



## Ensuring equitable access to education for children with special needs: What were the achievements in FY 2018/19?

### Overview

In order to achieve equitable access to relevant and quality education and training over the Second National Development Plan (NDP II) period, the Education and Sports Sector planned to develop and implement programmes targeted to disadvantaged communities, marginalized groups, and students with special learning needs.

The sector committed to: (i) Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations; and (ii) Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive; and (iii) Provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

This was to be achieved through a number of interventions including among others; Universal Primary Education, Universal Secondary Education, Special Needs Education (SNE), and provision of specific education facilities that are gender and disability sensitive.

This briefing paper reviews interventions undertaken by the government during FY 2018/19 to promote equitable access to education for learners with special needs. The review covers the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It also highlights challenges and gives policy recommendations.

### Introduction

The Government of Uganda (GoU) has designed and put in place a number of policies, reforms, institutional and legal frameworks for children with special needs. These include: The Constitution of

### Key Issues

1. The Special Needs Education Programme has improved the learning environment for special needs children and teachers through provision of instructional materials, subvention grant and provision of loans to SNE students in higher education.
2. The current rate of Ug shs 20,000 per SNE student per year is inadequate to deliver special needs educational essentials.
3. There are very few SNE teachers and their schools are largely under staffed.
4. There is low prioritization of SNE as evidenced in the low percentage of the budget allocation.

Uganda (1995), the Uganda National Institute of Special Education Act, 1995 which instituted Special Needs Education (SNE), and the Persons with Disability Act (2006), to ensure children with disabilities can access education. However, despite the legal framework, the goal of inclusive and quality education for all is yet to be realised.

### Planned Interventions

#### 1. Procurement of specialized equipment

During the period under review, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) planned to procure 350 cartons of braille paper; 250 sign language dictionaries, five braille embossers and computers, and 28 Perkin braille machines.

By the end of the FY, 350 cartoons of braille paper and 250 sign language dictionaries were procured and distributed

to 50 schools.<sup>1</sup> The balance of Ug shs 138million for braille paper procured in FY 2017/18 was also cleared. However, the contract for the Perkin braille machines was signed late and no deliveries were made to the schools. Additionally, due to inadequate funds, the five braille embossers and five embossing papers were not procured.

Six SNE schools were visited in August 2019, and these confirmed receipt of items from the MoES. In Masindi School for the Handicapped, the head master confirmed receipt of 5 cartons of braille papers, one eraser and a dust cover, 3 bags of universal braille kits and 10 sign language dictionaries from the MoES.

*“The sign language dictionaries aid the teachers in all classes from P1 to P. They are our reference books when we are doing lesson preparations. They are so helpful because many times we do not know all the signs,”- Teacher at Hassan Tourabi Education Centre, Wakiso District*

In some institutions, the beneficiaries were concerned about the size of braille paper procured. In Bishop Wills Demonstration School-Iganga, the braille paper received was of good quality, however the size was too small. The children were inconvenienced with adjusting the margins of the Perkins braille machine.

Under the **Uganda Teacher and School Effectiveness Project (UTSEP)**, the sector planned to distribute hearing aids to children with hearing impairments.

A total 1,554 (818 males and 736 females) pupils from 79 districts (across all regions) were fitted with hearing aids. This exceeded the initial planned target of reaching 1,000 pupils.

Six primary schools (Mpenja Church of Uganda in Gomba District, Ngomanene

P/S in Gomba District, Bushenyi P/S Centre for the Disabled in Bushenyi, Masindi School for the Handicapped in Masindi District, Entebbe Children Welfare P/S in Wakiso District, and Mulago School for the Deaf in Kampala City) were visited to verify receipt of the hearing aids.

It was confirmed that pupils with hearing impairments in these schools received the hearing aids.



**Pupils being fitted with hearing aids at Mulago School for the Deaf under the UTSEP**

Teachers testified that the intervention improved the class learning environment as pupils became more engaged in classroom activities. There was an increased level of integration among the deaf and other pupils/students. As a result, there was a marked improvement in hearing abilities and communication capabilities. Some children who had never talked before, started talking.

*“The school has 74 boys and 86 girls and all of them got these hearing aids. They like the gadgets much as we use sign language here. Some of them show that they can hear the loud noises. Many of them had never heard noise,” Teacher at Mulago School for the Deaf.*

As a sustainability measure for the intervention, four teachers were sent to Zambia for a one-year training on how to assess children and fit hearing aids. The

<sup>1</sup> Some of these schools are integrated schools, others special schools, while others are normal schools.



objective of these teachers' training was that they become master trainers. Additionally, 24 teachers were also trained within the country to become trainers of trainers.

