



INITIATIVE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Factors contributing to Poor Performance of Pupils in National Examinations in Najja Sub County, Buikwe District



Education Baraza Report

April 26, 2018.



INITIATIVE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

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A. Introduction.

The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) convened an Education *Baraza* at Kiyindi Landing Site in Najja Sub County, Buikwe District on April 26, 2018. The *Baraza* followed the release of the national Primary Leaving Examination (PLE), 2017. Although, Buikwe is not among the districts with the lowest performing grades, Najja Sub County registers the worst performance in the district.

The *baraza* was attended by community members, local leaders, and government officials such as; - head teachers for government aided primary schools, members of the School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs), Security personnel, Najja Community Development Officer Mr. Kalyowa Arajab, Sub County chief Mr. Kabogoza Ronald, The Sub County Vice Chairperson Ms. Namusoke Betty, and various parish councilors. The District was represented by the Assistant Inspector of Schools Ms. Ssenfuma Babirye Florence and the District Inspector of Schools Ms. Nalubega Joyce.

ISER was represented by: Joshua Kisawuzi – Community Outreach Officer; Mugoya Musa - Program Officer, Right to Education. ISER Community Health Advocates (CHAs) from Buikwe District including Harriet Rwabugahya, Dorothy Nabisere and Mutebi Karim supported with logistics handling and registration of participants.

The overall objective of the education *baraza* was to bridge the communication gap between the community members of Najja Sub County and the district leadership and strengthen relationship between the community members and the district leadership on ways of improving the performance of learners in the sub county in PLE.

B. Issues raised by the community members

Business Activities

Other factors notwithstanding, during the interactions at the Education *Baraza*, community members pointed out that the poor performance of learners in Najja Sub County is caused by the high pupil absenteeism. A number of pupils are engaged in economic activities instead of attending school. Some of the economic activities pointed out include;

i. Fishing

The poor performance of schools in the sub county is due to the high rate of school absenteeism which is attributed to the fishing activities in the area. Najja Sub County is located on the shores of Lake Victoria at Kiyindi landing site which is one of the busiest landing sites. The community members reported that on school days, pupils are found in the lake fishing instead of attending school. They blamed this on adults who employ children of school going age into their fishing activities and miss out classes and topics covered which in the end lead to poor learning outcomes especially in PLE.

Sugarcane growing

The community members also attributed the poor performance to the large scale sugarcane growing in Najja Sub County. Sugarcane is one of the major cash crops grown in the sub county. This is attributed to the presence of Lugazi Sugar Corporation Uganda (SCOUL) the oldest and

one of the biggest sugar factories in the country. Sugarcane is grown by many farmers and children are engaged in provision of labour on sugarcane plantations from planting, weeding, harvesting, loading and transportation from the plantations to the factories. As a result of these activities, pupils attend school irregularly which affects their learning and performance in examinations.

Local market.

The primary school head teachers reported that absenteeism in schools is very rampant on Fridays. This is attributed to the local market that take place every Friday at Kiyinndi landing site. Many parents ask their children to escort them to the market on Fridays instead of attending school. Missing classes for a whole day every week has a big negative impact on pupils' learning as they are unable to catch up with the rest of their colleagues who attend school on a daily basis. It further denies them opportunity to study what sometimes is set in national examinations thus the poor performance.

Apart from business or economic activities, the community raised other issues that include;

Thematic curriculum

The community pointed out that considering the ethnic diversity in the area, the implementation of the thematic curriculum is a challenge. In lower classes, pupils are being taught in Luganda yet some of the pupils are Basoga, Bagwere, Bagisu, Japadhola, Iteso. This affects comprehension in lower classes thus a weak learning foundation that affect pupils' transition to higher classes where they are taught in English. This leads to low understanding and appreciation of the subjects and result into poor learning outcomes at the end of the primary cycle.

High number of substandard private schools

The District Inspector of Schools also pointed out the mushrooming private schools with limited facilities and unqualified staff as one of the factors leading to poor performance in the area. In the entire Sub County, there are only 15 government schools compared to the 60 private schools. However, a big number of these private schools do not meet Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards such as employing unqualified teachers. As a result, pupils who are enrolled in such schools receive poor quality education which cannot enable them to sit and pass the standard examinations such as Primary Leaving Examinations.

Inadequate infrastructure

The community members also noted that some public and government aided primary schools in the sub county lack adequate facilities like desks and classrooms. The community members noted that in some schools with enough classrooms, the desks are not enough and pupils have to sit on the floor which affects their concentration. While in some schools pupils study under trees and during rainy seasons some of the classes' lessons are interfered. This leads to delay or not

completing the syllabuses which makes the pupils unfit for national examinations and thus resulting into high failure rates.

Teacher- head teacher absenteeism

The community members especially members of SMCs and PTAs reported that late coming and absenteeism among teachers is very rampant. This is due to their poor attitude towards work and opting to first run their businesses to supplement on their meager salaries. They also added that the absenteeism and late coming of teachers is due to the fact that the head teachers who are mandated to manage and supervise the teachers are also absent in their schools. The absence of teachers in schools leave the pupils unattended to and some go without having their lessons hence affecting their preparedness to sit and pass the examinations.

