



**Baby Kaguta dies** A one-month-old baby named after President Museveni's father Amos Kaguta passed on Rubaga Hospital in



**Road accident** The Third Deputy Prime Minister and minister for East African Affairs, Hajji Kirunda Kivejinja was on Tuesday night involved in a car accident.



**Police raid NGO** Police on Thursday besieged the headquarters of Action Aid Uganda, in Kampala, where they conducted a cordon and search operation.



**SOLOMON SERWANJJA** > EDUCATION

# Public-private partnership in education; lessons for Uganda

The recent report from UWEZO 'Are our Children Learning' showed that while some progress is being made in Uganda, there is still a lot more to be done when it comes to improving education in the country. New approaches need to be explored and if other African nations are succeeding in improving learning, then the government should see what lessons can be learnt and imported to Uganda. There is no doubt that the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997 has had a tremendous achievement of increasing school enrolment. However, the quality of education and learning in many UPE schools remains wanting.

According to the annual UWEZO report, in 2016, only three out of 10 pupils between Primary Three and Primary Seven could read an English story and do the maths meant for Primary Two children. This is a very worrying statistic for those concerned with education in Uganda and the future of her children.

In a bid to improve the quality of education, the government in 2007 introduced Public-Private Partnership (PPP) at secondary level with the introduction of Universal Secondary Education. However, 10 years later, the jury on whether

PPP has in fact been effective in improving secondary education is still out. In fact, much of the available research suggests that it hasn't. The success in PPP schools has often been compromised due to insufficient funding, widespread shortage of resources, including but not restricted to learning materials, basic infrastructure, and qualified teachers. The challenges, and some might say failures of the secondary reform, mean that no Public Private Partnerships have been explored at primary level.

That is why the government should be reviewing the results that have just emerged from Africa's most innovative education public-private partnership (PPP) in Liberia. Liberia has many challenges similar to Uganda such as Ebola outbreak, low literacy rates and communities living in extreme poverty, among others. However, in just one year, the Liberian PPP has produced impressive results. Why has it succeeded where a decade of Public-Private Partnerships secondary education in Uganda has not? What has Liberia done differently?

In Liberia, the government decided that it needed to do something radical to improve the learning outcomes of her children. So it

**Way forward. Shouldn't the Ministry of Education and Sports and by extension the government generally be exploring a partnership such as the one in Liberia?**

designed a programme called Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL), which saw the government partnering with the private sector to run public schools. The schools used teachers on the government payroll and taught the Liberian curriculum. The Ministry of Education in Liberia contributed \$50 per pupil to some not all partners, and the rest was raised by philanthropy and donor investment. This was new money that went directly into the Liberian education system. This approach meant that government didn't have to divert funds from other important programmes to finance education. The results have been amazing. Pupils in 95 Liberian public primary schools have seen an increase in learning by 60 per cent in just one year. One of the partners that was used by the Liberian government was Bridge International Academies. Bridge also runs 63 schools in Uganda serving 14,000 Ugandan

children. Although in Uganda they are working closely with the government to finalise the licensing process, Uganda has not yet explored the kind of innovative primary education Public-Private Partnership being operated in Liberia. Shouldn't the Ministry of Education and Sports and the government generally be exploring a partnership such as the one in Liberia?

The Liberian programme results come from an independent report conducted by the Centre for Global Development and Innovations for Poverty Action that spent a year studying data in the country. The report showed that pupils in Bridge-run Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) public schools learn twice as fast as their peers in traditional public schools, receiving the equivalent of a full year of additional schooling. Of course the education programme designed by the Ministry of Education in Liberia is planned to disrupt the status quo in classrooms by lengthening the school day; reducing class size; holding teachers accountable and tackling teacher literacy. Their policies were focused on improving student performance. However, the new report proves that a government intervention with these core principles can deliver real change. It makes sense that children learn better in classrooms that are not bursting at the seams. It also makes sense that a teacher who can read and write, and who is present in class, can deliver better results.

**Solomon Serwanjja is a journalist and communication specialist. soloforgod1@gmail.com**