



KATHERINE NABUZALE > EDUCATION

Education crisis: Challenge to rural development

The discrepancies in child education between urban and rural areas are quite huge with rural children experiencing a serious lack of a solid foundational education compared to their urban counterparts.

Education for rural people, with a focus on children, is crucial to achieving both an inclusive and equitable education for all and the sustainable development goals of eradicating extreme poverty, hunger, and promoting gender equity, among others, factors that could accelerate realisation of the middle-income status for all Ugandans. Increased access to quality education among the rural poor is paramount to ending poverty, food insecurity and promoting uniform as well as sustainable development across the country.

The vast majority of our population is rural, trapping the children in precarious situations. Due to rampant poverty, access to fundamental needs such as quality education, good health care and proper nutrition are hardly satisfied.

The gender gap inequality is more pronounced in rural areas since the ratio of girls to boys in school, as well as that of adult women to men literacy is much lower in rural than urban areas. These inequities in education directly threaten rural development, and consequently, inclusive equitable development of the country.

Notably, the lack of proper education and learning opportunities is both a cause and an effect of rural poverty. This is why quality education is imperative as every child matters and deserves equal opportunity to a good and

sound education. Unfortunately, rural children have fewer prospects to an education that could help secure their future and prepare them to ably compete for a decent living in today's global world. Therefore, special effort must be made towards promoting rural development and fostering better living conditions for the rural poor. Despite efforts by the government to increase the number of school going children through the provision of free education for all, the rate of attainment of an education for personal empowerment remains dismally low in rural areas.

Access to a decent education for all children is the first step towards availing a genuinely equal opportunity for inclusive empowerment of all children. Taking determined steps to resolve the factors that hinder access to quality education for all will be critical in unlocking the potential and genius of so many young and talented minds locked away in rural areas.

In realisation of this, refocusing several national initiatives, for example through the enactment of policies purposefully targeting improvement of education and training of rural populations, strengthening existing policies, rigorous monitoring and coordination of the effectiveness of policy implementation, and continuous improvement of capacities, human, institutional and infrastructural, as well as more investment in the education sector, are all necessary.

Integration of education and training strategies within all aspects of sustainable rural de-



Way forward. Access to a decent education for all children is the first step towards availing a genuinely equal opportunity for inclusive empowerment of all children.

velopment projects, through multi-sector and interdisciplinary plans of action: This means creating new partnerships between people working in agriculture and rural development with those working in education. This initiative should involve an inter-agency approach to facilitate targets and coordinated actions for education in rural areas. It is within this framework that all stakeholders should be brought on board for the success of this cause.

Promotion of adult education: As many of the rural parents have never been to school or are early drop outs, they may not be necessarily the best guides and role models for their children. Mothers should especially be facilitated in adult education and empowering programmes

Allocation of special funds for rural schools: This may include consideration of incentives to parents of school-going children for the loss of income from child-labor, free supply of scholastic materials, mid-day meals to all children, scholarships for best performing students, incentives for rural teachers and those working in hard to reach areas.

Heavy concentration on rural female literacy/education, since well-informed mothers are better prepared to properly guide their children. Vocational Education: The large and

bulging section of rural school drop-outs needs to be covered under the vocational education programs, which directly benefit and improve rural livelihoods. The type of vocational training may relate to agriculture and allied occupations, since this is the economic backbone of most rural communities.

Mobile science laboratories and model learning centres: will go a long way in shaping careers and the future of rural children whose chances of accessing a standard laboratory or even perform an experiment are often time a far dream. The basic objective behind mobile science labs is to make education more fun and engaging for children by making their minds more receptive, and instilling inquisitiveness. The whole process is interactive in nature with a stimulating hands-on experience for children thus, replacing boring lecture-style classroom lessons with model learning centers, where children learn skills and boost their creativity.

The enormity of the problem, however, calls for multifaceted innovative approaches and concerted efforts. The goal for all inclusive empowerment should be government's primary concern and responsibility.

It should, however, be noted that for effectiveness, the policies and strategies addressing the education needs of rural people should accommodate diversity, for example, agro-ecological, geographical as well as socio economical and cultural diversity, through a range of flexible modalities.

These may include distance learning, non-formal educational programmes, school feeding programmes, strengthening early childhood care and education, establishing feeder schools and clusters, promoting multi-grade classrooms, reforming teacher recruitment and deployment policies and promoting vocational education for rural development and sustainable livelihoods.

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