunda, Principal Research Officer at EOC, revealed. By the end of FY 2020/21, the paved road network had expanded to 5,305 km, according to the Ministry of Works and Transport. This growth has been reflected in major road developments across all regions, which expansion represents a significant milestone in advancing equal opportunities. By improving connectivity across all regions, the road infrastructure has reduced spatial disparities and promoted balanced access to services and economic opportunities, thereby strengthening inclusive national development.

Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities; In addition, in the 1980s, Uganda had minimal infrastructure to support persons with disabilities, with little to no consideration for accessible roads or public spaces. However, under the NRM government, Atukunda says there are now marked parking spaces for persons with disabilities, ramps and lifts in public buildings, etc.

#### ACCESS TO ENERGY

In the energy sector, Atukunda says the NRM government has made significant efforts to increase urban and rural electrification, which is essential for improving the quality of life and fostering economic opportunities. In 1986, Uganda's electricity generation capacity was about 60MW, primarily from Nalubaale Power Station. However, by 2025, Uganda had made significant progress in expanding its electricity generation capacity, reaching 2,058 MW, with contributions from hydropower, thermal power, and solar energy (MEMD, 2025). She explained that the expansion of electricity generation and distribution has strengthened equitable access to energy across