## **2. Provision of subvention grant**

This grant supports schools that have units for special needs to purchase instructional materials. Currently the MoES allocates Ug shs 20,000 per child with a disability, per year.

In FY 2018/19, the sector planned to disburse subvention grants amounting to Ug shs 643,973,000 to 100 special schools/units.

By end of the FY, the MoES had transferred subvention grants amounting to Ug shs 540,045,524 to a total of 100 special schools/units supporting 5,000 learners with special needs.

Several SNE schools confirmed receipt of the subvention grant from the MoES. Some of these included: Hassan Tourabi Education Centre (Wakiso), Bushenyi P/S Centre for the Disabled, Masindi School for the Handicapped, Bishop Wills Demonstration School-Iganga. Buckley High School-Iganga and Mulago School for the Deaf. These schools used the grant to buy instructional materials such as manilas, makers, food stuffs, text books, and letters of the alphabet, flash discs, and stickers.

Other schools used the grant to procure first aid kits and essential drugs, and food items for SNE pupils while at school. In Masindi School for the Handicapped, the head teacher reported that she also used the subvention grant to procure medicine for SNE pupils suffering from dyslexic and autism.

Despite many schools confirming receipt and being able to use the funds to address some of their needs, it was noted the

allocations per school were inadequate and head teachers struggle to provide all the necessities required.

## **3. Training of SNE teachers in specialized skills**

The expected output of the intervention was 750 teachers trained in functional assessment and specialized skills.

In FY 2018/19, the sector trained a total of 435 (317 females, and 118 males) tutors and Centre Coordinating Tutors from 5 core Primary Teachers Colleges (PTCs) Bushenyi Core Primary Teachers' College (CPTC), Bulera CPTC, Nakaseke CPTC, Gulu CPTC and Nyondo CPTC.

A total of 108 tutors from PTCs were trained in the identification of learners with special needs and inclusive education in schools. In addition, a total of 101 officials (3 male Chief Administrative Officers, 98 DEO/DIS (74 males and 24 females) from districts with PTCs were oriented on special needs and inclusive education planning and budgeting processes. Also 69 staff for Mbale and Wakiso schools of the deaf were trained in sign language.

Due to inadequate funding however, recruitment of five specialized instructors and training of 750 teachers in functional assessment was not done

## **4. Construction of learning facilities**

At Mbale School for the Deaf, the construction of the dormitory block was completed and the 5 stance VIP latrine was completed. Some beds for the dormitory and 150 arm chairs for the classrooms were procured.

A contractor was procured for the construction of two dormitories, two classrooms and a teacher's house at Wakiso School for the Deaf.



## **5. Provision of loans to SNE students to pursue higher education**

In order to increase access to higher education for students with special needs, the Higher Education Students Financing Board provided them with loans. Applications were received and assessed using a score card.

As a form of affirmative action for SNE students, a proven disability earns an applicant 6 more points on the score card, while proven disability of either parents earns an applicant 3 more points for each of the disabled parents. During FY 2018/19 the Board received 33 loan applicants from PWDs, of which 9 students were found to be truly disabled and were supported.

Including SNE students, the Board supported a total of 2,943 new students (2,174 males 74% and 769 females 26%) during FY 2018/19.

### **Implementation Challenges**

1. Funding to SNE is limited and a number of SNE essentials are not met. i.
2. Limited pre-service and in-service training in handling SNE students. Many teachers do not have the required skills to handle SNE learners. Since the PTCs get inadequate funding, sometimes this training is not carried out. ii.
3. Disinterest from the parents: Some parents do not support children with special needs. These children are at times not given any requirements, while some are abandoned at school. In iii.

some instances, parents do not know sign language so when learners return to their respective homes, they cannot communicate with them.

4. Understaffing in SNE schools: There are very few SNE teachers and SNE schools are largely under staffed. Sometimes, government posts non-SNE teachers who do not have skills to handle different categories of SNE learners. The attrition rate for such teachers is high. The few available SNE teachers are overworked.

### **Conclusion**

The interventions reviewed contributed to ensuring inclusive and equitable education for SNE pupils. While, some gains were registered in increasing access to and improving quality of education for SNE students, the unmet need is still large. Consequently, a high proportion of SNE children are hitherto not benefiting from the interventions.

### **Recommendations**

- i) The MoES should allocate additional funds to SNE and rollout the interventions to address the needs of all SNE categories.
- ii) The MoES should sensitise parents of children with special needs and their communities about the use and benefits of educating these children.
- iii) The MoES should prioritize having more specialized SNE teachers. Additionally, all teachers should be exposed to basic SNE skills during pre-service and in service trainings.

#### **For more information, contact:**

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