



## **Key Bottlenecks to Gender Mainstreaming in the Education Sector**

### **Overview**

Provision of equal opportunities to education for boys and girls is a right as enshrined in the Constitution of Uganda (Article 30 and 34(2)). Education is one of the critical sectors for reducing gender inequality. Providing women and girls with equal access to education promotes sustainable economies and benefits societies and humanity at large.

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Development Partners have put in place initiatives/interventions and policies that emphasize equal opportunities for both boys and girls. These include Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE); Universal Post O-level Education and Training (UPOLET), and sensitization campaigns to support education for girls. Gender inequality in education however remains a challenge.

This briefing paper explores the persistent challenges that limit the gender mainstreaming efforts. This is based on the field findings for the Gender and Equity Performance Report for Financial Year (FY) 2018/19 and secondary data from the MoES Gender Unit.

### **Interventions towards Gender Mainstreaming**

There are various interventions to address gender inequalities in the Education Sector. Gender mainstreaming in the sector is guided by the Gender in Education Policy, and some institutions have customized policies. For instance, Public Universities which benefited from the African Development Bank (ADB) Higher Education Science and Technology (HEST) project had a component on developing Gender Policies. As a result of this support since FY 2018/19, the universities have promoted a favorable inclusive

### **Key Issues**

1. Poor implementation of the Gender Policy.
2. Low funding towards gender mainstreaming especially in the Local Governments (LGs).
3. Limited capacity of officers to carry out gender mainstreaming.
4. There are still persistent negative attitudes towards Girl Child Education.
5. Poor coordination between the existing implementers.

environment; such as instituting an admission target of 50/50 for males and females, and conducting sensitization campaigns. In addition, incinerators in the campuses of Busitema University, and a girls' hostel at the Nagongera campus were constructed, while a Gender Coordination Unit at Gulu University was created.

A total of 80 districts were trained in gender mainstreaming by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and therefore there is a fair appreciation of gender. Across the districts, where construction of latrines for primary and secondary schools is being undertaken, provision is made for an incinerator and separate stances for boys and girls. Under the Conditional Grant, some schools plan for emergency sanitary towels.

The Districts Service Commissions have tried to ensure that there are female teachers who can act as senior women teachers. Lira, Oyam, and Iganga districts reported to have community dialogues to sensitize the parents that all children regardless of sex are equal. Some Development Partners are supporting the construction of latrines, having



community engagements to discourage child dropouts and early marriages. These interventions have promoted the retention of girls in school. Despite several interventions, gender inequality in education is still a challenge.

### Persistent Challenges to Gender Mainstreaming

**1. Low funding:** The MoES made some efforts in Gender Equity Budgeting (GEB) in accordance with the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA), 2015. The approved budget for FY 2018/19 inclusive of external financing was Ug shs 180.71bn, of which Ug shs 176.9bn (98%) was released and expended by 30th June 2019. The gender and equity budget allocation in relation to the sector budget was 3%.

The funding mechanism however is not gender responsive at the Local Government (LG) level where most interventions are expected to be implemented. The strategy is therefore not implemented in a holistic manner.

*“At the Local Government, there are hardly any funds for girls’ education interventions,” Senior Officer, Gender Unit-MoES.*

The few districts that had targeted gender interventions were funded by donors. *“If it were not for donor support, you would hardly see any serious improvement,” DEO - Iganga District.*

#### ***Iganga District Interventions***

*Iganga District reported that with support from UNICEF, they were implementing a strategy to enhance pupil retention, end child marriages and child pregnancy through dialogues with the parents, teachers and children, and through radio talk shows. As a result, some children that were out of school had returned; and there were reduced incidences of sexual violence. This however is done in 10 out of 12 sub-counties.*

Institutions were not able to clearly delineate budgets towards mainstreaming gender. The Community Development Officer (CDO) Kitgum District highlighted that Community Development

Services Department which is supposed to implement gender interventions, in addition to supporting the youths, and other departments, had the smallest budget allocation.

The National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE 2014-19) had limited coverage of interventions due to resource constraints. This affected full implementation of the strategy. The MoES and other actors concentrated on project or programme areas largely supported by Development Partners. This was also reflected at the district level where interventions were limited to certain sub-counties and institutions of learning. The demand for services was greater than the available funding. This raises the issues of sustainability of interventions which MoES and partners should consider in future programming.

**2. Limited capacity to carry out gender mainstreaming:** Whereas efforts are being undertaken by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) to build the capacity of the LG staff, challenges of capacity still remain. Staff in the Education Department at the district level still lack specialized training.

The Community Development Officer in Iganga District who is charged with mainstreaming gender is specialized in Public Administration and had no relevant training in gender. It was also highlighted that the work of a CDO is enormous, since they also support youths and all other departments.

*“There is a knowledge gap. People do not understand gender,” (Acting DEO-Kitgum District).*

At the school level, it was also noted across districts that there were less female teachers than their male counterparts. This limited counseling and presence of role models that girls could look up to.

