

Celebrating 25 Years of Universal Education in Uganda: Reflecting on Successes, Challenges, and Future Opportunities

FOR MEDIA RELEASE

Universal Education in Uganda Celebrates 25 Years of Implementation

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda. In 1997, the NRM government launched UPE with the aim of providing free primary education to all children in the country. Since then, significant progress has been made in improving access to education and increasing enrollment rates, especially for girls and disadvantaged children.

Over the past 25 years, the Ugandan government has invested heavily in education infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development. The government has also implemented various policies and programs aimed at increasing access to education, such as providing free textbooks and abolishing school fees for primary education.

As we celebrate this important milestone, we recognize the contributions of all stakeholders who have played a role in the success of UPE, including teachers, parents, civil society organizations like Plan International Uganda, development partners, and the private sector. Together, we can build on the achievements of the past 25 years to ensure that every child in Uganda has the opportunity to reach their full potential through quality education.

As a Country, We are on course to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning through Universal Education from Primary to Secondary levels. In this way, we have been able to restore Gender parity with the enrollment of females and males almost balanced. Science and Technology remains high on the agenda of the country.

UPE has led to a great impact and specifically UPE has,

1) Increased access to education,

Following the introduction of UPE in 1997, gross enrolment in primary schools increased from a total of 2.5 million in 1996 to 5.3 million in 1997, an increase of 73% in one year and to over 8.6 million in 2023, according to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics.

2) Improved Quality of education,

The pupil-teacher ratio, which gives an indication of contact between pupils and teachers in classrooms, has improved. Large quantities of learning materials have been supplied to schools which have reduced the pupil –textbook ratio. In 1993, there were 37 pupils per book, compared to today’s 3:1 for P3 and P4, for core subjects. The increase in education inputs explains the gradual improvement of some education quality indicators from the time UPE was introduced

3) Achieving gender equity,

There is evidence that UPE has contributed to increased equity in education. The post-UPE period witnessed a narrowing gap between the number of girls and boys enrolled in primary schools. The number of girls attending school has also increased, with the gender parity index improving from 0.88 in 1997 to 1.04 in 2021.

4) Ensuring Inclusive education

After the introduction of UPE, by 2003 the number of children with disabilities in primary school was 247,953, and the Government has continued with affirmative action to address special needs of children with disabilities. In rural areas, children that were previously missing out totally from primary education are now benefiting as a result of UPE.

5) Access to wealth

The wealth bias that characterized access to primary education prior to the programmes have been eliminated. The 20% poorest households

now have as high enrollment as the 20% richest households; with the 84% to 85% respective access to primary education, according to a 2004 World Bank study.

6) Increase of Government spending on Education

The Government has increased funding to the education sector, more classrooms have been constructed, teachers deployed, the number of primary school teachers almost doubled in 25 years from 81,564 in 1996 to 136,819 in 2023.

The Universal Education programme in Uganda demonstrates that a Country with a committed Government can fight poverty through ensuring access to education for its citizens.

Despite these achievements, there are still challenges to be addressed. Many children, especially those in rural and hard-to-reach areas, still do not have access to quality education. There is also a need for more investment in teacher training, infrastructure development, and curriculum improvement to ensure that children receive a quality education.

In commemoration of the 25th anniversary of UPE, the Ugandan government reaffirms its commitment to providing quality education to all children in the country. The government is working to address the remaining challenges and is committed to increasing access to education and improving the quality of education for all Ugandan children.

For media inquiries, please contact:
The Directorate of Basic and Secondary Education.
Ministry of Education and Sports
P.O. Box 7063, Kampala,