Uganda needs quality educational research

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Introduction.

During the past few decades Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced a tremendous commitment to development in education. This commitment has been made both in terms of interest in human development and humanitarian ideals and in terms of promised potential economic returns to educational investment at the personal, community, regional and national levels. From thel960s to the present time continent-wide expansion in enrollments, increased access and opportunities for previously excluded populations such as girls and tribal/ ethnic minorities, as well as many other significant achievements were experienced in magnitudes not previously thought possible (UNESCO, 1998; UNICEF, 1999).

In local and national educational efforts to address domestic development issues and the impact, both concrete and ideological of global trends, governments have attempted to evaluate both the efficiency and effectiveness of current

However, Uganda and other Sub-Saharan African countries continually encounter one apparently insurmountable obstacle in understanding what it has really achieved, how it was done and what should be done in the future to achieve the most productive results from investment in educational programmes. Without information, data, and indicators how will the government and private citizens know what educational efforts are the most efficient and effective.

and Hite, 2001). In all of this Uganda is much like most other African countries. In fact, in many important areas Uganda has apparently done a better job than many other countries. For example, Uganda's recent achievement of its basic universal primary education (UPE) goals, secondary sector improvements in both government and private schooling and the astounding reforms of Makerere University are very impressive. However, Uganda and other Sub-Saharan African countries continually encounter one apparently insurmountable obstacle in understanding what it has really achieved, how it was done and what should be done in the future to achieve the most productive results from investment in educational programmes.

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The Major Challenge

The major challenge facing Africa, Uganda, and many other lesser-developed regions and

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s to the citizens (Atchoarena

students, teachers and parents) participating in education (Hallak and Fagerlind, 1991; Nammudu, 1991; Reimers, McGinn and Wild, 1995; Vulliamy, Lewin and Stephens, 1990; World Bank, 1995. Reimers and McGinn (1997) present this challenge succintly:

A common problem ministries (of education) face when they undertake educational planning is the of the system.

Information Systems

Good information systems are rare. Most ministries lack adequate data and indicators to monitor the achievement of education goals and objectives. They seldom have a way to examine how education objectives are affected by inputs and processes, (p.49).

Without good information systems, adequate data and indicators to examine and assess education in Uganda, how wil

the workplace? Further, without information, data, and indicators how will the government and private citizens know what educational efforts are the most efficient and effective and therefore the best investments for the future of Uganda and its citizens (UNESCO, 1996)? This is the place and role of quality educational research - to design **excellent** (not simply good) information systems, to collect and analyse **precise** (not simply adequate) data and indicators for the examination and assessment of Ugandan educational efforts, whether those efforts derive from government or private sources. The "bottom line" is the awareness by all educational constituencies involved of research being for the future of Uganda and its efficient results for their substantial personal and financial investments?

Educational research: There is need for basic, valid data on learning needs especially at the early learning stage.

Without knowledge of what works best in education how can a government or family be most confident in what educational programmes and efforts will yield the most effective and efficient results for their substantial personal and financial investments?

Education, and Human development

It is particularly important for the quality of educational research to take centre stage at the present time. The African continent has experienced adverse economic conditions generally over the last few decades and Uganda has not been immune to this trend or the challenges it has generated. The period of austerity and structural adjustment of the last two decades, it has been claimed, has caused a slow-down in educational expansion (Atchoarena and Hite, 2001). Diminishing national and regional resources have

, education is increasingly becoming a priority for national and local governments around the world. As people become much more aware the impact of education on furthering their own personal and financial development and survival, education becomes a higher priority for personal and family efforts and expenditures.

Many nations look at education as an avenue to achieve economic, political and social development. Expanding educational opportunities and improving the quality of people's lives are closely linked (African Development Bank,1998). Yet, as earlier stated, without quality educational research how can the best national and personal investments in education be determined? Without knowledge of what works best in education how can a government or family be most confident in what educational programmes and efforts will yield the most effective and efficient results for their substantial personal and financial investments? Lewin (1991) convincingly argues that better utilization of quality educational research will invariably enrich our understanding of the

efforts will become more focused which could facilitate the efficient utilization of available meagre resources to achieve greater benefits to society. Therefore, the renewed effort for building capacity for quality educational research and its use in evaluating, developing and supporting the most effective and efficient educational policies and practices is absolutely central in promoting Uganda's educational and economic development for the future.

A significant commitment and renewed emphasis on the part of government and tertiary educational institutions will be required in reallocating substantial resources. This budget restructuring needs to be done with the aim to support broad social policies and practices that reward quality research innovations and inquiries, and which facilitate dissemination of educational information regarding data and indicators (UNESCO, 1997). Policy makers at the national level as well as influential international agencies such as World Bank and UNESCO need to reassess their programmatic and funding

In addition, educational research will not only build capacity, but also educational reform efforts will become more focused which could facilitate the efficient utilization of available meagre resources to achieve greater benefits to society.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper is to provoke stakeholders interested in education in Uganda to realize the role of educational research in addressing such questions as (1) What education policies, programmes and practices work best - and why? (2) How can things such as expenditures, teacher training, pedagogical and curricular practices, etc.

How can governmental, international agency, and personal/family investments in education be made to maximize the personal and social return on these investments? Educational reforms involve and impact many different actors in the educational system, such as national and local policy-makers, teachers, teacher-trainers, parents, community members, administrators, politicians, parents-teachers' associations (PTAs), Board of Governors (BOGs), employers and the media. These stakeholders should be able to contribute towards the improvement of education through coordinated research efforts and shared information. But that information must be valid and reliable and it must be readily available to all these actors (Hite, 2001).

Unless Uganda builds a high quality research capacity capable of producing valid and reliable information systems and educational data and indicators, the economic and human development future of Uganda will be tenuous at best (Reimers, McGinn and Wild, 1995). Ugandans must become better at linking important and often hard hitting research questions that address the nation's social problems to sound theory. Ugandans, as is true worldwide, also need to become better at acknowledging and researching competing theories of best educational practice (Omland, 1997) and researching how these might be utilised to improve conditions in Ugandan education. Building local educational research capacity and producing the types of information discussed in this article is the most promising way for Uganda to **facilitate** best educational practices that will enable social policies and practices leading to a better understanding of social problems facing our people, the educational system and the economy

In the next Issue watch out for our next Topic: Central Issues in Ugandan Educational Research.

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