



Here is how we can fix our education and the country

BENJAMIN RUKWENGYE > EDUCATION

If you did your Primary Leaving Exams in a village school, wouldn't it be interesting to investigate how many children have gone on to get First Grades or even actually joined university since you left?

In about two weeks, the 20th group of pupils under the Universal Primary Education programme will sit their national Primary Leaving Exams. All their seven years of labour will come down to two days.

According to the national examinations body, the Uganda National Examinations Board, slightly more than 600,000 pupils will take the exam.

But considering that seven out of every 10 (70 per cent) children drop out of school before completing Primary Seven, we could (and should) have had about two million candidates this year. So where are the other children? What is their fate?

But let us look at the lucky 30 per cent, who somehow managed to stay in the system. The exam will require that they reproduce the given content, in the exact form it was given.

One in every three of these will also not make it to secondary school. It is 2017 and we still teach to memorise; not to analyse, critique and apply.

Those that drop out are mostly the rural schooled, urban poor and girls. The reasons are too many to compress in one article, but the statistics are saddening; and the

numerous reports by UWEZO, the World Bank and even the Ministry of Education, are damning for pupils, teachers, the ministry and the country as whole.

What is clear - and has been so for a while now - is that we are doing this education thing the wrong way. Children are not learning.

They cannot read, write or count. They cannot express themselves, analyse or apply knowledge. Their teachers are not much better. Schools do not have teaching materials, many are in disrepair and parents are disempowered.

What is not clear is why we are not changing. Even worse, if you consider the rhetoric about our middle income ambitions. We are approaching 21st Century problems with a 19th Century education system - and we shall not win.

We can learn a thing or two from what some of our neighbours and others across the seas are doing to fix education - and in effect - fix the country.

Rwanda's investment in ICT-For-Education, Kenya's piloting a high school curriculum focused on learner competencies, and the more advanced systems like Finland and South Korea, only the best and brightest become teachers. Challenges abound, but they are moving in the right direction. Why can't we emulate them?

According to the Uganda Bu-

Going forward. Visit your local school during Christmas festive season (or whenever you have the chance) and speak to a teacher. It will give you more context. Put your leaders (local and national) on the spot. Ask questions about budget allocations and investment, accountability, monitoring, implementation, plans, innovations. Just keep asking. Leaders respond to pressure.

reau of Statistics, ten million people (up from six million in 2012) are now living in poverty. This means there are more (potentially) diseased, hungry and uneducated people. Children are the first victims of any catastrophe and this inability to educate well is just that. It means we cannot innovate and invent, produce and create markets to compete, treat, or generally improve the standards of life because you need good education for that.

Education is everything. I have a few suggestions to make. Working as individuals and in groups, we can ensure that by this time next year, we will look back and be happy that we did something to improve

the situation. Get involved. Don't sit idly. Don't be oblivious. You can do something.

Mentor a child and speak to their dreams and aspirations. It starts with the mindset. Help to learn and get better. Commit one hour a week to this - phone call, visit, anything.

Sponsor a child and make sure that they do not drop out of school. Sometimes, it is simple things such as a dozen of books, lunch, a uniform fees, etc, - all costing less than Shs10,000.

Sponsor a teacher to get additional training. You will be amazed at how little it costs and the world of a difference a better teacher can make.

Join an education fellowship/volunteer programme and commit time to their work. Your skills and experience are what the children will need to have an edge.

Donate towards education causes. Nothing is too little to make a difference.

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Support and get involved in the affairs of your former or village school in some way.

Do something. Doing nothing is part of the problem.

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