Automatic promotion of pupils

Head teachers of schools present at the Baraza complained that some parents pressurize teachers to promote their children to higher classes even when they have failed. This mainly affects weak pupils at the end of the primary cycle since the content of the final examinations cover the whole primary school syllabus.

Parental negligence of their children

The teachers and other community members also reported that parents are not supporting their children with basic school necessities such as scholastic materials, uniforms, food and sanitary towels for girls among others. The participants noted that a number of parents/guardians have abdicated on their responsibilities of providing the required necessities to their children while in school. The lack of school necessities affect the pupils' concentration in school hence causing poor performance of learners.

Charging of fees in UPE schools

Community members reported that some public and government aided schools in the area are charging higher fees more than the private schools. A community member pointed out Buzaama primary school as one of the government aided school charging exorbitant schools fees. This has forced many pupils from poor background who cannot afford to raise the fees to stay out of school until they raise the schools fees as their fellows are studying. By the time they report back to school to those who have

Ineffective inspection of schools

The community members pointed out that the mode of inspection of schools by the inspectors is weak- that inspectors first make phone calls to the school head teachers before visiting the schools. The community members noted that this compromises the inspection as heads of schools and their teachers will put everything in order before the inspectors arrive. As a result, the inspectors get the impression that the school is running well and pupils as learning when

actually it's not. This weak supervision of schools and absence of proper quality check and control mechanism of education delivery affects the pupils learning and performance.

C. Responses by the District officials.

The head teacher of Buzaama primary school explained that the schools is only charging money for the school feeding program from parents because there is no way they can teach hungry children. Currently, the school is charging UGX 25,000 for porridge and UGX 40,000 for food per term.

The Assistant Inspector of Schools advised the heads of schools to improve on their management of schools through involvement of all stakeholders like SMCs, PTAs, community members and political leaders in the school programs.

The District Inspector of Schools explained that there is no problem with the thematic curriculum. It is a government policy to teach children in lower classes in local languages. Although, children in the area are of various ethnicities, there is a common language that is spoken by all children while playing and that is Luganda. She noted that using this common language in teaching helps pupils to understand easily in lower classes.

The Inspector of schools also informed the community members that the term of office for members of the SMCs is ending and the district will be constituting new ones. She thanked the outgoing members for their contribution and urged the community members to go back to their foundation bodies and PTAs to vote capable members to SMCs.

The Inspector also informed the community that the District is working on the improvement of infrastructure in schools. Under Phase I of the Buikwe District Fishing Community program, they have constructed classroom blocks, staff quarters and provided furniture and utensils in a number of schools. They will also construct same facilities in other schools in phase II that is soon commencing. In addition to sponsoring 43 students from Buikwe District in Teachers Colleges in a bid to increase on the staffing levels in schools. She also explained that it's a government policy to provide 7 teachers to schools with 350 pupils but in case of increase in the number of pupils, they are required to provide more teachers. However, as government sorts out this, she urged the SMCs to find ways of mobilizing addition revenue in schools and recruit some teaching staff on contracts.

She also noted that it is the parents who are affecting their children's learning by taking them to illegal private schools with unqualified staff instead of enrolling them in public or government aided schools with qualified staff and enough infrastructure. She informed the community that there is a directive to close all the schools that are operating illegally. And as such parents should be careful in selecting the private schools they take their children to and avoid unnecessary inconveniences to their children's learning.

She informed the community meeting that the District made a commitment to fight child labour and soon they will be launching a project to ensure that all pupils who absent themselves from school to engage in business activities attend school regularly.

She urged parents to improve on their relationships with teachers. She also asked those who turned up for the Baraza to go and sensitize the rest of the community members to improve on their attitudes towards their children's education.

D. Recommendations.

The District Inspectorate of Schools will resume the program of closing private schools that do not meet basic requirements and minimum standards.

The District Inspector of Schools will also commence a community mobilization program to ensure that pupils who absent themselves at school to offer labour on sugar plantations, landing site and in the local market attend school regularly.

The District is also committed to improve on the state of infrastructure of schools in the District. The second phase of the Buikwe District Fishing Community Program will soon commence with construction of classroom blocks, latrines, staff quarters, provision of furniture and utensils in a number of schools. In addition to recruiting of more teachers who are currently being sponsored by the District in Teachers' College.

E. Conclusion.

The District Inspector of Schools noted that the biggest challenge the education sector is currently experiencing in the District and specifically Najja Sub County is the high pupil absenteeism that is affecting performance of learners and even leading to school dropout. Despite all the efforts to improve on the state of infrastructure, attendance of school by most pupils is irregular. She requested that ISER's interventions in the education sector in the district should target addressing pupil absenteeism in school. ISER noted that the strategy on addressing pupil absenteeism in schools will be discussed and agreed upon after conclusion and completion of the Memorandum of Understanding with Buikwe District Local Government.