**3. Low prioritization of gender:** As much as the policies are in place, there is limited commitment to their implementation. For instance, when trainings are organized, Heads of Departments (HoDs) delegate junior staff to attend. In Iganga District, a HoD delegated an Office Attendant. *“Gender is not taken seriously because it is perceived as a women*



thing,” Officer - Iganga District. Whereas Kitgum District had a Gender Focal Person, there was no clear implementation framework for use. In the Gender Responsive Budgeting training that took place in Mityana, District in June 2019 organized by FOWODE, out of the 20 expected participants, only a third attended, while others prioritized other parallel meetings.

#### **4. Persistent negative attitude towards Girl Child Education:**

In a study by MoES (2016), 43% of girls stated that they left school because their parents had stopped paying school fees for them; 22% left because of pregnancy, with a higher proportion of drop outs in rural areas than in urban areas (24% vs 17% respectively). Furthermore, 66% of the girls cited doing substantial household chores, which affected regular school attendance in the year they dropped out of school. The higher domestic burden for girls reflects the belief and expectation that girls should be prepared in anticipation of their reproductive and care roles as good wives.

The MoES stated that awareness of laws, policies and guidelines to ensure that girls are in school was widespread in the districts and institutions. Similarly, referral systems were established for reporting abuse in various institutions. Proper functionality of the referral system however was still hampered by deeply rooted attitudes among parents and care givers, teachers, service providers and community members. Parents continue to force their girls out of school and lure them into marriage secretly, negotiate cases of defilement outside of the court system and child labour is rampant in homes.

In Oyam District, the police track parents who marry off their girls at a young age. The parents have now changed the strategy and are marrying off their girls in the market. They stage a sale of animals to the girls’ parents who in turn pretend to buy.

In Karamoja region, when a girl is considered mature for sex, the parents encourage them to find husbands in order to get cows in return. In Nakapiripirit and Amudat districts, education is

perceived as a secondary alternative and parents majorly groomed girls to master household chores and for marriage. In a Focus Group Discussion in Nabokotom Primary School, Amudat District, it was noted that a 12-year-old girl was forced into marriage with a 65-year-old man.

Consequently, transition to secondary schools by the girls has consistently been lower than the boys. Girls’ enrolment in Business, Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTNET) institutions reduced, and female enrolment to higher education stagnated (MoES Report, 2019).

**5. Sexual harassment still persists:** A survey conducted by UBOS in 2018 indicated that among 13-17-year-old Ugandans, one in four girls and one in ten boys reported sexual violence in the past year. For the girls, this resulted into pregnancy and child/early marriage. The MoES Gender Unit reported a case of sexual harassment in Kisozi Primary School, Gomba District; indicating that sexual abuse is still a challenge even in schools.

**6. Poorly coordinated interventions:** The MoES Gender Unit indicated that there were multiple non-state actors engaged in interventions that promote girls’ education but each working independently due to the gaps at the districts in coordinating the relevant departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community based organisations (CBOs) operating at district level. In Iganga District, UNICEF is supporting a strategy to end child marriages. Oyam District partnered with World Vision to construct latrines for girls and is implementing projects to retain girls in school. These interventions however are in a few districts and are not coordinated by MoES.

An assessment of the National Strategy for Girls Education (2014-2019) indicated that research on girls’ education was undertaken by public and non-state actors. Information obtained from such research however was not fully shared among the actors.



**7. Rampant poverty:** The MoES Gender Unit noted that in spite of the free education at primary and secondary schools, girls still drop out of school due to lack of sanitary towels; some are engaged in economic activities to generate income for the family; while others are married off to receive dowry.

### Conclusion

Tremendous efforts have been made towards gender mainstreaming in the education sector. The Gender Policy is in place to provide a framework for mainstreaming gender, as well as some visible efforts to ensure education for all. The Policy however, has only been translated into a few actionable interventions.

Gender mainstreaming is not well institutionalized across the sector. There is low prioritization of gender mainstreaming; inadequate funding, and low understanding of gender by institutions. There is therefore need to unpack gender mainstreaming for people to understand. There are persistent negative attitudes towards girl child education, and poor coordination by the public and non-state actors.

### Recommendations

1. There should be massive capacity building in gender mainstreaming for the sector staff to raise a critical mass of individuals with the necessary skills.
2. The MoES should support the integration of gender mainstreaming into the teacher training curriculum. Furthermore, all the teachers should be trained in gender mainstreaming.
3. The MoES should conduct dialogues with faith based institutions (churches, mosques), the politicians, and the district technocrats to step up sensitization on the importance of girl child education.
4. The MoES Gender Unit should enhance/continue gender awareness creation concerning girls among the public through use of mass media, including simplified information education and

communication (IEC) materials in all parts of the country.

5. The MoES should build partnerships and networks with stakeholders engaged in gender mainstreaming efforts.
6. The MoES should work with cultural institutions to address factors that create barriers to girls' education such as child marriage, household chores, and discrimination
7. The sector should implement the strategy for elimination of violence in schools.

### References

1. Gender and Equity Performance Report 2018/19 (MFPED 2019)
2. Karamoja Education Gender Audit Report (MoES, 2015)
3. Linkages between Pregnancy and School dropout in Uganda (MoES 2016)
4. The Violence Against Children Survey (UBOS, 2018)
5. Annual Performance Report (Gender Unit 2018/19)

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