



## Is the Education Sector budget for FY 2020/21 addressing the population needs due to COVID-19 challenges?

### Overview

On March 20<sup>th</sup> 2020, Government of Uganda (GoU) closed all schools and educational institutions in order to curb the spread of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). An estimated 15 million learners in 73,240 institutions and 548,192 teachers were affected, for close to three months now.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a number of priorities that put new pressures on the budgets for FY 2019/20, and the subsequent budget for FY 2020/21.

This policy brief reviews the new priorities created by COVID-19, and assesses the extent to which the budgets will address them. It also proposes possible policy actions.

### Introduction

The Government proposed to re-open schools in phases, starting with finalists at all levels of education. To facilitate this, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) put in place a COVID-19 Response Committee to mitigate challenges posed by the pandemic, and ensure continuity of learning. The ministry promoted remote learning through digital, television and radio channels. It worked with National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) and produced self-study revision materials for primary pupils and secondary students for all classes. In partnership, with Vision Group, the

### Key Messages

- The Education Sector budget for FY 2019/20, and the proposed budget for FY 2020/21 are silent on the COVID-19 emergencies.
- The cost of mitigation measures/standard operating procedures will increase the non-wage budget for the entire sector.
- Even when the COVID-19 crisis eases, its impacts on the sector and the school system will stay for some time, so the sector should plan for them now.

materials were distributed to all Local Governments (LGs). However, these measures had not been budgeted for FY2019/20.

For schools to open, there are new priorities that must be funded in order to ensure continuity of learning and safety of learners at school.

### New priorities due to COVID-19

The MoES has developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for schools to re-open. The SOPs presented new needs that must be funded. Some of short term SOPs include:

- All teachers and pupils/students reporting back to schools should be screened/checked to ensure that none of them reports back with COVID-19.



- ii. All schools should provide hand washing facilities for different classes. This will increase expenditures on water and soap in schools.
- iii. Daily disinfection of all surfaces that are touched by learners, teachers and all people in school. Some of these surfaces include railings, tables, desks, sports equipment, door and window handles, toys, teaching and learning aids, and all school infrastructure accessed by pupils/students, teachers and non-teaching staff. In addition, there are about 32 education institutions that have been used as quarantine centres which would need to be thoroughly disinfected before learners can access them.
- iv. Development, production and distribution of child friendly materials such as posters to disseminate messages on COVID-19 and encourage good hand and respiratory hygiene practices in schools and surrounding communities. The MoES has to produce and distribute them in schools.
- v. All schools to acquire Infrared Fever Detection guns to conduct routine daily checks for all pupils, teachers, non-teaching staff and all visitors accessing the schools.
- vi. Increased inspection of all institutions of learning, including private schools by Education Inspectors to enforce compliance to COVID-19 SOPs to ensure safety of learners. Schools to address the psychosocial needs of learners to prevent stress, anxiety, stigma and discrimination, and encourage learners to avoid stereotypes when talking about the virus among peers.
- vii. All boarding schools (government aided and private) to equip their sick bays (infirmaries) and make adequate arrangements to handle any COVID-19 related emergencies by having enough personal protective equipment (PPEs), medicines, and disinfectants for the rest rooms, etc.
- viii. Some schools may have to acquire temporary structures to accommodate all learners. They may also need additional desks for learners in view of social distancing.
- ix. The MoES has to undertake inclusive measures for special cases like children with disabilities, schools in hard-to-reach areas, displaced communities, and in refugee camps. There are approximately 600,000 refugee children in 13 districts of Uganda, most of them in camps bordering countries with a high risk. Other children are in displaced communities affected by floods and other emergencies. All these need to be targeted in a special way to continue with learning.

### **Are the short term priorities funded?**

In FY 2019/20, the government invested Ug shs 3.397 trillion in the Education Sector. In this budget, there was an increment of Ug shs 616 billion from Ug 2.781trillion in FY 2018/19. Most of the money was for wages (56%), non-wage (25%), GoU development 8.6%, and development by external financing (9.6%). The budget process for FY 2019/20 was undertaken without COVID-19 in view, therefore all the above SOPs were not funded.

