

Education Policy Review Commission Report 2025: Only political will can enable the realization of the aspiration enshrined therein

In May 2021, the Minister of Education and Sports, Hon. Janet Kataaha Museveni issued Legal Notice No. 5 of 2021 establishing the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) to investigate and inquire into several matters in the Education and Sports sector; make relevant recommendations on the issues examined and inquired into; and make the final EPRC report containing findings, conclusions, and relevant recommendations on all the matters investigated.

On 6th February 2025, the EPRC completed its report and handed it over to the Minister of Education. It should be noted that this is the second Education Commission under the NRM regime after the 1987 Education Commission also commonly referred to as Prof. Kajubi Education Commission.

We appreciate EPRC for adopting a consultative approach towards the education policy review and granting the general public, including the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) an opportunity to present our respective memorandums. Additionally, ISER appreciates the Commission for adopting and recommending to the government various progressive areas of reform towards improving the quality of education service delivery, these include;

- Implementation of an integrated 11-year compulsory Universal Basic Education (UBE) comprising one year of pre-primary, 6 years of primary, and 4 years of ordinary secondary. This will be followed by Advanced level education for 2 years.
- Regulating and enforcing instructional hours. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): 4 hours, from 8am to 12noon. Primary: 7 hours, P1 to P6, 7 hours from 8am to 3pm. Secondary level, 8 hours from 8am to 4pm.
- Development of a policy that deters schools from terminating students before completion based on academic performance.
- Adoption of a need-based approach towards the establishment of UPE. By revising the policy of one primary and secondary school per parish and sub county respectively to take into consideration the distance, size and population density of parishes and sub counties in the establishment of primary and secondary schools.

- Amendment of the Local Government Act 1997 to transfer the responsibility of educational inspections from district authorities to the proposed National Education Standards and Quality Assurance body.
- Development of a Policy with clear, standards, targets, and service levels for Universal Primary Education (UPE) and (USE).
- Development and implementation of clear school fees regulations.
- Development, implementation and enforcement of service delivery standards for both government and private schools.
- Development and implementation of a policy that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of foundation bodies in the governance and management of grant-aided schools.

The recommendations of the EPRC await consideration and adoption by the Cabinet. From which, the accepted recommendations will constitute the Government White Paper on Education (GWPE). However, as we wait for the conclusion of that process, we make the following observations;

- i. The implementation of some of the recommendations of the EPRC do not need to wait for the adoption of the GWPE can still be implemented. Under the current legal framework, the minister can still act on some of the recommendations. For instance, section 4 and 58 of the Education (Pre – Primary, Primary and Post – Primary) Act, Cap. 247 mandates the Minister in charge of Education from time to time to issue Statutory Instruments to regulate school fees in all schools in the country. Under the same provisions, the Minister can also issue regulations to set out the standards and service levels for Universal Primary Education (UPE) and (USE) programs; enforcement of instructional hours among others.
- ii. There is limited commitment by the government to implement the recommendations of the Government White Papers on Education (GWPE) that emanate from the Education Policy Review Commission reports. For instance, over the last 30 years of 1992 GWPE, less than 50% of its recommendations have been implemented. Out of the 220 recommendations, 84 (38%) have been fully implemented, 57 (26%) partially implemented and 79 (36%) not implemented at all. Despite most of the unimplemented recommendations still being relevant.

In conclusion, the successful implementation of the Education Policy Review Commission's recommendations hinges on deliberate and sustained political commitment. While some reforms can be initiated under the existing legal framework, a comprehensive and costed action plan with clear timelines is essential to ensure systematic execution. Furthermore, the government must demonstrate unwavering political will by allocating adequate resources and putting in place accountability mechanisms to track progress. Without this commitment, the aspirations enshrined in the report will remain unfulfilled, as has been the case with past education reform efforts. The future of Uganda's education system depends not just on policy formulation but on decisive and sustained action.