

**On this Day of the African Child, ISER calls upon States to utilize the Abidjan Principles<sup>1</sup> to ensure that "Every Child Benefits Fully from Quality Education" during and post the COVID19 pandemic.**

Today, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2021, Uganda joins the rest of Africa to celebrate the Day of the African Child. The day is celebrated every year since 1991, when it was first initiated by the Organization of African Unity, now African Union. It was the same year when the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was adopted. This commemoration is done in remembrance and honor of the students who participated in the Soweto Uprising of 1976, in which hundreds of them were shot dead. They were protesting the injustice and the inequalities in the education sector of the South African apartheid regime. In particular, the poor quality of education that they were being offered, but most importantly advocating for the right to be taught in their own language.

The day aims at raising awareness of the continued need to improve the quality of education on the African continent. This year's celebration is premised on the theme: ***"30 years after the adoption of the Charter: Accelerate implementation of Agenda 2040 for an Africa fit for Children"***. Particularly on the right to education, Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2040 is that every child benefits fully from quality education.

At this time when the COVID – 19 pandemic has dealt a big blow to the children's right to education, the Abidjan Principles on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education can offer the required guidance in building resilient education systems.

One of the lessons so far learnt from the pandemic is the need to strengthen public education systems. With loss of income resulting from the pandemic, many parents cannot afford the high cost of education. Also many private schools have closed as owners have either changed to other businesses or sold them off during the prolonged closure of schools. A free public alternative is critical. The state of Uganda has to prioritize the provision of free, quality, public primary and secondary education for all children.

The pandemic has also demonstrated the need to strengthen the regulation of private sector involvement in the delivery of education. During Uganda's first and now the second national wide closure of schools, learners and parents have been subjected to abuse and exploitation in form of the exorbitant high cost of online learning and private coaching. Also upon the phased reopening of schools, there was substantial increase of school fees, all in the name of collecting more funds to meet the COVID – 19 standard operating procedures. For some schools, especially the high end private schools, this was in total disregard of the full school fees payments that had been made for the first term that was abruptly stopped halfway. With the second wave of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Principles unpack and compile existing provisions in international human rights law and provide guidance on how to put them into practice as far as state obligation to deliver quality public primary and secondary education and regulation of the private sector involvement in education.

COVID – 19 pandemic in Uganda, there has been reports of some schools’ deliberate failure to disclose cases of COVID 19 among their students as a way of protecting their images which has put a number of the children's health at risk and by extension that of their parents and other family members.

As schools remain closed in Uganda and some other African countries, the continuity of learning programmes must be effective and inclusive. Specifically to the Ugandan Government, we urge;

- i. The Ministry of Education and Sports and other state agencies and ministries such as Parliament and Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to utilize the Abidjan Principles in undertaking the urgent needed policy, legal, administrative and fiscal reforms in the delivery of education; design and implementation;
- ii. Ministry of Education and Sports to collaborate with other state agencies and non – state actors to carry out national “back to school” communications and mass outreach campaigns to get children back in school. This is after ascertaining when the schools will physically reopen;
- iii. The Ministry of Education and Sports, upon the resumption of schools, to ensure elimination of school fees in schools implementing universal primary and secondary programs and guarantee universal access to free and quality education in such schools.