In addition, under Addendum No. 2 of the supplementary expenditure, schedule No. 2 of



FY 2019/20, Parliament approved Ug shs 284 billion to combat COVID-19 pandemic in the country. However, the schedule Parliament approved did not have any funds for the Education Sector.

The budget for the FY 2020/21 as presented to Parliament is Ug shs 3.645 trillion, of which 55% is for wage, 29% non-wage, 9% development, and 6% external financing for development.

Like the budget for FY2019/20, this budget did not fund the new priorities (SOPs) arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is worth noting that the share of the education sector budget has reduced from 14.6% in FY 2012/13 to 9% in FY 2020/21 against an increased population of Universal Primary Education (UPE) learners from 7,474,600 in 2018 to 7,624,490 in 2019, and an increase of Universal Secondary School (USE) learners from 669,922 in 2018 to 707,980 in 2019.

Furthermore, education in Uganda is significantly handled by the private sector. There are 13,000 private schools in Uganda (UBOS 2019). Private rural schools have been affected more than the private urban schools by the closure due to COVID-19. Many of them will struggle to fulfil the SOPs for re-opening. Some of these schools were servicing loans and did not realise all the fees for term one. Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) continues to demand taxes from the schools and they are accumulating tax arrears. Many schools are not able to pay salaries to their staff, nor file Pay as You Earn (PAYE) and corporation tax.

While government has deferred payment of these taxes from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020, schools will still not have money to pay. The concern is that if Government does not find a way of assisting private schools, continuity of learning and safety of the learners in these schools will be at stake. Some smaller schools particularly in the rural areas may not reopen and learners may have to change to new schools.

## Opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to transform education service delivery through adoption of remote/distance learning. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is working with countries including Uganda to support and scale up the best distance learning practices, and to create a repository of national learning platforms designed to support the continuity of curriculum based study.

The MoES has secured a loan of US\$ 20 million from the Global Partnership in Education (GPE), to meet all costs for printing and distribution of the self-study materials to all learners.

World Vision is operating in more than 82 districts in Uganda, and has helped in transporting, delivering and sometimes photocopying the self-study materials and ensuring they reach the vulnerable learners in communities. However, there are districts without such partners where learners are not accessing these materials.



## Conclusion

The budgets for FY 2019/20 and the proposed budget for FY 2020/21 are not addressing the challenges brought about by COVID-19. The cost of mitigating COVID-19 challenges has put additional pressures on the education sector budget. Government needs to find the resources to address them in order to ensure continuity and safety of learners in schools.

## Recommendations

- a) The World Bank's latest "Uganda Economic Update 2020", recommends increasing government spending on education to improve enrollment and the quality of learning in Ugandan schools from the current 10.4% in FY 2019/2020 to match the Sub-Saharan average of 16%. If schools are to re-open, then Government should increase the share of sector budget in order to address the post COVID-19 challenges. Government must quickly shift the priorities in the National Budget to make more funds available to the sector for the unfunded sector priorities.
- b) The MoES should make adequate plans to distribute learning materials within districts. The ministry could partner with development partners, civil society and religious organisations to assist in funding and delivering the materials to learners in their communities.
- c) A review of the FY 2020/21 Education Sector budget must be undertaken to re-prioritize activities and address any hitherto unforeseen post COVID-19 emergencies.
- d) In order to promote remote learning, government should make a number of interventions like increasing Internet connectivity, reducing connection fees and the cost of Internet.
- e) The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development should capture all the donor contributions (including off budget financing) responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in the sector for effective use.
- f) Government should assist private schools by giving them tax holidays and other incentives to enable them provide the education service amidst the post COVID-19 challenges.

## References

- MoES: The Education and Sports Sector Annual Performance Report (FY 2018/19)
- MoES: Education and Sports Sector Strategic Plan 2017/18 – 2019/2020
- UBOS: "The Uganda National Household Survey Report 2016/17"
- UNESCO Internet Resource (2020)
- GPE's COVID-19 Response (2020)
- Education cannot wait.org; COVID-19 and Education Emergencies (2020)
- The World Bank latest "Uganda Economic Update 2020"

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