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REVIEW OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATON WHITE PAPER ON EDUCATION BY SOCIAL WORKERS OF UGANDA

Introduction: We appreciate the Ministry Of Education for giving us an opportunity to review and make a contribution to the changes in the education white paper and also speak into the future of education in our beloved country, and cognitive of the fact that quality education is very critical to national growth and development. As the social work fraternity, our focus was on areas that affect the social well-being of learners and their interaction with the community and environment.

Participation in National issues and leadership awareness

Students should continue to debate, identify and work out solutions for their community problems both in primary and secondary. This should form part of their assessment because it builds leadership development and community ownership. Should receive and respond to news at regional and national level and also take on community leadership roles.

Pre-Primary section.

This section does not seem to have a curriculum so teachers are teaching content for P1 and P2 at this level which is not age appropriate. Baby class children aged 3 are forced to write and copy from the board even when their motor sensory skills are not yet developed. The ministry should design a curriculum focusing on building social skills, values and follow up on its implementation even in private schools. There should also be an age limit

for joining nursery because some children enroll as early as two years and start writing right away. This is aimed at enabling effective mental and physical growth of the children through age appropriate learning.

Structure of Education

The new school curriculum is rich and was beautifully designed with learner centred activities. However, there is need to supervise and attach key result areas to guide its implementation.

Private schools: Due to increased competition, many private schools are focusing on academics, using children as weapons of competition, they stretch study hours from 6:00am to 9:00pm, so parents are thus forced to take their young children to boarding section, elimination of co-curricular activities and even playtime which does not promote holistic growth. Their fees structures are unregulated and thus exploitative and school requirements are too many.

Supervision of UPE schools needs strengthening, teachers and sometimes even head teachers are not regular in class/school, libraries and science laboratories lack adequate equipment and as a result, grades are very low and students do not get the basics even when teachers' salaries are paid in time. School leadership should have minimum deliverables.

Support for special needs children requires a greater investment because most districts do not have special needs schools and the few available ones are very expensive thus leaving out many learners.

Addressing the social needs/challenges of children: Owing to the escalating psychosocial, behavioural, sexual and reproductive health challenges that directly impact on student's performance, retention and safety in education institutions at all levels; as well as the changes that have taken place in the legal and policy frameworks in these areas, NASWU proposes some changes within the structure to embed stronger administrative systems that will address the challenges that children, adolescents and young people face in education institutions. Children living in poverty, working children, children with disabilities, children from child-headed households, and children in post-conflict situations stand out significantly in their need for extracurricular educational and psycho-social support in order to succeed in school or, in many cases, simply to stay in school. Protection issues abound in education institutions including but not limited to violence against children, sexual harassment and exploitation, child labour, and other forms of abuse challenge children's schooling. The required services go beyond the current guidance and

pseudo-counselling provided by senior teachers and matrons who lack the skill, training and passion to address the need. There is therefore a need for schools and learning institutions to institute a **School social work unit** – This should be incorporated in the structure to oversee planning, prevention and response programmes for psycho-social difficulties and challenges that children, adolescents and young adults are confronted with in all education institutions; bridge gaps between families, communities and schools.

By applying social work skills and values, the root causes of the learner's problems can be assessed and thus effective intervention plans can be developed collaboratively among teachers, parents/ guardians and the respective students.[1] The multifaceted role of the school social worker implies supporting learners in addressing the difficulties that keep them from performing well in school.

Sexual Reproductive health, Rights and responsibilities in education: Besides the HIV/AIDS unit, a department or unit on sexual and reproductive health and rights in education is critical. This is important to enhance the implementation of laws, policies and guidelines on sexuality, sexuality education, reproductive health and rights in education. Teenage pregnancy and child marriage have remained daunting challenges to girls' education and implementation of planned interventions need to be strengthened through stronger and clear cut administrative systems and structures at the national, sub-national and institutional levels.

Life skills and character development: Given that learners spend 80% of their active hours at school during the formative years, the school curriculum at all levels needs to incorporate life skills and character development for all learners. These are basic and important for building character, resilience, problem solving, focus and a sense of self-worth. This will increase completion rates even amidst tough situations and reduce on school drop outs, give them the soft skills relevant to create/ acquire as well as sustain employment in future but also ably lead themselves and others.

Technical Subjects: Should be introduced at all levels. Network with funders to stock up for facilities, community involvement. They can be community based and not necessarily at schools to enable other members participate.

Need to address the negative attitude students have towards these courses and help them appreciate the benefits. Teach customer care, basic management and marketing alongside the major skill.

Education Tax: Not recommended, tax payers are already too strained. Education should be given priority in the budget and allocated more money since it's basic.

[1] Luwangula and Riedl, 2014

Rehabilitation of schools: The ministry should consider construction of schools but maintenance should be done by the partners and community.

Construct community based libraries and laboratories especially in rural and low income communities to benefit several schools that may not afford these facilities. They can pay user fees for maintenance. There are also many locations in the country that do not have secondary schools and so pupils are forced to drop out after P.7.

Avail study materials online with e-libraries that can be accessed online.

National Language: Well as the white paper recommended teaching Kiswahili in all schools, this is not being implemented and needs follow up. The regional languages should also be examined at the National Examinations so they can be taken seriously.

Community and military service: This was a great idea, however, it is not being implemented effectively, and in a few places, it appeared more political than social.

Community service activities have been abused especially in some rural areas where children start the day by digging in teachers' gardens and in some places classrooms have been turned into food stores.

In conclusion therefore, we are grateful and humbled to be part of this noble cause, and look forward to seeing the education sector flourishing and excelling even as we address the social and non-academic needs of the students that have a strong bearing on their academic performance and character formation, **For God and my Country**.